

Judy Watson

fruit and seeds 1–3 2000

etchings with chine collé
edition A/P

Courtesy of the artist and grahame galleries + editions, Meanjin/Brisbane

This series is about the life force within. I was heavily pregnant at the time that I made these prints and while they are not based on any particular plant or seedpod they are universal forms, some referring to male and female parts.

Judy Watson, 2000

Judy Watson

dispersal 2000

etching with chine collé
edition A/P

hollow trace 2000

etching with chine collé
edition A/P

Courtesy of the artist and grahame galleries + editions, Meanjin/Brisbane

Judy Watson

***vessel* 2000**

colour etching

edition A/P

***tenant creek* 1999**

pigment on paper

Courtesy of the artist and grahame galleries + editions, Meanjin/Brisbane

Judy Watson

experimental beds 1 2012

3-plate etching with chine collé

Thomas Jefferson, The Rotunda, First Floor Plan (N-330), courtesy Jefferson Papers of the University of Virginia, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia

experimental beds 2 2012

3-plate etching

Thomas Jefferson, Pavilion No. III W. Corinthian Palladio (N-316), courtesy Jefferson Papers of the University of Virginia, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia

experimental beds 3 2012

3-plate etching

Thomas Jefferson, Pavilion VII W. Doric Palladio (N-311), courtesy Jefferson Papers of the University of Virginia, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia

experimental beds 4 2012

2-plate etching

Thomas Jefferson, Library, Elevation of the Rotunda (N-328), courtesy Jefferson Papers of the University of Virginia, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia

Courtesy of the artist and grahame galleries + editions, Meanjin/Brisbane

In 2009, Judy Watson visited the University of Virginia, founded in 1819 by Thomas Jefferson, who had served as the third president of the United States (1801–09). Equally famed as the principal author of the 1776 Declaration of Independence (which espoused that ‘all men are created equal’), Jefferson was himself a slave owner, whose life and actions contradicted his public statements against slavery. Jefferson was also a self-taught architect, whose drawings Watson encountered during her visit to the exhibition *Thomas Jefferson’s Academical Village: The Creation of an Architectural Masterpiece*. When invited to undertake a residency at the University’s Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection two years later, Watson decided to use Jefferson’s drawings as the ‘bones’ for a series of works that investigated the historic figure’s story.

The series of six etchings titled *experimental beds* (four of which are on display here) are named after a description of the gardens Jefferson established at Monticello, the mansion he built over more than forty years. A means of assessing the use and viability in Virginia of non-native seeds and plants sourced from across the world, the beds—like Monticello’s farms, grand home and the nearby University—were developed and maintained through the labour of enslaved peoples. Resonant in the title, too, is an association with the private sphere. Alongside his white family, Jefferson had a family with the enslaved African American woman Sally Hemings, fathering at least six of her children. Of the over six hundred slaves owned by Jefferson, only two were freed in his lifetime.

Across the series, Watson combines architectural drawings by Jefferson with historic, and some contemporary, references. These include the profiles of Aboriginal artist and activist Richard Bell and Brisbane-based African American woman Lindsey T. Jackson, who has family in Virginia; vegetables grown in Monticello’s experimental beds; artefacts unearthed by an archaeologist working at Monticello during the artist’s visit; drawings of charcoal kilns used in the estate’s nailery, which was known to be staffed by ten-to-sixteen-year-old enslaved boys; and the elk antlers that hang in Monticello’s entrance hall, originally collected by Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark on their expedition to explore the Missouri River and seek a water route to the Pacific Ocean.

Judy Watson

joyce with queensland tenure map 2021

synthetic polymer paint and graphite on canvas

Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

A silhouette portrait of Watson's mother Joyce on Waanyi Country, outlined in indigo, sits atop a historic Queensland tenure map. English placenames crisscross the canvas alongside fissures of red and yellow ochre erupting within the form like brain bleeds—deep scars from the destruction of sacred sites on Country. The white, underlying rectangle hangs like a sheet, referencing the way Aboriginal people were historically measured and photographed against a backdrop for scientific and anthropological data collection. Netting emerges in the base layer, the blue pigment and other colours pushed into the canvas by the artist's feet stamping and dancing on Country.

Judy Watson

rani with freshwater mussel shells (malu malu) and hoop pine 2021

volcanic soil, synthetic polymer paint, graphite, pastel and chinagraph pencil on canvas

Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

While Victorian-era black silhouettes captured the profiles of white colonisers, Watson reclaims them to feature some of the women in her family using her signature blue palette. Blue is a reference to Watson's Waanyi 'running water' people and is the colour of memory and dreams. In this work, the artist's daughter Rani appears like Lady Justice with a blindfold of hoop pine leaves. This ancient plant species, which was plundered by colonists for its wood, dates from the Gondwana era when dinosaurs still existed. The surrounding malu malu, or freshwater mussels, also known as 'water beef', were an important staple for Waanyi people and are associated with women's bodies. There are middens of these shells at important sites (including women's sites) along rivers and creeks. In this work, they are delineated with fine lines like those incised on wooden cultural containers and utensils seen in museums. Rani represents generations of Waanyi women in Watson's family and reinforces family, cultural knowledge and connections to Country.

judy with global land, ocean temperature anomalies, baler shell and leaves (jamba, malu, yimbira) 2021

volcanic soil, synthetic polymer paint, graphite and pastel on canvas

Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

Here, a silhouette of the artist floats beneath a global temperature anomalies chart and a baler shell covered by a fringe of leaves. The baler shell is a recurring motif in Watson's practice, used by Aboriginal people as a cultural vessel, a cup for extracting and drinking water, a receptacle to mix ochre in for ceremony and for emptying water out of canoes. During the 2020–21 Covid-lockdowns, Watson visited a local park near her home where she noted the targeted replanting of Indigenous species to shade and replenish the local environment. She gathered various leaves and seeds from the park and brought them back to her studio—echoes of Country, culture, climate change and regeneration.

Judy Watson

ebony with aluminium toxicity chart 2021

volcanic soil, synthetic polymer paint and graphite on canvas

Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

The thin canvas background has earth danced into it, as though Watson was walking back on Country, while the top cotton layer is soaked with Prussian blue pigment to form a floating silhouette. The sitter is Watson's studio assistant Ebony and surrounding her is an aluminium toxicity chart, one of many that Watson has collected as part of her research on climate change. Aluminium in its raw state, after being mined and extracted from bauxite, has a red ochre colour. This work highlights ongoing environmental destruction that is deeply felt by many Aboriginal Communities, whose sacred sites are still being destroyed and access to Country denied.

dot with cotton tree string (kunda walkurji) 2021

indigo, synthetic polymer paint, chinagraph pencil and graphite on cotton

Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

The shadowy form of Watson's paternal European cousin Dot emerges from a blue background. Watson has used the shibori technique (taught to her by Dot) of wrapping and pleating, with the indigo dye sucked into the cotton giving the surface of the work the appearance of rippling water. The faint ochre shadow of cotton tree string hovers above Dot's head, sheltering and protecting her as she holds her head above water. Watson acknowledges both her Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage and identity: 'I'm a product of both the colonised and the coloniser, two cultural frameworks coming together in me.'

Judy Watson

carpentaria petition 1903, signatories, kangaroo grass, feather, cabbage tree palm (badakalina kanba, wulu, kunda) 2021

volcanic soil, synthetic polymer paint, graphite and waxed linen thread on canvas

Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

This 1903 petition of complaint about Aboriginal people was written and signed by white men from fifteen stations close to or on Waanyi Country in the Gulf of Carpentaria and sits in the background. Across the danced-in earth floats a white cockatoo feather, found by Watson on her Country. It is like an old writing quill, dipped in ink used by the petition's signatories. Waving kangaroo grass from Riversleigh Station forms a fringe at the top of the work. Fibre from the cabbage tree palm is woven across the bottom right, alluding to the fragility of the windbreak and reeds that saved the life of Watsons' great-great-grandmother Rosie. As a child, Rosie survived a massacre, evading police by hiding behind a windbreak and then going into the water, weighed down by rocks, and breathing through water reeds. This is a powerful work about survival and truth-telling of Australia's history.

In reply to Mr. Forry M.L.A. that I should like to have a communication of content from him in writing when presenting this document.

Dr Roth - Dr Forry 10/9/03 24/12/03

DEPT OF PUBLIC LANDS
37351 18 DEC 1903

Gregory Downs
28th Augt 1903

James Forryth Esq M L A
Cassiparia Electorate
Brisbane

Dear Sir,

As our representative in the Legislative Assembly of this State, we the undersigned beg to briefly put before you some of the annoying circumstances surrounding us in connection with the employment of aborigines, and would point out that our opinion is that so long as we are agreeable and anxious to act humanely and fairly with the blacks, we should not be hampered with restrictions, such as we have been and are now subjected to, in regard to the payment of certain sums to the Government for boys and gins employed whilst giving homes to these people who would otherwise be thrown on the state

We are of opinion that the amount of wages should be left optional with the employers -- to be paid in accordance with the merit of the employee--.

We would further state that rather than be subjected to present restrictions we would sooner have suitable white labor such as boys of past school ages.

We also state respectfully that under the Aboriginal Act our blacks are becoming insubordinate and useless and if we are compelled to cease employing them they will be thrown on the state and with the wandering blacks become a source of danger and trouble to the settlers who have no redress.

In conclusion we are of opinion that the present police protection afforded white and black should be considered sufficient for the Aborigines here, and that it is not necessary in the present position of the finances of the State, and the numerous other taxes accumulating that Dr Roth should be

NORTHERN PROTECTION OF ABORIGINALS
CR 1092/3

DEPT OF PUBLIC LANDS
37351 18 DEC 1903

retained, we are however of opinion that reserves should be set apart such as ~~we~~ have already been submitted to the Authorities for the Blacks now wandering in the District, and these reserves placed under police supervision guided by advice of local Justices.

Commending the matter to your usual kind consideration

We are, dear Sir,
Yours faithfully

- ✓ J. M. Stakerney. Riversleigh
- ✓ J. D. Macintyre. Koonah
- ✓ W. Briggs. hq. Grego of Barr
- ✓ John Thompson. Jalawani
- ✓ George H. Alexander. Augustus Downs
- ✓ Arthur Kelgour. Herbert Vale
- ✓ A. H. Lissan. Rocklands
- ✓ M. J. Stuart Russell. Yelberton
- ✓ G. S. Hilly. Dalton Hills
- ✓ J. M. Taylor. Yelberton
- ✓ W. Brown. Barclay Downs
- ✓ John Kincaedy. Lorraine
- ✓ Thomasman. Alsau
- ✓ R. H. Adams. Kamilaroi
- ✓ Power Bros. Coolullah.

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- W. Macintyre, Kurawul
- W. Briggs, Wagon Creek
- John Thompson, Jalawanti
- George H. Alexander, Augustus Downs
- Arthur Kelgour, Herbert Vale
- A. H. Lissan, Rocklands
- W. J. Stuart Russell, Yelberton
- G. S. Haly, Yelberton
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- Power Bros., Coolullah

*Mr. Forryth would
18/12/03*
In reply Mr. Forryth should like to have a communication of consent from him in writing when presenting this document.
14/12/03
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To Mr. Forryth M.L.A.
18/12/03
at Rotho - In reply



DEPT OF PUBLIC LANDS
37351 18 DEC 1903

Judy Watson

flinder's chart, terra australis 1803 with cotton tree leaf and string (kunda yilaka, walkurri) 2021

synthetic polymer paint, graphite and indigo on canvas

Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

Images of a cotton tree leaf and string made from the bark of the thin native hibiscus are overlaid on Captain Matthew Flinders's 1803 map charting Australia. Indigo dye and pigments have pooled and been danced into the weave of the canvas. Watson uses the map, emblazoned with the words 'TERRA AUSTRALIS', to highlight Flinders's voyage on HMS Investigator into the Gulf of Carpentaria, close to her Waanyi Country. It was here that Flinders's crew captured two Aboriginal men. One of the men was killed and then sketched by artist William Westall. In his diary, Robert Brown recorded the language of the remaining captive Yolŋu man alongside its English translation for his records. Aboriginal language was imprinted onto Country and stories were embedded in the land. The intricacies of words, like the different names describing different bodies of water, show the sophistication of the Aboriginal language. Language connects Aboriginal people to Country.

Judy Watson

lisa with territory map, boomerangs from lawn hill, burketown and the gulf, and kangaroo grass (jukuli, boodjamulla, munkubayi, badakalina kanba)
2021

volcanic soil, synthetic polymer paint and graphite on canvas

Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

Watson's sister Lisa, her face outlined in white, lies under a stem of kangaroo grass. The faint graphite outline of a grevillea is embedded in the background, while the white forms of boomerangs and throwing sticks—from Lawn Hill, Burketown and the Gulf Country—whirl across the canvas. Outlined from Ancestral objects housed in a museum, the iconic boomerang shapes appear like ribs, as though unveiling the skeletal layers of Country. Watson noticed the kangaroo grass growing at the Riversleigh World Heritage fossil site, an important location in Queensland for the study of palaeontology. Riversleigh Station, close by, is where Judy's grandmother Grace was born. The images sit atop a historical pastoral map of north-west Queensland and together represent a layering of nature, culture and the time immemorial presence of Community in Country.

Judy Watson

broken country, blacks not to be trusted: roth's sketch map north west central queensland 1897 (jamba, burrurri) 2021

synthetic polymer paint, indigo and graphite on canvas

Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

An 1897 map by Dr Walter Edmund Roth, northern protector of Queensland Aboriginal people, is overlaid with cotton tree fibre string. The string symbolically asserts Watson's ties to her Waanyi Country and people and can also read as well-worn cultural tracks or trading routes. Undervalued, underrated and seemingly rudimentary, string can be one of the most important items in Aboriginal people's toolkits. Made from fibre and sometimes human or animal hair, it is used to make nets, fishing lines, canoes, weaponry, baskets and adornment, and its function and symbology is important in this work. By dancing on and pooling the layers of colour and imagery, Watson meshes cultural and historical views across time and place.

Judy Watson

***skullduggery* 2021**

HD single-channel video, colour, sound, 16:9 ratio; 29 minutes 42 seconds
Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

skullduggery highlights the abhorrent practice of bone hunting and collecting Aboriginal people's remains. The personal letters between Matron Agnes Kerr of Burketown Hospital in the Gulf of Carpentaria and staff at the Wellcome Museum in London reveal the trading of the skull and breastplate of King Tiger of Lawn Hill Mines. Other Aboriginal people's bones were also collected and sent to the museum. The letters reveal the offensive treatment of the bones, which were regarded as commodities and as a scientific resource and not as the sacred remains of respected human beings. King Tiger, who died on Waanyi Country, is one of thousands of Aboriginal people whose remains were interfered with and plundered for museum collections. The repatriation of Aboriginal people's remains from museum and other collections to community and Country is essential for healing.

Judy Watson, 2022

Signed copies of Watson's artist book *skullduggery*, first published in 2020 and reprinted as a second edition in 2022, are available for sale at MUMA during the exhibition, along with other titles by the artist.

Judy Watson

Collaborators: Leecee Carmichael, Otis Carmichael, Rani Carmichael, Sonja Carmichael, Anne Carter, Dominique Chen, Nejmere Cody, Maxine V. Cole, Jo-Anne Driessens, Libby Harward, Michele Helmrich, Violetta Horsford, Mary Kelsey, Madeleine King, Edie Kurzer, Cheryl Leavy, Wendy Lyons, Tor Maclean, Mandana Mapar, Louise Martin Chew, Indy Medieros, Dhana Merritt, Cathy Moon, Adele Outteridge, Dot Watson, Joyce Watson, Lisa Watson, Lani Weedon and Ebony Wilmott

veil of tears 2021–22

vinyl, synthetic polymer paint, waxed linen thread, calico and muslin
Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

The stitching of wounds is part of healing and survival. For this work, Watson invited her family and friends to sew painted calico, resembling open wounds, onto seven muslin veils that hang in front of fifty-one identified Aboriginal people who died in police custody. These fifty-one people are only a fraction of the formal cases and informal stories of Aboriginal deaths in custody since colonisation. It also highlights the unacceptably high rate of incarceration of Aboriginal people. Those who died need to be recognised and respected—and get justice. This work and the communal activity it is based on is a part of healing for those directly affected by deaths in custody and for all Australians who need to know about this history. The process of sewing—of piercing and repairing—represents the ongoing trauma of these deaths. It is one of the many psychological scars carried by Aboriginal people in this country.

Judy Watson

cotton tree string (kunda walkurri) 2021–22

cotton tree fibre

Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

Making string can be a communal activity in Community, where people come together to chat, talk and learn. Gathering together to weave enables essential skill-sharing and the transmission of knowledge between young and old, male and female. Woven string is vital for use in fishing lines, nets, bags, adornment, weaponry and even in games—an essential part of any individual’s survival tool kit. For this work, Watson invited family, friends and colleagues, ranging from novices to experts, to make these individual string bundles.

Our strength and resilience underlies the adversity and painful events of colonisation experienced by Aboriginal people and hold Country and culture together. The native hibiscus is a thin multi-trunked tree that grows along the banks of creeks and rivers. Its inner bark provides strong, flexible fibre for string which, is often dismissed and underrated as fragile and unimportant, yet when gathered, prepared, double and triple-twined and woven, is stronger and more tensile than synthetic rope. String has been vitally important for survival on Country for thousands of years. The shadow lines evoke the umbilical cords that connect us to the earth, to our mothers and to each other.

Judy Watson, 2022

Helen Johnson

It doesn't say this is a problem we have to solve, it says how do you respond 2015

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Ruth Clemens, Naarm/Melbourne

Lisa's one 2015

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection, Naarm/Melbourne

Helen Johnson

It could be something tangential, like how much hay the horses ate 2015

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of John Bostock, Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland

Helen Johnson

***Becoming what you always were* 2019**

synthetic polymer paint and pencil on canvas

Collection of Alexander V. Petalas, London

This work layers imagery that is connected by the idea of becoming as something encoded in one's being—in some sense a celebration of giving oneself over to larger processes. Beneath the nursing mother, a figure of both nurture and exhaustion, grandiose caterpillars pupate to emerge as softly-hued moths; the Melbourne Anarchist Club, a long time stronghold, stands its ground as it is squeezed between newly developed bourgeois apartments; and a woman undergoes psychoanalysis, a process of examining your own unconscious in an effort to understand who it is that you actually are in the world.

Helen Johnson, 2019

Helen Johnson

Small pool (sisters) 2022

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

The figures in these paintings are not speculative beings, but ways of figuring our being in the world—our social relations and familial connections that at times are simultaneously nurturing and extractive, inquisitive and vulnerable.

How can one be a subject today under the conditions that we have created for ourselves? In this painting, subjects are implicated in one another's being, produced by one another, nourishing one another. As I made this painting, I was thinking of my three big sisters—the way we produced one another as children and diverged as adults—but keep holding some kind of connection, even if tenuous at times.

On one layer of the painting, subjects emerge from subjects, the gaze of one becomes the being of another, whose gaze becomes the being of yet another—how we make one another as social beings. Observing and being observed. On another register, eyes become gravid, both breast-like and phallic. The question of what they are giving and what they are taking left with the viewer.

Helen Johnson, 2022

Helen Johnson

Leapyear Ladies Pop 2022

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

What on initial encounter presents as a swimming, swirling mass of gentle hues juxtaposes two modes of imagery—a woman, a subject spewing forth, speaking versions of herself, giving rise to new iterations of her subjectivity or reproducing something in her own image. An attempt on the part of a subject to find purchase in a world.

On another layer, cutting through and interrupting this, is a cartoon taken from the *Police Gazette* (1876), which gives its name to the painting's title—*Leapyear Ladies Pop*—depicting the imagined, upside-down world of leap years, during which social habits are inverted and women propose marriage to men. This cartoon has been hollowed out at the centre to allow the space of the other subjecthood to flow through.

Helen Johnson, 2022

Helen Johnson

Painting-making 2022

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

The three most recently made works in the exhibition have been produced in conjunction with my undertaking training as an art therapist in a psychiatric unit at a public hospital. The modes of observation and complex encounters between subjects that are fundamental to therapeutic work in this setting have fed the sensibilities of these paintings. These works draw primarily on a flow of imagery from my mind.

I have often produced these large works in relation to my body. They become spaces I can move around on, reach the edges of with a stretch. As they are worked on in the studio, the space becomes a container. Conversation flows between myself and my studio assistants Yusi, Clare, Brigid and Beth. I love this experience. The conditions of this space, of the work's production, flip vertiginously when the works meet an audience and the murky anxiety of being seen descends; yet without this the works don't live. This work comes from a place of anxiety, but before that it comes from a place of love.

When I run art therapy groups, they take place around a large table—a space to share, to explore creative impulses alongside other people. This is a different set of conditions for creativity than those I was accustomed to when studying and later teaching at art school, where each person was allocated a space in a cubicle to work in semi or at least sought-after privacy. When creating with others as fellow participants, as mutual witnesses, aspects of our selves begin to emerge, and connections begin to form that we were otherwise unaware of, or unable to imagine. Facing one another, connecting, the shared gaze becomes substance, reiterated and recast in the meeting of subjects. This condition is re-staged in the studio as we sit around the painting, conversation flowing, and peel back the layers of mask to reveal the connections that have formed between registers in the painted surface.

Helen Johnson, 2022

Helen Johnson

The birth of an institution 2021–22

synthetic polymer paint and pencil on unstretched canvas, double-sided
Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22
Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Naarm/Melbourne

The birth of an institution depicts a white woman giving birth—not to a baby but to the dome of a colonial institutional building. She is surrounded by invested parties: the banker/father, the priest, the policeman, the schoolmarm, the doctor, the nurse. When I started this painting, I was reading Richard Broome's *Coburg: Between Two Creeks* (1987), which traces the history of the northern Melbourne suburb and clearly lays out the priorities of the colonial state: setting up the church, the police force and the education system to support mechanisms of suppression, exploitation and financial exchange. I was interested in putting a woman at the centre of this scene. I was thinking about women's labours, and the position of being exploited by, and an active participant in, building a colonial society. In this painting the rigid architecture of the institution becomes slippery and organic, subsuming the body of the woman before it has even come from her.

Helen Johnson, 2022

Helen Johnson

Crises 2021–22

synthetic polymer paint and pencil on unstretched canvas, double-sided
Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22
Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Naarm/Melbourne

The decorative lettering in this painting is mainly taken from early colonial publications such as *The Bulletin* and *The Police Gazette*. It should be noted that I did not include the racist depictions of First Nations peoples and other nationalities that I found in these publications. It is not appropriate for a white person to work with such imagery. I am, however, interested in how the colonists represented themselves at this time. These images present a clear picture of the colony as a police state fixated on class and personal wealth. The amount of information in the imagery means that the words spelled out in the painting can be hard to read. However, they are gradually revealed: complacent, cowed, ignorant, complicit. It's a pretty heavy-handed list, but it's there because these are characteristics of Australian colonial society. This is not to say that everyone is these things, but that they run like veins of quartz through the bedrock.

Helen Johnson, 2022

Helen Johnson

Foundation 2021–22

synthetic polymer paint and pencil on unstretched canvas, double-sided
Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22
Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Naarm/Melbourne

This work draws on imagery produced around the time of Australian Federation, in the years immediately before and after 1900. In the press at that time, the popular way to depict the newly federated Australia was as a young white woman, usually shown seeking guidance from an older patriarchal figure, like the politician Henry Parkes, or someone who represented European powers. Forming a shoddy foundation beneath these women are the faces of four members of the first parliament of federated Australia. The quotes issuing from their mouths are taken from the Hansard records of that first sitting, which throw into relief the stark racism that forms the foundation of Australia. One politician, Samuel Winter Cooke, is recorded as saying: ‘We must do our best to see that Australia remains as a possession for the white man, and the white man only.’

Helen Johnson, 2022

Helen Johnson

System maintenance 2021–22

synthetic polymer paint and pencil on unstretched canvas, double-sided
Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2021–22
Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Naarm/Melbourne

This painting was inspired by a controversy regarding the poisoning of protected temperate grassland in New South Wales on a property owned by Jam Land, a company in which former federal energy minister Angus Taylor has an interest. In this painting I wanted to honour that grassland. Beneath the grasses swirl clouds of herbicide from an agricultural sprayer. Overlaying the grasses is an image from a nineteenth-century Australian cartoon, showing two babies greedily plunging their fists into a tin of jam. Elsewhere, the thoughts of two men appear as tiny speech bubbles which could be mistaken for sperm: the little ideas of self-interested men that can lead to massive loss.

Helen Johnson, 2022