

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Black Sky

11 February – 22 April 2023

BLACK SKY ASSERTS SOVEREIGN VISIONS OF BLACKNESS

Far from neutral backdrops, skies are spaces that hold life and story, incite creation and dreams, and witness political action and environmental destruction. In this ground-breaking exhibition *Black Sky* takes over the entirety of the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery traversing unlikely spaces of resistance and cultural continuation, from creation stories across mountain ranges, to the ambience of a night club, to the black of the Aboriginal flag as a symbol of sovereign solidarities across skies.

Black Sky is presented as part of this year's Perth Festival and has been a major collaboration between the Berndt Museum, the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art and Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery. The exhibition features work from artists **Julie Dowling, Tracey Moffatt, Tennant Creek Brio, Roy Wiggan, Joseph Williams and Lévi McLean, and Gobawarrah-Yinhawangka Traditional Owners and Michael Bonner.**

Jessyca Hutchens, a Palyku art historian, and Michael Bonner, a Jingili/Yanyuwa filmmaker, are both curators at the University of Western Australia's Berndt Museum and describe the concept for *Black Sky* as "an exploration of the dynamism and energy of the sky". Hutchens explains the origins of the show saying, "the exhibition emerged out of discussions around how the Berndt Museum, which has globally significant collections of Aboriginal cultural material and artworks, could be guided by forms of cultural continuation and experimental creative practice". The ambitious scale of the show led to two additional curators, Lee Kinsella from the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, and Joseph Williams, an emerging Warumungu cultural leader and artist, joining the project, and working collectively and on different elements of the show.

Michael Bonner has worked with Gobawarrah-Yinhawangka Traditional Owners on a new immersive film installation which Bonner says "tells the story of two mountains who speak to one another – a story disrupted and threatened by mining activity. The project has been significantly enabled by many recordings done by the late mother of Roy Tommy and Julie Walker who was an Yinhawangka language activist."



Tracey Moffatt, *Up in the Sky # 18*, 1997, photographic series of 25 prints, edition 50 of 60, 75.5 x 105 cm each, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia, Copyright and courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.



Fabian Brown and Rupert Betheras, *Headless Horse*, 2022, mixed media on canvas, 215 x 212 cm, courtesy the artists and Nyinnka Art & Culture Centre

Julie Walker describes the significance of this project for her family and community saying, "I see this project as a way for me to continue to serve my mum Jirriirdinku, a Banagka woman, and my mother's mother, my grandmother, a Burungu woman, Bimba. Mums' motto was always to know your land, know your family tree. This night sky exhibition of Yinhawangka country is the first time her significant, impactful contribution will be seen."

A key feature of the exhibition is a major showing of predominantly new works by the Tennant Creek Brio. Hutchens says, "I first met members of the Tennant Creek Brio when I worked at the Biennale of Sydney, where the Brio had a landmark showing across Cockatoo Island and Artspace in 2020. They are an artist collective who have been prolifically producing works that draw on the everyday materiality of their hometown, and their spiralling installation for *Black Sky* will traverse the ambient and fantastical registers of night and sky life, from mining chasms and night clubs, up into the cosmos. Their work continually unravels the categories that limit how Indigenous art is often framed."

As Brio member, artist Fabian Brown says, "we are in the middle of it, I'm in the middle, the guys are in the middle - between traditional and contemporary."

Lee Kinsella from the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art has worked on a major showing of collection works by Julie Dowling and Tracey Moffatt. As Kinsella says, "Dowling's assertion of Badimia sovereignty and rights through intimate and intergenerational portraiture registers the personal, eternal, as well as the urgency of resistance". In Julie Dowling's words: "These works are statements of identity, place and the fight for expression as Badimia."

As for Tracey Moffatt's work, Kinsella explains that the "photographic series *Up in the Sky* (1997) is a rare showing of the entire twenty-five prints. It is staged in an ambiguous outback setting and employs dizzying cinematic effects through images that seem to be steeped in colonial residues."

Joseph Williams, a Tennant Creek Brio member, and curator on the show, together with collaborator Lévi McLean, will also present a separate installation titled *Wirringkiri* (2023) - a Warumungu word for both yellow ochre and gold. As Hutchens describes it, "the installation includes paintings on appropriated mining maps and a film with the poetic narration of a soaring eagle over archival footage of mining explosions, poignantly layering these stories of extraction and cultural sovereignty. Williams will also be an official artist-in-residence at the Berndt Museum and the UWA School of Design in the weeks leading up to the exhibition opening to fully realise the work."

The exhibition also features a unique work by the late Roy Wiggan. As Hutchens describes it, "The work is an *ilma*, or ceremonial object, that references a *jirrir* (shooting star) song that acts as a kind of welcome and closing to the entire show and as a metaphor for hope and direction."

Across this diverse array of works, a sense of overlapping sovereign skies and a series of affinities emerges, with resistance and creative expression intimately linked to struggles to protect country and to carry culture forward into eternal futures.

To mark the opening day of the exhibition on February 11, 2023, many visiting artists will gather for a half-day public programme, *Black Sky Collisions*, where there will be three artist panels at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (3–5pm) and an open studio party at the UWA School of Design (5–7pm). For further details visit lwag2302.eventbrite.com.au

Presented as part of the Perth Festival Visual Arts Program, supported by Wesfarmers Arts.

Exhibition launch opening date and time: Friday 10 February 6–8pm

Exhibition dates: 11 February – 22 April 2023

The Gallery is open Tuesday to Saturday, 12pm to 5pm, and admission is free

For more information, visit the LWAG website: uwa.edu.au/lwag/home

Exhibition Preview

There will be a media preview on Thursday, 9 February, 2–4pm

Please register at lwag2300.eventbrite.com.au if you would like to attend

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Images: [Images available here – please note all images must be accompanied by captions provided](#)

Website: uwa.edu.au/lwag/Exhibitions/Black-Sky

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