The TarraWarra Biennial 2014: *Whisper in My Mask*

presents the premiere of the play

*Weavings and Whispers: *Miwi* wisdom* by Diane Bell

On Saturday August 16 TarraWarra Museum of Art will present a new play written especially by Professor Diane Bell for the TarraWarra Biennial 2014: *Whisper in My Mask*, curated by Natalie King and Djon Mundine.

Professor Bell was inspired to write the one act play after being asked to write an essay for the exhibition catalogue on the TarraWarra Biennial’s theme of masking, and its many hidden narratives and meanings.

She says the play, which features a special live performance by the Ngarrindjeri Weavers from South Australia, will, “Take us into the world of the Ngarrindjeri women, who came to national prominence in the mid-1990s when they were accused of lying about their sacred places in order to thwart the building of a bridge. Their stories, told as they weave, reveal the hidden truths of their relationship to their country, families and sacred beliefs. This knowledge is inaccessible to those who privilege written texts and dismiss oral traditions. Through their Miwi, their ‘sixth sense’, located in the pit of the stomach, Ngarrindjeri wisdom comes to full voice”.

The Ngarrindjeri are the traditional owners of the lands stretching from Cape Jervis in the west along the Coorong to The Granites in the southeast, taking in the lower reaches of the Murray River, western Fleurieu Peninsula, Lakes Albert and Alexandrina of South Australia. The weavers will be travelling specially to the Yarra Valley to do two performances of the play on the Biennial’s opening weekend.

Diane Bell is a pioneering Australian feminist anthropologist, author and activist, Professor Emerita of Anthropology at the George Washington University in Washington, D. C., Writer and Editor in Residence at Flinders University, South Australia and Visiting Professor School of Social Sciences, University of Adelaide. In 2005, after 17 years in the United States, she returned to her native Australia to retire and currently lives and writes in Canberra.

**Saturday 16 August, 11.30am and 12 noon (repeat performance)**
Followed by discussion, free with museum entry fee, no bookings required. Entry: Adults $7.50, Seniors $5.00, Concessions free, including children 16 and under, students, pensioners

The TarraWarra Biennial 2014: *Whisper in My Mask* features at the Museum from August 16 to November 16.
The TarraWarra Biennial 2014: *Whisper in My Mask*, curated by Natalie King and Djon Mundine, is the fourth iteration of a signature event on the national exhibition calendar.

Inaugurated in 2006 to identify new developments in contemporary art practice, the TarraWarra Biennial invites artists to present their work at the unique TarraWarra Museum of Art, located in the spectacular Yarra Valley one hour from Melbourne. The Biennial highlights pivotal aspects of Australian practice under an experimental curatorial platform.

Featuring recent and specially commissioned works by more than 20 of Australia’s most vital contemporary Aboriginal and non-Indigenous artists, and taking a line from the evocative song ‘Art Groupie’ (1981) by singer Grace Jones, the title of this year’s Biennial, *Whisper in my Mask*, signals a wide-ranging exploration of masking.

*Touch Me in a Picture, Wrap Me in a Cast, Kiss Me in a Sculpture, Whisper in My Mask*

In a selection of works that elicit an emotional and sensory response, the Biennial explores the mask’s multifarious forms and functions and the ways in which it both reveals and conceals personas: to protect, beautify, frighten or pacify, universalise or eternalise, and intensify and amplify expression.

Disguise manifests as trace, inscription, erasure, secrets, camouflage, whisperings, dreamings and subterfuge. These ideas will infiltrate the Biennial as a series of trigger points by incorporating a range of artworks including sound, video, performance and participatory installation by cross-generational Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists.
The curators have undertaken extensive research and field work to cities and remote communities in order to select Aboriginal and non-indigenous artists working across diverse media. Having worked at Ramingining and Maningrida, Djon Mundine has extensive networks in rural communities as well as affiliations with emerging and established artists in various cities. This significant experience has been deployed alongside Natalie King’s expertise in photography and moving image practices to ensure a ground-breaking Biennial. Together, their collaborative curatorial methodology interrogates the work of lesser-known artists alongside those who are more established.

The participating artists include: boat-people*(NSW), Daniel Boyd (NSW), Søren Dahlgaard (VIC), Destiny Deacon & Virginia Fraser (VIC), Karla Dickens (NSW), Fiona Foley (QLD), Tony Garifalakis (VIC), Sandra Hill (WA), Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano (VIC), Romaine Moreton (VIC), Nasim Nasr (SA), Polixeni Papapetrou (VIC), Elizabeth Pedler (WA), Sangeeta Sandrasegar (VIC), The Telepathy Project (Veronica Kent and Sean Peoples) (VIC) and The Tjanpi Desert Weavers Project with Fiona Hall (SA/NT/WA).

TarraWarra Museum of Art Director, Victoria Lynn, says, “This year’s Biennial features both timely political gestures about the masking of history as well as a more mysterious interest in hidden personas, ghosts and telepathy. Featuring performances, talks and events, the exhibition also embraces a broad sense of community that encompasses not only the local Yarra Valley but also the significant Indigenous communities across Australia.”

Highlights include the specially commissioned work of the Tjanpi Desert Weavers with the Australian Venice Biennale 2015 representative Fiona Hall; The Telepathy Project which involves a town meeting at the Healesville Hotel, a libretto for TarraWarra’s lake, a project about dreams, and a library; and 3,500 litres of beanbag beans for the participatory installation by emerging Western Australian artist Elizabeth Pedler.

On August 16, timed to coincide with the Biennial’s official partner, Melbourne Art Fair, (13 - 17 of August, at the Royal Exhibition Building), the Museum will present the premiere of the play ‘Weavings and Whispers: Miwi wisdom’, written especially for the Biennial by Prof. Diane Bell, and performed by members of the Ngarrindjeri Weavers, followed by an audience discussion, along with a range of talks given by the exhibition artists throughout the day.

On October 19 the Museum will hold a special day of events curated for Melbourne Festival, Whisper in My Mask: A day in the valley, featuring Søren Dahlgard; The Telepathy Project libretto Reading Solaris to the Great Moorool; artists of the TarraWarra Biennial 2014 in conversation with curator Natalie King; poetry readings by Romaine Moreton and A Special Conversation: Henry Reynolds, Djon Mundine & Fiona Foley.

*boat-people - (Safdar Ahmed, Zehra Ahmed, Stephanie Carrick, Dave Gravina, Katie Hepworth, Jiann Hughes, Deborah Kelly, Enda Murray, Pip Shea, Sumugan Sivanesan, Jamil Yamani)
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