

IMAGES:

1. Tamara Baillie, *site documentation*, 2016, Bird Lake, South Australia. Image courtesy the artist.

This publication is published by the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia (CACSA), Adelaide.

© 2016 the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, the writers and artists. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission.

This publication coincides with *The Driest State* an exhibition held at the CACSA: Project Space from 5 November – 16 December 2016.

Tamara would like to thank Sue Kneebone, Jonathan Jones, Sasha Grbich, Coby Edgar, Amanda Radomi, Kathleen Wang, CACSA staff and Arts South Australia for support in developing and presenting this exhibition.

Executive Director: Liz Nowell
General Manager: Sarita Chadwick
Author: Sue Kneebone
Layout: Logan Macdonald
Designer: David Corbet
Printing: Newstyle Printing
Publisher: Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia Inc.

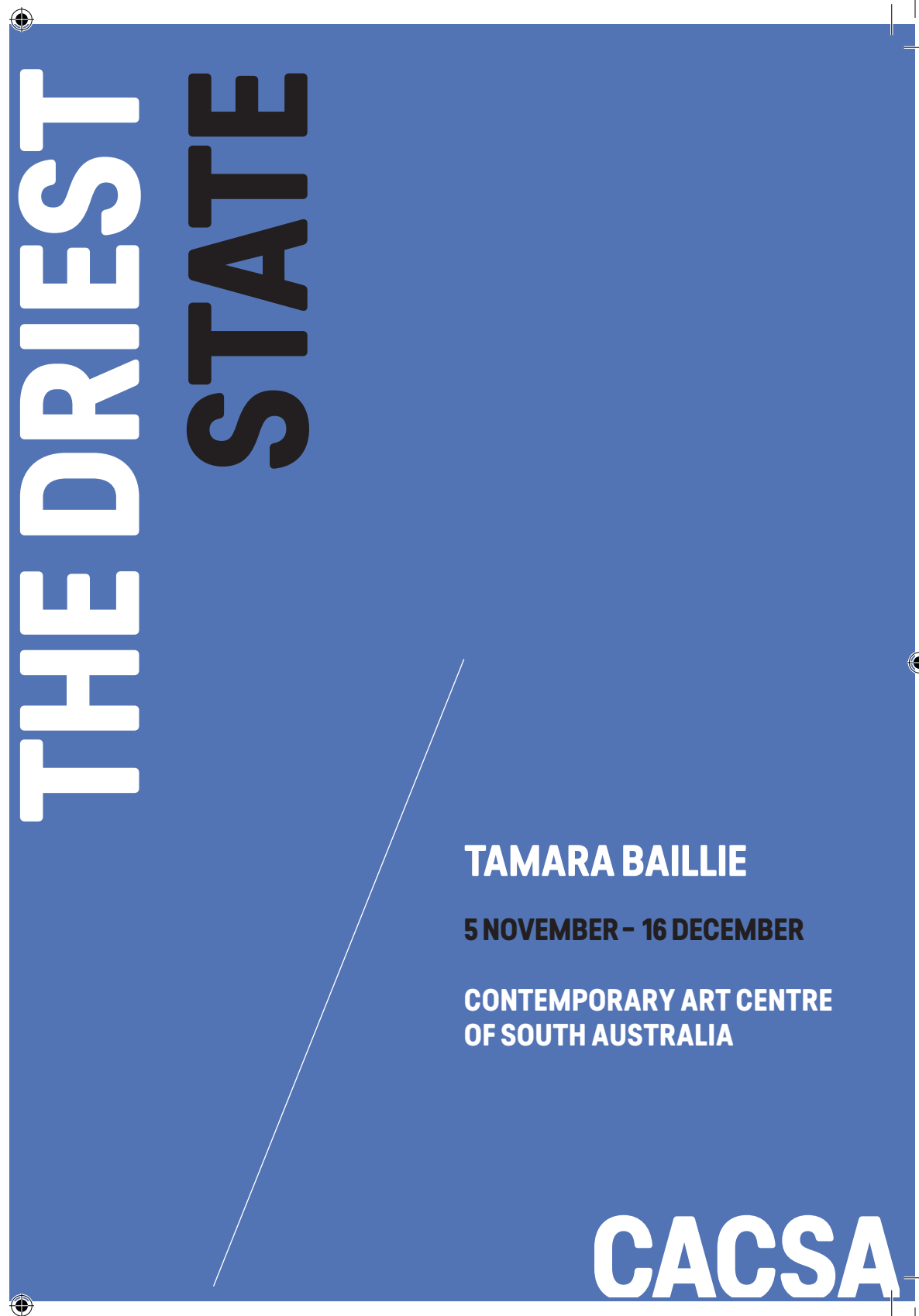
Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia
14 Porter Street
Parkside SA 5063
T +61 (08) 82722682
W www.cacsa.org.au
E admin@cacsa.org.au



The Driest State forms part of a year long Emerging Mentorship supported by the Government of South Australia through Arts South Australia.



The CACSA is assisted by the Government of South Australia through Arts South Australia and the Australian Government through the Australia Council and supported by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory governments.



Memory State

The evaporative process of water from salt in Tamara Baillie's expansive floor work slowly reveals the residual outline and crystalline beauty of South Australia's topography. Baillie has inverted our expectations of conventional map reading. Instead of relying on the magnetic north as our guide, we walk into this immersive map like peripatetic giants heading south.

Map-making has always been political, with geographical boundaries constantly redrawn through colonial occupation and conflict. The territorial evolution of South Australia has been inscribed according to the impositions of imperial rule onto a land already occupied by Aboriginal peoples whose intimate and cultural relationship to the land and sea is very different to the British colonisers'. South Australian borders were realigned numerous times to fit the straight lines of imperial rule. In 1860 the western border of South Australia changed from 132° east to 129° east to align with the border of Western Australia. I recall in primary school tracing these perfectly straight borders with a plastic template of South Australia, including the small straggly holes for those vast interior salt lakes such as Lake Eyre, Lake Gairdner and Lake Torrens, of which most of us knew little.

Through the lens of history we know that early surveyors often relied

on Aboriginal guides to lead them to waterholes in South Australia's outback terrain of waterless lakes. Aboriginal trackers also led search parties to find the remains of those that became lost. All too often colonial explorers' and white settlers' helplessness led to their own death and despair. Stories going back to the mid-1800s of survival and tragedy surround these salt lakes, such as the husband dragging his sick wife in a makeshift ambulant sled across the sand and rock from Lake Acraman. In 1858 on a sandhill between Lake Torrens and Lake Gairdner an empty metal water bottle was found inscribed with the last words of its owner, yet in the 1860s a pioneer claimed to have 'saved' the lives of Aboriginal people from thirst in this waterless terrain.

Through her spatial practice and salty alchemy, Baillie is seeking a way into the psycho-geography of this state with its history of colonial expansion and conflict, a past encrusted in murky memories branching back through her own familial lines. It is difficult to glean lived experiences and personal memories from the inscrutable nature of family trees. The pragmatism of names and dates and the polite chatter of living and distant relatives elide the emotional topography of the terrain within which these ancestors lived.

Within its brackish veils, Baillie's work alludes to the spectre of corrosive memories that may rise to the surface and turn to vapour, or like

salt in wounds, have the potential to both aggravate and salve a painful past. Like the school template, South Australia is a shape which continues to be drawn and rebranded, a boundary that continues to defy and override the past while looking to the future. Within these territorial boundaries, untold stories remain unbidden, and the process of their recovery may remain as elusive as a shimmering mirage across an outback salt lake.

Sue Kneebone

