



LOOKING GLASS: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce

28 November 2020 – 8 March 2021

EDUCATION KIT

Acknowledgement

TarraWarra Museum of Art, NETS Victoria, the artists and the curator of *Looking Glass* respectfully acknowledge and celebrate the continuing culture and custodianship of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples on whose lands this exhibition is presented and all communities across Australia.

Exhibition Introduction

Looking Glass is an important and timely exhibition which brings together two of Australia's most acclaimed contemporary artists—Waanyi artist, Judy Watson and Kokatha and Nukunu artist, Yhonnie Scarce. At its heart, the exhibition is both a love song and a lament for Country; a fantastical alchemy of the elemental forces of earth, water, fire and air. Watson's ochres, charcoal and pigments, pooled and washed upon flayed canvases, have a natural affinity and synergy with Scarce's fusion of fire, earth and air. Watson and Scarce express the inseparable oneness of Aboriginal people with Country, a familial relationship established for millennia.

Together these artists offer a far-ranging and holistic portrait of Country where the creation and experience of art recalls the lived, remembered and inherited history of Aboriginal people. Yet, while their works may refer to specific events, their enigmatic and often intimate forms, gestures and marks also imply an immersive timelessness outside of a linear chronology; an existence today that is more than the 'now'. Colloquially, this is often referred to as the Dreaming, an extraordinary perception of the connection of Country, community and culture.

Watson and Scarce, like all Indigenous Australians, share recent and personally painful histories of the destruction, exploitation and degradation of not only the land, but the people of the land. Essentially, this exhibition is about Australia's secret and dirty war—a battle fought on many fronts from colonial massacres to Stolen Generations, from the Maralinga bomb tests to the climate emergency. In their works, the artists poignantly remind us how the pursuit of the Great Australian Dream is not what it seems. It is, in reality, a nightmare, a shimmering mirage, a candle in the coming storm.

Looking Glass has been organised by Ikon and TarraWarra Museum of Art with curator Hetti Perkins. This project is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, as well as receiving development assistance from NETS Victoria's Exhibition Development Fund 2019, supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, and by Creative Partnerships Australia through the Australian Cultural Fund.

Judy Watson, dugong bones 2020; Yhonnie Scarce, Hollowing Earth 2016-17 (detail), installation view, *Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce*, TarraWarra Museum of Art.
Photo: Andrew Curtis

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Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce, installation view, TarraWarra Museum of Art
Photo: Andrew Curtis





How to use this kit

This Education Kit has been developed to support learning alongside the exhibition *Looking Glass* at TarraWarra Museum of Art and NETS Victoria exhibition tour venues. Teachers can select and adapt the questions and support materials provided within the resource for learning experiences in the gallery or classroom.

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Hollowing Earth 2016–17 (detail)
blown and hot formed Uranium glass
dimensions variable
Collection of the artist
Courtesy of the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne
Photo: Janelle Low

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Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce, installation view, TarraWarra Museum of Art
Photo: Andrew Curtis



About the artist: Judy Watson



Judy Watson. Photo: Jo-Anne Driessens

Judy Watson was born in Mundubbera, Queensland and lives and works in Brisbane. Watson's Aboriginal matrilineal family are Waanyi, whose Country is located in north-west Queensland. Watson works from site, archives and collective memory to reveal the fault lines of history within place and Country, lays bare the impact of colonial history and the institutional discrimination of Aboriginal people, celebrates Aboriginal cultural practice, and registers our precarious relationship with the environment. Her works comprise painting, printmaking, drawing, video, sculpture and public art.

Watson has exhibited extensively in Australia and overseas. Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK presented Judy Watson in 2020, a version to be shown at TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville, Victoria and touring. Judy Watson: the edge of memory was exhibited at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney in 2018. In 2015, her work was included in Artist and Empire: Facing Britain's Imperial Past, Tate Britain, London and Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation, British Museum,

London. A major survey of Watson's works made from 1989 to 2003, sacred ground beating heart, was exhibited in 2003 at the John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, WA, and at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane in 2004. Asialink toured a version of sacred ground beating heart in 2004 to Vietnam, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, and Australian venues. Watson co-represented Australia in the 1997 Venice Biennale.

Major awards received include the Australia Council Visual Arts Award (Artist) in 2015; in 2006, the National Gallery of Victoria's Clemenger Contemporary Art Award, and the Works on Paper Award at the 23rd Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award; and, in 1995, the Moët & Chandon Fellowship. In 2018, she received a Doctorate of Art History (honoris causa) from The University of Queensland.

Watson's work is held in major Australian and international public collections, including: National Gallery of Australia; all Australian state art galleries; Museum of Contemporary Art / Tate collections; Taipei Fine Arts Museum; St Louis Art Museum, USA; The British Museum, London; Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK; Library of Congress, Washington, USA; Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, USA; as well as significant private collections.

Watson has received major public art commissions, including bara, to be installed at the Tarpeian Precinct Lawn above Dubbagullee (Bennelong Point), Sydney in 2020; tow row, bronze sculpture installed outside GOMA, Brisbane, 2016; ngarunga nangama: calm water dream, 300-square-metre artwork, 200 George Street, Sydney; yara, Flinders University, Adelaide, 2016; living well, murri kitchen and fragments, grounds of Townsville Hospital, 2016; water memory, Queensland Institute of Medical Research foyer, 2011; freshwater lens, beneath Turbot Street Overpass, Brisbane, 2010; fire and water, Reconciliation Place, Canberra, 2007; museum piece and two halves with baler shell, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, 2006; heart/land/river, Brisbane Magistrates Court foyer, 2004; ngarrn-gi land/law, 50-metre etched zinc wall, Victorian County Court, Melbourne, 2002; walama forecourt, sculptural installation at Sydney International Airport, 2000; wurreka,

50-metre etched zinc wall, Melbourne Museum, 2000. Judy Watson: blood language, a monograph by Judy Watson and Louise Martin-Chew, was published by The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Publishing in 2009.

Key artworks: Judy Watson

standing stone, kangaroo grass, bush string 2020
synthetic polymer paint, graphite on canvas
246 x 181 cm

Assistant: Elisa Jane Carmichael
Geelong Gallery

Purchased through the John Norman Mann Bequest Fund
and with funds generously provided by the
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Many of Judy Watson's paintings in Looking Glass were made in response to research she undertook while visiting sites of prehistorical significance in England, Ireland and Scotland. The monolithic standing stones, circles and hill figures that Watson documented using photography and video during her travels appear on the surfaces of her paintings. Watson has overlaid the sentinel forms of standing stones with the silhouettes of leaves and stalks of Australian plant species: grevillea, kangaroo grass and gumbi gumbi. As Watson explains, these works draw together and explore connections between her matrilineal Waanyi heritage and her northern European ancestry on her father's side:

The conceptual idea underlying the trip was looking at ancient sites in the region, specifically stone sites: stone circles or standing stones. I also revisited the British Museum and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. My idea was to have images of standing stone forms—shadowy or very ghostly presences—and the floating of Aboriginal cultural material across the top. It's a layering of experiences and a layering of understanding of what is culture.

There is a physicality to the way Watson works in the studio, she washes, pools, brushes, scrubs and pushes pigment around raw canvas to create her work. The large scale, unstretched canvases are first placed on the studio floor and the artist moves across the entire surface of each work, pouring water over pigment, and using her feet to literally tread colour into the canvas fibres. Later, the works are hung on the studio wall and Watson draws and paints the silhouettes and outlines of objects using a combination of dry and wet media. In *standing stone, kangaroo grass and bush string* 2020, the shape of a

single standing stone has been created by filling in a graphite outline with small swirling blue painted marks. Ochre-coloured and black silhouettes of kangaroo grass and bush string have then been overlaid, creating a multilayered and shifting composition.

The twisting, sinuous form of bush string seen in *standing stone, kangaroo grass and bush string* is a recurring motif in Watson's work and one that is imbued with particular significance for the artist:

String is not just vegetable fibre, it could be hair from the body. It can be material fibre that has been worn on the body. It collects all the DNA from the hair of the person who's making the string—rolling it up and down on their leg and capturing the hairs and particles of skin—and then from whoever wears those hairstring objects ...

The DNA of those people, their resonance, is still in the object. You can feel it when you look at it or when you touch it. The first thing I thought when I saw some of those objects was, could that have been my grandmother's, great grandmother's, great great grandmother's hair within those objects? And further back, my great great grandfather as well.

Discussion Questions

- Many of Judy Watson's artworks feature painted silhouettes of bush foods such as kangaroo grass. Kangaroo grass was an important bush food in the diet of Aboriginal people across Australia before European people arrived. The seeds of this hardy, drought resistant grass would be collected and scattered by Aboriginal people as they travelled, and the grass was gathered, ground down and then baked—ready to be eaten. Have you ever eaten any bush foods? Were they prepared or cooked in a special way?
- Watson presents her paintings unstretched and pinned or nailed directly onto the gallery wall. Why do you think the artist chooses to display her artworks in this way?



Judy Watson
standing stone, kangaroo grass, bush string 2020
synthetic polymer paint, graphite on canvas
246 x 181 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane
Photo: Carl Warner

Key artworks: Judy Watson

spot fires, our country is burning now 2020
synthetic polymer paint, pastel, graphite on canvas
194 x 181 cm

Assistant: Dorothy Watson
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Judy Watson created *spot fires, our country is burning now* 2020 during the catastrophic bushfires which engulfed enormous areas of Australian habitat and devastated native flora and fauna over the summer months of 2019–20. This work directly references this moment of crisis in our country. Small, red, teardrop shaped painted marks clump together in swirling circles on the surface of the stained canvas, giving the impression of what bushfire might look like if flying high above the land in an airplane and looking down. The churning red forms in *spot fires, our country is burning now* signify the wildfires as they spiralled out of control, growing and sometimes merging to form megafires.

As the artist states: When I was making the work the fires were ever present throughout places in Australia, friends of mine had lost their houses, we had so much destruction of the environment of animals and there was also a lot of talk about Indigenous burning techniques and that translation of knowledge. And perhaps it's time to actually look at best practice which sometimes is not what is occurring right now ... I don't know how present it will be now that the fires have dampened and gone out ... I think that erasure of past practice is something that's very easy for politicians, developers, and people who are looking at a quick fix and the biggest gain ...



Judy Watson
spot fires, our country is burning now 2020
synthetic polymer paint, pastel, graphite on canvas
194 x 181 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane
Photo: Carl Warner

Discussion Questions

- Fire is a destructive force, but it is also important for the regeneration and renewal of the land. What happens to the land in the months and years after it has been burnt by fire?
- Research different ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities used fire to care for and manage Country in the past. Can you find a group in your local area or in your state that brings First Nations and other Australians together to share knowledge about managing the land using fire? What are the benefits of Indigenous burning techniques?



About the artist: Yhonnie Scarce



Yhonnie Scarce. Photo: Janelle Low

Yhonnie Scarce was born in Woomera, South Australia, and belongs to the Kokatha and Nukunu peoples. Her interdisciplinary practice explores the political nature and aesthetic qualities of glass and photography. Scarce's work often references the ongoing effects of colonisation on Aboriginal people; in particular her research has explored the impact of the removal and relocation of Aboriginal people from their homelands and the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Family history is central to Scarce's work, drawing on the strength of her ancestors, she offers herself as a conduit, sharing their significant stories from the past.

Scarce was recently announced as the winner of the prestigious Yalingwa Fellowship, 2020, and was selected for the National Gallery of Victoria's Architecture Commission, 2019. This commission, a collaboration with the architecture studio Edition Office titled *In Absence*, was the winner of the Small

Building of the Year at the Dezeen Awards 2020. In 2018, Scarce was the recipient of the Kate Challis RAKA award for her contribution to the visual arts in Australia, as well as the Indigenous Ceramic Award from the Shepparton Art Museum.

Recent international exhibitions include Paris Photo, Paris, France; Pavilion of Contemporary Art, Milan, Italy; Museum London, Ontario, Canada. Previous international shows include the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, India, 2018; 55th Venice Biennale collateral exhibition *Personal Structures*, 2013, Venice; Galway Art Centre, Ireland, 2016; Harvard Art Museum, Massachusetts, 2016; Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Museum, Virginia, USA, 2012.

Scarce was curated into the 2020 Adelaide Biennial at the Art Gallery of South Australia and has co-curated *Violent Salt* at Artspace Mackay, which will tour Australia until 2021. In 2018, Scarce was curated into major shows and public commissions throughout Australia, including the Biennale of Australian Art, Ballarat; *Installation Contemporary*, Sydney; the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; and the Newcastle Art Gallery. Previous major shows include *The National: New Australian Art 2017*, Art Gallery of NSW, 2017; *The 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial*, 2017; the 19th Biennale of Sydney, 2014; and a site-specific installation at the Art Gallery of South Australia as part of Tarnanthi Festival of Contemporary and Torres Strait Islander Art, 2016.

In 2012, Scarce held a residency and exhibited at the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Museum, University of Virginia, USA and participated in Aboriginal art symposiums at Seattle Art Museum and the Hood Museum, New Hampshire.

Scarce's work is held in major Australian public collections including: National Gallery of Victoria; Art Gallery of South Australia; National Gallery Australia; Flinders University Art Museum; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory; and the University of South Australia.

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Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce, installation view, TarraWarra Museum of Art
Photo: Andrew Curtis

Key artworks: Yhonnie Scarce

Hollowing Earth 2016–17

blown and hot formed Uranium glass

dimensions variable

Collection of the artist

A number of artworks by Yhonnie Scarce in Looking Glass have been made from uranium glass—a special type of glass that contains uranium oxide that gives it a sickly greenish colour. In *Hollowing Earth* 2016–17, blown glass forms are shaped like bush bananas—an important Aboriginal food and totem. This work examines issues related to the mining of Uranium on Aboriginal land. South Australia is home to over 25 underground and open cut mines, many of which are operating very close to occupied areas. The substances being excavated in these mines—zinc, copper, gold, iron ore, coal, and uranium—can be harmful to the health of people, animals, and plants, and the means by which these substances are extracted from the earth can result in the degradation of land and the destruction of whole ecosystems.

Scarce has used the green yellow hue of uranium glass to great effect in this work to relay the idea of sickness and decay. The glass bush bananas appear like bodily organs, some have been sandblasted with holes and their edges burnt and tinged with brown, emphasising the idea of sickness, deformity and conjuring the notion of the scarring of the land. According to Scarce, the earth is becoming sick, it is being 'hollowed' out and degraded by mining. The forms appear scarred, just as the earth has been scarred. As the artist explains:

Uranium glass has been used in this work to represent the sickness that this material inflicts on those who have been in contact with it. But also the illness that is left behind once the earth has been opened and its contents have been exposed. Each bush banana form identifies the desecration of Country, gaping holes and scarred surfaces, all of which is the aftermath of the disrespectful behaviour that mining inflicts on the planet



Yhonnie Scarce, *Hollowing Earth* 2016–17 (detail),
installation view, Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce, TarraWarra Museum of Art
Photo: Andrew Curtis

Discussion Questions

- What are some of the effects that open cut and other forms of mining have on the land? Why is it important to look after the land? What can be done to restore the land after mining has occurred?
- Consider the presentation of the glass forms in this artwork. The white tables that the forms appear on have been especially designed and fabricated. Why do you suppose the tables have been arranged in this particular way? What does the arrangement of the tables remind you of and how might it be connected to the ideas that the artist is conveying?



Key artworks: Yhonnie Scarce

Only a mother could love them 2016

hand blown glass

25 x 15 cm diameter each

(variable sizes – approx.)

Monash University Collection

Purchased by the Monash Business

School 2017

Courtesy of Monash University Museum of Art

Since 2015, Yhonnie Scarce has explored the under-represented history of nuclear testing in central-west South Australia by the British Government between 1956–1963. This period of nuclear testing was carried out with the consent and support of the Australian Government. Scarce addresses the silence and secrecy that surrounds the nuclear tests in her confronting, yet moving, installations. Using blown glass as a medium, her works evoke the physical, emotional and spiritual trauma caused by the violence and insidiousness of Australia's complicity in the race for nuclear arms. Scarce's approach to working with blown glass is conceptual—she is not interested in the beauty of glass for beauty's sake alone, rather she harnesses the power of the beauty of glass while relaying real stories of violent dispossession and disregard for the lives of Aboriginal people in Australia.

Scarce was born in Woomera, a town which lies several hundred kilometres east of Maralinga where the British tested seven nuclear bombs and carried out hundreds of other nuclear tests. For those Aboriginal people living on the lands and surrounding areas who survived the nuclear bombs, the fallout from the tests left air, land, and food contaminated with fatal radioactive materials—affecting infants and children especially. As the artist explains:

About 15 hours west of Woomera, where my family lived, is Maralinga, where the British conducted nuclear testing in the 1950s. Dust and clouds travelled from the site across the state making many people sick, and the infant death rate was high during and after those tests. Recently I've made work that references these events, which I felt were not being talked about.

Many of the forms that the artist creates from glass take the shape of food to refer to both her culture and to stand in for human bodies. In *Only a mother could love them* 2016, a group of small, blackened glass bush plums are installed on a steel mortuary table against a backdrop of a large-scale black and white photograph of Woomera Cemetery. The blown glass bush plums in this artwork are darkened and deformed, pierced through with gaping holes, to represent the children born without body parts:

"I wanted the colours of the darkness—black lustre—you flame it—it's like bruising ... They're a perfect metaphor for bodies, even though they are food. I chose the bush plum because of their embryonic state, like the moment the sperm enters the egg, the initial beginning of life, but these kids didn't get that chance, hence dysmorphia."

Discussion Questions

- **Why would blown glass be considered a beautiful artform? Is beauty important when making or viewing artworks? Why/Why not?**
- **Look carefully at the blown glass forms in *Only a mother could love them*. Are all of the forms the same or do they appear slightly different to one another? What are the differences that you can find between the forms?**
- **Consider how the glass bush plums have been grouped and placed in this artwork. Why do you think the artist chose to present the objects in this configuration? Give reasons for your answer.**



Yhonnie Scarce

Only a mother could love them 2016 (detail)

hand blown glass

25 x 15 cm diameter each

(variable sizes – approx.)

Monash University Collection

Purchased by the Monash Business School 2017

Courtesy of Monash University Museum of Art

Photo: Andrew Curtis

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Yhonnie Scarce

Hollowing Earth 2016–17 (detail)

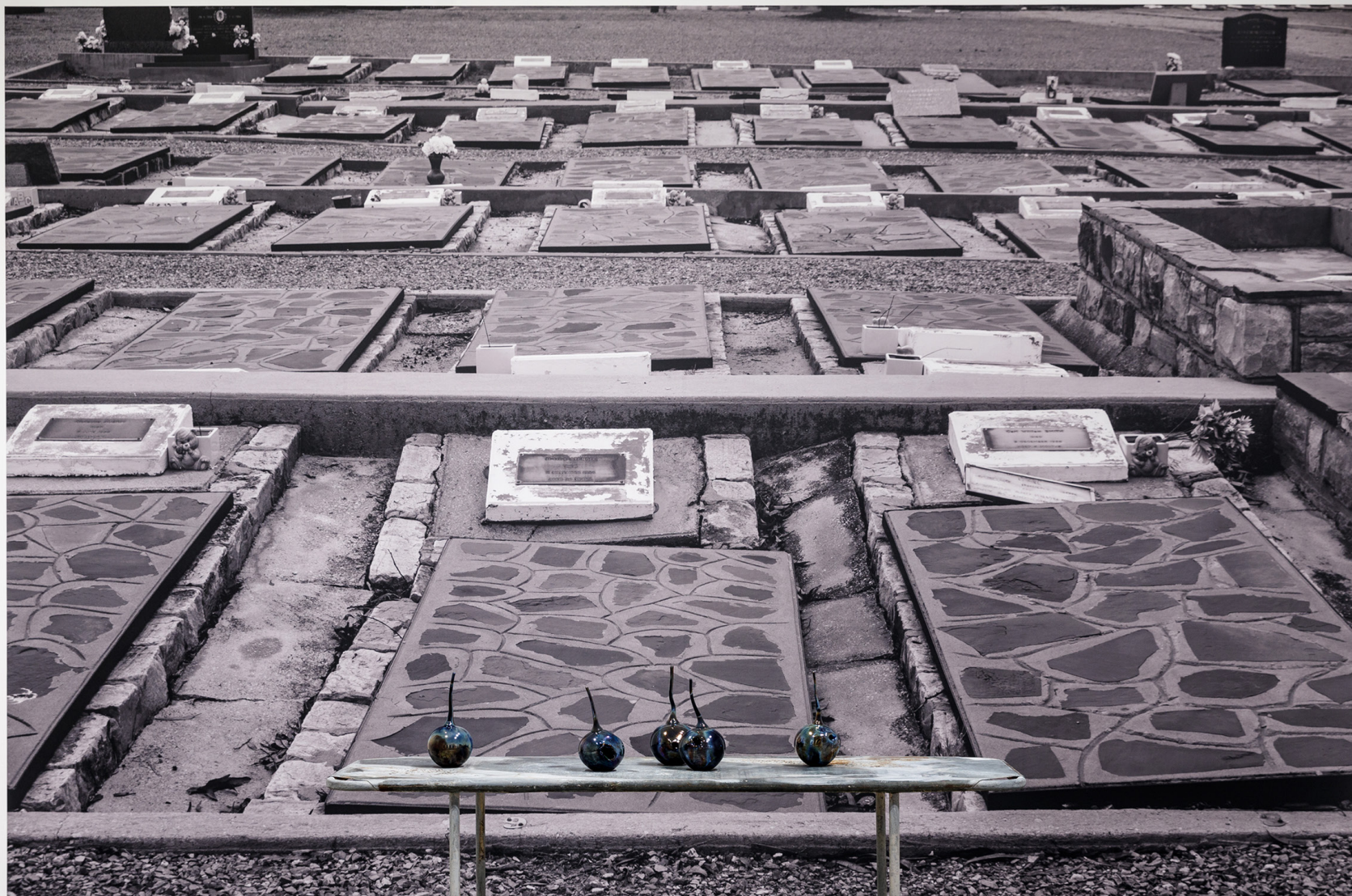
blown and hot formed Uranium glass

dimensions variable

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne

Photo: Janelle Low



Support Materials

Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce: <https://youtu.be/IRqbQqoLVVs>

Judy Watson Interview | IKON Gallery: <https://youtu.be/jrbz5SI6Abs>

In The Workshop: Yhonnie Scarce | IKON Gallery: <https://youtu.be/gfm6lw7bbmU>

Looking Glass: Community Voices: <https://soundcloud.com/tarrawarrama/sets/looking-glass-community-voices>

Curriculum Links

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Visual Arts

Foundation to Year 2

Explore ideas, experiences, observations and imagination to create visual artworks and design, including considering ideas in artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists (ACAVAM106)

Respond to visual artworks and consider where and why people make visual artworks, starting with visual artworks from Australia, including visual artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAVAR109)

Years 3 and 4

Explore ideas and artworks from different cultures and times, including artwork by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to use as inspiration for their own representations (ACAVAM110)

Identify intended purposes and meanings of artworks using visual arts terminology to compare artworks, starting with visual artworks in Australia including visual artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAVAR113)

Years 5 and 6

Explore ideas and practices used by artists, including practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent different views, beliefs and opinions (ACAVAM114)

Explain how visual arts conventions communicate meaning by comparing artworks from different social, cultural and historical contexts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artworks (ACAVAR117)

Years 7 and 8

Experiment with visual arts conventions and techniques, including exploration of techniques used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent a theme, concept or idea in their artwork (ACAVAM118)

Identify and connect specific features and purposes of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore viewpoints and enrich their art-making, starting with Australian artworks including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAVAR124)

Years 9 and 10

Conceptualise and develop representations of themes, concepts or subject matter to experiment with their developing personal style, reflecting on the styles of artists, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists (ACAVAM125)

Analyse a range of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their visual art-making, starting with Australian artworks, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider international artworks (ACAVAR131)

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Yhonnie Scarce

Only a mother could love them 2016

installation view, Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce, TarraWarra Museum of Art

Photo: Andrew Curtis

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Visiting TarraWarra Museum of Art

TarraWarra Museum of Art's Education Program is available for primary, secondary and tertiary groups Tuesday - Friday during exhibition seasons. Bookings are required for both guided and self-guided school and tertiary groups.

twma.com.au/education

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