Traditionally Aboriginal possum skin cloaks were a significant cultural item, not only as clothing but also as signifiers of your identity. The inside of the skins were marked and ochred with personal tribal designs, totems and maps of Country. Contemporary possum skin cloak making is a recent continuation of this practice and for each new cloak the art on the skins is deeply considered and relevant to our communities. — Carol McGregor

Using contemporary techniques inspired by ancestral practices of cloak making, Carol McGregor’s Skin Country (2018) details the Indigenous plants used across Greater Brisbane Aboriginal communities. Skin Country is inspired by Bruce Pascoe’s important research in Dark Emu: Black Seeds: agriculture or accident? (2014)—which unearthed a long history of Aboriginal agriculture that had previously been omitted from Australian history. Through cloak making, McGregor is also passionate about sharing the diverse traditional applications of plants by Aboriginal people and bringing this knowledge into a national discussion.

“As an Indigenous artist I am continually adapting and embracing new technologies to reclaim and connect to cultural expression; creating objects as vehicles of remembering that give physical form to shadows of the past; ‘un-silencing’ our stories to make the invisible visible; and working towards a more richly informed future.” — Carol McGregor

McGregor’s black seeds (2016) marked the commencement of her mapping of South East Queensland’s Indigenous landscape, and the rich variety of Indigenous plants and food sources. Expanding on this earlier work, Skin Country goes deeper—in both research and process—to create an oversized cloak, made from possum skins ethically sourced from Aotearoa New Zealand.

Inherent to cloak making traditions is an embodied artistic practice that encompasses intimate knowledge systems relating to the natural environment and skills of creation. Skin Country reflects the importance of process, along with the finished output. Each skin has been intricately hand sewn together to create a canvas that centres on the Brisbane River and its journey to the mountains, bay, and coastlines.

Following Indigenous protocols is integral to McGregor’s practice. Throughout the development of the cloak, she has worked with Traditional Owners, Brisbane Elders, and community members to collectively share stories and memories of plant uses and histories. Other information is drawn from books and archives.

The knowledge McGregor has garnered is represented on the skins through bold and intertwined illustrations that have been burnt and painted using only ochre and charcoal. The immersive scale of the cloak emphasises the wide-spread extent of local flora utilised by Aboriginal people, whilst also celebrating the power of traditional wisdom, strong living culture, and the vitality of the land.

Carol McGregor gratefully thanks Traditional Owners from whose lands the cloak’s material comes, especially the Turrbal, Yuggara, Quandamooka, Jinibara, Yugambeh and Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi peoples of South-East Queensland. She also thanks Uncle Bruce Pascoe, Uncle Joe Kirk, Uncle Bob Anderson, Uncle Nurdon Serico, Derek Sandy, Judy Watson, Dr Ray Kerkhove, Caitlin Franzman, Balaangala Community Group, Griffith University and community members for their sharing of knowledge and gifts of ochre.
**Carol McGregor** (Wathaurung, Scottish) works across multi-media disciplines with materials including ephemeral natural fibres, metal, and paper. Her recent art practice revives the traditional possum skin cloak as an art form and a way to strengthen community and individual identities.

**Freja Carmichael** is a Ngugi woman belonging to the Quandamooka People of Moreton Bay. She is a curator working alongside artists and communities on diverse exhibition projects and is currently the inaugural Macquarie Group collection First Nations emerging curator and a member of Blaklash Collective.