

'Bidya Gurbarl (Open Secret)' -John Curtin Gallery, Bentley, Western Australia.



John Curtin Gallery | Bunuru Season

ISAAC JULIEN

JULIE DOWLING: *Bidya Gurbarl (Open Secret)*

Carrolup coolingah wirn – The spirit of Carrolup children

WANJU, WELCOME

On entering the John Curtin Gallery (JCG) you will pass large scale prints of three artworks mounted on the external windows. These artworks, originally created by the child artists of the Carrolup Native Settlement in the late 1940s, introduce you to the recent exhibition: *Carrolup coolingah wirn – The spirit of Carrolup children*. Their story and artworks begin conversations about the impact of colonisation in the first exhibition at JCG curated by Michelle Broun, Curator of Australian First Nations Art. It is a prelude to Curtin University's Centre for Truth-telling currently under development.

The spirit of Carrolup children and the truth of this art remain with us on our journey through the galleries where other artworks approach truth-telling in Australia and internationally, with themes that affect us all. Their artworks reveal the enduring human spirit, despite the efforts of consecutive white supremacist colonial policies to destroy the First Nations peoples.

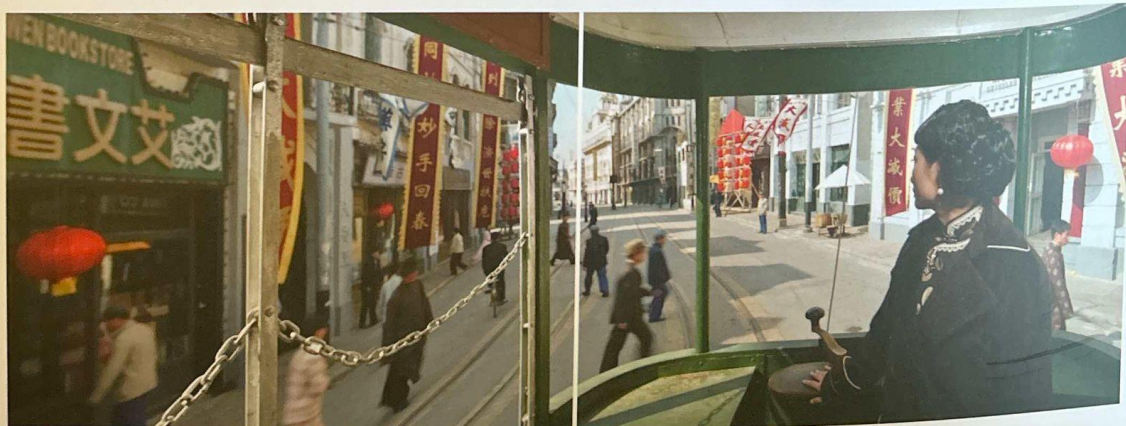
In the Atrium, JCG presents *Bidya Gurlbarl (Open Secret)*, a group of portraits by Julie Dowling including a selection from *Yagu Gurlbarl – BIG SECRET*, curated by Charmaine Green,

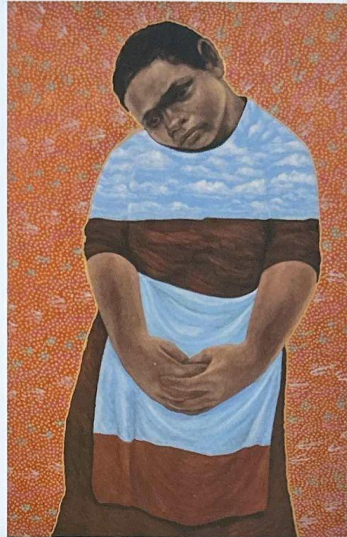
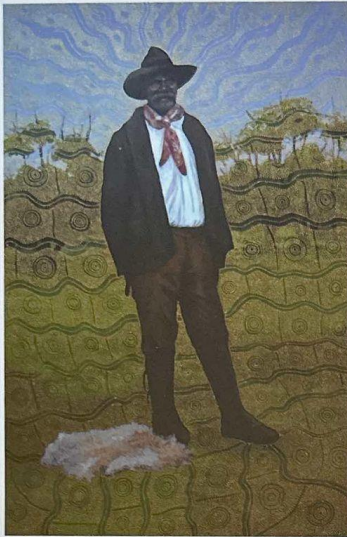
that directly communicate the history of enslavement of Aboriginal people in Australia since British colonisation. This exhibition extends the narratives of the Stolen Generations, child labour and Deaths in Custody dealt with in *Carrolup coolingah wirn*, and challenges the viewer to look directly into the eyes and hearts of the First Peoples of Australia.

In the main galleries Isaac Julien's *Lessons of the Hour* honours the Black public intellectual, abolitionist and freed slave Frederick Douglass. This is presented alongside Julien's *Ten Thousand Waves*, an immersive memorial and critique of the ongoing impact of globalisation and modern slavery.

These three exhibitions articulate the global legacies of colonisation that continue to impact lives today. They come together at a critical time for Western Australians as we approach the 200th anniversary of British invasion in 2029.

Isaac Julien, *Nanjing Road Tram (Ten Thousand Waves)*, 2010, Endura Ultra photograph, diptych. Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.





*It is no secret to our
Aboriginal communities
that our Ancestors were
enslaved.*

JULIE DOWLING

From left Julie Dowling, *Great Uncle Sam*, 2017.
Acrylic, red ochre and mica gold on canvas, 152 x 101.5cm.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Julie Dowling, *Tuppence (my great-grandmother)*, 2005.
Acrylic, red ochre and plastic on canvas, 80 x 49.8cm.
Image courtesy of the artist.

JULIE DOWLING

BIDYA GURLBARL (OPEN SECRET)
11 FEBRUARY–20 MARCH 2022

Julie Dowling is an internationally acclaimed Badimia (Yamatji) First Nation artist and activist who creates iconic pictorial critiques of contemporary and historical Australian narratives. Through the stories of her own First Nation family, Dowling re-presents the violence and power imbalance in settler-colonial and contemporary Western Australia. Her portraits of family members reference archival photographs of Aboriginal people in which the abuse of power is stark. These portraits speak to the strength of Aboriginal spirituality and connection to Country and kin. Dowling's own ancestors, and those of other Aboriginal people, gaze directly at the viewer, challenging them to acknowledge Australia's colonial history and protest the ongoing injustices experienced by Aboriginal people. This strategy emphasises the personal impact of the conditions of slavery while celebrating the beauty, strength and dignity of those gone and those still living.

Aboriginal workers were denied wages for their work until well into the 1970s, receiving rations of flour, tea and sugar. Aboriginal slavery has underpinned the development of mining and pastoral successes in the State of Western Australia and all other States and Territories. Indentured Aboriginal workers, listed as chattels on property deeds, could not legally leave the employment of their white bosses. Children stolen from their families were deployed as free labour in the missions and native settlements where they were detained.

The intergenerational trauma experienced today from such injustice impacts the health and well-being of all Australians. Although Aboriginal people may no longer be possessed and

traded, Dowling comments on the legacy of how Aboriginal people were posed as ethnographic exhibits on postcards in the 19th and 20th centuries. Such voyeurism meant that those who were photographed were unidentified and continue to be unclaimed and unknown centuries later. The same could be said for the thousands of body parts and sacred objects that await repatriation from overseas institutions. All should be returned to their people for proper burial and to give their spirit peace.

ARTIST STATEMENT

It is no secret to our Aboriginal communities that our Ancestors were enslaved. Yet the existence of slavery in Australia has been downplayed and conveniently ignored at the highest level.

It was a pretty brutal place, but there was no slavery in Australia.
AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER, SCOTT MORRISON, 11 JUNE 2020

Australia's white colonial administration was one of the most brutal systems of slavery in the world. Our people were captured, chained around their necks, and made to walk hundreds of kilometres to work as slaves on cattle stations, pearling boats, and in the kitchens and gardens of English gentry. Our leaders were forced to be the 'chattels' of white people. That's called SLAVERY!!!

The wealth and prosperity of this nation was founded on such brutality. The denial of this history calls on white Australia to grow up and be honest. In doing so, this secret becomes knowledge and empowers whoever is willing to learn.

¹ This quote is taken from a radio interview on 11 June 2020. It was widely circulated and caused public debate about the mistaken idea that there was no slavery in Australia.



Left Isaac Julien, *Green Screen Goddess (Ten Thousand Waves)*, 2010, Endura Ultra photograph. Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

ISAAC JULIEN

25 FEBRUARY–8 MAY 2022

LESSONS OF THE HOUR

Isaac Julien, CBE RA is one of the most important artists working in film and time-based media in the world today. *Lessons of the Hour* is inspired by episodes in the life of freedom fighter Frederick Douglass (1818–1895). The film depicts Douglass as one of the most powerful voices and visionaries of the 19th century—from his demands to abolish chattel slavery to his aesthetic theory on photography—and demonstrates how his trenchant analyses continue to resonate.

Filmed at sites in Edinburgh, London and Washington D.C., Julien's film excerpts three speeches Douglass delivered after returning to the U.S.: 'What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?' (1852), 'Lecture on Pictures' (1861), and 'Lessons of the Hour' (1893). Based on original archival sources, letters and writings, the film *Lessons of the Hour* reconstructs aspects of the history of abolitionism, the suffrage movement and the invention of film itself.

Julien pays special attention to the women who were key to Douglass's life and accomplishments: Anna Murray Douglass, his wife for 44 years, until her death in 1882; Helen Pitts Douglass, a Mount Holyoke alumna whom he married following Anna's death; suffragist and friend, Susan B. Anthony; Otilie Assing, his German translator; and Ellen and Anna Richardson, British Quakers who raised the money to purchase Douglass's freedom.

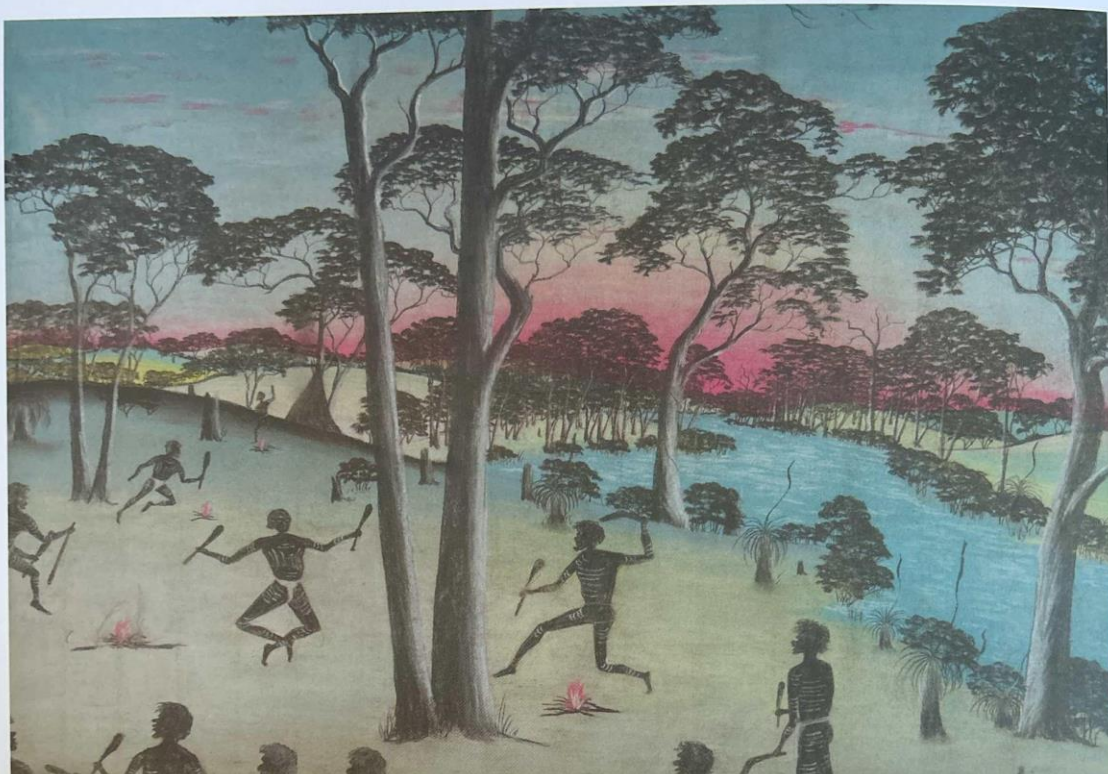
TEN THOUSAND WAVES

The original inspiration for *Ten Thousand Waves* was the Morecambe Bay tragedy of 2004, in which 23 Chinese cockle-pickers died. In response to this event, Julien commissioned the poet Wang Ping to travel to England and write *Small Boats*, a poem that is recited in the work. In the successive years, Julien has spent time in China slowly coming to understand the country and its people's perspectives, developing the relationships that have enabled him to undertake this rich and multifaceted work.

Through conversations with academics, curators and artists both in China and the UK, Julien uncovered a symbolic body of material which he has used to create a work that explores modern and traditional Chinese values and superstitions. Following ideas surrounding death, spiritual displacement, and the uniquely Chinese connection with 'ghosts' or 'lost souls', the film links the Shanghai of the past and present, symbolising the Chinese transition towards modernity, aspiration and affluence.

Conceived and made over four years, *Ten Thousand Waves* sees Julien collaborating with some of China's leading artistic voices including: screen goddess Maggie Cheung; rising star of Chinese film, Zhao Tao; poet Wang Ping; master calligrapher Gong Fagen; artist Yang Fudong; acclaimed cinematographer Zhao Xiaoshi; and a 100-strong Chinese cast and crew. The film's original musical score is by fellow East Londoner Jah Wobble and The Chinese Dub Orchestra, and contemporary classical composer Maria de Alvear.

Filmed on location in the ravishing and remote Guangxi province, at the famous Shanghai Film Studios and various sites around Shanghai, *Ten Thousand Waves* combines fact, fiction and film essay genres against a background of Chinese history, legend and landscape to create a meditation on global human migrations. Through formal experimentation and a series of unique collaborations, Julien seeks to engage with Chinese culture through contemporary events, ancient myths and artistic practice.



CARROLUP COOLINGAH WIRN – THE SPIRIT OF CARROLUP CHILDREN

The child artists of Carrolup were forcibly removed from their parents and detained at the Carrolup Native Settlement, southwest Western Australia, in the 1940s. From 1946–1950 under the tutelage of their teacher Noel White, they created hundreds of beautiful artworks, mainly landscapes. The children were inspired by Noongar Boodja (Noongar Country) and encouraged to draw with Government-issued chalk, charcoal, pastel and pencils. They went on to receive local and international acclaim for their art, which was at the time heralded as equal in merit to that of Albert Namatjira. As with Namatjira, the story unfolds to reveal a system of racism, control and trauma which continues to adversely impact communities today. The children were deemed by government under its assimilation policies, to become domestic slaves, farm hands and station hands.

The story of Carrolup and The Herbert Mayer Collection of Carrolup Art is one of hope inspired by a group of children whose art belied the trauma they suffered. Their teacher, unlike many in his position, delivered a program to develop confidence and hope for their future. Mrs Florence Rutter, a kind and clever philanthropist from the UK, introduced the children's art to the world, placing Carrolup

firmly on the map internationally. However, the children's success was also their undoing, attracting unwanted attention to the plight of Aboriginal people at the hands of the State Government. The Settlement was suddenly closed and the children 'dispersed' to other institutions in 1951.

Many survivors of these Stolen Generations went on to become high achievers in government and academia, acclaimed artists, parents and grandparents, despite the trauma they suffered. But some continued to experience a cycle of incarceration, the highest rates of which are still experienced by Aboriginal people today. The handful of people that survive today who can share their lived experience from Carrolup, are joined by their descendants and others of the Stolen Generations, in a fight for justice which recognises the trauma they endured. The art of Carrolup allows us to share the truth of Australia's history as a settler-nation, and an opportunity to consider the healing needed in order to re-build a nation based on equity and justice.

Above Reynold Hart, *A Native Corroboree*, c1949, pastel and charcoal on paper, 72.5 × 107cm. Curtin University Art Collection.

DIRECTOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thank you to the Perth Festival through their Visual Arts partner Wesfarmers Arts as well as the Festival's Program Associate, Visual Arts, Gemma Weston, and Artistic Director, Iain Grandage, for their continuing support in 2022 with our *ISAAC JULIEN* exhibition. We are proud to note that 2022 marks the 25th anniversary year of the John Curtin Gallery's partnership with the Perth Festival.

Thank you to London-based artist Isaac Julien for his powerful and inspiring work and commitment to make this ambitious self-titled exhibition project possible across two states in Australia, in spite of all of the challenges we faced in a COVID disrupted world. Thank you to the team at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, for their assistance in this project and most importantly, I wish to acknowledge the collaborative partnership with Samstag Museum of Art, our exhibition partner in Adelaide and thank their Director, Erica Green and Curator, Gillian Brown, who are working with the Adelaide Festival to present the other half of the *ISAAC JULIEN* exhibition we are presenting with the 2022 Perth Festival.

I would like to pay my respect to Badimia (Yamatji) First Nations artist Julie Dowling for her generosity in sharing her insights and reflections on the lived experiences of both her own family and their ancestors as well as other Aboriginal people through her artwork. I wish to also acknowledge and thank Julie's sister Carol Dowling for her assistance with the development of *JULIE DOWLING: Bidya Gurtbarl (Open Secret)*, working with our Curator of Australian First Nations Art, Michelle Broun alongside our Adjunct Curator, Dr Helen Idle, who I also wish to specifically thank for all her work on the production of this publication.

Finally, I would like to extend a very sincere thank you to all John Curtin Gallery staff, for their continuing dedication and commitment – particularly those that have contributed to each of these three exhibitions and the development of their supporting programs, especially our Exhibitions, Communications and Installation teams.

Chris Malcolm,
Director, John Curtin Gallery

This publication supports the exhibitions:

ISAAC JULIEN
25 February–8 May 2022

JULIE DOWLING: *Bidya Gurtbarl (Open Secret)*
11 February–20 March 2022

***Carrolup coolingah wirn –
The spirit of Carrolup children***
11 February–4 December 2022

John Curtin Gallery
Building 200A
Curtin University
Kent Street, Bentley
Western Australia 6102

Phone: +61 (0)8 9266 4155
Email: gallery@curtin.edu.au
Website: jcg.curtin.edu.au

This exhibition is a Perth Festival event presented in conjunction with the Adelaide Festival and SAMSTAG Museum of Art.

Publication copyright 2022 John Curtin Gallery
Text copyright © Michelle Broun, Carol Dowling, Julie Dowling, Dr Helen Idle, Chris Malcolm

All rights reserved. This exhibition catalogue is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private research, criticism or review, as permitted under the copyright act, no material whether written or photographic may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the artist, authors and Curtin University. The opinions expressed in this catalogue are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the John Curtin Gallery or Curtin University. All works of art are copyright of the artists.

ISBN: 978-0-6450795-2-4

Curators: Michelle Broun (Carrolup and Julie Dowling),
Dr Helen Idle (Julie Dowling), Chris Malcolm (Isaac Julien)
Designer: Isabel Kruger

Cover Isaac Julien, *Lessons of the Hour (Lessons of the Hour)*, 2019, Framed photograph on matt archival paper, mounted on aluminium, 160 × 213.29 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

Bunuru Season



Julie Dowling



Carrolup



Perth Festival 2022



Presented in association with

**PERTH
FESTIVAL**

Wesfarmers Arts

SAMSTAG
University of
South Australia

Principal exhibition partner

navitas

Supporting exhibition partners

BHP

JCG DONOR CIRCLE

YAMAJI ART
MAA Art Aboriginal Corporation

UAMA
UNIVERSITY ART
MUSEUM AUSTRALIA

Curtin
fm 1001



Curtin University

JOHN CURTIN GALLERY