



# RADICAL FUTURES: FERTILE GROUND



ART ON  
THE MOVE



Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries  
Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

GALLERIES WEST

REGIONAL  
ARTS WA



DENMARK  
ARTS

## RADICAL FUTURES: FERTILE GROUND

Curator: Saira Ellen K. Spencer

Presented as part of Regional Arts Triennial #3 2025/2026

Supported by Denmark Arts and City of Albany

## OVERVIEW

Presented by Denmark Arts and Emerging Curator Saira Spencer as part of the Regional Arts Triennial, *Radical Futures: Fertile Ground* is a group exhibition that will explore how Great Southern communities engage with bushfire and bushfire management in the near and distant future.

The brief challenges artists to imagine a world where we have gone through a cultural palimpsest: A process where a socially-divided group of people come together to replace old ways of understanding with new ones, but pre-existing ideas still influence how those new ideas take shape.

It responds to the Triennial's core theme *Radical Futures*, as outlined by Lead Curator Sarah Roots. Roots' brief can be viewed here: [RAT3 Brief](#)

In responding to *Fertile Ground*, artists are directed to critically examine the dominant narratives of bushfire resilience that position human beings outside of ecosystems. Selected works are expected to engage with hopeful, positive imaginings of a future where the intersections of fire and community are experienced as productive and generative.

In developing their work, artists are asked to consider the roles of collective responsibility, community-driven response and environmental stewardship in building true resilience.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are particularly encouraged to contribute to the project. Non-Indigenous artists are urged to consider how the Menang-Noongar people's cultural connection to fire has shaped the land around us and how it impacts their relationship to fire.

*Radical Futures: Fertile Ground* will be exhibited at Albany Town Hall 12 December 2025- 17 January 2026.

## BRIEF

Each dry season Great Southern communities are put in their place by fire. Images of charred homes, towns, wildlife and landscape are weaponised to promise an apocalyptic future of smoke-choked airways and anxiety-filled dry seasons. We find ourselves at a point of crisis: one where we are grieving past losses, human and ecological, whilst attempting to anticipate and conceptualise this future devastation.

But... What if we no longer felt the need to mourn for a future that hasn't happened yet? What if the threat of fire wasn't so threatening?

In constructing this future, *Fertile Ground* challenges artists and creatives to reflect on the collective agency and collaborative capacity of your local community to imagine a world where our culture of care for all forms of life extends beyond times of crisis.

Artists are particularly encouraged to reflect upon how grief can shape perceptions of the future, to draw inspiration from the ways Great Southern communities cope with profound loss and consider how, in a (radical) future, these capacities could offer a foundation for addressing and shaping our emotional, psychological and spiritual rebuilding process before, during and after fire.

Ask yourself: How can we move forward from this point of discord toward a future where the necessary work is done, our country is still burning but so is our passion to protect this place we call home?

What existing and emergent ideas will help us get there?

*"We must draw from the tangible miracles of everyday life"* - Manifesto of Futurist Painters, 1910

## **BACKGROUND**

In the past 20 years homes, lives and thousands of hectares of native vegetation within the Great Southern have been lost to fire, driven by extreme weather and a drying climate.

However: climate change aside, bushfires are one of the few 'natural' disasters that human action is often directly responsible for. In Australia, approximately 50% of fires in remote areas are caused by lightning but in areas populated or visited by people up to 85% of bushfires are the result of human activity or infrastructure. Yet, responsibility and culpability for their management, suppression and prevention is currently a burden shouldered by very few.

Prescribed burning is one of the key government strategies employed to mitigate the risk of fire that Great Southern residents assume by choosing to live amongst the region's unique fire-loving, Gwondanan scrublands and forests.

Burn regimes predominantly began as a Department of Forestry initiative to protect and maintain logging forests. They were expanded in WA following the 1961 fires south-west of Perth that destroyed 1.8 million hectares of bush, forest and farmland and displaced hundreds of residents. These burns are performed to reduce threat to built environments and to people, with efforts made to protect native environment & wildlife in the process. The motivation to maintain this practice has increased as more and more people move to or visit southern WA seeking out solace in nature, economic reprieve and community life.

Opponents of prescribed burns are calling for state and local governments to expand rapid detection and suppression strategies to reduce the need for burning. This includes investing in existing and emergent technologies such as autonomous drones, AI-supported fire detection systems and satellites with thermal sensors as well as increasing resources and staffing for firefighting crews.

Concerns that WA's fire ecology is being mis-managed have existed within scientific and environmental activist communities since the 70s. Many environmental advocates argue that both controlled burns and wildfires can be catastrophic for ecologically vulnerable areas. While many native flora and fauna species are fire-adapted, many ecosystems cannot survive frequent, intense fires regardless of how they first started.

Many parties have pointed toward Indigenous traditional burning practices as an alternative. Studies show that intense forest fires in particular became far more frequent in WA following European colonisation and the subsequent dramatic change to landscape and disruption of cultural burning practices.

However, Menang-Noongar Elders interviewed in 2020 by academic Ursula Rodrigues were clear that, while fire management is a cultural obligation and that cultural burning should be the exclusive realm of Noongar people, the landscape has changed too significantly for them to take on the responsibility entirely.

One Elder stated:

*"The biggest issue is that we're fixing something, we don't have the knowledge about fixing."*

Another added:

*"We are trying to fix something here that is broken, so maybe their [fire practitioners'] science is about creating fire breaks first and then later on let the old Noongars strike the match and let it burn."*

Regardless of the solutions offered, discussions on prevention and resilience do little to address the reality that living through a firestorm is a physically dangerous and deeply traumatic, isolating experience. Firefighters are particularly vulnerable to developing debilitating physiological and mental health problems (such as PTSD) from exposure to catastrophic fire, with their symptoms worsening over time.

In a wildfire, emergency services often need to employ triage-like strategies to prevent en-masse devastation: Sometimes, one property may be lost in order to save 200. However, as a result many civilian survivors can feel abandoned by emergency services when the responsibility of defending their property falls squarely on their own shoulders. In addition, while grassroots community responses from neighbours, local groups/organisations and fellow townsfolk were crucial to emotionally survive the event, fire-affected individuals often experience a second form of abandonment when help fades as the sense of urgency subsides.

So...the burning question is... how will Great Southern communities navigate a fire-filled future?

*"Like my dad used to say, 'fire fixes everything'."*

- Noongar Elder, 2020

## GLOSSARY

### Cultural Palimpsest

*Palimpsest* is the academic term for a piece of writing material on which the original writing is erased, scraped or washed off to make room for later writing but of which traces of the original text remains and affects the new writing.

A *cultural* palimpsest refers to “the removal of past interpretive framings and the emergence of new cultural interpretations by which the original meanings shape the emergence of new collective schemes.” (Prickett & Timmermans)

In simple terms: An symbolic process of a group starting afresh, without disregarding prior conversations, conflicts or (mis)understandings.

Palimpsest or cultural palimpsest is where the phrase “wipe the slate clean” comes from.

### Cultural Burning

Cultural burning is a cultural fire practice used by First Nations people to improve the health of Country and its people.

Cultural Fire is used in unison with the landscape and the environment. Working with the Local First Nations community is essential. It is the local Mob who know their country and their connection to fire and knowledge of the local area.

This knowledge is essential for understanding the way fire is implemented in cultural burning: Using local knowledge about the landscape, local flora and fauna and understanding of complex kinship connections between fire and landscape informs where they will burn and how they will burn it.

Source: Minyungbal woman Rachael Cavanagh, via The Australian Museum

## FURTHER READING

### Cultural Palimpsests

1. [“If no one grieves, no one will remember”: Cultural palimpsests and the creation of social ties through rituals - PMC](#)
2. [Culture and grief: Ethnographic perspectives on ritual, relationships and remembering](#)

## **Impact on wellbeing: Living in rural and remote Australia**

1. [The importance of 'place' and its influence on rural and remote health and well-being in Australia - Butterworth - 2024 - Australian Journal of Rural Health - Wiley Online Library](#)

## **Indigenous Cultural Fire Practices in Great Southern and South West WA**

1. [Indigenous Knowledge, Aspiration, and Potential Application in Contemporary Fire Mitigation in Southwest Australia](#)

## **Bushfire Data and History**

1. [Causes of bushfire in Great Southern WA 2017-2021](#)  
Source: Department of Fire and Emergency Services
2. [Report and Witness Statements: 1961 Bushfire Royal Commission](#)
3. [Historical perspectives on mosaic burning in Western Australia's southwest forests](#)
4. [Surprisingly few animals die in wildfires – and that means we can help more in the aftermath - CSU News](#)

## **Bushfire Fighting in the Future**

1. [Fireline Intensity Projections in Australia \(MAP\) and proposed future-planning for bushfires](#)
2. [Disaster experts call for more funding for new technologies to fight future fires in Australia - ABC News](#)
3. [Implications of artificial intelligence for bushfire management | AJEM Research](#)
4. [Future of bushfire fighting in Australia - RISK FRONTIERS](#)

## **Psychological Impacts of Bushfire**

1. [The long-term impact of bushfires on the mental health of Australians: a systematic review and meta-analysis - PMC](#)
2. [OPINION: The human cost - psychological impact of the bushfires](#)
3. [Psychological Benefits of Bushfire preparedness](#)

# **RADICAL FUTURES: FERTILE GROUND**

## **INFORMATION FOR ARTISTS**

Radical Futures: Fertile Ground is 1 of 13 regional exhibitions developed and presented as part of the 2025-2026 Regional Arts Triennial (RAT3).

The WA Regional Arts Triennial is a regionally-led capacity building cycle of development to strengthen confidence, capability and interconnectivity within WA's regional visual arts sector.

RAT3 focuses upon the theme of Radical Futures, as outlined by the Lead Curator Sarah Roots. Radical Futures explores the role of the arts as a catalyst for change in times of collapse. Focusing on collective imagination and drawing upon the concept of aesthetic force, Radical Futures reveals aspirations for tomorrow, across what is now known as regional Western Australia.

**Before developing their proposals for Fertile Ground, artists are strongly encouraged to read and consider Lead Curatorial Brief Radical Futures by Sarah Roots: [RAT3 Brief](#)**

## **EXHIBITION INFORMATION**

Radical Futures: Fertile Ground will be exhibited:  
12 December 2025-17 January 2026 at Albany Town Hall

Artists will be required to host an artist talk onsite at Albany Town Hall during the exhibition period.

Following the regional exhibition, artworks may be selected for inclusion in the Triennial's survey exhibition at John Curtin Gallery in Perth in September-October 2026 and form part of the RAT3 touring exhibition with Art on the Move in 2027. Artwork selections for the survey exhibition and touring program will be at the discretion of Triennial Lead Curator Sarah Roots.

Before submitting your expression of interest, please review the indicative timeline for the project, proposal requirements, eligibility and inclusion and selection criteria described in this document.

## **CONTACT / more information**

For questions about the brief, exhibition or support in developing your proposal, please contact:

Curator - Saira Ellen K. Spencer      [sairaellen.art@gmail.com](mailto:sairaellen.art@gmail.com) // 0488 780 811

Please email or SMS Saira prior to calling to confirm her availability

## INDICATIVE TIMELINE

### 2025

#### EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST & ARTIST SELECTIONS

- 12 May - *Expressions of Interest Opens*
- 9 June @ 10pm - *Expressions of Interest Closes*
- 10-12 June - *Artwork selection*
- 13 June - *Shortlisted artists & unsuccessful artists notified of outcome*
- Mid-June - *Initial briefing sessions for shortlisted artists*

#### ARTWORK DEVELOPMENT

- June - October - *Creative development and production of artworks  
(Inc. ongoing consultation with curator)*

#### MARKETING AND ARTWORK DEADLINES

- Late October - *Marketing content, artwork images due (where possible)*
- Early November - *Notice of specialist installation requirements due*
- 1 December - *Artwork label information due*
- Early December - *Artwork drop offs*

#### EXHIBITION OPENS, ARTIST TALKS

- 12 December - *Exhibition open to the public: Albany Town Hall*
- 12 December - *Opening Event (TBC)*
- Mid December - *Artist & Curator Talks- Albany Town Hall (dates TBC)*
- Dec/Jan - *Visit by Lead Curator: survey exhibition selections (TBC)*

### 2026

#### EXHIBITION CLOSE/ ARTWORK COLLECTION

- 17 January - *Exhibition closes*
- 19-20 January - *Exhibition bump out: artwork collection from Town Hall*
- Sept/Oct - *Radical Futures Survey exhibition: John Curtin Gallery- Perth*

## EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

### PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

To apply for Radical Futures: Fertile Ground, artists must complete an online expression of interest using this form:

<https://forms.gle/7hDeY4uxtgmsLxwb8>

Expressions of Interest are invited until **9th of June** 2025 at **10pm**

Late submissions will not be considered

The Expression of Interest process is not a test of writing ability (unless you're a writer): Artwork proposals and application answers will be assessed according to artists' capacity to respond in written English.

### EXAMPLES OF PREVIOUS WORK

Following completion of the above form, please email up to 5 artwork examples to Saira Ellen K Spencer via **sairaellen.art@gmail.com** before **9th June** 2025 at **10pm**

It is advisable to choose a range of artworks that either provide an overview of your breadth of practice OR choose images that reflect your current style/preferred media OR relate to the media/approach you'd like to create for this exhibition

Please ensure files are named with the title of each artwork, year completed and artist name. Please do not provide files with generic titles (ie. IMG\_123456)

## SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

### VISUAL ARTWORKS

1. Please ensure each file is no larger than 5MB per image. PDF or JPG, PNG formats only. Please include all images within the one email.

### AUDIO & AUDIOVISUAL ARTWORKS

1. Audio & video files must be no longer than 15 minutes in total (for example: please submit a maximum 3 x 5 minute-long audio recordings , 1 x 15 minute video)
2. If your audio or video files are more than 5MB, please provide links to Youtube, Bandcamp or another universal platform
3. Please do not provide Dropbox, Soundcloud or Spotify links
4. Google Drive links are acceptable but please ensure the linked files are authorised for public viewing

## ELIGIBILITY & INCLUSION

- Curator Saira Spencer and partner organisation Denmark Arts will consider submissions from any artist living in regional WA.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are particularly invited to apply [see Indigenous Inclusion and Representation for more information].
- Great Southern\* artists will be given preference for inclusion. For the purposes of this project, the Great Southern region comprises the local government areas of Albany, Broomehill-Tambellup, Cranbrook, Denmark, Gnowangerup, Jerramungup, Katanning, Kent, Kojonup, Plantagenet, and Woodanilling.
- Artists living in bushfire-impacted areas, survivors of bushfire and/or with lived experience of fire, fire fighting, recovery efforts, scientific study, activism or as bushfire survivors are encouraged to apply.
- Artists from culturally diverse backgrounds and/or with lived experience of poverty, homelessness, disability or mental illness are encouraged to apply.
- Submissions welcomed from established, mid-career and emerging/early-career artists\*.

\*For the purposes of this exhibition, an emerging or early-career artist is defined as someone who has been sharing their creative works with the public for 6 years or less, aged 16 years or older. Preference for selection will be given to Great Southern emerging artists, who will have the option to be supported by curator Saira Spencer in developing their work.

## INDIGENOUS INCLUSION AND REPRESENTATION

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists will not be expected to respond to First Nations cultural conceptualizations of fire to be considered for inclusion in Fertile Ground.
- The exhibition selection panel will include a member of the Triennial First Nations curatorium panel to advocate for appropriate representation of Australian Indigenous people, practices and culture. This will include reviewing proposals from non-Indigenous artists that describe work that represents Aboriginal people, practices and culture.

## ELIGIBLE ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES

Any form of 2D, 3D art or audiovisual art depicting any subject matter including but not limited to: abstracts, landscape, figurative and portraiture, illustration, painting, collage, mixed media, textile-based works, ceramics, sculpture and contemporary fine-art photography

- Interactive, collaborative and/or interdisciplinary, multimedia works are permitted.

- Submissions for immersive soundscape and/or audiovisual works suitable for displaying on TV and/or via PA system are strongly encouraged. Headphones-based works will not be considered.
- Original written artworks (such as poetry, short stories) will be considered.
- Works made with technological assistance are invited for consideration. AI-generated art is not permitted.

Preference will be given to new works made in-response to the brief. However, adapted and existing works are eligible to apply.

Scale of works must be appropriate for venue (ie. it needs to be able to fit through the doors of Albany Town Hall).

To be eligible for consideration, works must have the capacity to be available to the public for the entire duration of the Town Hall exhibition and be appropriate for consideration to exhibiting in the survey exhibition at JCG and/or as part of a touring programme.

## **INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY**

1. If your proposed work discusses, represents or uses First Nations languages or cultural and intellectual property (such as references to Aboriginal lore, cultural practices, etc) and you are not a member of that community you will be required to provide proof of community endorsement for your work/project from the relevant Indigenous group at least 3 months prior to exhibition opening.
2. Non-Indigenous creatives working with First Nations artists and/or communities to develop or create your work must do so in a respectful, culturally appropriate way.

## **SELECTION CRITERIA**

### **7 artworks will be considered for the Albany Town Hall exhibition**

Artwork proposals will be assessed by:

- Saira Spencer (Curator)
- Abbie Pedersen (Director of Denmark Arts)
- + advisor: Anna Louise Richardson

Proposals submitted by First Nations artists or containing themes pertaining to Indigenous cultural knowledge and practices will be reviewed by person(s) suitably qualified to act as a First Nations advisor.

The following criteria is a guideline for artists. Final selections will be made on the basis of impactful curation and representation of themes outlined in brief.

Key criteria for review will be:

#### **Artistic Merit**

- Relevance to brief
- Quality of the proposal in terms of strength of concept. Specifically: evidence of vision, originality, creativity, experimentation, innovation and inquisitiveness
- Clear articulation of concept
- Calibre of the applicant as evidenced by their relevant experience and in the quality of their previous work (expectations adjusting in-line with career experience)

Also for consideration:

#### **Viability**

Suitability and viability of the artist's proposed approach to the brief and their capacity to professionally manage and deliver the project. This may include:

- Realistic and achievable planning and resource needs
- Relevance and timeliness of proposed activity
- Role of any partners, including confirmation of involvement

#### **Inclusion and benefit to audience and community**

Where necessary:

- Evidence of considered consultation and engagement with proposed partners, participants, audiences and communities
- Adherence to relevant cultural protocols
- Contribution to diverse cultural expression
- Level of deliverable benefits for community audiences and participants
- Increased and diversified participation in arts and culture, particularly among diverse cultural groups

All selection decisions are final. Conversations about selection will not be entered into.

## FEES, FUNDING AND SALES

**The exhibition at the Town Hall is funded for 7 x \$800 artwork development fees.**

This fee was calculated according to NAVA guidelines

- How these funds are spent/used is at the discretion of the lead artist: including costs related materials, research and travel costs. Compensation for artists contributing to collaborative works is at the discretion of the lead artist. They are not entitled to financial compensation through Denmark Arts or other funding bodies for the Triennial.
- If an artist wishes to pursue funding from other sources to cover their costs (ie. an audio artist needs to hire musicians or equipment), they are encouraged to do so.
- If making community-based works, artists are permitted to charge workshop or participation fees to recoup costs. They are encouraged to approach Denmark Arts when selecting an appropriate venue.
- Denmark Arts can support funding applications via letters of support or auspicing arrangements provided the artist contacts them in a timely fashion. Denmark Arts cannot provide funding to any artist beyond the aforementioned artwork development fees.

## ARTWORK SALES

- Artworks featured in the Town Hall exhibition **do not** have to be for sale
- All sales of works exhibited at Albany Town Hall are to be handled by City of Albany Arts and Culture Department
- Artworks for sale will need to include a 25% (+ 10% GST) commission in their sale price
- If an artwork is sold during the Town Hall exhibition, in order for consideration in the survey exhibition or touring program, the collector must consent to an artwork loan agreement. Sold artworks cannot otherwise be considered for the JCG exhibition or touring program. If an artwork has been selected for the tour or survey but the buyer does not wish to loan the work, it is at the discretion of artists whether they choose to sell their work rather than remain in the tour or JCG exhibition.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### COLLABORATIVE WORKS

For the purposes of this project, collaboration refers to an imaginative process.

Collaborative works do not require contributions from multiple artists:

For some, this might mean making a work through a community workshop, it might mean responding (with consent) to another artist's work on this topic.

Collaboration also refers to conversation- artists are urged to go out into their communities (whether that be their cultural community, workplace) or visit with outside communities (ie. someone from a different social circle/industry/ culture to you) and have a conversation about the themes raised in this brief.

In respect of the fact we all have differing accessibility needs, time and resource availability, no preference will be given to artists who choose to outwardly engage vs. those whose collaboration takes a more nuanced form- be playful, interpret this criteria creatively.

### SUPPORT

Artists participating in Radical Futures: Fertile Ground will be supported in the following ways:

- Access to curator, Saira Spencer, to support the development of work
- Consultation with curator during the EOI process. Artists may contact Saira via **sairaellen.art@gmail.com** to arrange a phonecall to discuss the brief
- Curated installation of artworks
- Social media marketing for exhibition
- Artwork sales handling (please note, a commission of 25% + GST will apply)
- Where possible, curator Saira Spencer will provide additional support to artists with accessibility needs.