

# NGUNUNGULA

Retford Park  
Southern Highlands  
Regional Gallery

**[belong – align – future–carry]**

By Ellen van Neerven

belonging

As First Nations people we belong to Country. Country doesn't belong to us. There is a big difference. Megan Cope's work is built on this fundamental knowledge.

aligning

I saw Megan's map work for the first time about ten years ago – at home. This map had my mob on it, Yugambah, and the feeling in my body was immediate. It was seeing my Country and mob visible on the map – in the sense of the present and future not just the past. This was a feeling of different parts inside of me coming together. Aligning. Mapping, in Megan's decolonial framing of the practice – is putting 'it' right, is asserting ourselves, our names, the true names of Country. Aligning. Megan's mapping is a radical affirmation of who we are, pushing back against the erasure and violence and racist tropes.

healing

During 2021 NAIDOC week, I remember Jeanine Leane writing 'our Countries cannot heal until their names are given back'. This speaks to justice. Places become sick without cultural nourishment. Language is critical in healing and decolonising and a returning to a natural state. When First Nations languages are amplified, then so are we. Vibrations start to form in the ground when names are returned. And all who live on Country have the opportunity to hold Country on their tongues and in their hearts.

returning

Megan's practice is part of a greater national and global conversation that has carried us forward in the last decade. Through the activism and work of many, we have seen places return to their original names officially or in general usage. We see Country, and Traditional Custodians and knowledge holders rightfully acknowledged. Meanjin, Naarm, Boorloo, for example, are in common usage by First Nations people and settlers. First Nations place names are featured in the weather segment of the news, at airports, and post offices. This geographical literacy challenges the whitewashing of place. Is this enough?

amplifying

Megan's mapworking practice has transformed into a community methodology. As a visitor to Country not her own, Megan has created this work in collaboration with community for the Ngununggula opening on Gundungurra Ngurra. Community as creators, Elders as leaders. The importance of 'starting right' cannot be understated. The process is as important as the work produced. Mapping Country is community, is story, is healing. This work highlights the matriarchal lineages of place and the bonds between all living things, and brings local language to the forefront. This is a work that amplifies the nuances of place.

futuring

Visions for the future are embedded in all Megan's work. It is the future she feels deeply obligated to. A future hundreds of years from now. A future where ancient practices and ancient relations with the land are valued.

carrying

This map is a beautiful realisation of visionary work for Gundungurra Country. Captured here in this reflective yet active space is the importance of carrying the knowledge and stories for future generations.