

Julie Dowling
Winyarn Budjarri
(Sorry Birth): Birth's End

8-25 June 2005

at

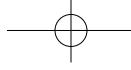
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Budjarri Maroubra, 2005, acrylic and red ochre on canvas, 100x120cm

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Moorditj Djurapin (Strong Love)
By Carol Dowling, twin sister to the artist

In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine. It does not really belong to me, and while I feel greatly responsible for it, I also enjoy the irresponsibility of the pleasure obtained through the process of transferring. Pleasure in the copy, pleasure in the reproduction. No repetition can ever be identical, but my story carries with it their stories, their history, and our story repeats itself endlessly despite our persistence in denying it. Then someday our children will speak about us here present, about those days when things like that could happen.
 (Minh-ha 1989:122)

This exhibition, entitled **'Winyarn Budjarri: (Sorry Birth) Birth's End'**, is made of stories and events experienced by our family and our community. The Noongar term refers to a birth or pregnancy that is unhealthy and refers to the worldwide movement by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to cease the destruction of entire ecosystems and along with them, the 'ethnosphere' – the diversity of cultures who protect the natural environment. The notion of 'the death of birth' is about a foretold future where humanity will lose all knowledge to protect and procreate the conditions for nature to flourish. As long as we do nothing to preserve and respect ancient knowledges held by geographically specific Indigenous peoples, we, as humans will become sick in spirit and in heart. We see this everyday as Indigenous women where our families over a few generations have lost the nuances of our languages and our knowledge of the land has been fractured. Julie's **Self-Portrait: Budjarri** is a statement about her fears for our children and about being a survivor of a damaged family. Within her body rests an inner landscape showing our country near Lake Moore and symbolises our family's loss of cultural knowledge through dispossession and colonisation.

As we have grown up together as sisters, Julie and I have become passionate about the global struggle for Indigenous rights and not just the struggle for our own community in Australia. We know that genocide, the physical extermination of a people, is condemned universally and is told in our family stories. More importantly, we also know that 'ethnocide', the destruction of a people's way of life, remains a great source of sorrow to us everyday. Ethnocide is not condemned when it comes to Indigenous peoples because it is advocated as appropriate policy by governments throughout the world including Australia. From our community experiences, we both know that our people cling to what we can of our cultures and have incorporated into its fabric the suffering of the missions and reserves and stations. These stories have been handed down in the homes of every black Australian, told to new generations, taught in explanation of racism and mistreatment, recited with rage and dignity and sorrow. They are memories that end, more or less, in a present when our people struggle with mind-numbing alcoholism and drug addiction. We all still celebrate a triumphant survival together.

We have memories of injustice and images of what life has been like. There are hundreds of voices, crying out about great pain and small degradations, about the way Australian society was structured so that we were placed last, closest to the door, and closest to the policeman. These stories are seen in the series **Stations of the Cross** which is based on oral histories on topics as broad as mandatory detention, children removed by government policy, welfarism, white media scrutiny, deaths in custody, early death, our health issues, and conflicts of identity. However, the series is also about the hypercritical stance of church and state towards Aboriginal peoples since colonisation and uses the iconography of the 'stations of the cross' as a starting point to describe events and circumstances familiar to Aboriginal people. In this last year, Julie has become drawn to investigating the impact of Catholicism's relationship to Indigenous peoples and several generations of our own family. This series main statement is that there is no delineation between the past and present injustice of Indigenous peoples in Australia.

We know that Noongars did not stop being Noongar when their traditional cycle of life was broken. It was not the work of missionaries that transformed Noongar life; it was the baggage that came with it, the imposition of the spiritual worldview of outsiders who believed that they had the monopoly on the route to God. Add to this the industrial exploitation of Noongar homelands: the road that pierced the wild, the bushland that in time would turn fragile forests into a wasteland. The result is the bewilderment of our people and the loss of another possibility of life. We saw this confusion in the stories of our great-grandmother, Mary Oliver and the generations that followed. I suppose what Wudjulas (white people) feared was a loss of control, of themselves and of their planet; and there's no doubt, nature is chaotic, random, violent, uncontrollable, no matter how hard we try to outwit it. But it's also dazzling, soothing, all embracing, and restorative. Wonder is a bulky emotion. When it fills the heart and mind there's little room for any thing else.

The argument that Indigenous societies are simply fated to fade away is quite wrong. In virtually every instance, indigenous peoples are being torn from their past and propelled into an uncertain future because of specific political and economic decisions made by powerful outside entities. If people are the agents of destruction, they can also be the agents of cultural survival. There are many nuances of culture that Indigenous people do not discuss or even think about. Rather, culture is embedded in our very essence, an impulse that lingers along the boundaries of our collective subconscious. In time, we can all come to realize that in unveiling indigenous knowledge, our task is not merely to identify new sources of wealth but to understand and celebrate a distinct vision of life itself, a profoundly different way of living in the forest. This is something that Julie and I know to be true.



May

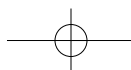
Richard

Frank

Violet

Fred

Nyorn series (10), 2005, acrylic, red ochre and plastic on canvas 30x30cm each



We also know that the world's first archives or libraries were the memories of women. Patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body-to-body, hand-to-hand. In the process of storytelling, speaking and listening we refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is heard, seen, smelled, tasted and touched. It destroys, brings into life, nurtures. Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and of transmission. By using Renaissance imagery such as icons and bible stories by Michelangelo and Da Vinci, the notion of the 'death of birth' is coupled with moments of gradual dispossession in catalyst moments as seen in **Budjari Waddi** and **Budjarri Maroubra** showing our Great-Grandmother, Mary giving birth in her country and the **Nyorn** series showing our Grandmother and her brothers and sisters as newborns birthed naturally in the bush without a midwife or doctor. Understanding such stories is about creating, and living. Such an immense gift that thousands of people benefit from each past or present life being lived. The story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being. The story of a people. Of us, peoples.

However, when the trees are felled, the bush is cleared and the hills are levelled, the cultural resonance of the landscape, the sites with biographical, social and historical significance to the stories are hidden, producing a sort of collective amnesia. As cultures wither away, individuals remain, often shadows of their former selves, caught in time, unable to return to the past, yet denied any real possibility of securing a place in the world whose values they seek to emulate and whose wealth they long to acquire. It is not change that threatens the integrity of the 'ethnosphere', it is power, the crude face of domination. Given a chance, we believe that indigenous societies can thrive in a period of flux and transformation. But, as in any time of turmoil, there are risks, and the consequences can be dire. Every view of the world that fades away, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life and reduces the human collection of adaptive responses to the common problems that confront us all. Knowledge is lost, not only of the natural world but also of realms of the spirit, intuitions about the meaning of the universe, insights into the very nature of life.

Our strategy should be not only to confront Empire, but to lay siege on it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe. The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling – their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability. Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. (Roy 2004:77)

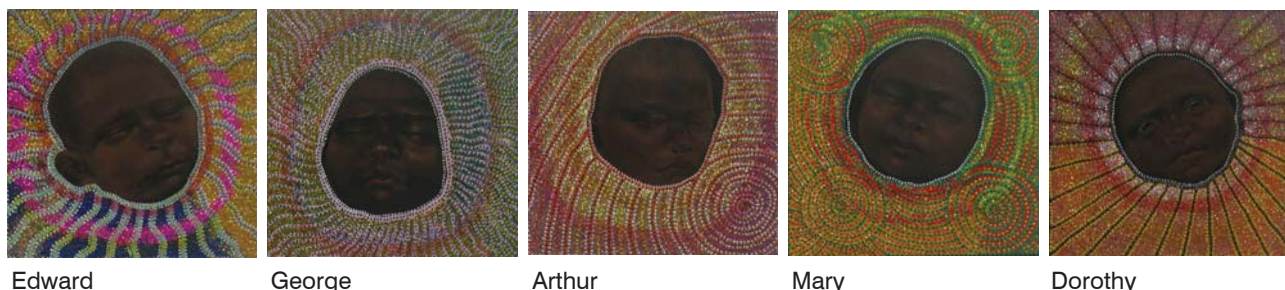
Julie and I often feel that we, as Indigenous women, must always be taught in order to be anti-colonialist and de-westernized. We are, indeed, in this world of inequity, the handicapped who cannot represent and have to either be represented or learn how to represent ourselves. Whatever the issue, we are entrapped in a circular dance where we always find ourselves a pace behind our white saviours. Having just completed my Masters at Curtin University, I find that knowledge belongs to the one who succeeds in mastering a language, and standing closer to the civilised language, as a matter of fact, makes me nearer to equality. The same could be said for Julie and her painting.

Our family has learnt since the 1967 referendum that cultural survival is not about preservation. Change itself does not destroy a culture, since all societies are constantly evolving. Indeed, our culture does survive but we must have enough confidence in our past and enough say in our future to maintain its spirit and essence. With this strength our culture can endure all the changes it will inevitably undergo.

When Indigenous people are asked the meaning of being human, there are ten thousand different responses. It is this diversity of knowledge and practice, of intuition and interpretation, of promise and hope, that we will all rediscover the enchantment of being what we are, a mindful species aware of our place on the planet and fully able not only of doing it no harm but of ensuring that all creatures in every garden finds a way to flourish. Most of all, we need to know that we emerged from nature and will return to it upon death. We need to have sacred places that are not just opportunities to harvest resources but are worthy of respect and worship. For Julie and I, we draw upon a wellspring of wisdom from the stories of our ancestors and elders every day. When Julie paints she calls upon their guidance and in the same sentiment as Ethno-Botanist, Wade Davis, who writes "...even the dead must be made to serve the living; and in order to serve the living, they must be invoked by ceremony to become manifest, returning to Earth to displace the soul of the living..." (Davis 2001:86)

Reference:

- Davis, W. (2001) *Light at the Edge of the World: A journey through the realm of vanishing cultures*, National Geographic, Washington.
- Minh-ha, T. (1989), *Woman Native Other*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Roy, A. (2004) 'Confronting Empire' in *The Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*, Harper Collins, London



Edward George Arthur Mary Dorothy



Self portrait: Budjarri, 2005, oil, acrylic and red ochre on canvas , 120x100cm

Born Subiaco, 1969 , Badimaya (Yamatji), Noongar

Education

1992 Bachelor of Fine Art, Curtin University
1989 Diploma of Fine Art, Claremont School of Art

Solo Exhibitions

2005 'Winyarn Budjarri', Fortyfivedownstairs, Melbourne
2004 'Warridah Sovereignty', Artplace, Perth
2003 '...Yes, Boss!', Fortyfivedownstairs, Melbourne
2002 '...big womanhead...', Artplace, Perth
2001 'Melbin', Span Galleries, Melbourne
2000 Artplace, Perth
1999 Festival of Perth, Artplace, WA
Adelaide Festival Centre, South Australia
1996 Artplace, Western Australia
1995 'Secrets About Being Strong', Fremantle Arts Centre , WA

Selected Group Exhibitions

2004 Artplace Group Show 2004, Artplace, Perth
Melbourne Art Fair 2004, Melbourne, VIC
'Terra Alterius- Land of Another' , Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of NSW, Paddington, NSW
'Holy Holy Holy', Flinders University and Adelaide Festival, travelling and touring nationally
98-05 'Spirit & Vision: Aboriginal Art', Sammlung Essl, Vienna, Austria
15-21st Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
2003 'Places that Name Us' Kate Challis RAKA Award 2003: Contemporary Indigenous Visual Arts #3, The Ian Potter Museum
The 2003 Portia Geach Memorial Award, S.H Ervin Gallery, Sydney
'ART AUSTRALIA - Zeitgenössische Kunst', travelling exhib., Germany
2002 'Heat', Noosa Regional Gallery
'Spirit Country' Gantner Myer Collection, Melbourne Museum
'It's a beautiful day' New Painting in Australia: 2, AGNSW and Ian Potter Museum, University of Melbourne
01-02 Native Title, touring exhibition - 2005
2001 Archibald Portrait Prize - Art Gallery NSW
Federation, National Gallery of Australia, touring exhibition
Blake Prize,
Bunbury Biennale
2000 Beyond the Pale - Adelaide Biennale, Art Gallery SA
Mum Shirl Tribute Exhibition - Boomalli Sydney
Doug Moran Portrait Prize - touring exhibition
'Side by Side', Art Gallery of WA
'Across', Canberra School of Art, National touring exhibition.
Mornington Peninsula Works on Paper Prize,
1999 'Aboriginal Kunst aus West Australian', Galerie Gaswerk, Germany
Ceremony, identity and community', South African N.G., Capetown
1998 RAKA Exhibition, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne
'Ceremony, Identity and Community' Flinders Art Museum Adelaide
1997 Gabrielle Pizzi Gallery at Art Fair Cologne, Germany
'Daughters of the Dreaming', Art Gallery of WA
1996 Out of Australia, curated by John Stringer, PICA, Perth
'H.J Wedge and Julie Dowling', Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi Melbourne
Wijay Na? 24HR Art, Darwin
1995 'Urban Belonging: The Raw Edge', Art Gallery of WA, Perth
'On a Mission', Boomalli Aboriginal Arts Coop, Chippendale
'bur-ran-gur-ang (court out) - Women and the Law', Lawrence Wilson Gallery
1993 National Graduate Degree Show, PICA, travelling exhibition

Grants and Awards

2003 Finalist RAKA Award
2001 The People' Choice and NATSIAA Art Award
2001 Finalist Archibald Prize
2000 Winner - Mandorla Award for Religious Art
Winner (Painting) - 17th NATSIAA Award
Finalist - NAIDOC Aboriginal Artist of the Year
Finalist - Doug Moran National Portrait Prize
1998 Australia Council Development Grant
Artist in Residence, Curtin University
1995 Australia Council Development Grant

Publications and Reviews

2005 Australia's 50 most collectable artists, Australian Art Collector issue 31, Julie Dowling, Timothy Morell, page 88
'Way beyond the promised land', Heidi Maier, Courier Mail, 15.9
2004 'Two of us' , Gail Williams, Sunday Times, August 8
'The power of protest', Simon Blond, Weekend Extra, The Australian, 17.7
'Dowling unmoved by fame', Nyanda Smith, Today, The WA , 7.7
'In Translation, Jennie Fitzhardinge, Indulgence, The Sunday Times, 4.7
'Family Story Shows Personal is Political', Ted Snell, The Australian, 1.7
Interview, Ted Snell & Sian Prior, The Deep End, Radio National, 30.6
'Too cool for School', Ted Snell, The Weekend Australian, 5-6.6
'Holy Holy Holy', Nick Waterlow, Art Monthly Australian, #170 June
'A powerful display of Aboriginal art' Terry Ingram, Sale room pg45, The Australian Financial Review, 22nd April
2002 'Vorwort', pg 6, Indra Wussow & Ralf-PSeippel, 'Art Australia', p7, Barbara Alms, 'Julie Dowling', pg 22, Ralf-PSeippel and 'The Contemporary Art Scene in Australia', pg 46, Peter Hill, ART AUSTRALIA exhibition catalogue
'...Yes, boss!', Jodi Hoffmann, Arts section p37, The Koori Mail, 21.5
'We are bosses ourselves...' Carol Dowling, "...Yes, boss!" exhibition catalogue, Artplace
'Review' Ted Snell, Art & Australia, Vol.40 #3, p 499 -500
2002 "Listening to the land" National Indigenous Times, p27, January 22nd
'All ages show leaves one lusting after virtuosity' Anne Loxley, Sydney Morning Herald, November 27th
'You beauty!', Peter Hill, The Sydney Morning Herald, Nov 22-28
'Happy 30th, you mad little beauty' Ted Snell, The Australian 22..11.
'Our new icon' Jane Faulkner, Melbourne Age, 21.10
'A fair to remember' John McDonald, The Aust. Financial Review, 10.10.
'Fine art of programming' Ron Banks, The West Australian, 11.9
'Art round-up: Perth' David Bromfield, Art Monthly, # 153, Sept.
'Deep Pockets', Ted Snell, Artlink, Volume 22 #3
'The New Artplace', Andrew Nicholls, Artlink, Volume 22 # 3
Native Title Business, Contemporary Indigenous Art, exhibition cat. It's a beautiful day, New Painting in Australia:2, Bala Starr, exhib.cat.
'Cultural directions', Andrew Nicholls, SHOUT, pg.8, July
'When hard labour is a beautiful thing' Ashley Crawford, The Age, "Wisdom, humour and solidarity", Ted Snell, Arts p21, The Weekend Australian, July 13-14th
'Judgement day', Robert Cook, The West Australian, July 13
'Hybrids all, let us rejoice' Arts, The Australian, Friday July 12th.
'Picture of popularity', Sarah Palmer, The West Australian, July 3rd
'Henry' a finalist", Jodi Hoffmann, The Koori Mail, June 26th
'Being a big Womanhead" Carol Dowling, ...big womanhead... cat. Australia's 50 most collectable artists, Aust. Art Collector, nr.19
'A Different Way to the Future", Judith McGrath, Aust. Art Coll. nr.19
2001 "The Double life of Julie Dowling", Victoria Laurie, The Weekend Australian Magazine November 10
'Cultural Reflection", David Bromfield, The West Australian, 4.8, Australia's 50 most collectable artists, Aust. Art Collector, issue 15
2000 'Why Nostalgia Corrupts', David Broomfield, The West Aust., 11.11
'Beyond the Pale' D.Mellor, Art & Australia, May
'Unflinching Portraiture', Bruce James, Austr. Art Collector, issue 14
'Seven sins is not a sorry affair', Ted Snell, The Australian, June 16
'Art can reveal but never resolve', Humphrey McQueen, Art Monthly
'Festivals King Hit', Bruce James, The Sydney Morning Herald, 11.3
'Art indigenous and incredible', Ruth & Vincent Megaw, Adelaide Advertiser, March 6th
1999 'A Sorry Story', Joanna Mendelssohn, The Bulletin, March
'Shock of colours', Christine Nicholls, Adelaide Advertiser, Dec 29th
'Private eyes', Victoria Laurie, The Weekend Aust. Review Arts, 11-12
'Butcher Chere! Janangoo, Julie Dowling, Julie Gough', Judith McGrath, Artlink, 19:2.
'Perth Festival: Unfolding from the margins' Andrew Nichols, Real Time, April
1998 'History and memory', Philippa O'Brien, Artlink, 19:1, May
'Grandmother's mob and the stories', Lavinia S Ryan, Artlink, 18:1
1997 'Shooting stars -Brigitte Braun's Artplace', Dorothy Erickson, Artlink, 17:3, December
'Inside the Visible', Barbara Bolt, Real Time, April-May, p. 6-7
'Daughters of the Dreaming', Ted Snell, The Australian, February 7
1996 'Sisters act', Victoria Laurie, The Bulletin Arts, The Bulletin, Nov 19
'An urban aboriginal artist and her sense of family' Anna Herriman, Periphery no 28
1995 'Honest dialogue', Judith McGrath, The Western Review, August
Artist in Residence, John Stringer, Sandpiper Press, Perth
Julie Dowling - Cultural communion, Carol Oakes, Artlink, Vol.15, No. 2 & 3,
'Festival neglects the visual arts', Dorothy Erickson, Artlink, Vol.15, No. 2 & 3
'Show examines women and law', Nikki Miller, The West Aust. 19.3
'bur-ran-gur-ang - Women and the Law', University of WA

Collections

Art Gallery of WA, Curtin University, University of Western Australia, Berndt Museum of Anthropology - UWA, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, Artbank, Royal Perth Hospital, King Edward Memorial Hospital, Hyphema - Perth, National Native Title Tribunal, Kent-McNeil Inc. Canada, Sir James and Lady Cruthers, Dr Ian & Sue Bernadt, Kerry Stokes, Carrillo Gantner, Charles Sturt University, Kelton Foundation California, New Norcia Monastery, Flinders University, University of Southern Queensland, National Gallery of Australia, City of Wanneroo, Town of Vincent, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Reconciliation Council of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Wesfarmers, Bunbury Regional Gallery, Museum of Western Australia, Art Gallery of SA, Adelaide Festival Centre, city of Banyule