Indigenous artist Maree Clarke has been trying for 25 years to broaden the public’s perception of Aboriginal art and put a spotlight on Victorian artists whose work is not in the familiar dots and crosshatching styles.

Clarke, from northeast Victoria, says she is always asked, when people learn that she is an artist, whether she “does dots”.

“I do a whole range of things, from possum-skin cloaks to installations to multimedia to 3-D photography; it’s endless,” she says.

Clarke’s work *Born of the Land* features in *Sovereignty*, an exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne that focuses on the contemporary art of indigenous people from southeast Australia.
*Born of the Land* represents death and rebirth, and includes sticks collected from along the Murray River.

The video depicts Clarke emerging from sand: she had intended to film the piece on country but, she says, she was afraid of scorpions. Instead the video was filmed in a controlled environment with 200kg of dirt.

Clarke says the variety of work on display in *Sovereignty* is amazing, but she notes a common link among the indigenous artists. “Everything that you do has some connection to your family, your country, your kin, always,” she says.

Co-curator of the exhibition Paola Balla, a Wemba-Wemba and Gunditjmara woman, says contemporary indigenous art from Victoria tends to be overlooked in favour of more traditional art practice.

“One of the things we wanted to do with this show was really platform the work and the quality of contemporary indigenous art in Victoria,” she says.

“A lot of people in mainstream education and mainstream thinking think that authentic or traditional Aboriginal art is the only kind, it’s usually dot paintings. What we’re doing is really saying our practice is diverse and contemporary and dynamic and made with every kind of medium, though essentially we’re telling the same stories of resistance and sovereignty and culture and family stories and genealogy.”

The exhibition includes historical works such as a 19th-century club and shield from activist and artist William Barak.

ACCA artistic director and co-curator Max Delany says the exhibition looks across generations of practice and is rich in social history, politics, family and culture.

It explores themes such as sovereignty, assertion of cultural identity, resistance to colonial imposition, women’s cultural practices, activism and interaction of people, land and place. “I think it is perhaps true that southeast Australian indigenous art hasn’t had the same profile on a national scale,” he says.

*Sovereignty is at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Saturday to March 26*