



# VCE Studio Arts: ART INDUSTRY CONTEXTS

*Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce*

Curated by Hetti Perkins

TarraWarra Museum of Art

28 November 2020–8 March 2021

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## TarraWarra Museum of Art: Gallery Model

**Key knowledge:** *The methods and intentions of public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, university art galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, outdoor spaces and online galleries in exhibiting artworks*

- The TarraWarra Museum of Art's gallery model is a public art museum. Key **characteristics** of public art museums are that they **collect, preserve, research and exhibit works of art**. Public art museums are **established in the public interest** as **permanent, not-for-profit** organisations that contribute **long-term value** to communities.
- The TarraWarra Museum of Art is the first privately funded, significant public visual arts museum to be set up under the Australian Government's philanthropic measures announced in March 1999.
- The Museum is a not-for-profit institution with a charter to display **Australian art** from the **second half of the twentieth century to the present day**. This means that the Museum collects and exhibits **Australian modern** and **contemporary** artworks.
- The TarraWarra Museum of Art was founded by Eva Besen AO and Marc Besen AC, who began collecting artworks in the 1950s and had a vision to form a new museum in the Yarra Valley with its own collection of Australian art from their private collection. Eva and Marc Besen wished to share their passion for Australian art with the public.
- The Museum was first established as a company limited by guarantee in the year 2000.
- Three exhibitions were staged in a site in Melbourne's CBD in 2002. That same year, construction commenced on the building at Tarrawarra.
- The Museum is named after the area in which it is located—Tarrawarra. The word 'tarrawarra' is a **Woiwurrung** word, the language of the **Wurundjeri** people of the Kulin Nation, that **translates approximately** as 'slow moving water'.
- TarraWarra Museum of Art's building is **purpose built**. It was designed for art exhibitions and contains **one large** (Main) and **two smaller galleries** (North and South). The interior spaces of the three galleries are often reconfigured for exhibitions using temporary moveable walls (which can be moved into wall

storage units when not in use). The 'Vista Walk', an arching passageway, flanks the three galleries and is punctuated with West-facing floor to ceiling glazed windows. The 'Vista Walk' can also be used as an exhibition space.

- The Museum was officially opened in 2003 by the Victorian Premier, The Honourable Steve Bracks.
- In 2004, Allan Powell—the architect who designed the Museum—was awarded the winner of the Victorian Premier's Design Award. Powell designed an elegant, gently arching, rammed earth and glass building which echoes the contours and colours of the landscape it is situated in.
- TarraWarra Museum of Art usually has **four exhibition seasons** each year. Exhibitions include: the TarraWarra Biennial or the TarraWarra International (these exhibitions alternate every two years), Museum collection exhibitions, touring exhibitions and thematic curated exhibitions which often include Australian modern and contemporary artworks exhibited alongside one another (e.g. *Joy Hester and Patricia Piccinini: Through Love ...*). Each season is accompanied by Public and Education Programs.
- The Museum is in part **funded** by the TarraWarra Museum of Art Foundation (a charitable foundation set up by Eva and Marc Besen, the Museum's founders). The Foundation contributes 65% of the funding needed to run the Museum. The other 35% comes from government funding in the form of grants (Australian Council, Creative Victoria, Yarra Ranges Council), support from philanthropic trusts and foundations, sponsorship in-kind (e.g. Yarra Valley Dairy donates cheese for events and openings), revenue from admission fees and the Museum shop.
- The Museum has a **small core staff** comprising: Director; General Manager; Registrar; Exhibition Manager; 2 x Curators; External Relations Manager; Marketing and Events Manager; 2 x Visitor Services Coordinators; Education Coordinator; Office Administrator and 20+ volunteers. We also work with an external Publicist and a graphic design company.
- For **installation** and **de-installation** of exhibitions, a core team of specialists is employed. We work with a fine art handling and installation company called Exhibit One. We also contract external builders, painters, electricians, lighting and audio-visual specialists as required.

## TarraWarra Museum of Art: Gallery Characteristics

**Key knowledge:** *The characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study*

- The Museum has a stated **vision** to actively engage with **art, place and ideas, where unexpected links between contemporary art and modernism are presented within global, national and Indigenous contexts**.
- Although the Museum's collection was initially formed from gifts of Eva and Marc Besen, the collection continues to grow through the acquisition of works by leading Australian contemporary artists and key Australian modern works of art.
- Aside from collecting Australian modern and contemporary artworks, one of TarraWarra Museum of Art's key priorities is to curate exhibitions of new and pre-existing artworks by international, Australian and First Nations artists.
- A **curator** is usually someone who is responsible for a collection in a museum, gallery or institution.
- The word 'curate' comes from Latin and means '**to care for**'. A curator is a person whose job it is **to care for artworks**. Roles of curators in different museums and galleries vary greatly.
- Curators at TarraWarra Museum of Art research and write about artists and artworks held in the Museum's collection, put together exhibitions of artworks from the collection or loaned from other public and private collections, and also invite contemporary artists to make new artworks for exhibition at the Museum. This process is called '**commissioning**'.

- The commissioning process involves an artist being **invited and paid to create new work** for an exhibition. A TarraWarra Museum of Art curator will research the kind of art the artist makes and the kinds of ideas that they are interested in. If the curator sees an opportunity for a new artwork that aligns with that artist's practice to be made, they can then invite the artist to create new work for an exhibition. Artists maintain ownership of artworks that are commissioned at the end of the Museum exhibition—they can be sold or re-exhibited in another gallery.
- Commissioning involves discussions about **practicalities**: how long the artist has to make the artwork, how much money is in the budget, and the idea for the exhibition.
- TarraWarra Museum of Art's exhibition program is determined by the Director and curators. The Museum does not accept exhibition proposals from artists and practitioners.
- The role of a Museum curator is as **facilitator** and **mediator**—working directly with artists to help realise artwork, to be the link between the artist and the Museum, and also to mediate the relationship between all artworks in the collection or in exhibitions and the public (by helping to communicate ideas in artworks to the public—in writing, interviews or public talks).

## Preventive Conservation

- **Light:** Strong light or exposure over a long period can break down materials used in artworks and cause fading. Some of the Museum's galleries do have windows that open to the outside but these windows can be covered over to provide darker conditions and block sun light. Depending on the kind of artwork, different types of lights are used to provide ideal conditions. Some artworks, particularly works on paper, photographs and textiles from the Museum collection require low levels of light. This may affect the overall design of the exhibition; these works may need to be placed in particular galleries to ensure that light levels can remain low. However, contemporary artists often request that their works are presented in brightly lit environments.

Generally artworks are protected against three types of light: Lux (Visible Light), Ultra Violet and Heat (Infra Red).

Daylight = 10,000 Lux.

Fragile works (works on paper, photographs, textiles) = 50 Lux.

Oil paintings = 200-300 Lux.

Wood = 400 Lux.

- **Temperature and Humidity:** The Museum has a sophisticated climate control system to provide stable temperature and relative humidity (RH) in the galleries. The temperature must stay at 20 degrees (+ or - 2 degrees). The relative humidity is measured by hygrometers located in the galleries and must be maintained at 45/50%. Keeping a constant temperature and humidity level helps prevent work from being damaged by insects and mould (they flourish in hot, moist environments), buckling, shrinking, cracking or expanding.
- **Security:** Accidents and vandalism pose a threat to artworks. Touching objects and transferring dirt and acid from hands onto fragile surfaces can cause chemical damage. Cotton or Nitrile gloves must always be worn when handling artworks. Security measures taken to protect artworks depend on the level of visitation during an exhibition season. Signage is used throughout the gallery to remind visitors to not touch the artworks. Visitor Services staff, volunteer guides, curators and educators also verbally remind visitors of the Museum rules. Sometimes bollards, low plinths, or covered vitrines may be used to put some distance between vulnerable artworks and the public. There are recording security cameras located throughout the Museum so Visitor Services staff and volunteers can monitor visitors in the galleries. During busy periods/exhibitions gallery attendants (or invigilators) are employed to help look after artworks.

## Exhibition Case Study: *Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce*

**Key knowledge:** *The curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and displaying artworks in current exhibitions*

- The exhibition is titled *Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce*.
- *Looking Glass* arose from an invitation to TarraWarra Museum of Art from Jonathan Watkins, Director, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (UK), to collaborate on an exhibition of leading contemporary Aboriginal artists.
- TarraWarra Museum of Art and Ikon Gallery invited Arrente and Kalkadoon curator Hetti Perkins to be the curator for the project and Hetti proposed Waanyi artist Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce from the Kokatha and Nukunu peoples, two of Australia's most respected, poignant, and innovative artists.
- In March 2020, Ikon Gallery presented a suite of new works by Judy Watson, selected and installed by Hetti Perkins. Many of these works were made in response to visits Watson undertook to see sights of prehistorical significance in England, Ireland, and Scotland—including circles and hill figures at Stonehenge, Avebury, the Outer Hebrides and Orkney—as well as visits to The British Museum and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge.
- Yhonnie Scarce travelled to Birmingham to undertake a residency and produce new work for Ikon Gallery. This residency was cut short by COVID-19, but there are plans for Scarce to return to the UK once it is safe to do so, so she can complete her research into Birmingham's history as a centre of glass manufacture and the place where scientific calculations that led to the development of the atom bomb were conducted during World War II. Scarce will show this new work at Ikon, once complete.
- TarraWarra Museum of Art presented an expanded version of the exhibition during the summer of 2020–2021, curated by Hetti Perkins.
- Watson's paintings, installations and videos shown at Ikon are combined with earlier works on loan from leading private and public collections. Scarce's works in *Looking Glass* date from 2015 to 2020. A large-scale glass installation titled *Cloud Chamber* (2020) was commissioned especially for exhibition in the North Gallery of the Museum. A steel grid was installed in the ceiling of the North Gallery especially for this work. The steel grid will remain in place as part of the building so heavy artworks in the future may be safely hung from the ceiling.
- While the curator decided on the artworks to exhibit and where they would be placed, the Museum's Registrar and Exhibition Manager worked to ensure all works were received and condition reported ahead of the installation period.
- *Looking Glass* is a thematic exhibition. This means that the curator has selected works made by the artists that are linked to an underlying idea or theme. Watson and Scarce's Aboriginal histories underpin their practices and both artists explore Australia's deeply unsettling history of colonisation and the ongoing impact of European settlement on Culture and Country. Perkins has said that 'At its heart, this exhibition ... is simultaneously a love song and a lament for Country; a fantastical alchemy of elemental materiality: of earth, water, fire and air.'
- *Looking Glass* is a touring exhibition and marks the first partnership between National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Victoria and TarraWarra Museum of Art. Selected artworks from the exhibition will reach audiences across Australia until the end of 2023, as the touring exhibition is presented in six different Museums and Galleries.

## Artwork/Artist Case Study: Yhonnie Scarce *Hollowing Earth* (2016–17)

### Artwork Presentation, Preservation and Storage

- *Hollowing Earth* (2016–17) is composed of individual blown glass forms in the shape of bush bananas—an important Aboriginal food and totem. The forms sit atop six architect designed and specially fabricated white painted steel plate tables. The tables are arranged to form a gently tapering arc, with each table in the sequence nestling slightly under the one before it.
- This artwork is intended as a commentary on the degradation of the land through mining in Australia. The design and arrangement of the tables echoes the terraced sides of an open cut mine, or stratigraphic layers of the earth, emphasising a connection to the activities and visuals associated with the mining industry.
- Each glass component of the artwork is affixed to the tables using a preservation material called 'Quake Gel'. Quake Gel is a clear adhesive that secures glass from toppling over and shattering. It is completely removable and leaves no marks on solid non-porous surfaces. The clear polymer gel is designed to be rolled into small balls, placed on the bottom of a glass object, pressed down lightly, and twisted into position. The gel then flows across the base of the object until it creates an invisible bond with the solid surface below.
- During the exhibition, additional security measures were in place around *Hollowing Earth* to protect the objects from being touched or disturbed by the public. Vinyl signage was applied to the floor around the work at intervals, reminding them not to touch. A gallery attendant was also stationed close to the artwork during busy periods to ensure that visitors moved carefully around the tables and did not disturb the arrangement of glass objects on top.
- *Hollowing Earth* is included in the NETS Victoria touring exhibition.
- Special crates lined with high density foam have been created for the glass forms for transportation between touring venues. Each form is wrapped in a piece of Tyvek before being placed in its individual foam lined space in the crate. Packaging the work in this way helps to keep the glass forms protected, shielding them from impacts during transportation.
- The crates double as long-term storage for the work. When the artworks are de-installed at the end of each exhibition period they are placed straight back into the crates.

## Artwork/Artist Case Study: Judy Watson *standing stone, kangaroo grass, bush string* (2020)

### Artwork Installation and Conservation

- Judy Watson's Aboriginal matrilineal family are from Waanyi country in north-west Queensland. The artist once stated that she's interested in 'what's beneath the surface ... peeling back the layers.'
- Many of Watson's works respond to the stories hidden in specific sites, bringing visibility to Indigenous histories by tracing and revealing the psychological and emotional contours of the landscape.
- Her work *standing stone, kangaroo grass, bush string* (2020) in *Looking Glass* is a blue stained canvas depicting a central monolithic a standing stone in small swirling blue marks, overlaid with the silhouettes of tufts of kangaroo grass and bush string in rich ochre and black.
- The edges of the canvas are frayed and feathered. We can easily see the material qualities of the canvas support, that it is a woven textile with a warp and weft. The artist has chosen not to stretch the canvas prior to, or after, painting it. This is an intentional decision and one that indicates a questioning of canonical Western painting methods and techniques.

- Sometimes Watson works by laying the canvas directly on the studio floor and pushing pigments into the surface using her feet, hands, and large brushes. She will then pin the same canvas to the studio wall and work back into a stained ground with paint, blocking out areas and inserting imagery, symbols, and shapes.
- Watson uses clear push-pins or nails to secure her canvas works to gallery walls. This reflects the way that the works appear during their creation in the studio.
- *standing stone, kangaroo grass, bush string* is directly tethered to the Museum's wall using clear push-pins through the same holes that the artist originally pierced during the works creation in the studio. The top of the canvas is perfectly straight. A level has been used during installation to ensure that the work hangs straight during installation.
- The push-pins pierce the top of the work, the bottom of the canvas hangs freely.
- Installing the work in this way allows us to imagine that the canvas could respond to any movement that is around it, the movement of visitors or the gentle movement of air from the air-conditioning system. Despite the canvas material being quite heavy, presenting the work in this way makes it appear light and ethereal. The standing stone motif in the work could signify something that is permanent, rigid, and unmoving, while the bush string and kangaroo grass motifs present as something more organic, malleable and temporary.
- Due to the time in which they were made, Judy Watson's works are contemporary artworks.
- Many contemporary artists prefer their artworks to be exhibited in brightly lit gallery spaces. While many of the materials that Watson uses are not overly susceptible to damage from bright light, deliberate decisions were made during the curation of the exhibition to ensure that her works on paper and on canvas would not receive high levels of natural light.
- All of Watson's works were intentionally installed in either the South or Main Galleries at the Museum. These galleries receive very low levels of natural light.

## **Artwork/Artist Case Study: Judy Watson *40 pairs of blackfellows' ears, lawn hill station part of salt in the wound* (2008)**

### **Artwork Installation and Condition Reporting**

- *40 pairs of blackfellows' ears, lawn hill station part of salt in the wound* (2008), is an installation consisting of individual cast beeswax ears directly tethered to the Museum wall using rusty nails.
- This installation references the actions of Jack Watson (no relation to the artist) a wealthy, educated man who nailed forty pairs of ears of Aboriginal people to a slab hut homestead, a display he would show proudly to visitors. This brutal act took place in Lawn Hill in Waanyi country, the area inhabited by Watson's ancestors.
- Perkins chose to exhibit this installation spanning the mid-section of the 'Vista Walk' wall.
- The gently arcing walls of this space and its narrowness means that visitors can't stand back and perceive the work in its entirety. Instead, the work unfolds as visitors to the exhibition walk the length of the 'Vista Walk'. Installing the artwork in this way means that the weight of the history and story that informs the work is revealed more slowly; the impact of the meaning of the work is drawn out over time.
- The material that Watson used to make this artwork poses a challenge to conserve and install. Although malleable at first, as it ages beeswax becomes quite brittle and can be prone to cracking. The Museum's Registrar, Exhibition Manager, and fine art handlers need to be incredibly careful not to unduly disturb the beeswax material when they are unpacking, condition reporting, installing, and re-packing this artwork.

- The nails used to install the work needed to be just large enough in diameter to fit through the hole pierced in each wax object. If the nails were too thick and had to be forced through the hole and into the wall, the wax could crack. A variety of different nails were used to install the works to ensure a perfect fit for each wax object.
- Condition reporting this work is a challenge! With so many individual parts that need to be independently checked for signs of damage or change, the process of condition reporting the entire installation took a fine art handler and the Museum's Registrar a whole day to complete.
- Each component of the work is photographed and any incongruous marks on the wax object's surface are logged. When the work is de-installed, each component is checked again and its condition logged before it goes into storage.

## Marketing and Promotion

**Key knowledge:** *The processes associated with the production, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in current exhibitions. The curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and displaying artworks in current exhibitions.*

- TarraWarra Museum of Art's marketing plan usually includes the following strategies: Advertising – campaign based and carried out with print and electronic promotion of exhibitions. Print ads, listings in Art Guide and Art Almanac, radio commercials, direct mailing, electronic direct mail (EDM), brochures, signs, website, social media, etc.
- The Museum's Marketing and Events Manager develops and manages a marketing budget.
- **'Hero Image' and Media Release:** The 'hero image' for an exhibition is chosen two months before the exhibition is due to open. It is important as the audience's first impression of the exhibition. It is used for print advertisements in Art Guide, Art Almanac, for the Museum's print collateral, and on the Museum's website. The Marketing and Events Manager and an external Publicist produce a Media Release to send to journalists, writers, and critics of publications ahead of the exhibition opening. The Museum has no control over what is produced to publicise the exhibition; a review may be favourable or unfavourable.
- For *Looking Glass* an artwork titled *standing stone, kangaroo grass, red and yellow ochre* (2020) by Judy Watson was selected as the 'hero image'. In addition, a pack of detail and installation views of artworks in the exhibition were selected and distributed to journalists, writers, and critics of publications ahead of the opening. Once the exhibition opened to the public, an installation view incorporating new works by both artists and the view through the North Window of the Museum was widely distributed and used to promote the exhibition on the Museum's website. This image was chosen for its beauty, balance, and symmetry as well as for its celebration of new work and connection to the view of the landscape outside.
- There was a **substantial hard-cover catalogue** produced for this exhibition which included an essay by the curator, interviews between the curator and the artists, images of artworks in-situ, and artist biographies. **Wall labels, didactic texts and 'For Younger Audiences' labels** provided additional information on each artist's work and ideas for visitors of all ages to engage with.
- TarraWarra Museum of Art Education invited two local community members, Nikita Aldridge and Kaitlyn Healy, to offer their interpretations and thoughts on a selection of artworks in the exhibition. The interpretations and thoughts were professionally sound recorded, resulting in the production of the **'Looking Glass: Community Voices'** project. 'Looking Glass: Community Voices' sound recordings were uploaded to the Museum's SoundCloud channel (TarraWarraMA) and linked to QR codes that were printed as wall labels.
- The exhibition was presented during the summer months of 2020-2021, at a time when COVID19 restrictions were in place.

- A media production company called Maison Snap was hired to produce a 3D virtual rendition of the installed Looking Glass exhibition. The Virtual Tour is available to view via the Museum's **website** allowing audiences, far and wide, to explore the exhibition and the works on show, despite restrictions and lockdowns.
- The exhibition was **professionally photographed**. These images have been used to promote the exhibition on the Museum's **social media channels** (Instagram - @tarrawarra & Facebook - @TarraWarraMA)
- Because **Instagram** and **Facebook** are highly visual they are very well suited to promoting the Museum's exhibitions, which contain mostly visual artworks. All the Museum's Public and Education Programs accompanying exhibitions are promoted via the Museum's website and social media channels. Website and social media promotion of programs is cheap, in contrast to print promotion which is very costly.

## Additional Information

The Virtual Tour for *Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce* is available [here](#).

The full catalogue for *Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce* is available [here](#).

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