

Jody Rallah *The Memory of Water*, 2025



Jody Rallah *The Memory of Water*, 2025 Installation view
Uku/clay on varnished board
7 panels. Each panel 200 H x 120 W
Photo: Peter Rees
NZ \$55,000 inc GST

Jody Rallah, *The Memory of Water*, 2025

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Biography

Jody Rallah is a Yuggera and Biri artist from Magandjin/Brisbane. Her multidisciplinary practice is rooted in a deep reverence for materials, place, and intergenerational knowledge. Working in harmony with the aliveness of her surroundings, she embraces a Country-echoed approach to storytelling. Her work spans large-scale and intimate creations, encompassing object-making, sculptural installation, painting, soundscapes, and collaborative processes. Each piece becomes a 'knowledge vessel'—a living archive that embodies living history, connection, and healing.

Rallah graduated with a Bachelor of Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art from Queensland College of Art - Griffith University in 2019 and was selected for the prestigious Hatched program in Perth in 2020. In 2024, Rallah was the recipient of the third Galang Residency, based in Paris at the Cité Internationale des Arts, as part of the Powerhouse initiative to support Australia-based First Nations creative practitioners. Recent work includes large-scale public commissions produced in collaboration with Elders and the community. Rallah regularly contributes to panel discussions and sits on the advisory board of the Journal of Australian Ceramics.

Jody Rallah was the 10th Artist in Residence for Waiheke Art Gallery's three-month residency programme, during which she connected with Māori, mana whenua, artists and creatives to respectfully consult and learn about working with materials of the whenua. The residency exhibition *Mosaics of Memory* explores the relationships that connect us across the sea, considering the social tapestry of materials, bicultural and cross-generational exchange and vessel-making practices that embody deep-time transitions through threads of memory and veins of clay. Working with clay, fibres, print and paint, this cross-disciplinary and tactile approach has taken shape.

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Introduction

Down by the river, at the base of mountains, along sandy banks, clay—*uku* emerges as both substance and metaphor. Diverse and alive, it flows with water, carried across shorelines, waterbodies, and even through our bodies. Each clay body is unique, reflecting the beauty of its community of soils. Clay forms strongly under pressure; it protects, it heals, and it facilitates culture.

Gathered respectfully from the whenua, *uku* becomes a social fabric—binding communities through shared histories and enduring connections to land, water, and sky. The work honours this strength and diversity of people and place, celebrating cultural relationships and exchanges that ripple across the motu and the Tasman Sea. It gestures toward a living sense of belonging, care, and unity—sustained, like water, by memory and flow.

What does it mean to say that water remembers? Could every drop carry the journeys it has taken—passing through stone, across valleys, into bodies? Might water hold memory as it travels between places, bearing the substances and stories of all it touches? These questions echo through the work, inviting reflection on the way water sustains, connects, and transforms.

The memory of water lingers in every ripple and flow. It carries the trace of stone, soil, and story—holding the voices of Ancestors and the rhythms of Country. Water is a living archive: shaping land, nurturing life, and acting as a vessel of connection that remembers and renews across generations and cultures.

As rivers carve valleys, leaving traces in their flow, so too do my fingertips create ravines in the artwork—echoes of roots, channels, and lifelines. Each mark carries story, strength, and transformation.

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Artist Statement

Although each panel can be experienced as a stand-alone work, together they form a greater narrative—an unfolding story that reflects my residency on the motu of Waiheke, and the relationships formed through cultural exchange. While the panels are numbered one to seven from left to right, my own storytelling instinct draws me in the opposite direction, beginning from the right and moving left.

Together, these panels form a mosaic of connection—each piece an offering of story, relationship, and reflection. They invite us to see how roots, waters, and pathways intertwine, reminding us that growth and unity begin with a seed and expand outward through care, exchange, and shared belonging.



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7. Contemplation

Emerging from the edge are the roots of contemplation, inspired by time spent with the sprawling pohutukawa—cousin to the bottlebrush and some of our gum trees across the Tasman. These resilient root systems, part of the Myrtaceae family, speak of endurance, growth, and renewal. Their lessons reminded me of the eels that weave through our coastlines, carrying quiet strength in their hidden pathways.

6. Dandiririba

In Yuggera, we say *Dandiririba* to describe a place of meeting, akin to the Marae in te reo Māori. This panel honours spaces of unity, diplomacy, and cultural exchange. Uku from the Marae was generously gifted and pressed into this work, embedding the generosity and spirit of collaboration into its very surface.

5. Core

Here, mountains rise like reaching hands, echoing the movements of tectonic plates and the gestures of people who meet, connect, and grow together. Water flows between them, binding land to sky, and people to each other. This panel celebrates collaboration as a foundation stone for community and creativity.

4. Seed

At the centre lies an ambiguous oval form—seed, vessel, or coolamon. It is a place of potential, holding the promise of growth, connection, and renewal. To place this seed into the work, the very foundations had to be opened, and intentional strong cracks formed, where the water has carved through them. Colours of uku radiate from its centre, watering and nurturing what is yet to come. It breathes life into ideas, creativity, and kinship.

3. Journey

This panel traces the flow of waters and the paths they carve, embodying the experience of traversing Country and waterways. It speaks of movement, respect, and the journeys that shape us. Uku, with its grounding qualities, offers protection and reflection, reminding us of our roots while guiding us safely onward.

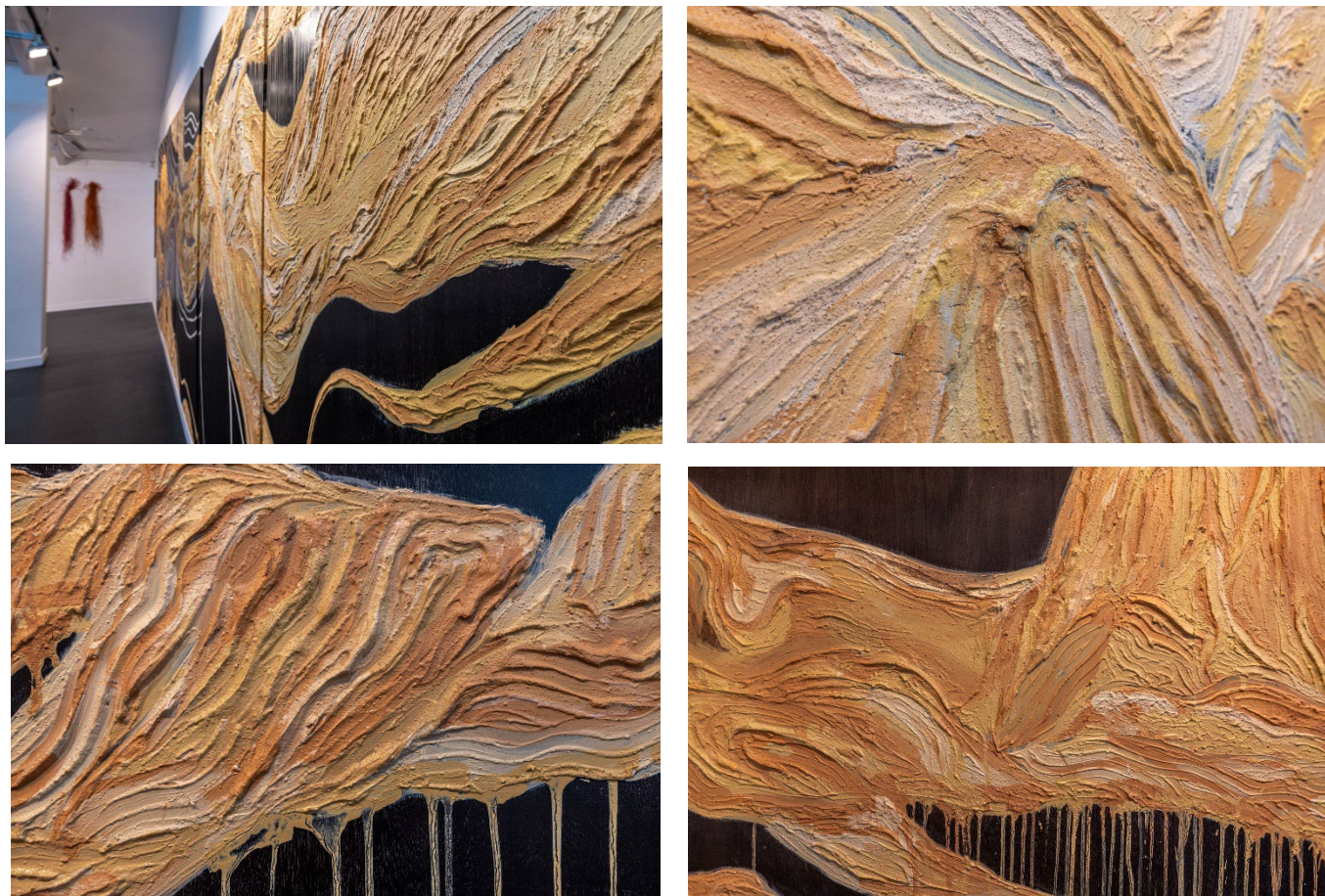
2. Home

Beneath the rising sun and moon, home is found—not only in Ancestral lands but also in the people and connections that sustain us. Home is both a place and a relationship. Here, Uku acts as a cultural facilitator, binding together memory, care, and belonging.

1. Fish Trap

This final panel is inspired by the eel traps and the deep dreaming that links cultures across the Tasman. Just as eels travel great distances, weaving through waterways and connecting lands, so too do our relationships. The fish trap represents kinship, exchange, and the bridges we build as cousins across seas.

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Jody Rallah *The Memory of Water*, 2025 detail
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Protocols and Uku origins

Respecting Country and cultural protocol is central to my practice. In working with uku (clay), I build relationships with the land, waters, and their custodians, consulting with knowledge holders and community members to ensure gathering is carried out with care, respect, and integrity. This includes collecting only what has naturally fallen, not digging out of hanging cliffs, gathering during rain when the earth offers, and pausing during times of mourning — practices that honour both Country and people.

Each uku holds its own body, memory, and character. Some were gathered where saltwater meets fresh; some flowed like rivers of uku; some carry volcanic ash that strengthens their form; others were gifted from marae, drawn from home foundations, or collected from deep below the surface.

Together, these clays form a living archive — weaving connections between people, place, and cultural continuity across the Tasman.

Processing – a labour of love

Working with uku directly from the whenua is a labour-intensive and deeply tactile process. Each batch required careful reconstitution, including hydrating, drying, sifting, grinding, and heavy lifting to achieve the desired particle sizes for painting. Larger fragments were thoughtfully distributed—some incorporated into the textured base, others shaped into coolamon works, and others returned to the whenua, closing the cycle of connection with Country.

Throughout much of my residency, this labour of love became a daily and weekly practice, shared with collaborators who contributed their time, energy, and care to this demanding work. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all who assisted, acknowledging the physical and mindful effort required to honour the uku, the whenua, and the creative process it sustains.

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Technical Details

Ensuring the artwork's longevity and sustainability was central to the making of this seven-panel series. The panel forms were crafted in collaboration with master cabinet maker and artist Paulie Rhind, using lightweight yet durable materials designed to remain stable and resist warping over time.

To protect and enhance the surface, the artist applied a black varnish containing mould-resistant compounds. This treatment both highlights the rippling texture of the underlying wood and safeguards the panels from environmental wear.

The base foundation layer underwent extensive testing to select and develop a non-toxic formulation that sets securely while maintaining the desired aesthetic. This layer captures thematic elements of the practice, including the ephemeral qualities of water and the opening of foundations to form strong crevices, while remaining structurally stable and enduring.

The uku (clay) used throughout the work was carefully processed to remove any foreign matter and mixed with gum arabic—a material with traditional significance in the artist's lineage. This ensured that the clay retained its integrity, while connecting the work materially and culturally to the artist's practice.

Finally, the complete series was sealed with a matte, UV- and mould-resistant varnish. This final layer protects the panels, ensuring they maintain their vibrancy and structural integrity over time. With this careful combination of materials, techniques, and testing, the panels are designed to endure, free from warping or 'landslides,' and to continue conveying their layered narratives for generations to come.

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Process images



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NB: Additional shipping and installation costs apply