

bodies of water

Artwork

Judy Watson



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EDITOR'S NOTE

A brief presentation of Judy Watson's work by Marilynne Brun and Estelle Castro-Koshy is included below.



Figure 1

string over water (walkurrji kingkarri wanami) (detail), 2019
 261 x 180.5 cm acrylic, graphite, pastel, watercolour pencil on canvas
 © Judy Watson

**Figure 2**

great artesian basin springs, the gulf (jiwil, wanami), 2019
 212 x 169 cm indigo, acrylic, graphite on canvas
 © Judy Watson

- 1 We have the great pleasure of opening this special issue on Alexis Wright's oeuvre with two beautiful art works by Judy Watson. Connections with *Carpentaria* can be established with both *string over water (walkurrji kingkarri wanami)* and *great artesian basin springs, the gulf (jiwil, wanami)*, in particular with Watson's unique representation of water – water sovereignty, movement and connections – and use of string. “[A] tangible link to the unbroken practice of string making” (Strzelecki), the string recalls the continuation of cultural and sovereign practices “older than time itself” in *Carpentaria* (Wright 2008, 114) and evokes the characters “following the old ones travelling their country to at least a thousand sites they knew by memory” (30). *string over water (walkurrji kingkarri wanami)* also recalls the ethics of renewal and recycling that are deployed in *Carpentaria*: by Angel to create Number One House, Norm in his fish taxidermy, and Will on the floating island of rubbish. The surfacing presence of the string – as one of the “tools of survival” (Watson quoted in Strzelecki) Judy Watson wanted to depict – evokes a violent and painful history, as her great great grandmother escaped a massacre by hiding underwater and breathing through reeds (Clugston 2020).

- 2 With *great artesian basin springs, the gulf (jiwil, wanami)*, Watson's superimposition of representations of the Gulf of Carpentaria and its flows creates a palimpsest, a complex, layered work that draws connections between site and memory and resonates with the multi-stranded, interconnected narrative layers of Wright's *Carpentaria*. Michele Grossman highlighted that in *Carpentaria*, "Wright reveals with great skill and generosity why any white Australian conception of Indigenous interests in rights to land and country that stops at the shoreline is deeply flawed and ultimately fatal."¹ So does Judy Watson in *great artesian basin springs, the gulf (jiwil, wanami)*.
 - 3 We hope that readers will form their own interpretations of Judy Watson's works and establish other connections with Alexis Wright's works.
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NOTES

1. This sentence was included in the original version of a review of *Carpentaria* that Michele Grossman wrote for *Australian Literary Review*. The review was published on 4 October 2006, but the sentence quoted here was not included (personal communication between Michele Grossman and Estelle Castro-Koshy, 7 July 2021).

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AUTHOR

JUDY WATSON

Judy Watson was born in Mundubbera, Queensland. Her Aboriginal matrilineal family is from Waanyi country in north-west Queensland. The artist's process evolves by working from site and memory, revealing Indigenous histories, following lines of emotional and physical topography that centre on particular places and moments in time. Spanning painting, printmaking, drawing, sculpture and video, her practice often draws on archival documents and materials, such as maps, letters and police reports, to unveil institutionalised discrimination against Aboriginal people. Watson has exhibited extensively since the 1980s. Her work is included in several Australian and international collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, and the British Museum. A significant solo exhibition of her work opened in March 2020 in Birmingham. Her work is currently on display at the TATE Modern, London. Watson is an Adjunct Professor at Griffith University. In 2018, she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Art History by the University of Queensland.