

Naomi Hobson

Global recognition is growing for this First Nations artist, who is inspired by her home on Queensland’s Cape York Peninsula.



Story by Kate Hennessy

It’s easy for Naomi Hobson to pinpoint what connects her mediums of abstract expressionist painting, portrait photography and ceramics. She works from her home on the Coen River in Cape York on the traditional lands and water of the Southern Kaantju people, shared with the five other clans that call Coen home. “A few metres down the riverbank is my grandmother’s birthing place and upriver is my grandfather’s,” she says. “What links my art is that all of the stories are from here. They’re my family’s stories, my community’s stories. We own them.”

This was not the case in the past when visiting anthropologists took photographs of Hobson’s ancestors. Efforts by her Elders to repatriate these photos back to the community continue today. “I thought, ‘I’ll take the pictures then; I’ll photograph mob,’” she says. “My photos are owned by community; it’s their narrative and their story.”

Hobson’s *A Warrior Without a Weapon* series (at Canberra’s National Portrait Gallery as part of *In Bloom* until 19 April 2026) depicts local men with flowers in their hair or beards. The portraits revive an ancient cultural practice where men would decorate their bodies with the flowers of plants in dwindling supply and dance to encourage their abundance the next season. “That old ritual of dancing with flowers is a celebration of life and the photos are, too,” she says. Hobson’s paintings, meanwhile, crackle and pop with a profusion of colour and movement, teeming with irrepressible energy. “That’s my Country absorbed in those colours. Every day, it shows me a different sky or a new native grass or fish. I share those stories through my art.”

London’s Rebecca Hossack Art Gallery began representing Hobson last year and has displayed her work at eminent art fairs, Art Central Hong Kong and Art Paris. The portraits struck a particular chord. “It makes us proud there’s so much interest in stories from the bush,” says Hobson. Next up is Art Toronto (23 to 26 October) and Art Basel Miami Beach (3 to 7 December) but for now, Hobson is at home painting. “We’re finishing the wet season (*ngaachi yangkuyi*) here,” she says. “This is when we head to Saltwater Country (*taw’a aw’achina*) for oysters and mullet (*kapikamu*). There are so many untold stories here. Telling them is how our culture will continue to live.”

Exhibited at: Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London; Grand Palais (Art Paris), Paris; Arthouse Gallery, Sydney; ReDot Fine Art Gallery, Singapore; Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs

Awards: The Alice Prize (2016); Australian Tapestry Workshop commission (2021); Mervyn Moriarty Landscape Award (Queensland Regional Art Awards, 2023)

Breakthrough moment: “It was a huge buzz when Christian Louboutin and Elton John purchased my works but it also felt amazing when all my works sold on the opening night of my first solo exhibition in Melbourne in 2013 [at Alcaston Gallery].”



Sir Willy, A Warrior Without a Weapon (2018; above) and *Seven Sisters* (2025) by Naomi Hobson (right); the artist in Coen, Far North Queensland (top)

Shonae Hobson