

Lucy Simpson

Baayangalbiyaay

Curated by Aimee Frodsham



Canberra Glassworks is a major ACT arts centre that provides a range of well-equipped workshops for artists to develop and create works using the medium of glass. Established in 2007, it operates within the historic Kingston Powerhouse - a building that was Canberra's first major public building and played a critical role in the early development of Canberra.

Built on the land of the Ngunnawal people who used the site as a meeting and gathering place, practising their culture on the banks of the Molonglo River for millennia, Canberra Glassworks acknowledges and respects the traditional custodians of the land on which it is located.

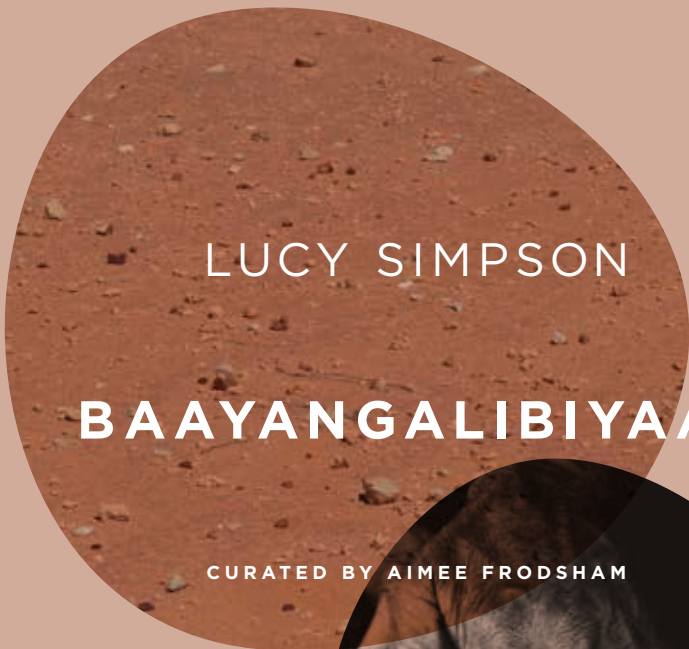
Over the sixteen years since its opening, the Canberra Glassworks has been pivotal in the development of the careers of artists using glass as a creative medium. The collaborative process of the creation of studio glass has built a community of artists whose work has been recognised throughout the world. It attracts visiting artists who spend time in Canberra to access the facility. A program of curated exhibitions increases the profile of studio glass artists.

Canberra Glassworks is delighted to present this exhibition of work by Lucy Simpson (Yuwaalaraay people), curated by Aimee Frodsham.

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LUCY SIMPSON

BAAYANGALIBIYAAY

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canberra
glassworks

A continuous past

I met with Yuwaalaraay artist Lucy Simpson in her Sydney studio one Friday afternoon to talk about projects, glass and art. We had just started our third glass project together. As we discussed her pieces, our conversation seamlessly worked its way from making artworks to her design practice, to her connection to Country and the importance of knowledge sharing. It was a privilege to listen to the stories, and to hear about her shared history and thought process behind each artwork. This would form the exhibition *Baayangalibiyaay* presented at Canberra Glassworks.

Simpson is an extraordinary designer and artist, and I would come to learn more about her philosophies as we worked together on this exhibition. Through her design practice, Gaawaa Miyay, she explores and shares essential pieces of her life and traditions, where collaboration and knowledge sharing are ingrained in her daily life. Often drawing upon poetry, song and her relationships as a daughter, mother, sister, and ancestor.

As a multidisciplinary artist and designer, she collaborates with museums and galleries on artwork commissions, while also working with clients such as Breville Australia, fashion designers, photographers, and traditional tool makers. These meaningful collaborations and connections effortlessly intersect across all her projects. This brings us to glass and how it forms part of Simpson's continuously evolving story.

This story began with a public artwork commission for Bloomberg titled *Galuma-li*, curated by Carriageworks and fabricated by Canberra Glassworks.

In early 2020 when Simpson first visited Canberra Glassworks, she immediately connected to the material qualities of glass and equally to her guide and teacher, artist and glass expert Kirstie Rea. Over an intensive week-long residency, they tested many ideas and techniques, including casting a set of glass grinding stones. These glass stones were small enough to fit into the palm of your hand and were rubbed together until the pieces sat together in unison, joined through time and process. The stones were made using a sand-casting process, where a form was pushed into a box of sand to create a negative space, and then filled with hot glass. The liquid glass fills the space and the sand provides a coarse texture which fuses to glass surface. Simpson saw something magical in this process, and we would use it to create her next body of work for the exhibition *SITEWORKS* at Bundanon Art Museum.

The exhibition's title, *Baayangalibiyaay*, translates to having a natural balance and the order of all things in the living world. At the exhibition's core is an artwork with the same name, reconfigured from the pieces first shown at Bundanon. In her artist statement, Simpson describes it as a body of work that focuses on a small collection of very old dhanggal¹, 60-80 years old or more, collected from the parched riverbed, which had perished along with more than 2 million others in the Murray Darling Basin between 2017 - 2020 at the height of the NSW drought.

It tells the story of materiality and memory and looks to the glassmaking process to record, absorb, reflect and transform its body to represent great periods of upheaval and environmental crisis across river landscapes².

Through the glass-casting process, Simpson was interested in embedding materials collected from Bundanon during a residency, an area heavily affected by the 2019-2020 bushfires. Simpson collected sand from the Shoalhaven riverbanks, still visible with charcoal. This sand, charred with remnants of the fires, would meld into the glass and form the surface of small, shell vessel forms. Each shell would become a record of time and place, specifically connected with extreme fire and water events. These are uniquely beautiful and raw forms, some with amazing clarity and others look as though they have smoky, contaminated skin. Ranging from translucent to opaque, black to white, pure to gritty, creating a subtle yet striking collection of memories in and of Country³.

Back in her studio on that Friday afternoon, Simpson told me about the importance of adapting, learning, and listening and the responsibilities of teaching and retelling stories. She spoke about why using glass to tell stories was important to her. As we learn and have new experiences, stories can transform and be adapted to fit today's world, but the embedded narrative or lesson must stay the same. There is a sensitivity in understanding this, in hearing and retelling the story within the context of your own experience while also knowing that others have lived and adapted and shared this too.

A beautiful example of this would be three sisters hearing a story from their Mother, this story will be retold three different ways from three different points of view, but the lesson will be the same. It is not linear. It is a continuous story. Simpson believes that she can use glass, this non-traditional material, to tell her stories. It is a material that is not liquid or solid, it can be formed and reformed, but it will always remain glass. She believes that it is material that helps us learn.

In Yumwaalaraay language Simpson says ‘Winangaylana ngay mara’ my hands remember, and their making continues. ‘Design is a tool, making a process and art the narrative that connects us back to story and experience. Through my work, I create and tell stories in ways that can often transcend words and language, flowing from deep within my bones. This relationship is extended well beyond the understanding of technique.’

As a glassmaker, I often refer to skilled makers as having material knowledge. A term that originated in material science and anthropology but is arguably more relevant in the arts and crafts. Put simply, a skilled maker understands their chosen material and can make quality items using it. Material knowledge is acquired by doing, feeling, and learning. A form of muscle memory that includes the hands, heart and mind. As glassmakers, we learn and experience this over many years or decades. For Simpson, storytelling and being part of a natural system are engrained and nurtured. This has endured, and it is complex.

Jilda Andrews, cultural practitioner and researcher at ANU and also Simpson’s sister, said in a podcast for the Guardian

‘...it’s less about the ground that’s under your feet. When you find yourself within this system of things, of happenings, of utterances, of a bird arriving, or the wind kissing your cheek, we

have names for all these things. In our language, they are important and we notice them and we feel as though we’re embedded within this system. It is also an expression of how you belong.’

Collectively, these works celebrate the stories of regeneration and continuation of important cultural traditions, and the strong people and vital water places that sustain them. The country, and wide range of environments, practices, and knowledge represented speak to both deep time and contemporary experiences—bringing into focus the importance of water to our cultural health and our capacity for resilience⁴.

Aimee Frodsham
April 2023



Lucy Simpson:
Artist Feature *The Design Files*,
by Alisha Gore



¹ Large bivalve mollusc, freshwater floodplain mussel.

²⁻³ Lucy Simpson, artist statement, *SITEWORKS*. Curated by Sophie O’Brien and Boe-Lin Bastian for Bundanon Art Museum.

⁴ Lucy Simpson, artist statement, *Long Water – Fibre Stories*. Curated by the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane.

Yuwaalaraay wirringgaa Lucy Simpson is Creative Director and Principal Designer / Maker behind Gaawaa Miyay; a First Nations process-led studio-based practice inspired by Country, relationships and notions of continuity and exchange.

Grounded in and guided by the timeless and sophisticated philosophies of First Nations design, Simpson's Wangal and Sydney-based multi-disciplinary practice connects to narratives of Country through function, materiality and transfer; through a wide range of applications spanning commercial, conceptual, and community-based projects and collaborations across a wide range of media.

A graduate of UNSW Art and Design and current PHD Candidate at the University of Technology Sydney, both Lucy's creative practice and research focuses on the continuing role of First Nations design as tool and conduit to baayangalibiyaay / interconnected notions of wellbeing (people and place).

Lucy is recognised by the Australian Design Centre as an honouree of Australian Design, and has exhibited

works at museums, galleries and institutions locally and abroad, also collaborating on a range of projects for theatre shows at festivals and major venues across Sydney. She has exhibited at Powerhouse Museum, Bundanon, Bankstown Art Conetre, State Library of Victoria, Insitute of Modern Art (Brisbane), National Art School (Sydney), Australian Design Centre, and the Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney).

Established in 2009, Gaawaa Miyay is a 100% First Nations owned and operated studio and a certified supplier with Supply Nation and a proud member of the National Association of Visual Artists (NAVA). Her clients include Westpac, Breville, City of Sydney, Bloomberg, Sydney Festival, LendLease, Koskela and Planex.





Dharriwaa (Narran Lake)



Baayangalibiyaay
2022
cast glass, sand

Baayangalibiyaay
2022
cast glass, sand





Dhanggal
2023
cast glass

Baayangalibiyaay
2022
cast glass, sand





Dhaggal
2023
cast glass



Barwon Riverbed

Dhaggal
2023
cast glass



Yarral (glass)
2023
cast glass



Scar Tree, Barwon River

Baayangalibiyaay
2022
cast glass, sand





Giba (small)
2020
cast glass



Dharriwaa shell midden (Narran Lakes)



Holding Ngurrmbaa





Bibil
2023
frameworked glass

Giba (small)
2020
cast recycled glass, sand





Barwon Riverbed



Yarral (glass)
2023
cast glass

Trade Stones
Simpson Family Collection





Dhayurr (large)
2023
cast glass, sand

Gidjirrigaa at Dharriwaa (Budgerigar)







Baayangalibiyaay
2022
cast glass, sand

Lucy Simpson:
Artist Feature The Design Files,
by Alisha Gore



Baayangalibiyaay
2022
cast glass, sand

Baayangalibiyaay

Baayangalibiyaay

Canberra Glassworks
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Melbourne Design Fair

Melbourne Convention and
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Canberra Glassworks
11 Wentworth Avenue
Kingston ACT 2604

Enquiries 02 6260 7005
canberraglassworks.com

Canberra Glassworks

CEO
Elizabeth Rogers

Artistic Director
Aimee Frodsham

Technical Director
Tom Rowney

Marketing
Brooke McEachern

Production & Commissions
Jacqueline Knight

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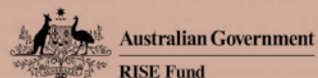
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