



**Dedication, 2019**

Koala what you reckon?

I dedicate this to people who lost their lives, homes and land, livestock even animals lost who lost their home. I also dedicate this to the firemen's and women's, the police man and women's who did their best to fight the fire no rest and those who lost their life in action.

Koala standing up just like he holding a fire hose putting the fire out. Also, a goanna and some more animal standing up.

This a koala talking to Morrison who tied up in Queensland. All animals going to dance around him all holding fire stick around him. All the wild shark and whale will be swimming at the back. Poor Morrison will be burn by the Koala. The bug is holding Morrison, crocodile don't like him.

What about the nest on his head? The houses are burning and people trying to jump out the

window (behind Morrison head in WA). The emu is drilling Morrison's ear.

Fire engine in the back, what you reckon? This side where the whales and sharks and everybody from the sea helping flushing water to help the firemen you know, whale getting water from his back. Them whales and the rest come to help close to the beach. Even the Tassie devil is helping. Got the picture? Swans ducks helping too.

Bird making you know what on Morrison head. Big Barra in the back. Even people escaping by small boat. Even small jetty boats burning. The bush man ancestor is blowing didgeridoo water out the ocean. The bush woman on the WA side is very upset because the fire destroyed her land and the place she grew up fishing. Her grandmother is buried somewhere there in an unknown grave, while fire is coming close.

**John Prince Siddon**



**Welcome to the world of John Prince Siddon;  
the road is rough yet paved with gold.**

A man of many pasts, elusively literal, joyfully macabre and terribly concerned with the politics of our time. Where fantasy is lore and myth stems from reality; inside Prince's studio in the heart of Fitzroy Crossing, 400 kilometres east of Broome in the remote West Kimberley region of Western Australia.

For Prince 'myth' loosely correlates to the First Nation's concept of Narrangkarni (Dreamtime), which is fixed, through systems of lore. Reality then, is a combination of TV, radio, 'the outside world' and Fitzroy Crossing community life (or, 'the inside world').

The line in the sand moves again.

This dog-eat-dog world we live in; life, death, morality, mortality, incineration, judgment, reformation, rebirth – Prince always puts you somewhere on the edge, in viewing his work you're usually left somewhere between elation and anxiety.

**And yet, I can see his wry smile.**

**Mangkaja Arts is a significant Kimberley organisation rooted in advocacy and opportunity for the multiple language groups of the Fitzroy Valley region. It supports five different language groups including Bunuba, Nyikina and Gooniyandi of Martuwarra (River Country), and Walmajarri and Wangkajunga from the jilji, (Sand-hill Desert Country).**

**Originally from the Great Sandy Desert, Walmajarri people were displaced and relocated through systems of colonisation, often used as unpaid labour on cattle stations across the region. Prince is a Walmajarri man whose father Pompey Siddon was one of the founding members of Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency. From 1981, until the organisation became incorporated in 1993, Mangkaja (a Walmajarri word for 'shelter' or 'gathering together') operated from a small building near the highway. Led by local men, Mangkaja was a place where people could study and paint their personal stories, bush trips and histories. Many stockmen were laid off after the introduction of Equal Wages legislation and were forced to the fringes of Fitzroy Crossing. Displaced from their traditional homelands, the many cultural groups forged new ways of working together.**

Like many men from the Kimberley, Prince spent his early years working on cattle stations, until he lost his leg in a horse-riding accident. They said he would never walk again: he has been walking ever since. After the accident he discovered art,

**"Once I learnt to paint, I just couldn't stop".**

Avoiding explicit narration of specific Narrangkarni, the concepts and knowledge embedded in Prince's work contextualise ancient principles for the modern world. Walmajarri's cosmology can be seen as a grand morality tale for the times we find ourselves in; visions of a future which respects and integrates Indigenous practices, and avoids the environmental devastation that we have seen in recent years.

The clues are there within his technicolour occult where desert iconography surfaces, often encrypted and in uncanny places.


*All Mixed Up* encourages you to play Prince's universal tarot; pick an icon, pick an image; every time you will see something new. To decipher these fragmented realities, the works demand repeated viewings, and even then new insights emerge, dreamlike, while others fade: the man vomiting a snake; the man from Snowy River; a kangaroo ocean mirage; spider union jack; wheelchairs; boat people; footless people; cockroaches; ScoMo; lizards wielding spears.

"Go back and read it properly", he told me. That I did, realising I had missed a whole point within a four word text.

*All Mixed Up* (2019) is a literal mix of icons, blending diverse Australian cultures, Kimberley communities and current politics. For the most part, his message is light, yet sinister. The giant HMAS Sydney with its pointed cannon protruding from Ned Kelly's pants confirms this.

*Fear*, (2019) and *Escape*, (2019) do the same. Yes, the animals are all going to die in the fire, yes, it's about life and death, but when we think of Indigenous land management strategies, this work is also about renewal and regeneration. It is about ancient principles and ways of being that we, the coloniser, have tried to destroy; knowledge and practices which now make perfect sense in the face of catastrophic devastation.





The Kimberley has seen many decades of environmental destruction including introduced livestock, cane toads, bull grass, camels, foreign land management and damming – it all seems so silly, dunnit?

When we think about deep time and the epic creation of our cosmos, we have destroyed our own natural habitat and the home of all living things in the blink of an eye. This universal concern manifests in Prince's work. He is not angry: he wants us all to look after each other, to work this out together.

In *One Punch Mob* (2019), Prince worries about brutality, using the tropes of colonialism, cow skull and leather, as mediums. He says, "This work is about power; I can still hear women screaming. Little kids crying, women ending up in hospital, they have nobody to mind them while their mum is in hospital badly hurt. You see them on TV news, those one punch victims. Ends up badly, one punch can kill you!"

**Painfully serious, familiar yet unfamiliar, the lightness and the darkness, allured yet confused – as I unravel these works, I feel more twisted.**

The 1967 referendum was not that long ago. Many artists have told me over the years that they feel the Kimberley was forged off the back of slave labour, and that the wealth of the state can be tied to the Indigenous workforce that built it and were never remunerated. Today, the push for water and other resources can be seen as an extension of that disparity. Aboriginal people are still forced to compromise on decisions that impact the health of their Country, their communities and their cultural selfhood.

From 1968, Equal Wages legislation forged a new set of horrific circumstances. A senior artist in Kununurra remarked that, "when we all got laid off, they left us on the fringes in camps and told us not to worry, that the government would look after us... that's where we have been ever since". Many of these issues remain unresolved; it's hard to fully understand the layers of complexity in what is arguably a continued frontier experience. These are our brutal narratives to own, they are the history of our nation.

**A story within a story, within a global story.**

Right now we find ourselves at a political turning point. As people we are changing, yet our shifting consciousness, our new awareness, is being resisted by the leaders of our Country. For many Australians, the true history of our country has never been taught.

Indigenous art has always run parallel to history books, documenting our nation and a history of Country which continues to be under the custodianship of Indigenous peoples. Prince is part of a long tradition of Kimberley painters who see truth telling, communicating their personal history and lived experiences, as a matter of urgency. In the works of Rover Thomas, Ben Ward, Mervyn Street, David Downs or Tommy Ngarralja May, paintings of the Narrangkarni cannot be separated from the politics of place, of recent history and contemporary reality.

**Prince's work is urgent – magnificently meshing two incongruent worlds into a "mixed up" version of Australia. In his words, "we mixed up, tru, let's keep it that way!"**


*All Mixed Up*, challenges traditional and conservative notions of Indigenous painting and disrupts our notions of Australian contemporary art. Creating links between space, time and history, Prince references our shared past offering a unique and critical voice in these challenging times – a time of intellectual revolution, a time when the dominant narratives are being questioned. Prince's work reflects the absurdity of our time; he asks us to look at where we are, in reference to where we have been.

Within Prince's works there is also softness and compassion. At his studio, in an aged care facility, Prince resides with his wife Susan. Occasionally the resident aged care pet, a pink and grey cockatoo makes an appearance amongst the turbulence of Prince's painted worlds.

A shout out to Susan  
Beloved muse  
Thank you for being an integral part of this journey

**Emilia Galatis – Curator, John Prince  
Siddon: All Mixed Up**





In time  
In dreams  
In the heat  
Springs a mirage  
Eyes sting  
TV  
Magic  
Myth  
Reality  
Sublime nature of our beings  
Rotten depths of our cores  
Crying birds  
Within the vines  
These are hot  
And desperate times

Cameras shatter in the heat  
Blisters form on novice feet  
Watching real movies  
Dead volunteers  
Bandaged and ravaged baby bears

Adani, Hawaii, Murray Darling  
Mr Houston, Amen  
Animated confrontation  
Lost or found in translation

Coal in the courtroom  
Come on in  
Koala, what you reckon?  
Lost, broken, found, rebuilt  
Dead, not forgotten

Echo's softly across  
Screaming soft  
We all mixed up  
True  
Not a reason to be blue  
The lizards rattling in the roof  
Remind me  
Always was, always will be

**Emilia Galatis, John Prince Siddon  
(2020)**

**Fremantle Arts Centre acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the  
Noongar nation as the traditional owners, spiritual and cultural  
custodians of the greater Fremantle/Walyalup area.**

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