Straying towards the scenic route

Making artwork while on the road, Jazmina Cininas discovers the joys (and otherwise) of adventuring around Australia while remaining ready to frottage.

It's Christmas Day 2024. Jonas and I bid our families farewell and embark on The Big Lap with our dog, Snukis. For the next year, we will be living in a caravan as we travel around Australia. Twelve months without making art is unthinkable, so I devise projects that are achievable on our 59 x 62cm caravan tabletop and which respond to the landscapes through which we will be travelling. Following on from my earlier forays into frottage (rubbings) from manhole covers in Japan, I settle on a similar project for the Big Lap, hopeful of more inspiring options than the cracked earth motifs on the concrete telecommunications covers in my local Northcote streets. Tatake zomé, or flower pounding, will form an alternative mode for mapping the changing landscape with the juice of its flora. A third project will consist of souvenir postcards made from the printed ephemera of travelling. Thrown into the mix is an edition of fifty-six frottages for a Rona Green print exchange portfolio project. Utter madness in a caravan, but I can't say no. I pack enough pre-torn kozo for all the projects into the caravan's 59 x 32 x 28cm hatch, along with my colour pencils, a hammer, cutting mat, steel ruler, box cutter and glue.

South Australia

We springboard our odyssey in Adelaide/Tarntanya where our folk-singing group, The Lost Clog, is performing at a Lithuanian cultural festival. On day two, our brand-new car is side swiped at the traffic lights. We bide our time on the Limestone Coast and the Murray until our appointment with the insurance assessor. When we return the following week, we trash the awning against a streetlight after visiting the Dale Chihuly exhibition in the Botanic Gardens. Not the most auspicious start.

We kill more time awaiting the replacement awning at the Yorke Peninsula/Guuranda. We stay at bush camps, witness spectacular sunrises and sunsets, have close encounters with dolphins. I begin collaging postcards from caravan park maps, cereal boxes, paper straws, sultana packets, toilet paper wrappers. A brass plaque at Corny Point lighthouse gets my frottage juices flowing. This is more like it.

Williamstown/Nuriootpa on the edge of the Barossa Valley becomes basecamp while we wait out repairs. We frequent the nearby pool, opened by Dawn Fraser in 1958, while men in matching Lycra speed past in the Tour Down Under. I take rubbings of the pool's plaque and town memorials.

Mid-January, we finally break free of Adeleide's municipality and head for the Eyre Peninsula. The coastline shifts

from mountainous, blindingly white sand dunes and turquoise waters to rugged rock formations, dramatic cliffs and the churning waves of the Southern Ocean. The only lakes we see are salt. Termite mounds resemble military cemeteries. We encounter emus on the streets of Coffin Bay and swim with sealions and dolphins in Baird Bay. We get bogged in sand on rugged Whaler's Way, eventually digging ourselves out with a Romanian-army folding shovel. The land is parched, the sun merciless.

Frottage opportunities are limited and flower-pounding is largely restricted to salt-bush berries and bougainvillea from street plantings. Most native plants are either out of season or out of bounds in nature reserves. The hammering threatens relationships with canvas-walled neighbours. I begin stockpiling flowers in the fridge until solitary moments.

We arrive at Cactus/Warabari, an almost mythical mecca among my brothers' surfing fraternity. I am not leaving without a frottage of its plaque, however inconveniently it is obscured by a fence, or however much the wind is blowing and the insects are biting. Make no mistake, frottage en plein air is an extreme artform. In towns, I navigate cars, pedestrians, hard surfaces turned to hotplates in the blistering sun, cramps, my natural self-consciousness. But I am determined.

Next stop, the Nullarbor (Latin for 'no trees') or Oondir (Mirning for 'no water'). It is our first crossing. I am surprised by the number of trees. And by the rain. One minute, it is 44°C, the next, 26°C. We turn on our windscreen wipers for the first time in more than two months.

Western Australia

We cross the border with 700 kilometres remaining until the first town, Norseman/Jimberlana. The temperate forests of Noongar lands feel like paradise. Once more, lakes and rivers flow blue with water. Jaw-droppingly beautiful beaches line the coast.

We're invited to house-sit in Margaret River/Wooditjup for a week, which turns into two, then three. The weather is glorious, the infamous wind blissfully absent. I take rubbings from the town streets as well as objets d'art that cram

Above: Jazmina Cininas taking a frottage at the Uluru Visitor Centre, 2025.
Photography: Jonas Lipšys

Opposite page: Jazmina and Snukis on The Big Lap, 2025.
Photography: Jonas Lipšys

the home, and pound flowers from the garden. My ever-expanding collage materials spread luxuriously over bench tops as I produce postcards in earnest. I start on the frottage plates for Rona's print. Jonas gets the car serviced in Manjimup while I have a productive, if unglamourous, frottage session with the town's decorative rubbish bins.

When our friends return from Melbourne, we retrace our route along the coast. Nearing Pemberton, the skies unleash buckets of rain. I gaze wistfully at the laser-cut kangaroos and bottlebrushes adorning the streets from the car window, mourning a lost frottage opportunity.

We pull into Bremer Bay/Baalungup and stay a few days. As I'm admiring the view, I learn that my former RMIT boss, Richard Harding, has suddenly died.

It is now Easter. Coastal beauty is tempered by grief and cooling weather. We head inland to Hyden and Wave Rock/Katter Kich, attended by lightning and torrential rain. Rainbows span the sky when we arrive. Eschewing holiday crowds, we opt for a short-stay camp, essentially a paddock with a drop toilet. We have not seen the BoM's Severe Thunderstorm Warning for the Central Wheat Belt. We are parked in its epicentre.

The thunderstorm that night is apocalyptic. Hyden receives triple its average monthly rainfall in a single night. Lightning turns night into day. Thunderclaps shake our bones. A direct lightening hit blasts our new awning and camp table to shreds. Snukis cowers on our pillows, then our heads. We emerge the following morning, shell-shocked, and gather up the debris. Passing through Hyden, I lament more laser-cut signage, out of reach in shin-deep puddles. We drive to Menzies for Richard's live-streamed funeral, tissues at hand. It's a full house. Vale Richard Harding. You were one in a million.

Next stop, Lake Ballard where Antony Gormley's steel figures cast otherworldly shadows over the vast, dry lake system. It is simply extraordinary. The flies love it. We plan our exploration route as the sun goes down. In the middle of the night, we are woken again by thunder and lightning, and the whimpering of Snukis on our heads. The following morning, Ballard has reverted to a lake proper and we retreat towards the coast on roads turned rivers.

In Geraldton, I take advantage of the marine-life impressions in the footpaths. We swim with sea turtles in Monkey Mia and whale sharks in Exmouth, our vessel flanked by orcas. I harvest Sturt Desert Peas from street verges. We snorkel among coral gardens in Ningaloo and bathe in teeth-chattering waters flanked by primordial escarpments in Kalbarri and Karijini. We camp at windblown stations overrun by feral goats with spectacular beach frontage.

In early June, we reach Broome/Rubibi. Halfway! We recalibrate, swim in crocodile-free waters, and watch camel trains on Cable Beach. I revel in the town's frottage opportunities and begin on my edition for Rona in earnest. The arrival of squadrons of mosquitoes sends us up the Dampier Peninsula to idyllic Gnylmarung.

Next, the Gibb River Road—660 kilometres of unsealed corrugations infamous for breaking caravans. We ford rivers and dodge potholes the size of bulls. Cupboard doors fall off. Grass seeds infest Snukis' paws. We indulge in scones and outdoor baths at Ellenbrae Station, wade across lily-pad filled lagoons to Manning Gorge and swim below dreamlike waterfalls at El Questro. Invasive Hibiscus sabdariffa releases luscious fuchsia when pounded. The Kimberley escarpments are Jurassic. It's magnificent.

By the time we reach Kununurra/

Goonoonoorrang, my edition is ready to post to Rona. Hallelujah! The police station gates are adorned with premium frottage opportunities. We take in a bush tucker tour at the Warringarri Art Centre, a cruise among crocodiles at Lake Argyle.

Bungle Bungles/Purnululu beckon. The roads into the park are diabolical, the river crossing brutal, the geology mesmerising. Next stop, the Tanami Track, a 1050-kilometre corrugated 'short cut' through the desert to Alice Springs. It is 600 kilometres between fuel stops at Bililuna and Yuendumu.

Northern Territory

The WA/NT border is spelt out in wine bottles beside a beaten-up oil drum. Swainsona tanamiensis spreads purple carpets against ochre. Dingoes howl and camels grunt in the night.We plan our Yuendumu arrival to correspond with their renowned art centre's opening hours, only to find padlocked gates. We have to be towed the final 300 kilometres to Alice Springs. After the car returns from the garage, Jonas plasters DIESEL, YOU IDIOT on the fuel cap.

The spectacular geology of Kings Canyon/Watarrka is almost eclipsed by its fabulously frottage-friendly signage. But the main event in town is Uluru. There's an undeniable thrill at our first sighting of the sacred monolith. My heart skips a beat in the car park. The signage is made for frottage. But first, the three-hour circuit of Uluru.

Rock paintings reveal former classrooms. Spirits haunt shaded water holes. A willy willy blocks our path, unnervingly human in its proportions and demeanour. It seems to be watching us. Or warning us. At the halfway mark, my phone falls into the only toilet on the circuit, a chemical long drop affair, taking all my unsaved photos and my driver's licence and credit cards with it. Two hours later, five rangers meet us with a long-handled grabber. Jonas emerges from the cubicle triumphantly holding my mortally compromised phone aloft. The rangers don't want their grabber back.

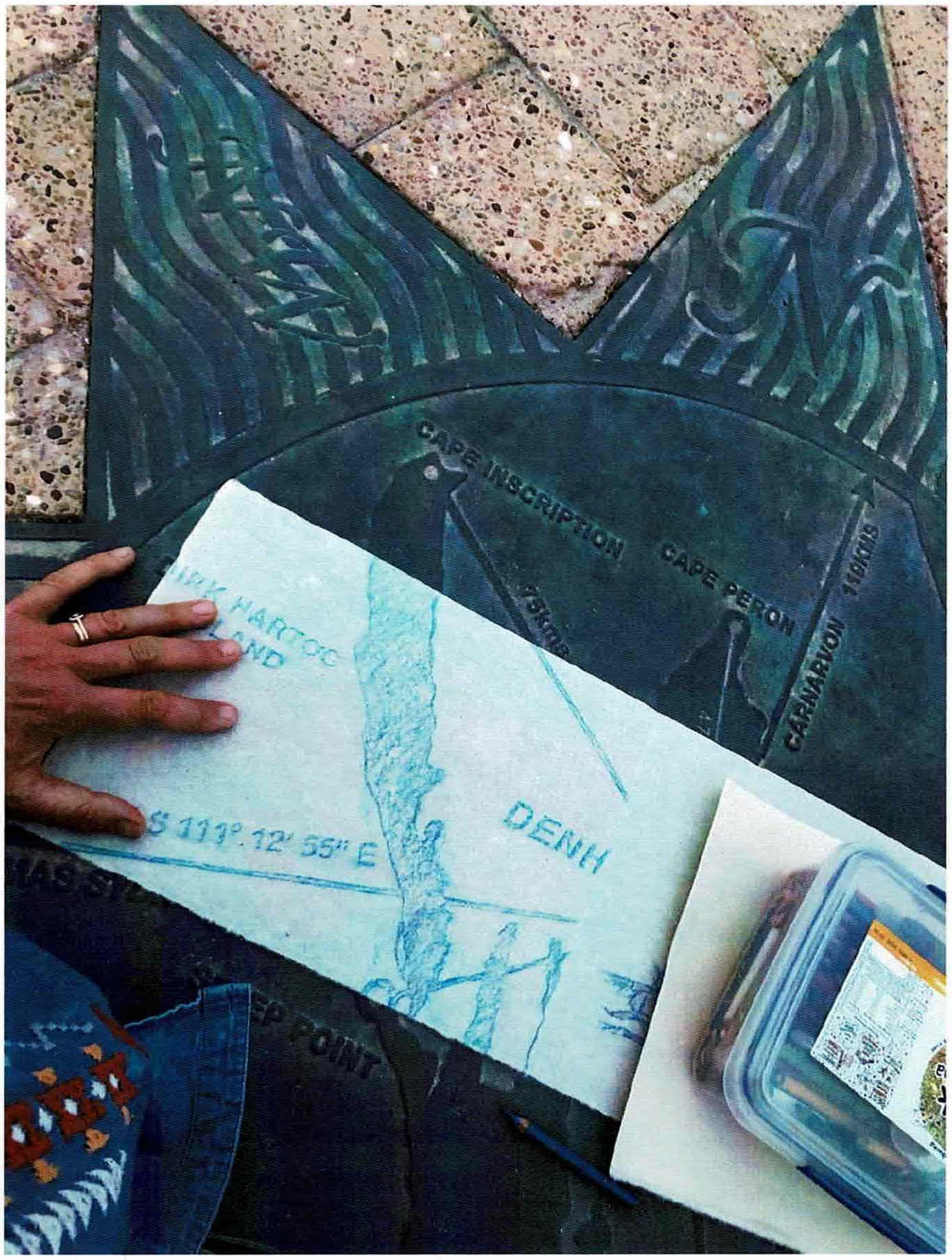
Kata Tjuta rivals Uluru in its sacred beauty, but I am too demoralised to surrender to awe. I revisit the carpark for much-needed frottage therapy. A sudden gust blows open my frottage case and scatters seven-months of work in all directions the exact moment a large family pass by. They leap into action. I don't lose a single page.

Back in Alice I buy a new phone. Jonas' photo of Snukis watching the sunset over Uluru makes it onto the ABC News NT weather.

There's a 1500-kilometre trek to Darwin/Garramilla ahead. We re-enter the Tropic of Capricorn, camping at Daly Waters and Tennant Springs before arriving at Mataranka. We spend four luxurious days drifting in viridian thermal springs alongside turtles.

In Katherine, Nitmiluk gorge is nice, the signage and frottage opportunities spectacular. A miracle working technician resurrects my phone and all my photos from the dead. I feel like I've won the lottery.

The Darwin Festival is kicking off as we arrive in Larrakia country. We have arranged to mind our veterinarian god-

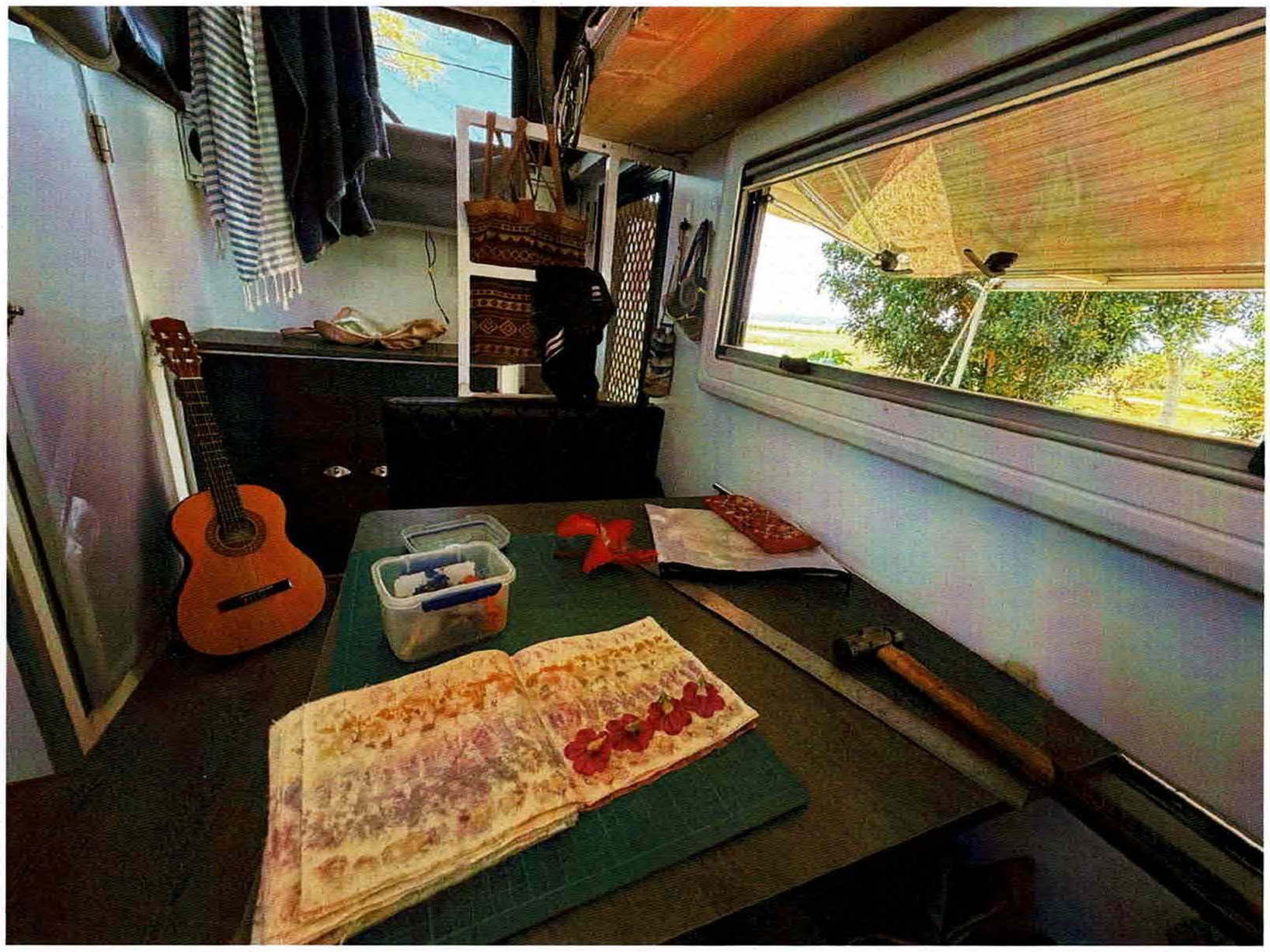


Above: Frottage in action, Denham, 2025.

Opposite top: Frottage in action, Narooma, 2025

Opposite: Frottage in action, Mingenew, 2025.

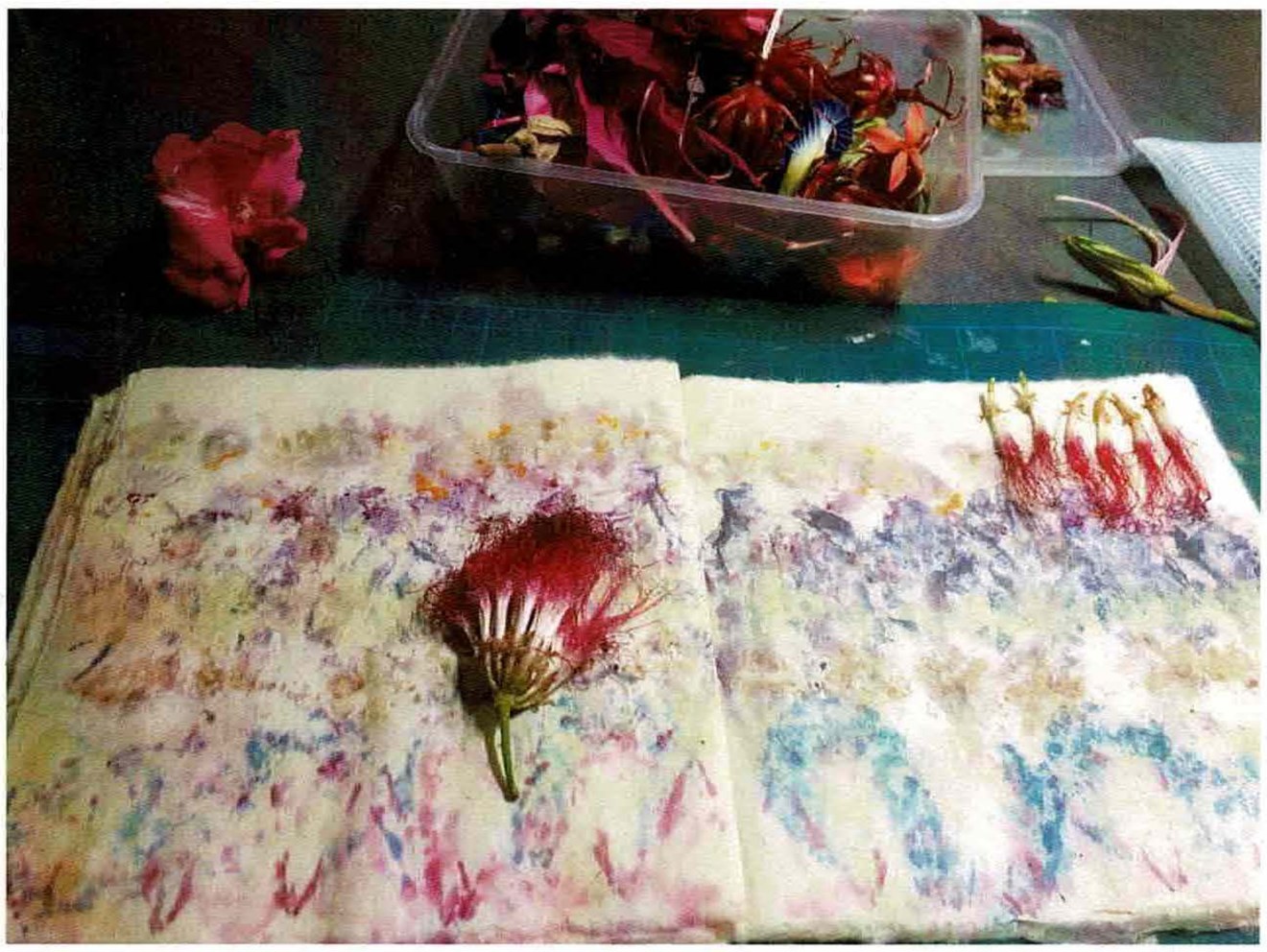
Photography: Jazmina Cininas



Left: Tataki-zomé in action, Newell Beach, 2025.

Below: Tataki-zomé in action, 2025.

Photography: Jazmina Cininas



daughter's three-legged former racing greyhound, blind Italian greyhound, rescued street cat, opera-singing parrot, chickens, lovebirds, quail, snake and two Rottweilers, while she knackers camp dogs in Maningrida. Mark Chapman invites us to the Aboriginal Art Fair opening. I leave with a Wilma Napangardi Poulson from the Yuendumu art centre. The NATSIAA award exhibition is inspired, the National Indigenous Music Awards a hoot. Smith Street mall is a frottage mecca of historical plaques. I spend days scribbling furiously on baking footpaths. Mark convinces us that the Buku-Larrnŋuy Mulka Art Centre in Yirrkala is worth the corrugated 1300-kilometre return drive. He informs manager Will Stubbs that I'm up for some volunteering. We get permits and brace for Central Arnhem Road, King Stingray on repeat.

At Djilpin Art Centre, Julie teaches me basket weaving on a rug beneath a tree, from pandanus she harvested and dyed herself. Legend. The only other permissible stop on the brutal road, Mainoru Station, surprises us with grass and a shady swimming hole. We arrive in Nhulunbuy bone-rattled and caked in red dust. Signage is refreshingly bilingual, Yolŋu and English. Nhulunbuy's historic plaques are frottage gold.

It's a short drive from Nhulunbuy to Yirrkala, an unassuming community that birthed Yothu Yindi, King Stingray and the landmark Bark Petitions. Intimidating credentials. Buku-Larrnŋuy Mulka is crammed with world class artefacts including the sublime Yirrkala Church Panels. I spend a day packing prints with Claudine for an exhibition in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy.

The wet season lurks on the horizon. We grit our teeth for the return drive. After recuperating at Mataranka, we gun it for the east coast.

East Coast

The Atherton Tablelands on Yidinji Country in Far North Queensland provide a soft landing. Grass! Rainforests! Waterfalls! Gourmet supermarkets! Ancient figs grow citadels of tangled roots and dizzying canopies straight from Hollywood AI. Gardens are a riot of colourful blooms made for pounding. Street begonias release exquisite watercolour blushes, the vibrant orange blooms of the invasive Spathodea campanulate transform to a disappointingly turgid brown.

It is October. A sense of urgency creeps in. Time to journey south. Ba-

nana plantations gradually give way to towns as we approach my brother's place in Noosa/Kabi Kabi Country. We spot dolphins and whales from Darius' boat and return with mammoth fishes that Shelley cooks into sensational feasts. We get bogged getting into our beach-front campsite on North Stradbroke Island/Minjerribah. And again when getting out. The road south is littered with coastal gems.

In Sydney's heaving metropolis, I avail myself of Martin Place's frottage bounty. Melbourne appears on road signs for the first time in eleven months. We visit places we already know and love: Mystery Bay, Tilba, Tathra, Merimbula, Bermagui. Back in Victoria, a herd of deer almost collide with us at the turn off for Mallacoota. Koalas and lyrebirds inhabit the caravan park. Wombats, bandicoots, kangaroos and lace monitors visit us at Cape Conran/Gunnaikurnai Country.

In January, we dot the 'i' of our Big Lap with a ferry crossing and Cygnet Folk Festival on Tasmania/Lutruwita, bookending our trip with another Lost Clog performance. I squeeze in rubbings between rehearsals and downpours. We shiver through the stunning natural beauty of Chain of Lagoons and Bay of Fires in the coldest summer on record.

By the time we arrive back in Northcote, I have a hefty tome of rubbings, a volume of flower poundings and a caravan hatch overflowing with surplus packaging, as well as a new appreciation for the creative opportunities offered by council rubbish bins and the colour mysteries hidden within flowers. I marvel at the subtle diversity of cracked-earth designs on the local telecommunications covers.

Australia, you've been epic.

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Jazmina Cininas is a Melbourne-based artist whose work has been shortlisted for numerous art prizes and exhibited extensively nationally and internationally. In 2025, Jazmina retired from RMIT School of Art, where she was a lecturer in printmaking and artist books for close to three decades. She has been travelling since.

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Jazmina Cininas will be exhibiting work created during her travels around Australia, Japan and the Baltic States at Australian Galleries, Melbourne, from 13-31 October.

Top: Collage postcards in progress, Loxton, 2025.

Above: Collage postcards in progress, Margaret River, 2025.

Photgraphy: Jazmina Cininas