

IKON

Ikon Gallery
1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708 / ikon-gallery.org
Open Tuesday-Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm / free entry
Registered charity no. 528892

Judy Watson

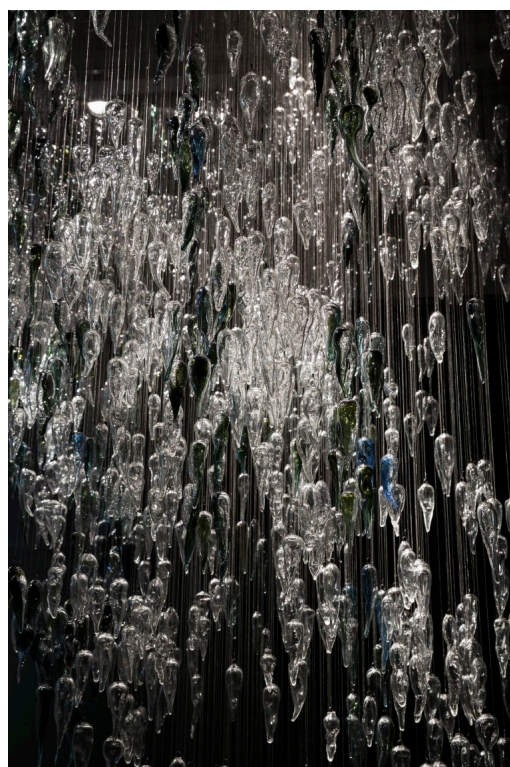
4 March – 31 May 2020

Yhonnie Scarce

9 April – 31 May 2020



Judy Watson, *standing stone, kangaroo grass, bush string* (2020)
Acrylic, graphite on canvas
Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery



Yhonnie Scarce, *Thunder Raining Poison* (2015)
2000 blown glass yams, stainless steel, reinforced wire. Installation view, Tarnanthi, Art Gallery of South Australia. Courtesy the artist and This Is No Fantasy

Ikon presents exhibitions of new work by Australian Aboriginal artists Judy Watson (b. 1959) and Yhonnie Scarce (b. 1973), as part of an international tour developed in partnership with TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville, Australia.

Hetti Perkins, curatorial advisor on this occasion, explains that the artists are concerned essentially with "Australia's 'secret war' - a battle fought on many fronts

from colonial massacres to Stolen Generations to the Maralinga bomb tests. The seductive beauty of Watson's and Scarce's works belies their powerful message about the sustained campaign of the destruction of country, culture and community in Aboriginal Australia - their work is a kind of 'tender trap'. With the devastating evidence of climate change in Australia, manifest in apocalyptic wildfires and storms, these timely exhibitions deliver an urgent message.

Born in Mundubbera, Queensland, Judy Watson derives inspiration from her Aboriginal matrilineal Waanyi heritage, working from site and memory to reveal Indigenous histories and following lines of emotional and physical topography that centre on particular places and moments in time. Her practice often draws on archival documents and material to unveil an unceasing and institutional discrimination against Aboriginal people – the 'secret war' to which Perkins refers. Watson makes work that is politically charged, but she deliberately avoids didacticism, as she explains:

"Art as a vehicle for invention and social change can be many things, it can be soft, hard, in-your-face confrontational, or subtle and discreet. I try and choose the latter approach for much of my work, a seductive beautiful exterior with a strong message like a deadly poison dart that insinuates itself into the consciousness of the viewer without them being aware of the package until it implodes and leaks its contents."

Including new paintings, video and sculptural pieces, this is Watson's most comprehensive UK exhibition to date. A number of works have been made in response to visits she undertook to see British sites of prehistorical significance – including standing stones, circles and hill figures at Stonehenge, Avebury, Uffington and Orkney. Watson's paintings consider a more balanced and sustainable relationship between humanity and the rest of the natural world, chiming with a description of her recent exhibition in Australia: "exploring Indigenous strength and resilience in the face of climate change and other pressures".

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. Judy Watson

Yhonnie Scarce was born in Woomera, South Australia, and belongs to the Kokatha and Nukunu peoples. Working with glass, she explores the political nature and aesthetic qualities of the material – in particular corresponding to the crystallisation of desert sand as a result of British nuclear tests in Maralinga during 1956-63. The

shocking disregard for the safety of local Aboriginal people at the time was symptomatic of the pervasive racism that characterised much of Australian history since European settlement. Scarce explains the personal nature of the politics:

"[When conducting] family research or research in general related to issues of colonisation, it can be hard to [make those discoveries]; it's an emotional process and then once it's done, it's not necessarily done but it's a way of helping you deal with it [...] It's important to speak about what happened because it's still affecting Aboriginal people today.

In Scarce's *Blue Danube* series (2015), the hand-blown transparent Blue Danubes (a type of bomb used by the British) are filled with anthropomorphic glass black bush yam objects, like seeds in a pod, while *Thunder Raining Poison* (2015) could not send a clearer message about the impact the nuclear tests had on Scarce's homeland. For Ikon, she undertakes a five week residency before presenting a major new work in our Tower Room. Birmingham is an ideal location for this project due to the proximity of traditional centres of glass manufacturing. Furthermore, the University of Birmingham was the site for most of the scientific research undertaken in the UK during World War II that ultimately led to the unleashing of the atom bomb.

Both exhibitions are accompanied by catalogues, each including an interview with Hetti Perkins, and tour to TarraWarra Museum of Art (*Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce*, 21 November 2020 – 8 March 2021).

Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce are two of Australia's most respected artists. They each display a distinctive, visually engaging and strident approach to the impact of colonisation on Indigenous Australians. The artists have spent periods of time researching this history in the United Kingdom, which has amplified and consolidated their ideas. TarraWarra Museum of Art is thrilled to be working with Ikon in the presentation of this unique project with new work by the artists, set to premiere in Australia at TarraWarra Museum of Art in November 2020.
Victoria Lynn, Director, TarraWarra Museum of Art

The exhibitions are supported by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and the Australian High Commission in the United Kingdom.

The exhibitions have received assistance from NETS Victoria's Exhibition Development Fund, supported by Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

Ikon's programme of events includes a symposium, *Culture and Country in Aboriginal Australia*, at King's College London on Friday 6 March - organised in partnership with Menzies Australia Institute, speakers include Hetti Perkins, Yhonnie Scarce and Judy Watson.

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small or Laura Jaunzems on 0121 248 0708 or email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or l.jaunzems@ikon-gallery.org

Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery @TarraWarraMA
Links: ikon-gallery.org
twma.com.au

Note to Editors:

1. Exhibition dates: Judy Watson, 4 March – 31 May 2020; Yhonnie Scarce, 9 April – 31 May 2020.
2. Ikon Launch Night: Wednesday 4 March 2020, 6-8pm.
3. Please note the Tower Room is only accessible via a number of steps.
4. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. ikon-gallery.org
5. TarraWarra Museum of Art is a leading Australian museum with a charter to display Australian art from the second half of the twentieth century to the present day. Since opening in 2003, the Museum has become recognised as a cultural jewel of the Yarra Valley, providing visitors with an enjoyable and inspiring experience which combines stunning architecture with the very best of modern and contemporary art. Over 100 exhibitions have been presented at the Museum to date, covering a diverse range of stimulating and innovative Australian and international art in group and collection shows and single artist surveys, providing the opportunity to experience fresh contexts in which to view Australian art.

TarraWarra captures the vision of the museum's founders, philanthropists Eva Besen AO and Marc Besen AC, passionate collectors of Australian art from the 1950s to now, who have gifted both the building and its collection to the public. The collection features many significant Australian artists who were instrumental in the development of modern art in this country. Building on the Eva and Marc Besen gift, TarraWarra Museum of Art actively engages in art, place and ideas, where unexpected links between contemporary art and modernism are presented within global, national and Indigenous contexts.

6. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 5pm. Admission is free. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. For the latest news and events follow @ikongallery on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).
7. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. ACE support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, ACE will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. [artscouncil.org.uk](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

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Judy Watson, *standing stone with spines* (2020)
Acrylic, graphite on canvas
Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery



Judy Watson, *standing stones, ashes to ashes* (2020)
Earth, acrylic, graphite on canvas
Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery

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Yhonnie Scarce, *Glass Bomb (Blue Danube)* (2015), hand blown glass bomb and yams.
Photograph by Janelle Low. Courtesy the artist and This Is No Fantasy



Yhonnie Scarce, *Hollowing Earth* (2017), hand blown uranium enriched glass.
Courtesy the artist and This is No Fantasy