

# ***GROWING UP ON THE ISLAND :: ALBERT (DIGBY) MORAN***

A LISMORE REGIONAL GALLERY EXHIBITION

1 SEPT - 14 OCT 2018

EDUCATION RESOURCE



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**LISMORE REGIONAL GALLERY :: 11 RURAL STREET LISMORE NSW 2480**

**TEL: 02 6627 4600**

**Please contact Lismore Regional Gallery Learning Officer for more information about learning resources/programs, tours and exhibition schedules**

**CLAUDIE FROCK | LEARNING OFFICER**

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**LISMORE REGIONAL GALLERY**

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**Learning Officer work days**

**Wednesday**

**Thursday**

**Friday**

# Albert (Digby) Moran: *Growing up on The Island*

“I’ve always been a spiritual person. When I work things just come out of me and I don’t even know what I’m doing until I stop and look. There are things I didn’t know I had. Only when I discovered painting and gave away alcohol and cigarettes and cleaned my head, then I started to get this spiritual stuff in my life. I think it’s from the ancestors passing things down.”

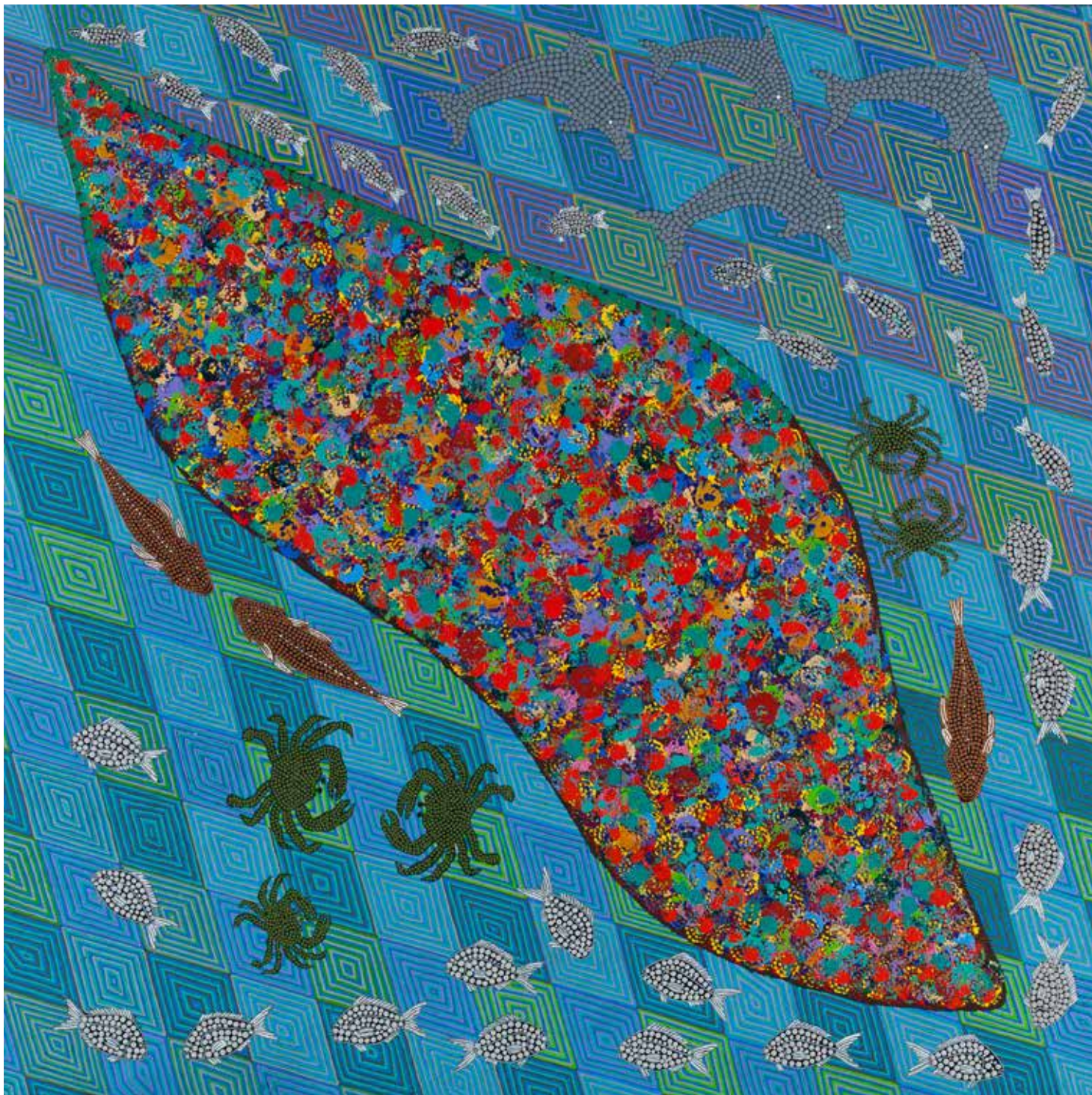
“Sometimes someone comes in [to my studio] and tells me I’ve been laughing while I’m painting. I don’t realise, but it’s because I’m thinking about some memory.” Digby Moran

Albert (Digby) Moran’s life is divided into two parts, before he started painting, and after. He worked in agriculture and even as a boxer before he turned his hand to painting. In 1991 he undertook an art course through Ballina TAFE which launched his career as an artist. Art provides a means to access memories in paint, and to pass them on. These memories are mostly based in childhood – happy recollections of a carefree life growing up on Cabbage Tree Island (on the Richmond River near Evans Head) with close family and friends. Moran recalls playing in the sand and on the river banks – swimming and fishing. Recurring iconography includes fish and native wildlife in abundance, water, sand, mangrove mud, and fires moving through cane, grass and timber.

Moran’s studio was badly affected by the 2017 Lismore floods. He lost most of his materials and a lot of work. Much of this exhibition is the result of a burst of creativity Moran has undergone since the floods. His new works are often typified by a thick application of paint, applied with a full open hand, or in confident splatters. Pre-flood works, including *Lorikeets* 2009 and *Bundjalung Boondies* 2012, characterise Moran’s fine painting style.

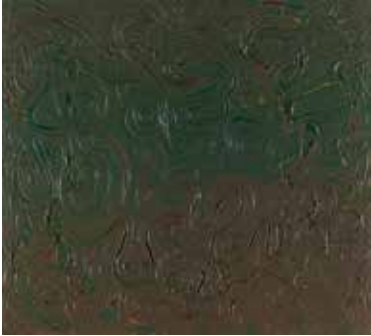
In his 2018 *Fun Times* works, paint expresses the pure happiness of being on the island. In others it embodies sensations of mud and sand between fingers and toes, the movement of water, and the flicker of first morning light. Moran also paints spirits, like the big foot, who he first got a sense of as a young boy. Linking back to childhood again, his recollections of “the old people’s warnings around sites where bad things happened.” Moran says “places where the old ones would tell you ‘don’t go there’. They knew what happened there but it was too much for them, too sad to talk about.” Now Digby realises these were massacre sites. *Bloody Ballina* 1998 and *Rivers of Blood* 2018 are powerful statements about the massacre of local Aboriginal people at an old campsite at East Ballina in the 1850s.

Over the past 30 years Moran has established himself as one of the Northern Rivers’ most recognized artists. He is a leader in the regional Indigenous arts community and has achieved national and international recognition as an artist. His esteem has come from his unique and deeply personal story, expressing his place within Bundjalung land.



Albert (Digby) Moran, *Island home*, acrylic on canvas, 2018, photograph by Linda Cunningham

# A WALK THROUGH THE ART WORKS



**Fun Times, 2018**

*This swirly idea took me back to when I was a kid on Cabbage Tree Island, we used to play and muck around on the riverbank, making swirls in the mud with our fingers. They were happy times. We kids we'd be there with our rellies playing and swimming. The water was clear. The old fellas used to look after the swimming hole and keep it clean.*

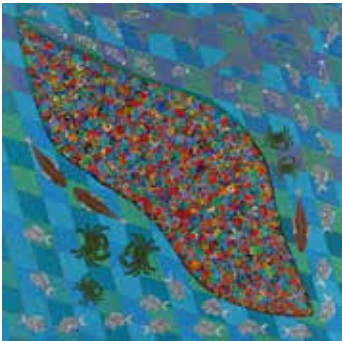
*When this painting was wet I got my little grandson and held his hands as he walked on the painting to make the kid's footprints in the paint. He was slipping and sliding. It was like being a kid in the mud. Digby Moran*



**Sunset, 2018**

*This is about water and light, when we were kids on the island. Those were happy times.*

*I remember my mother and 2 sisters, we used to row the boat across the river and walk to the beach with prams and bikes and anything with wheels, we'd push all our stuff out to the beach then we'd camp for the summer holidays. It's about the good times, when we were kids growing up and all the stuff we did together as a family. That was the best times of my life. There were 9 of us and cousins and, yeah there would have been a whole tribe of us on the beach all playing and swimming in the sun and water. Digby Moran*



**Island Home, 2018**

*This is Cabbage Tree Island in the Richmond River. The painting is about growing up on the island with all my relatives and friends. My family. The water was so clear, there were mullet and dolphins used to come up the river, they'd come up so close. I remember my sister dragging a hessian bag along the sand to catch prawns and digging red worms out of the river bank for fishing bait. Digby Moran*

# A WALK THROUGH THE ART WORKS



***Lismore Flood, 2017***

*This is the flood that went through my studio. It's the flood water. A lot of my works were in there and the water came right up to the roof - they all got damaged. I had to take a whole lot of wrecked paintings to the tip. That was very hard. So I had this damaged canvas and I thought to just paint the flood water. Digby Moran*



***Meeting Place, 2018***

*It's about a special place at Evans Head. That country meant a lot to the mob around here. I went out there and collected different coloured ochre. I didn't know how it would turn out, I just worked on it and made these shapes and patterns. It's like looking down at the land. I made it with the sand and glue. That was a lot of work! Digby Moran*



***Mullet Hopping, 2018***

*When you go rowing the boat around at night. You get right up close and get the oars and make a noise, under the mangroves, and the fish jump right out of the water. The mullet would jump into the boat. Digby Moran*



Albert (Digby) Moran, photograph by Raimond De Weerd, 2018

## EXHIBITION THEMES

There are different themes, the main ones are:

**Happy Memories** – *They're about life as a child on the island, of water and light and playing in the sand and on the river banks, swimming and fishing.*

Digby Moran

**Special Places** – *Where I paint about places in the local area that are important like Evans Head. That was an important place for our old people. And I paint the water and the plants and leaves and birds around me. I also see eagles, they always come to me at special times, they're my totem. When my sister died I went down to Broadwater. I looked up and saw five eagles. I knew one was my sister and she was with my mum and dad and my elder brother and sister. Then I knew they were all together and everything was alright.*

Digby Moran

**Places Where Sad Things Happened** – *Places where the old ones would tell you 'don't go there'. They knew what happened there but it was too much for them, too sad to talk about.*

Digby Moran

## OTHER THEMES IN THE EXHIBITION

- Sense of place
- Remembering being a child and growing up on the Island
- Living on Bundjalung Country and the close connection Digby has to the Island
- Living and working on the land and the Island and taking care of the natural environment
- Painting and Digby's life as an artist
- Storytelling
- Family
- Friends
- Spiritual beliefs
- Sad and happy memories

## Key Art Terms

**Painting:** is the art practice of applying paint, ink or other mediums to a surface such as canvas, board, wood, paper, walls or fabric, etc. Common application methods and tools include brushes, palette, knives, sponges, and airbrushes, spray cans.

**Abstract art:** is art that uses the visual language of line, shape, tone, and colour. Abstract art is often more communicating feelings, emotions, psychological states of mind. Abstract artists work towards creating compositions that are free from traditional depictions of physical objects, scenes or figures.

**Figurative art:** is an artwork that represents real objects, scenes or figures, it is also sometimes called representational art.

**Landscape art:** is art that depicts environmental scenery such as hills, deserts, mountains, forests and other natural settings.

**Narrative art:** are artworks that tell a story. They might mark a particular moment in time or be part of a story that told as a sequence of events. For example Moran's painting *Mullet Hopping*, reflects on a story of his younger days when he would row his boat in the water and Mullet fish would jump right into his boat.

**Island Home**, painted by Digby Moran, represents Digby’s strong feelings and memories of growing up on Cabbage Tree Island; living, playing, working, fishing and sharing life with his family and friends.

He has painted the shape of the island filled with bright happy colours, surrounded by blue and green tones in a diamond pattern to represent the water.

The water around the island is filled with fish, crabs and dolphins; all the creatures that were plentiful when Digby was growing up on the Island. Digby says he painted the Island with bright abstract colours to represent the happy memories of his time of growing up on Cabbage Tree Island.



**Island Home**

*This is Cabbage Tree Island in the Richmond River. The painting is about growing up on the island with all my relatives and friends. My family.*

*The water was so clear, there were mullet and dolphins used to come up the river, they’d come up so close. I remember my sister dragging a hessian bag along the sand to catch prawns and digging red worms out of the river bank for fishing bait.*

Digby Moran.

1. Can you think of a place that is important to you and your family or friends?

2. Write a short paragraph about this place and what you did there.

3. Describe a happy memory of your special place

**DRAW A PICTURE OF YOUR SPECIAL PLACE**

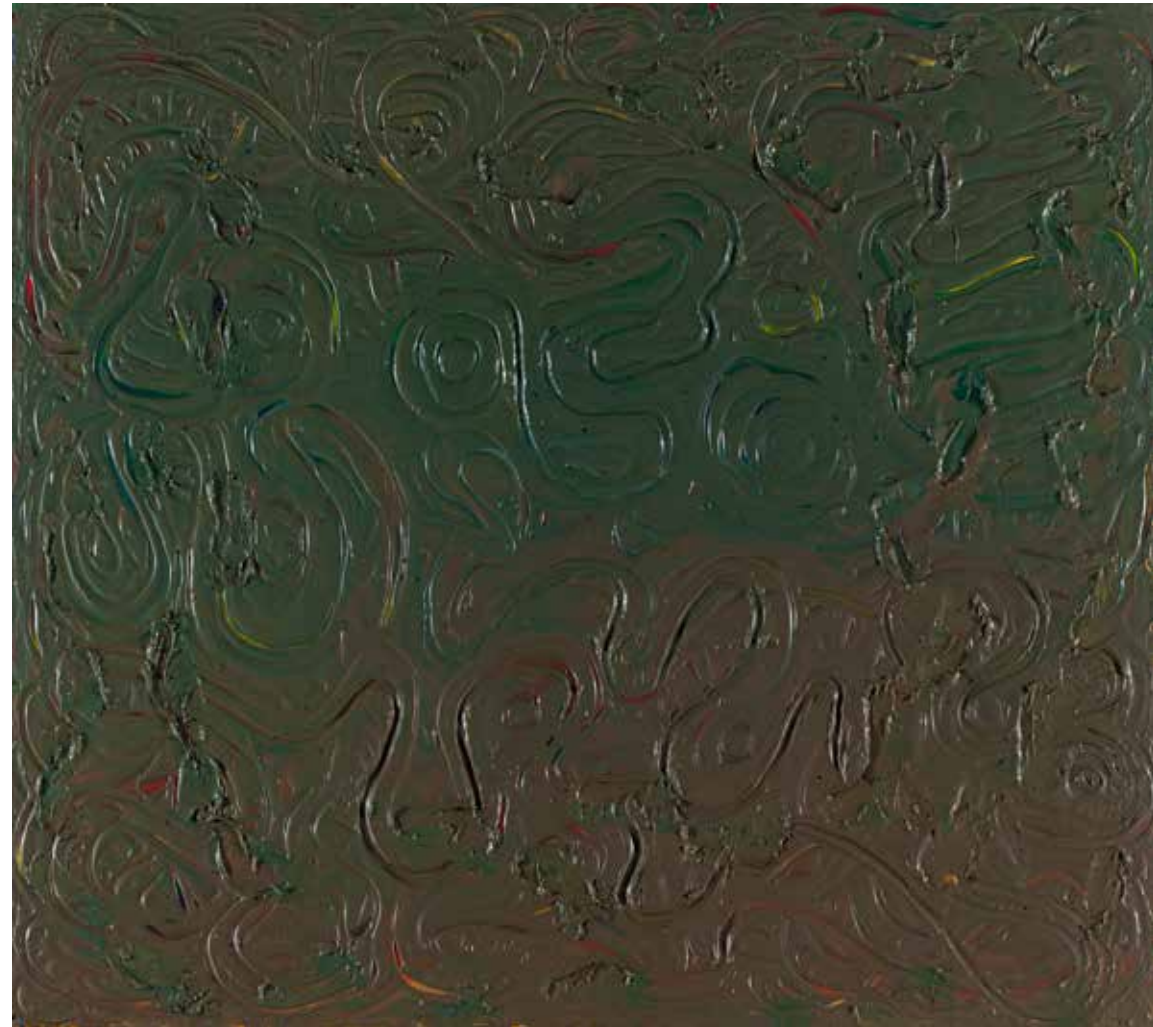
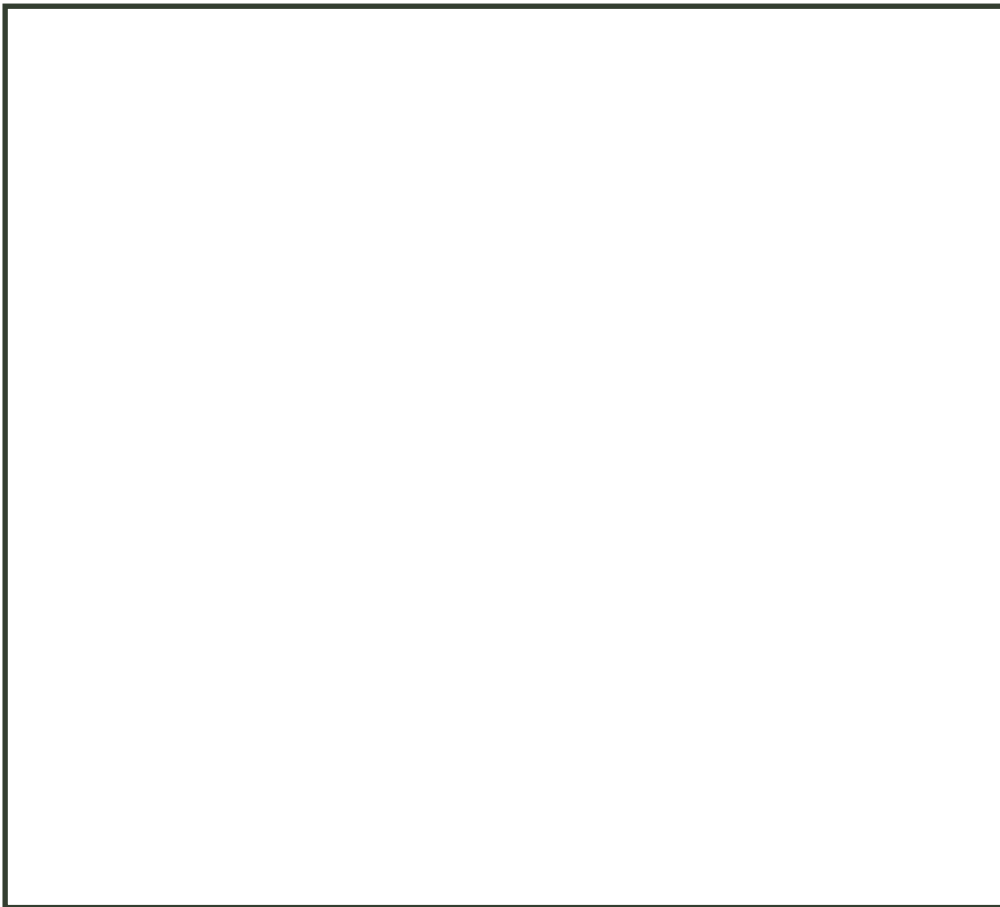


Digby Moran's painting ***Fun Times*** was made by pouring paint on to a large canvas. he then used his hands and the end of a paint brush to make swirls. He also got his grandson to walk around on the canvas to create the footprints.

*When this painting was wet I got my little grandson and held his hands as he walked on the painting to make the kid's footprints in the paint. He was slipping and sliding. It was like being a kid in the mud.* Digby Moran

The painting represents a strong happy memory of Digby's childhood playing and drawing in the mud. It is also an abstract artwork, created using colour, shape and movement.

**Create an abstract drawing made of shapes, patterns, colours and a feeling of movement.**



***Fun Times*, acrylic on canvas, Digby Moran 2018**

*This swirly idea took me back to when I was a kid on Cabbage Tree Island, we used to play and muck around on the riverbank, making swirls in the mud with our fingers. They were happy times. We kids we'd be there with our rellies playing and swimming. The water was clear. The old fellas used to look after the swimming hole and keep it clean.*

Digby Moran



Albert (Digby) Moran, *Mullet Hopping*, acrylic on canvas, 2018

***Mullet Hopping*** is a painting of Digby Moran's uncle, who Digby would go fishing with on the river. They would go out in a row boat in the evening and the Mullet fish would think the boat was a Bull Shark and would jump out of the water right into their boat.

Digby has used acrylic paint to make this painting on canvas and he has used a **figurative style** to paint real objects such as the boat and oars, animals and figures, such as the fish and Digby's uncle. This painting is also a narrative artwork, an artwork that tells a story.

**Can you think of a great story from an experience with a family member or a time you spent in nature?**

**Write Your Great Story below and draw a picture based on your great story in the box.**

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