



ANNE LORD

Anne Lord's life experiences in north west Queensland growing up on a sheep and cattle property and returning to help during teaching holidays have contributed to her unique approach to interpreting the environment. As an established and highly respected artist who has worked in a range of media for over three decades, Anne reflects on the land's deep past. Tracing back to the pre-human existence of organisms emerging from primal matter of the prehistoric inland sea, she invites viewing audiences to re-think the necessity of collaborative custodianship of this ancient land as the planet moves towards a precarious ecological future.

I grew up six hundred and forty kilometres west of Townsville on a grazing property called Kilterry. It was acquired through the 1900s on government-run ballots for people who were interested in purchasing land for grazing. At twelve noon on May 2, 1917 my grandmother won the ballot for a twenty-two thousand-acre allotment of land. And while that sounds like a big stretch of country, even that size of land proved to be unviable to run enough stock for the survival of families on such acreage. It's very sparse country in the dry tropics and you really need two or more blocks of this size to work on it effectively. Prior to this, the government sent out surveyors to draw up boundary lines, and then people could apply for the ballot where apportioned areas of land were awarded to them for purchase. My grandmother was

still unmarried when she won the ballot, and the title stayed in her name. It was sold to my mother Mary Lord and father Robert Lord as Lyne and Lord partners.

My grandmother Margaret Lyne nee Gillespie worked alongside her three sisters helping run the family Hotel in Hughenden. Their mother Margaret Gillespie, was dependent on the girls' help as their father was an alcoholic. But still, it was accepted that Margaret Lyne would leave to set up a life of her own. Her mother was excited and hoped to live on the property after leaving the pub but she passed away before that was possible.

Hughenden was a lively place in the early 1900s. There was a decent social life and many people travelled west from Townsville. But while my grandmother was familiar with Hughenden and understood the ropes

about how to be a publican, she had no idea about what she was up for in terms of working the land. In the early part of that same year that she'd won the ballot, she met a man called Percy Burton Phillipson Lyne who came from Tasmania. He had returned from the Boer War and had money to buy land. They decided to go and live on Kilterry, so he sold his property Saego Plains near Hughenden. They married in the November of that year, and my grandmother's mother and sisters gave them a new car as a wedding present. On the same day as the wedding ceremony they drove out to Kilterry. The existing Cobb and Co. roads were very rough and slow going. There were some Cobb and Co Coach Hotels where people stopped overnight. For the horse-drawn coaches, tired horses were rested at these stops.

In the months prior to that day, my grandfather had ridden to Kilterry with a packhorse and supplies to fence the new property and build a small shelter for them to live in initially. It would have been a very simple start, but they worked that property according to conditions of sale set out by the government. My grandmother Margaret Lyne always spoke of being very lonely, and of how she cherished social meetings where she would play the piano.

My mother Mary Lord, nee Lyne, grew up on Kilterry as an only child, and also remembered being terribly lonely. She hoped to have eight children of her own so that none of them would suffer the same loneliness. In the end she had six children, and there was no loneliness in our family. The property called Kilterry has for me always been associated with a sense of home, and my eldest brother's son is now in Succession Planning to take over looking after the place within the terms of what's called a 99-year lease.

When I was growing up, there were mostly merino sheep, but now it is mainly cattle – everyone recognizes it's not suitable country for sheep. I can remember lots of bird life around the homestead, especially along the creek by the house. There are many kangaroos running through the grasslands, often seen when riding or driving through the country. I still love it and I'll always want to call it home – even though technically it's not my home any more. During the 1980s on breaks from TAFE at Townsville I'd go back there every chance I got, and I'd always come back to my studio with huge amounts of drawings and paintings I'd produced out there. I always love that kind of endless-seeming country that comes from natural grasslands; it's called black-soil country and it stretches out over flat plains. People and stock can live there due to the water from the Artesian Basin (underground aquifers). If it rains the soil is boggy and you can't drive a normal car through it. When Mum was growing up you couldn't cross the river during the wet season for several months of the year

and provisions would be ferried across the river on little boats. Cars or trucks from the local railway siding and from the properties on the opposite side of the flooding Flinders River met on the riverbanks to take provisions to the homestead or send mail back to the train station.

We undertook primary school education through the Primary Correspondence School (PCS) based in Brisbane. The lessons were conducted at home. Sometimes Mum, sometimes the overseer's wife and sometimes a governess would supervise and check our work. The PCS would send out packets of mail every week of the term, and the governess would make sure you were understanding and following the instructions. By the time you'd reached Grade 6 you'd be following the instructions yourself. In the late 1950s the School of the Air started. Initially School of the Air (SOA) was only available to us for about an hour a week. Primary Correspondence School (PCS) was all very formal and your work would be carefully mailed out, corrected in Brisbane and mailed back to children living on the properties.

For secondary school I was sent down to Brisbane to enroll as a boarder at Stuartholme College, (Convent of the Sacred Heart in those days). I was very homesick for the country and I'd heard that one of our second cousins had tried to run away. It seemed adventurous to me but Dad came out to see me when he was in Brisbane on business and advised me "if you run away we'll bring you right back again". My sister loved it down there but I took a bit of time adjusting.

But there were benefits to boarding school. During the 1960s, the Dr. Behan art collection was hung throughout of the school. The works were so inspiring and we had a really wonderful art education - one of the teachers was Andrew Sibley and later, another was Betty Churcher. I can still remember how she taught art and the way she connected civilisations and cultures; styles and methods. Her teaching was instrumental in my wanting to be a painter.

We'd have to fly down to Brisbane for boarding school and back for the holidays on the old TAA Fokker Friendship that flew on kangaroo hops doing many stops on the Townsville/ Mount Isa run of the regional towns. It was a very a bumpy ride and every time we landed you could be sure that one of the kids would be sick. The travel time took a whole day from the property to Julia Creek airport with a 2 hour stop-over in Townsville where we changed planes. Friends met us at the Brisbane Airport and took us up to school.

After high school I decided to take the equivalent of a gap year to return home. But I ended up staying three years. During the second year I was there, Mervyn Moriarty flew up to start Eastaus Art School, a venture that he'd initiated. He learnt to fly to teach art classes

in the regions. He and his wife Helen produced booklets that students could follow between his stopovers, flying into the towns. Later Eastaus became the Australian Flying Arts School. I just loved it and he told me I was one of his star pupils. He suggested that I should go to art school in Sydney so I did. In those days I enrolled at what was East Sydney Technical College but I started at the suburban branch of the campus at Kogarah. In second year we all moved on to that wonderful complex that used to be the convict-built Darlinghurst jail. After those early years it changed to a College of Advanced Education and after I'd left, it transformed into COFA – the College of Fine Arts, UNSW, Sydney. I majored in painting and enrolled in minor subjects: fine art printing and photography as well. One of the teachers told me I was doing too many studio subjects but my attitude was that I was going to need all those skills and information when I returned home, or at least to Townsville. Another lecturer asked in our final year what we would do next. He seemed amazed when I said I would go back to Townsville, north Queensland to work. He asked, "Why would you do that? What's up there? Why would you even go back up there?" And I said "That is where I want to be..." And even though Townsville was over six hundred and thirty kilometres from the place where I really felt at home, it was the closest professional centre to where I grew up and I could still be involved with producing and teaching visual art.

Within the first year of my return to Townsville, after taking three part-time jobs to make ends meet, I was offered a part-time job teaching at TAFE. I had become so tired of being poor in Sydney I felt enormously relieved. I had a studio that wasn't all that great when I was first teaching and it was a bit of a set-back to the progress of my work as an artist, but later I got a better studio and things improved a great deal. In the 1980s TAFE gave us a studio day a week so I was really able to produce a decent amount of work while teaching art. TAFE was housed in a beautiful old building in the city centre. I taught art between 1980 and 2013. During that time there were several transitions to the institution and, as a result, to the kind of teaching we were able to do. The TAFE art school was pushed out into the suburbs at Pimlico and then after that. When the institution was amalgamated into a university, the TAFE Diploma was offered as a degree. The university system of academic work and lecturing did not provide a studio day for artist/educators. It was focused on formal lectures and students enrolling in higher degrees. I was supervising Honours, Masters and PhD before I was given a redundancy.

I now live with my husband in the suburb Mundingburra, about eight kilometres from the city. It feels good to be back in my own studio, able to do full time art work – I also have more time for a garden – art

and gardening are a big part of what I do, and I have to make sure I discipline myself in terms of studio time.

I lived in Brisbane when I was undertaking my Masters, Visual Arts at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. My research focus was centred around a recycling project to do with big cities including Townsville and waste. Titled ROT, my project was included in IMA program as an off-site structure. Although I was motivated and productive there, living in Brisbane didn't give me the same sense of connection I have with North Queensland. I produced a parallel project building a site-work on the ground in clay at the Kilterry Artesian Borehead that has been well documented. I guess I'll always have a connection to the dry tropics where I grew up. The art work I'm currently developing is a re-imagination of the creatures that might have come out of the inland sea or water-mass in prehistoric North Queensland. Locals and scientists keep finding fossils around Richmond, Winton and Julia Creek. There are many that have been picked up on Kilterry. But I want to imagine what it might be like going back before fauna developed skeletons, to the time of *prima materia* – to imagine what it might be like when some creatures initially came out of the primal ooze.

From an ecological perspective we're at a point where we don't know what the future holds – and I'm making up a story that suggests that even back then, the future was already cast – the emergence of these sloth-like hybrid creatures from pre-history could bear signs and clues of what was to come. Ecological issues are key.

What might make it difficult?

Townsville is not a capital city and north Queensland is not yet a separate state. Thus we don't have the kind of support we need to sustain our community of artists and audiences. There are just a few commercial galleries, but it's hard to make sales here. I think the community could do with an injection of art support, human capital and infrastructure funding. For example, the commitment to building the new Cowboys Stadium is encouragement for people to invest money back into the community. The three tiers of government should do the same for visual arts culture and that would make a difference.

For many artists, cultural products are developed from and emerge from the open possibilities that their own region offers. In a city, people might go into a chain-store to buy a reproduction or print to put on their wall rather than support the production of the artists that live in the area. How do we learn to see our own sense of place unless it's through the way people and place are depicted by creative thinkers and artists? Creative practice, and all that involves, allows us to shift our own sense of the possibilities of what makes us different, as



well as similar, and how we grow our sense of locality, perhaps through creativity. It's frustrating at times – I have seen the development and celebration of small places in other countries, but they also have to work at it. There are many visual artists in Townsville, many people creating art work, but not enough professional support and infrastructure for the amount of work to be presented to audiences.

And where do the other challenges lie? But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

People who live up here like the tropics. Many like gardens and the laid-back qualities that come with the lifestyle here. It's a place where you have the time to ponder and ask yourself what you want to be doing, creating! There's a sense of time that's different from how you experience it in capital cities. I've always really valued the opportunity to build up the sense of a personal home and garden space. My studio exists across both. Nowadays that's in Townsville but even so, there's still that connection to North-West Queensland that I don't think I'll ever lose. The challenges are worthwhile because of the space we create.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

I don't know that artists actually shape any communities – they might provide things that help give a sense that people are connected, and other things emerge out of that feeling. There's a magazine called Huxley.Press (<http://huxley.press/2018/05/03/staying-in-character/>) up here that's been launched and supported by Sarah Mathiesen and Nathan Toll. The magazine and web site are devoted to the creative arts. At this stage it's connecting people to what's happening. I've been running Gallery 48 in Townsville for about 10 years. I open it for two afternoons a week. There's no money in it so you can't take out big ads for the shows but we are able to run interviews with artists. Other spaces like the Drill Hall and Sylvia Ditchburn Gallery are operating partly as ARIs (Artist Run Initiatives), they are also functioning as ersatz commercial galleries because there are so few other outlets. Umbrella and Perc Tucker Regional Gallery also sell artworks, as does Pinnacles Gallery in the Riverway Art Centre (a complex that houses a theatre, swimming pool, meeting rooms and coffee shop). They are funded partly or wholly by the Townsville City Council.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

Well as I've said, I've always remained deeply connected to this region, north Queensland and the dry tropics. Townsville has been a business centre on the coast for many people in the west. In the 1980s there was a yearly Pacific Arts Festival and people travelled from other parts of Australia for the festival. That would be a big challenge now - to bring back a similar event.

How does it feel now?

Well if you look around, you can see all these suburban developments, north, west and south of Townsville CBD; but one of the huge problems is that Townsville has a massive water supply problem. For three years the Townsville Ross River Dam has been down around fifteen percent– then a monsoon storm filled it to eighty-five percent in one week. But no one can predict the weather and there has been little follow up rain since, so there's just no water security. What large city the size of Townsville has that kind of low-level water security? It's an example of the kind of frustration that comes with living in a regional city where you know that so many of the things that are allowed to happen would never have been allowed to develop to the same extent in larger capital cities.

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

I think that any attempts to make connections to other regional places is important – it helps to connect people in similar situations. It also helps to see how cultural differences are so important, maybe like biodiversity! Though, I think that in bigger places people don't bother too much about what's happening in the smaller regions. When funding is available for regional art projects: then things can happen in impressive ways in the regions.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

The houses are generally cheaper – getting around is cheaper but on the other hand a lot of the produce that's trucked in from the bigger cities is more expensive. Even so, there is a lot more produce coming from Ingham in the north, the Atherton Tablelands west of Cairns and just south of us Ayr is a region that has a major irrigation system and produces seasonal vegetables as a result. Of course, sugar cane is a major crop north and south of Townsville. I'm currently growing my own vegetables, and it does seem that more people are doing that - we can't live off it in our small house block, but it does help cut everyday living costs. I also have four hens – they're my pets and I've given them names so I'll never be tempted to kill them and eat them – we get two eggs a day from the mature hens, with two about to lay eggs.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

Yes – it's pretty essential. Last year I went with my husband to Italy and in 2015 to Europe. I always spend most of the time when I go overseas, in the art galleries, or at art events. Medieval and early Renaissance painting are two of my favorite periods; Giotto's paintings exude a sense of calmness, serenity and spiritual purpose... it's something I search for. But on the whole, contemporary art seems similar from place to place – it's good to see new work, but there tends to be quite a bit of homogeneity in those big international biennales or triennales. Well perhaps the same big names are often presented, although the shock factor is impressive in the big centres.



In 1993 I took eight months to travel overseas. I was based in Paris and went to a lithography studio one day a week but most of the time I was just looking around, and that strengthens the sense of connection to place you have for your own country – I don't connect to Europe as a place but I keep seeing similarities. We have a different sense of heritage here in Australia possibly through painters and writers who have looked at place and reinterpreted it back to us. People say that the tropical regions are too hot most of the year but you have to put up with something, and at this time of year (May) and in winter over June, July and August, the weather is just perfect.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

...or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc)?

Social media helps to connect what happens in the dry tropics or communicate this place to other communities. Websites annelord.com.au and connected Facebook pages, such as <https://gallery48thestrandtownsville.com/?s=48.com> are my methods of connecting art in Townsville to people here and in other regions. Similarly, I have a WordPress site Gardening in Townsville <https://wordpress.com/post/gardeningintownsville.wordpress.com/76> because success is so joyous and revealing, due to the fact that it is such a challenge to grow things in an environment spanning monsoon weather and drought.

The possibility of building any sort of region-to-region relationships is an important way of seeing connections that go beyond the obvious. For me place is still important – I've got a sense of connection here in the city and suburban area of Townsville where I live. When I've gone away to travel overseas, it feels like I'm coming home when I return to Australia.

What is the role of your work?

I can only hope it has a role, as nothing is assured – it's something to do with the way you look at things and so that has a lot to do with your beliefs – if there's integrity in the way an artist looks at things and interprets them, that carries on into their art. I'm probably too cynical about the art scene, such as it is, to say there is a role for my work within that kind of framework, but you need to get it out there to audiences for the work to fulfil its role. Being a creative person and wanting to say something is one thing, but you don't have so much control over how your work is delivered to audiences and how it is perceived. If it does manage to reach many audiences and I've connected to someone about what I believe, I consider that a bonus.

