

Zaachariaha Fielding

Paralpi

04 – 22 June 2024

Zaachariaha Fielding's 'gremlins' lurk at the peripheries. They manifest in paint as playful saboteurs, but their flashy colours and impish expressions belie a darker set of universal antagonisms – doubt, fear, worry, ego.

Fielding comes from a strong lineage of Anangu artists, but took up painting in earnest during the 2020 lockdowns in lieu of performing as one half of the musical duo Electric Fields, who most famously represented Australia earlier this year at the Eurovision Song Contest. For a visual artist thinking in musical terms (and vice-versa), Fielding is acutely aware of who commands the microphone, who leads the choir. The tricksters that dance at the edge of his canvases—and psyche—are momentarily offered centre stage. Using close-at-hand sheets of cardboard found around the APY Art Centre Collective's studio in Adelaide, where the artist currently works, he says, "If I'm on a canvas and I'm overthinking, I need a gremlin, I need a cardboard next to me."

Having moved from Mimili community on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands of far north South Australia, Fielding finds the city psychologically noisy – a gremlin's playground – 'whereas ngura has no ego'. In Pitjantjatjara language, ngura describes both the physical geography of a place and the land to which one belongs; it is home, family, mother.

When working at the canvas, Fielding visits ngura. His resonant colour and rhythmic forms reverberate across the canvas, the very act of painting sings Fielding's memories of ngura into the present. Paint becomes a mnemonic device:

"My brushstrokes play with the choreography of the past, present and future... Ngura reminds you that you're very temporary: 'At the end of the day, you walk over me, you ignore me, but I'm the one that has to put you to bed.'"

In lyrical arcs of inky magenta and tightly traced gestural songlines, Fielding travels back to Paralpi in particular, a significant Anangu song ground where grandparents and grandchildren gather to perform inma (song and dance) and teach tjukurpa (ancestral law/lore). As Fielding describes, ngura itself is a major participant in such gatherings:

"[That song ground] is the closest I can ever get to being free, with all those elements, all moving the way that they are moving. I know what it feels like and sounds like for these song lines to be sung. That memory has hundreds of grandparents just all there, singing their grandchildren forward. And when it goes off, it's just so beautiful. That's in my music, that's in my painting." - Z.Fielding, 2024
Catalogue text by Belinda Howden, 2024

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Currently based in South Australia, Fielding's work has been recognised in major art awards, most notably as Winner of The Wynne Prize (2023), finalist in the Ramsay Art Prize at Art Gallery of South Australia (2021) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards at Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory (2021). His work is currently held in important public collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Artbank and numerous private collections.