

# Carmen Ky

## Five Elements

Exhibition 29 April – 28 May 2023



  
Humble House  
gallery est. 1998

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Wed to Sun 10am - 4pm

# Five Elements

**29 April – 28 May**

An exhibition of paintings in acrylic, oil paint and encaustic wax on canvas and works on paper

## Carmen Ky

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Based at the edge of the Royal National Park, artist Carmen Ky is primarily a painter and printmaker. She has also worked as a photographer on books and documentary films in Kakadu and the Himalayas and collaborated on projects with indigenous Australian artists and elders. She has a Diploma of Painting from the National Art School Sydney. Graduate Diploma in Printmaking from College of Fine Arts UNSW Sydney. A Master of Philosophy from the College of Art and Social Sciences, School of Art & Design Australian National University.

For 17 years she taught painting and printmaking at several TAFE colleges, the National Art School and EORA Faculty of Aboriginal Studies in Sydney.

Carmen Ky's paintings bring together western traditional art training, eastern philosophy and a deep connection to the Australian landscape. These works celebrate the numinous presence of natural environments. They are the result of immersion and contemplation in diverse landscapes as well as research into cultural interpretations of the ancient philosophy of the Five Elements: earth, water, fire, air and space. Carmen deploys specific landscapes to symbolize the intrinsic qualities of each element and transform the landscape in terms of colour, shape, light, luminosity and meaning by responding to deserts, ocean, mountains, rainforest, air and space itself.

"Art is about ideas. For me regions of nature induce an osmosis, a gradual assimilation of knowledge and ideas, a liminal way of working with energy, light and colour to create or dissolve form and transform space in my paintings. By bringing another perspective to the elements, I hope to evoke a deep respect for our natural environment."

Carmen Ky has had many solo shows, been in various curated exhibitions and group shows around Australia and overseas and won several art prizes. She is represented in public and private collections around Australia and overseas.

Carmen suggests that drawing on various cultural experiences and integrating them opens up the potential of painting as a field within which different philosophical, cultural, formal and material influences can be brought together into a fluid exchange.





## Paintings – Earth



**Title:** Finding Fossils – Lake Mungo

**Price:** \$4,400

**Media:** acrylic and oil paint on canvas

**Size:** 102 x 102 cm

**Year:** 2016

**Artist statement:** For me, Lake Mungo encapsulates the elemental energy of earth. The erosion of hard sand has revealed the most ancient human remains on the continent. This work is based on my wanderings in that endless silent plain of sandy soil and memories of time spent in the amazing lunettes of fossilized sand dunes. The colours of this desert are subtle and soft and the landscape has a haunting beauty.



**Title:** Liminal Tracks and Sandy Desert

**Price:** \$4,400

**Media:** mixed media & oil paint on canvas

**Size:** 102 x 102 cm

**Year:** 2022

**Artist statement:** I find myself in a liminal space between past and present at Lake Mungo. It resonates with prehistory, archaeological history and continuity through change. It embodies the earth's fragile stability in sustaining life and changing life forms. In 1992 I joined elders and documented the handover ceremony for the skeletal remains of Mungo Lady. The winds of change and the silence are felt here.



**Title:** Snail Trails and String Theory

**Price:** \$5,300

**Media:** acrylic and oil paint on canvas

**Size:** 122 x 122 cm

**Year:** 2018

**Artist statement:** *Snail Trails and String Theory* grew from observing snail trails in a tidal rock pool. It then changed into abstraction through rhythm and line as I listened to a radio talk about String Theory. Some snails remained in the painting as a reference to its figurative beginnings.



**Title:** Unveiling the Dusk: Lake Mungo

**Price:** \$ 4,400

**Media:** acrylic and oil paint on canvas

**Size:** 102 x 102 cm

**Year:** 2017

**Artist statement:** I worked with the colours of dusk and shapes appeared, suggestive of early life forms and fossilized sand dunes. When I watch a sunset in the desert, forms appear and dissolve in the flickering twilight. I sought that quality of colour and light combined with the texture of cracked earth, with traces of time embossed in the paint texture on the canvas.



**Title:** Inlet

**Price:** individual paintings are \$1,100  
Set of eight paintings \$8,400

**Media:** mixed media and encaustic  
wax on paper on board

**Size:** each painting 42 x 29.7 cm

**Year:** 2022

**Artist statement:** This work references inlets and estuaries where fresh water meets saltwater, places where life begins and myths are born. Beautiful lakes and rivers intersect the blatantly elemental SE Coast of NSW, its ancient rocks platforms formed by volcanos and tossed by tsunamis. It alludes to my 12 years of living on the ocean's edge at Mystery Bay and exploring that coastline. *Inlet* comprises eight panels and combines mediums of collograph, etching, watercolour and encaustic wax on hahnemuhle paper, mounted on board.



## Paintings – Water



**Title:** Naga

**Price:** \$3,330

**Media:** watercolour, ink, acrylic, gouache  
on hahnemuhle paper

**Image Size:** 75 x 108 cm

**Framed size:** 127.6 x 157.6 cm

**Year:** 2014

**Frame:** White open grain timber box  
frame with glass

**Artist statement:** Looking at water, I see a fluid weaving, with ripples moving in one direction, undercurrents moving in other directions. Water is the perfect metaphor for the Chinese philosophy of Tao, the way of harmony with natural order, also described as “the source, pattern and substance of everything that exists”<sup>1</sup> In India Naga is the serpent water spirit who activates the water element in rivers, lakes, seas and wells.



**Title:** Tide

**Price:** \$3,330

**Media:** watercolour, ink, acrylic, gouache  
on hahnemuhle paper

**Image Size:** 75 x 108 cm

**Framed Size:** 127.6 x 157.6 cm

**Year:** 2014

**Frame:** White open grain timber box  
frame with glass

**Artist statement:** This work defines predominant rhythms in water, its flux and changing nature and I see the moon as a meaningful visual symbol for water. I have long watched the full moon rise over the ocean, aware of its energy and pull on water causing tidal change and noticing how my own body energy waxes and wanes with moon cycles.

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<sup>1</sup> *Worlds together, Worlds Apart: A History of World: From the Beginnings of Humankind to the Present, Concise Edition 2011, 164, 1*



**Title:** Waterfall

**Price:** \$1,850

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Size:** 61x 61 cm

**Year:** 2014

**Artist statement:** The dynamic flowing energy of a waterfall, constantly moving, shimmering and changing, perfectly describes a stream of consciousness. *Waterfall* explores the concept in Tantric art of vibrational patterns of the expansion and contraction of energy as immobilized energy that represents consciousness itself.<sup>2</sup> Using repetition of line and shape and colour combinations creates a shimmering quality of light and vibrational pattern. A layer of glowing orbs relates to drops off falling water and reflected light.



**Title:** Serpents Nest

**Price:** \$1,850

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Size:** 61 x 61 cm

**Year:** 2014

**Artist statement:** This painting references reflected light on water and serpent energy. It thereby evokes the mythological serpent water spirit Naga who activates the water element. With *Serpents Nest*, I introduced two serpents of contrasting colour, these balance each other preventing any sudden movement and contain the flow of pattern and rhythms of water in a still space. Reflected light on the surface becomes rippling patterns of constant sequences.

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<sup>2</sup> Ajit Mookerjee, Madhu Khanna, *The Tantric Way Art-Science-Ritual*, (New York Graphic Society Boston, Thames and Hudson 1977),51



**Title:** Ebb Tide

**Price:** \$900 each or \$ 2,550 for triptych

**Media:** etching, acrylic & oil paint on paper and board

**Size:** each painting 31 x 30 cm

**Year:** 2015

**Artist statement:** Seeing water as fluid iconography, changing as it travels through country, evokes French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's contribution on the importance of metaphoric thinking and its relevance as poetic reverie to stimulate the imagination. He claims "The element water is the fundamental metaphor for depth and past time. Everything that flows is water; everything that flows participates in water's nature".<sup>3</sup> Also in this series of paintings red references the Indian tantric system of colour for water and I also added sequences of crescent moon shapes, iconography for water in the same yogic system. The crescent shapes also appeared to represent floating white boats.

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<sup>3</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1999), 6.





**Title:** Locana at Mystery Bay

**Price:** \$5,100 triptych

**Media:** acrylic and oil paint on board

**Size:** each painting 63 x 29.5 cm

**Year:** 2021

**Artist statement:** '*Locana at Mystery Bay*' references twelve years of living next to the ocean at Mystery Bay and studying Tibetan Buddhism. Rhythms of waves, patterns of light and the female Buddha Locana who represents the purity of the element earth and expresses mirror-like primordial wisdom appear in this triptych. The pristine environment of Mystery Bay corroborates the energy of water that confirms connection to the moon and notions of impermanence as well as infinity.

## Paintings – Fire



**Title:** Liquid Fire

**Price:** \$1,800

**Media:** mixed and encaustic wax on board

**Size:** 60 x 43 cm

**Year:** 2017

Artist statement: Liquid Fire references the fluidity and everchanging form of flames and incorporates the symbolic colour for fire in both Indian (white) and Tibetan (red) Buddhist traditions. I created a luminosity in the painting alluding to the transformative aspect of the fire element. By adding hot encaustic wax to the painting then burning it in with a heat gun added a sense of alchemic transmutation, further enhancing the idea of fire as transformation.



**Title:** Playing with Fire

**Price:** \$850 each or \$1,600 for diptych

**Media:** mixed media

**Size:** each painting 31 x 30 cm

**Year:** 2016

**Artist statement:** These small paintings began by collaging torn etchings that I had made about the central desert. Then using oilstick I transformed the surface with hues of red and orange, colours of the 'Red Centre'. Repeated flame-like rhythms of white forced the collaged etching shapes forward in the picture plane like escaping figures. The climatic intensity, ambient heat and primordial vastness of the Northern Territory epitomize the element Fire for me. The fire of the red desert and its extreme heat melt the boundaries of consciousness. It is the fire of transformation. As blood throbs through my veins, the landscape pulses in a sublime heat haze and internal and external worlds are harmonized.





**Title:** Phoenix

**Price:** \$3,500

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Size:** 102 x 71 cm

**Year:** 2018

**Artist statement:** I sought to combine the flickering quality of fire, the energy of different marks with a formal structure reminiscent of Tibetan thangkas. Phoenix has a strong dramatic palette based on the colours which appear, flicker and dissolve while gazing into a fire. The intensity and depth of colour reflects my sense of Tibet while a series of translucent white flames deliver a further spatial dimension and bring white fire the aura of mind of the Indian colour system into the painting. *Phoenix* is an offering, in the hope that Tibetan culture will also regenerate.



**Title:** White Light

**Price:** \$3,500

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Size:** 102 x 71 cm

**Year:** 2018

**Artist statement:** Compositionally *White Light* is mirror image to *Phoenix* in format. However, I sought a different light and space, a more internal reflective space with the colours of the Five Elements infused into the canvas. White is containing all colours as the backdrop to the movement of smoke and flame. "Fire as white is representing the aura of mind and the light that holds the rainbow of all-views of wisdom"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Personal communication from Kulavadhuta Satpurananda, 2016.





**Title:** Old Flame

**Price:** \$3,450 set of 3

**Size:** each painting 50 x 50 cm

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Year:** 2019

**Artist Statement:** The triangle is a symbol for Fire. These paintings came from investigating esoteric meanings of fire, in Tibetan and Indian Vajrayana tradition of Buddhism. “Tibetans see fire as emotional structure in sex, desire, attraction, greed, anger, hate, craving and represented as red and related to medical texts. Whereas Indian yoga tradition describes fire as the practice of consciousness and is white representing the aura of mind”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Personal conversation with Kulavadhuta Satpurananda, 2016.

## Paintings – Air



**Title:** Indigo Wind

**Price:** \$1,900

**Media:** acrylic on paper on board

**Size:** diameter 60 cm

**Year:** 2018

**Artist statement:** Air connects everything. (Literally out of the air.) It carries change and relates to intellectual flexibility in Tibetan Buddhism and judgement in Indian Tantra. I consider Air, as the energy, the vitality and the intelligent flow in in this work. As wind it is the rhythm weaving throughout the painting and it is the dynamic or subtle pulse that holds the composition. Indigo is a traditional Indian colour to represent air.



**Title:** Dark Moon

**Price:** \$1,700

**Media:** acrylic canvas

**Size:** 40 x 30 cm

**Year:** 2017

**Artist statement:** Simply the night sky, some wind currents, and a dark moon. The cloud is the symbol for the element Air in Indian tradition, I added glowing orbs as vital energy points



**Title:** Dawn – Glasshouse Mountains

**Price:** \$800 each or \$4,500 set of 6

**Media:** ink, watercolour, linocut on paper  
on board

**Size:** each painting 21 x 21 cm

**Year:** 2016

**Artist statement:** These paintings explore the poetics of abstraction in response to the natural world and Buddhist philosophy. They were made when I returned home from a Dzogchen (Tibetan Buddhist) retreat with Chogyal Namkai Norbu in the Glasshouse Mountains, Queensland. This area is considered spiritually significant for First Nations people and has many protected ceremonial sites. The mountains are plugs, remnants of volcanic activity that occurred approximately 25 – 27 million years ago.





**Title:** Air Waves

**Price:** \$850 each or \$1,600 for diptych

**Media:** acrylic and oil paint on board

**Size:** each painting 21 x 21 cm

**Year:** 2017

**Artist statement:** *Air Waves* references a bright blue Australian summer sky, golden sunshine and the constant sound of cicadas. The continuous ribbons of line suggest the waves of harmonies and intense volume of surround sound as hundreds of male cicadas sing in ear-piercing harmonies to attract a mate. Having dug their way to the surface and climbed a tree after seven years underground as a nymph, some cicadas have three short days of life in the open air to sing, mate and reproduce. These paintings are a tribute to cicadas whose sound is consistent component of a summer breeze.



**Title:** Subtropical Rainforest

**Price:** \$4,400

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Size:** 120 cm diameter

**Year:** 2021

**Artist statement:** Rainforests are often called the lungs of the planet. Just as human lungs absorb oxygen and give out carbon dioxide. Rainforests absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and release oxygen. This painting was made looking at the rhythms and forms of the remnant rainforest that is my back yard. It maintains my fresh air.



**Title:** Twilight Helix

**Price:** \$1,850

**Size:** 61 x 61 cm

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Year:** 2021

**Artist statement:** The energy of dusk gently weaves and coils into shades of evening as lights appear.



## Paintings – Space



**Title:** Breathing Space

**Price:** \$8,000

**Size:** 152 x 152 cm

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Year:** 2019

**Artist statement:** Space contains all the other elements. In Tibetan Buddhism the element space relates to the nature of mind as the luminosity of the natural state – the light and unity of emptiness and clarity, the ground of being. Space contains the unceasing display of appearance and awareness.



**Title:** Weaving Time

**Price:** \$5,300

**Size:** 122 x 122 cm

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Year:** 2017

**Artist statement:** Space has infinite potential. Here I considered the space-time continuum as a continuous rolling grid of particles and waves. The Infinity symbols are endless circuits that indicate ongoing presence and the notion of complete and constant perpetual change.



**Title:** Starry Night

**Price:** \$1,850

**Size:** 63 x 30 cm

**Media:** acrylic on board

**Year:** 2016

**Artist statement:** Working this painting brought memories of outback skies and ethereal energy and evoked Vincent's Starry Night. So, I decided to further enhance a connection to Van Gogh and built up the texture to relate to his rough frenetic flow of brush strokes.



**Title:** Cloud

**Price:** \$1,700

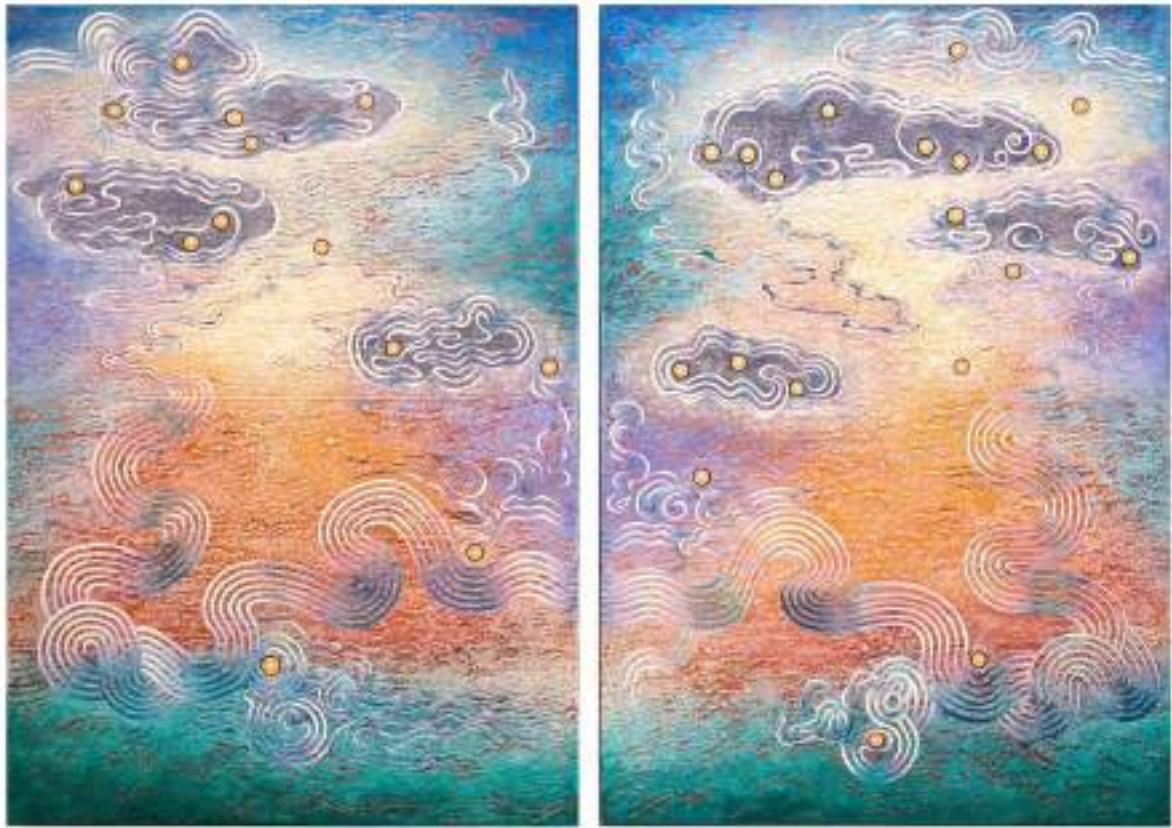
**Size:** 40 x 30 cm

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Year:** 2017

**Artist statement:** Considering sky as space, I overlaid multiple layers and rhythms in harmonious sequences, creating a visual space. The final layer of floating clouds suggested continuous manifestation and added a sense of vastness.





**Title:** Beyond Clouds

**Price:** \$6,000 diptych

**Size:** each painting 107 x 71c m

**Media:** acrylic and oil paint on canvas

**Year:** 2019

**Artist statement:** This diptych references space as ether. Soft hues of the colours of the five elements evoke a sense of the sublime, the beauty of a sunset and a sense of exalted, blissful spaciousness.





**Title:** Continuum

**Price:** \$8,000

**Size:** 137 cm diameter

**Media:** acrylic on canvas

**Year:** 2019

**Artist statement:** *Continuum* acknowledges my journey investigating the energy of the five elements from study and work as an acupuncturist in the 1970's to visually depicting the five elements in the 2000's by taking landscape into abstraction and transforming it into a field of elemental energy, rhythm, space, light and luminosity in my paintings.

