

JULIE DOWLING


Gallows
Gallery

'Guwanda Barna (Feeling Country)' October 16 - November 9 2025



JULIE DOWLING

‘Guwanda Barna (Feeling Country)’



Above: Self-Portrait (Atom) by Julie Dowling

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas, 120 x 100cm

In Guwanda Barna (Feeling Country), Dr Julie Dowling delivers a body of work that is as politically charged as it is emotionally resonant—a suite of paintings that do not ask for permission to speak, but demand to be heard. This is not art for the faint-hearted or the aesthetically complacent. It is art as testimony, art as resistance, art as sovereign declaration.

Dowling’s canvases are not mere representations of Aboriginal life—they are indictments of the colonial condition. They speak of exile not as metaphor but as lived reality: Aboriginal families uprooted, relocated, and forced to navigate the alienating geometry of urban Australia. Her own family’s memories—Nana labouring in the city, children marveling at the zoo, the spectacle of the Royal Show—are rendered with a painterly tenderness that belies their political weight. These are not quaint vignettes. They are the residue of dispossession.

Yet Dowling is no sentimentalist. Her work is steeped in the knowledge that Aboriginal people are not relics of a vanished past, but sovereign beings in a present that continues to deny their rights. Her use of red ochre, gifted by a Badimia elder, is not decorative—it is sacramental. It carries the weight of centuries, the trace of trade routes older than any European map, and the spiritual charge of Barna itself. Wherever these paintings travel, they do so as emissaries of country.

What makes Guwanda Barna so compelling is its refusal to flatter the viewer. Dowling does not pander to the liberal conscience or offer easy catharsis. She paints with the authority of someone who knows that truth-telling is not a curatorial trend but a cultural imperative. Her work is a rebuke to the aestheticisation of Aboriginal suffering and a challenge to the art world’s penchant for symbolic gestures over structural change.

This exhibition is not about reconciliation—it is about recognition. It is about sovereignty never ceded, about the dignity of living as a refugee in one’s own land, and about the quiet heroism of those who continue to care for country even as the machinery of modernity grinds on. Dowling honours the Whadjuk Noongar people not with platitudes but with genuine reverence, acknowledging their custodianship while asserting her own ancestral claim.

In an age of curated empathy and institutional amnesia, Guwanda Barna stands as a necessary provocation. It reminds us that art, at its best, is not a balm but a blade—cutting through the fog of denial, slicing open the myths of national innocence, and exposing the raw, unvarnished truth of history.

'Buyun gami' (blue grandmother)*Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas*

120 x 100cm

\$28,000

This portrait depicts my grandmother, Mollie, dressed in the blue suit she wore during the Second World War—a uniform of respectability, stitched not for pride but for survival. She wore it to be seen as acceptable in a society that demanded Aboriginal women erase themselves to be tolerated. It was assimilation by tailoring.

Surrounding her are symbols that feign the natural: bees, agate stones, roses, and wildflowers. But these are not drawn from country—they are stylised, synthetic, manufactured. Their prettiness is brittle. They evoke the decorative clutter of suburban artifice, not the organic truth of land. They speak to the dislocation of a Badimia woman, severed from her ancestral ground in the central west and re-rooted in a culture that prized mimicry over authenticity.

Above her, the golden sky blooms with lace chrysanthemums—ornate, intricate, and wholly unnatural. They hover like colonial ghosts, floral filigree masquerading as reverence. But this is not reverence. It is a visual taxonomy of displacement.

This painting is not nostalgic. It is forensic. It examines the aesthetic machinery of assimilation and the quiet violence of imposed civility. Mollie's gaze is not passive—it is diagnostic. She sees the performance, the cost, and the lie. And so must we.



'Nyiya mudu' (This mob)*Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas*

120 x 100cm

\$28,000

This painting presents a family quartet: my mother Ronnie on the left, my grandmother on the right, and in front, my twin sister Carol and me—Carol on the left, myself on the right. We are dressed identically, as twins often are, not for novelty but for cohesion. The dresses were handmade by our mother, stitched with care and matched by her own top. It was not fashion—it was pride, resourcefulness, and love rendered in fabric.

We were often looked at. Twins in public drew attention, and the gaze was always kind, but not always wanted. There's a difference between admiration and intrusion, and as children, we felt it. The smiles from strangers were gentle, but they reminded us that we were being watched. We stood still, posed, polite—aware of ourselves as image.

Behind us, the background is alive with meaning. The symbols are not decorative—they are cartographic. Goanna tracks, emu footprints, the marks of cultural burning, and stylised flowers embedded with agate stones and pearls. These are not embellishments. They are records of movement, survival, and cultural continuity. They speak to a deeper geography than the one we stood on.

My grandmother, dressed in white shoes and carrying a white handbag, was always precise in her presentation. Her appearance was a kind of armour—an assertion of dignity in a world that measured worth by polish. She understood the power of being well-dressed, and she wielded it with quiet authority.

This painting is not sentimental. It is composed. It examines the choreography of family, the tension between being seen and being known, and the quiet strength of women who held their ground with grace and intention.



Wilya (wi-la-ya) Moon*Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas*

120 x 100cm

\$28,000

As a Badimia artist, I speak from a legacy shaped by survival, resistance, and truth-telling. Around the 1870s, when Europeans first arrived on Badimia country, western clothing became the most valuable item a person could possess—not for comfort or status, but as a form of protection. If you were seen living traditionally, like our ancestors before contact, you risked being shot or poisoned on sight. Western clothing marked you as enslaved or 'owned' by one of the many squatters who had taken our land.

My apical ancestor, Melbin, wore western clothing—just like the nyarlu (woman) I've painted here. My great-great-grandmother was named after the town of Melbourne by her captor, who took her to England in the 1880s as a colonial trophy. These acts were not isolated. Across the continent, Aboriginal people were subjected to systems of unpaid labour, forced servitude, and domestic slavery—often under the guise of 'protection' or 'assimilation'. This history is rarely acknowledged in the national narrative, yet it shaped generations of our families.

In Yamatji country, massacres were widespread but never documented. No one was ever charged. No one was ever convicted. The power of white squatters was vast and unchecked. Despite this, the night sky continues to guide us. For Badimia people, the moon is a sacred calendar and spiritual compass. Western clothing, by contrast, is a mask—one that distances us from our deep connection to nature, to Country, and to the cosmos.

In this work, I've used found objects to represent the detritus of western capitalism and mass production. These fragments speak to the ongoing legacy of colonisation—what it discards, what it consumes, and what it tries to erase. Through art, I reclaim these materials and stories. I honour my ancestors. I make visible what was meant to be forgotten.



Warlandi (Rainbow)*Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas*

120 x 100cm

\$28,000

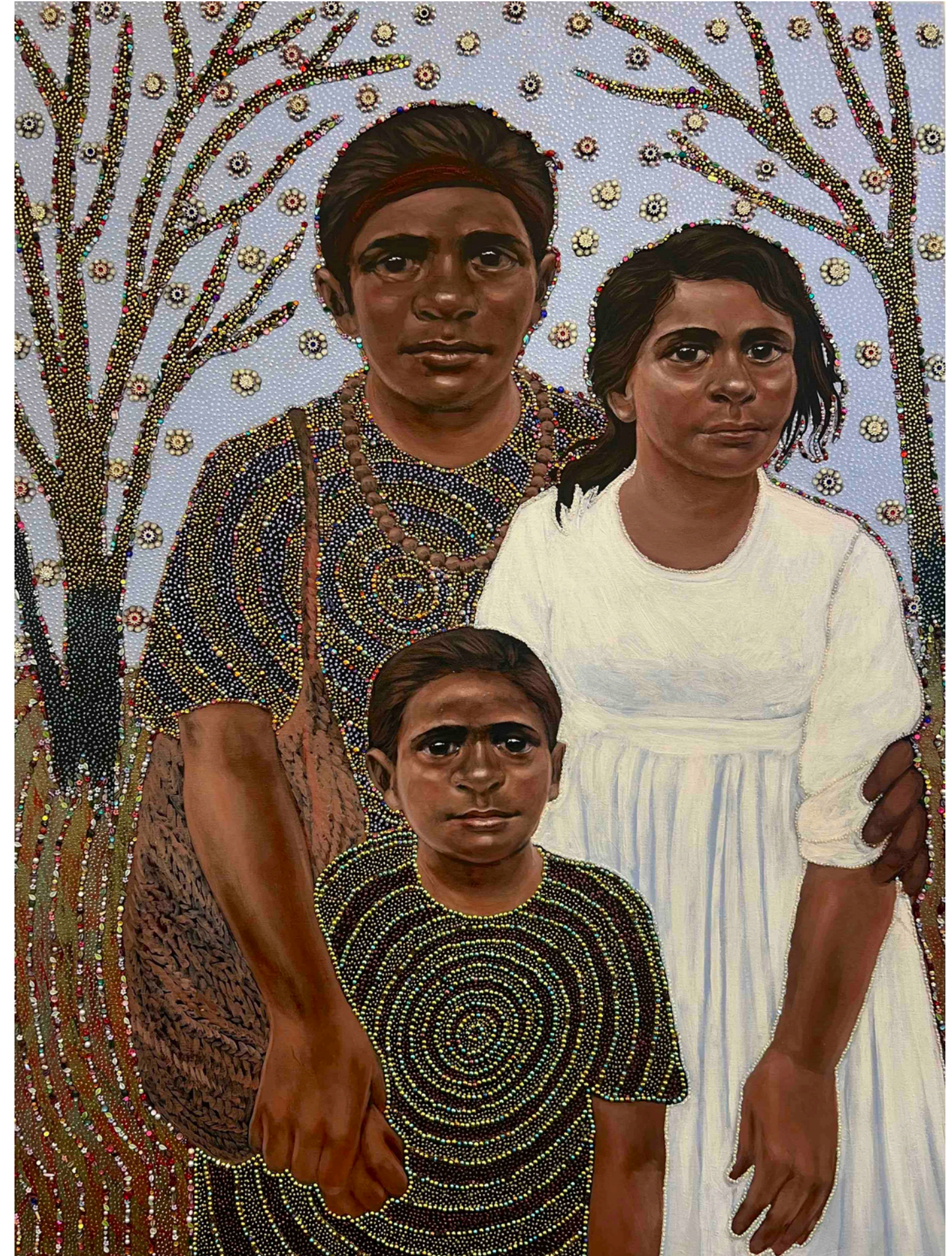
This painting honours the quiet but powerful resistance of Aboriginal families who reclaimed their right to live on their ancestral lands during the 1960s—a time when colonial systems were still trying to erase us. It speaks to the strength of our people who refused to be confined to missions, reserves, or policies of assimilation, and instead chose to return to Country, to culture, and to each other.

The family in this work—a mother, father, and young son—stand proudly on their sacred land. They are healthy, strong, and unbroken. The father holds his son's hand with tenderness and purpose, carrying a hand woven bag over his shoulder—a symbol of cultural knowledge and survival. The band around his head marks him as a man who has been through lore, carrying the responsibilities of ceremony and ancestral law that colonial systems tried to suppress.

The mother wears a white dress, not to reflect colonial ideals of purity, but to reclaim it—purity of spirit, of connection to Country, and of cultural integrity. Their direct gaze challenges the viewer: we are still here, still sovereign, and still connected to our lands despite generations of attempted dispossession.

The blue sky is scattered with flower-shaped glass beads, symbolic of the 1960s—a time of blossoming resistance and renewal. The trees beside them are not just part of the landscape; they are kin, witnesses to survival and resurgence.

This painting is a declaration: our return to Country was never just about geography. It was about reclaiming what was always ours—our land, our law, our families, and our future.



'Dyambadya' (Running together)*Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas*

120 x 100cm

\$28,000

This painting is a memory held in the heat of a Perth summer—1970, during the Royal Show. The kind of heat that clings to skin and settles into the folds of clothes. My mother, Ronnie, stands on the left. She was the eldest sister, raising me and my twin Carol on her own, with strength stitched into every gesture. Liz, the youngest, stands beside her, smiling into the lens of a street photographer who stopped them mid-step. That moment was never meant to be grand. It was just a pause in the day, a breath between show rides and dust.

Ronnie wore her best—simple, practical, dignified. Liz carried a tote with a green smiley face, bright against the sun-bleached ground. Behind them, the world swirled in colour: oranges, greens, reds, yellows. Not the colours of country, but the colours of spectacle. The kind that distracts and dazzles, but never quite settles.

Scattered through the painting are black pearl shell buttons and plastic trinkets—small things, ordinary things. But they carry weight. The buttons speak of tradition, of care passed down through hands. The trinkets, cheap and cheerful, remind us of what was offered in place of belonging.



Self-Portrait (Atom)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas

120 x 100cm

\$28,000

I painted Self-portrait (Atom) as a meditation on connection—on the truth that every living thing on this planet is made of the same atomic ingredients. Atoms are the building blocks of matter, and they don't discriminate. They don't recognise borders, race, or class. They simply exist, and in their existence, they bind us to one another and to country.

This portrait is not just of me—it's of everything I am part of. Even when I'm far from Badimia Barna, I feel it in my spirit, in my bones, in the very atoms that make me. Country isn't just a place; it's a presence. It lives in me, and I live in it.

When I painted this work, I was thinking about how racism, bigotry, colonialism, and prejudice are not just cruel—they're irrelevant. They miss the point entirely. Those who cling to these ideas are blind to the deeper truth: that we are all made of the same stuff. That sovereignty, spirit, and connection run deeper than any imposed system of division.

This portrait is a quiet rebellion. It's a refusal to be reduced, categorised, or erased. It's a reminder that I am country, I am community, I am history—and I am also stardust. The ochre I use, gifted by a Badimia Nyarlu madya (Badimia Woman Elder), carries the essence of Barna. It's been traded across this continent for centuries, and now it travels with my work, carrying country into every space it enters.

Self-portrait (Atom) is a statement of truth-telling. It's about seeing beyond the surface, beyond the imposed narratives, and recognising the sacred in the scientific. It's about honoring the interconnectedness of all life and stand firm in the knowledge that I belong—everywhere and always.



'Bulidya' (These two)*Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas*

100 x 120cm

\$28,000

This painting captures a moment at the Perth Zoo in the early 1970s. Two children stand side by side, dressed in matching strawberry shortcake dresses sewn by their mother, Ronnie—handmade garments with daisies stitched at the hem, a quiet act of care in a world that rarely offered it. The girls hold their Christmas dolls, posed near the gibbons enclosure, where the animals swung freely on ropes strung between palm trees. The enclosure was an island, and in many ways, so were we.

I am on the left. Carol is on the right. We were twins, and in public, that made us a spectacle. People stared. They commented. They pointed. And while Carol smiled through it, I often felt the weight of those gazes—embarrassed, exposed, uncertain of what made us so different. The attention was never neutral. It was a kind of social theatre, and we were cast without consent.

The background is not decorative. It's symbolic. The circular forms behind us represent waterholes—sites of gathering, memory, and cultural continuity. They stand in contrast to the artificial setting of the zoo, where nature is curated and performance is expected. The iconography is deliberate: it speaks to the tension between being observed and being understood.

This painting is not nostalgic. It is diagnostic. It examines the way visibility can be both a gift and a burden, especially for Aboriginal children in a society that treats difference as novelty. It is a portrait of quiet resistance, stitched into fabric, held in posture, and carried in the gaze of a child who knew she was being watched.



Warda (Far Away)*Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas*

100 x 120cm

\$28,000

This painting is deeply personal to me. It honours the quiet strength of Aboriginal families during World War I, especially the men who enlisted despite being told they didn't belong. I imagined an elder woman standing with her three grown children—two daughters and a son—just moments before he boards a ship bound for war.

The brother wears his uniform with pride, but his face carries the weight of uncertainty. He's hopeful that the army will let him see the world and treat him as an equal, even if only for a moment. Like many Aboriginal men of that era, he's stepping into a system that barely recognised his humanity, yet he carries the hope that his service might change something—for himself, for his family, for his people.

The women wear clothing from the early 1900s, with skirts patterned in symbols of connected waterholes. These represent our ties to Country and each other—unbroken, even in times of separation. Around the painting, I've placed pearl shell buttons to mark the era and to honour the beauty and resilience of our cultural materials.

The sunset glow is intentional. It's a moment of warmth before the unknown. It's the light of love, of farewell, and of hope.

This work is for all the Aboriginal families who stood together in strength, even when the world tried to pull them apart.



Mudyi (Spouse)*Acrylic, red ochre, agate & mixed media on canvas*

100 x 120cm

\$28,000

As I painted this scene, I imagined a young married Aboriginal couple experiencing the Perth Royal Show in the 1970s. They sit together, side by side, on a wooden bench, watching the vibrant crowds pass by with a direct gaze. The husband, with his long hair is dressed in modern clothes. His young wife is also in her best dress as she holds onto her husbands arm.

In this painting, I aimed to capture not only the couple's love and pride but also the sense of wonder and excitement that comes with experiencing something new and significant. The Perth Royal Show, with its bustling atmosphere and diverse attractions, serves as the perfect backdrop for this moment of joy and togetherness.

This scene is particularly poignant because attending the Perth Royal Show was not a common experience for Aboriginal people. From 1927 to 1954, Aboriginal people were restricted from entering the City of Perth, including events like the Perth Royal Show, under the Aborigines Act 1905 (WA). This restriction was lifted in 1954, allowing Aboriginal people to attend such events without needing a permit. This painting captures the joy and significance of this newfound freedom and the couple's first experience of the show.

The canvas is decorated with wooden butterflies and metal charms, capturing the essence of the hippy era. These elements add a touch of whimsy and nostalgia, highlighting the couple's connection to the cultural movements of the time. The butterflies symbolize transformation and freedom, while the charms represent the unique and eclectic spirit of the 1970s.



Walarda (Sandalwood Trees)*Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas*

100 x 120cm

\$28,000

This painting honours the rare and sacred walarda (native sandalwood trees) of Badimia country in the central west of Western Australia. Once abundant, these trees are now endangered—threatened by decades of ecological damage, overharvesting, and land clearing. Their decline is not just environmental; it is deeply cultural. For Badimia people, the absence of walarda is felt in the land itself. These trees are intimately connected to water sources in our semi-arid landscape. Without them, the balance of Country is disturbed. The drying of waterholes is not just a climate issue—it is a spiritual and ancestral one.

In this work, I depict a family of five—mum, dad, and three children—returning to Country. For the younger children, this is their first time on barna (ancestral land). Their bodies carry symbols of gabi dhaa (waterholes), representing both physical and spiritual nourishment. Behind them stand the copper-coloured trunks of a sandalwood grove, found on Ninghan Station along the Great Northern Highway, leading toward my ancestral home.

This painting is a story of reconnection. It speaks to the resilience of Badimia families and the urgent need to protect what remains. The walarda trees are more than botanical—they are guardians of water, memory, and life. Through this work, I call attention to the fragility of our ecosystems and the strength of our cultural ties. We return not just to land, but to knowledge, to healing, and to truth.



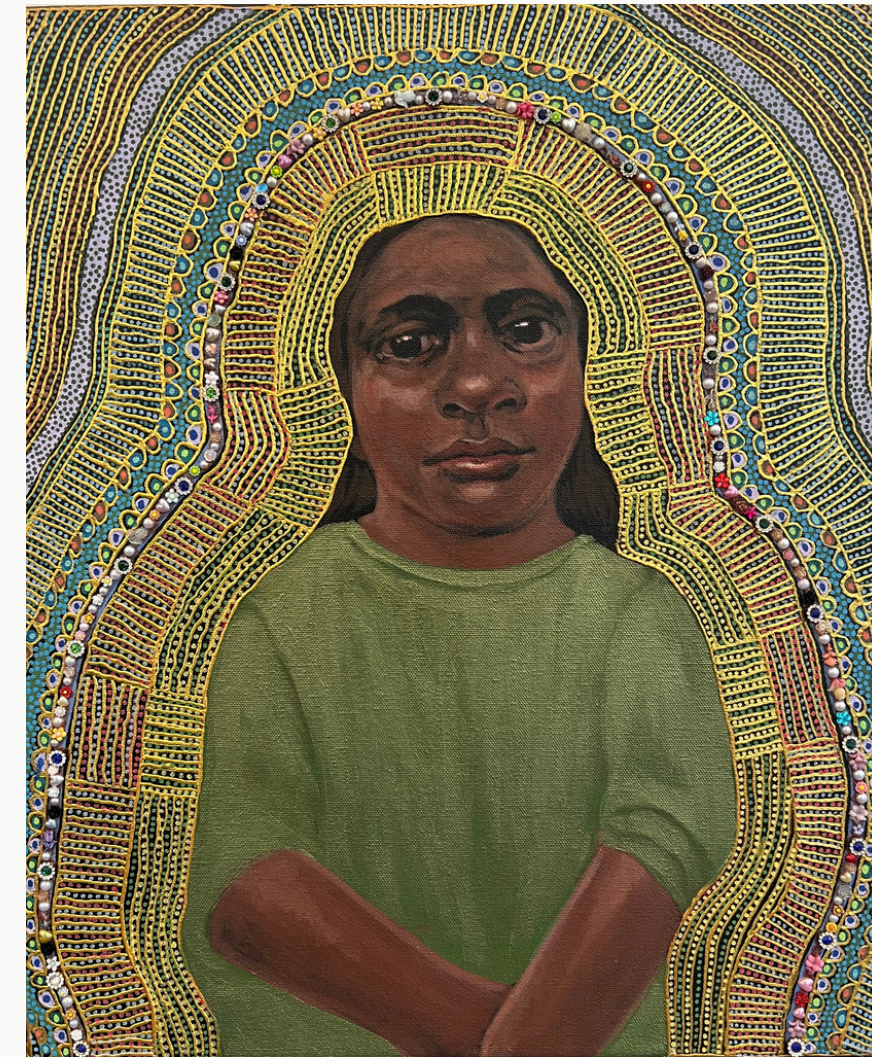


Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Gurriya' (One)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$7950

This painting, Gurriya—"One" in Badimia language—is a portrait of absence rendered with the gravity of iconography. The figure stands frontal, composed, and quiet. There is no theatricality in the pose, no sentimentality in the gaze. It is the stillness of someone remembered but not known.

The child is surrounded by a river—an encircling form that is both boundary and memory. It does not flow naturally; it holds. Within it are trinkets, flowers, diamonds, and pearls—objects of beauty, yes, but also of displacement. These are not heirlooms. They are fragments. They speak to what remains when family is lost and only the land is remembered.



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Urnda' (Shield)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$7950

This painting, Urnda—"Shield" in Badimia language—is part of the Icon to a Stolen Child series. The figure stands frontal and composed, surrounded by a radiant field of concentric lines and intricate patterning. There is no theatricality in the pose, no sentimentality in the gaze. The woven fibres encircling the figure act as a shield—not of steel, but of culture. They are defensive, not decorative, speaking to the quiet strength of traditions that endure despite systemic erasure. The shield is a boundary, a protection, a statement of survival.



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Irra' (Language)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$7950

Icon to a Stolen Child: Irra (Language) is about what remains when everything else has been stripped away. I painted this child to speak to the fractured memory of language—how, for many First Nations children who were stolen, broken words are all that's left to trace their way back home. In this work, roads loop back into her body. They represent different languages—Badimia among them—all connecting across Australia. These aren't just pathways. They're lifelines. They show how language, even when fragmented, still finds its way back to the speaker.

Our languages were targeted. In institutions, children were punished for speaking them. They were taken from their mothers, their families, and then from their tongues. Behind her are waterholes and trees—symbols of family, of kinship, of what was severed but not forgotten.



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Milyabaya' (Getting soft)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$7950

Icon to a Stolen Child: Milyabaya (Getting Soft) is a tongue-in-cheek response to the idea that stolen children were expected to be stoic—hardened by institutional life, silent in the face of loss. I painted this girl smiling. Not because everything's fine, but because hope is an act of resistance. Her optimism isn't naïve. It's deliberate. She's not accepting the hard reality handed to her—she's reshaping it.

Behind her is a wall of colour, like a threshold. It suggests movement, change, maybe even a new beginning. Around her head I placed plastic trinkets and paste jewellery. They're cheap, mass-produced, and chosen for that reason. They mimic the halo of religious icons, but here they speak to survival with whatever's left. Milyabaya isn't about softening in defeat—it's about refusing to be hardened beyond recognition.



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Dyina' (Footprint)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$7950

Icon to a Stolen Child: Dyina (Footprint) is a portrait of a girl who remembers only fragments—just the emu and goanna tracks. She was taken too young to recall the faces of her family, but the land left its mark. Those animal tracks are not symbols of innocence. They are the last traces of connection, the footprints of memory that survived removal. I placed them around her head deliberately—not as decoration, but as evidence. She stands frontal, solemn, and composed. Her gaze is quiet, but it holds.



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Mirdandyi' (Summer)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$7950

I called this painting Icon to a Stolen Child: Mirdandyi (Summer) because it speaks to a kind of comfort found in heat. The girl I painted feels calm in the summer sun. That natural intake of vitamin D—it's more than physical. It regulates her, grounds her. She stands facing forward, composed. There's no drama in her expression. She's simply present.

Around her, I placed freshwater pearl shell, diamonds, and plastic trinkets. These aren't just embellishments—they're a statement. They reference icons as portable wealth, and they play with the language of Christian imagery. The halo effect is intentional, but not devotional.



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Bandu' (Thorn)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$7950

Icon to a Stolen Child: Bandu (Thorn) is about strength—not the kind that's celebrated, but the kind that's endured. I painted this child with a weary look, not because she's defeated, but because she's lived through what most people choose not to see. Her caution is earned. Her experience is written in the way she holds herself, in the way she meets the viewer's gaze.

The title Bandu refers to the thorn—a small, sharp truth hidden beneath beauty. She's like that. Not fragile, not soft, but shaped by pressure. The halo around her head is made of paste jewellery and plastic trinkets. They're not valuable, but they're deliberate. They mimic reverence while pointing to what was denied. This icon doesn't ask for sympathy. It stands as a record of resilience, of a child who learned early that survival is its own kind of strength.



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Dyula' (tree root)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$7950

Icon to a Stolen Child: Dyula (Tree Root) is about finding strength in what doesn't speak but still holds you. I painted this child surrounded by the quiet presence of trees—not as scenery, but as refuge. When everything around her said she didn't belong, nature didn't argue. It just stood there. The trees became a kind of truth. Not soft, not sentimental—just constant.

The title Dyula refers to the root, the part that's hidden but essential. That's how I see this child's connection to Country. It's not always visible, but it's there, anchoring her. The forces around her—institutions, systems, silence—tried to tell her she was "less than." But the trees didn't. They offered shade, memory, and something close to healing. This icon isn't about escape. It's about endurance. She stands in the centre of it, held by what can't be taken.



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Gadyamurni' (Daughter)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$7950

I called this painting Gadyamurni, which means “Daughter” in Badimia. It’s about a child who remembers the trees—just the trees. Not their names, not their uses, just the way they stood around her before she was taken. That memory is faint, but it’s hers. The symbols of those trees are behind her now, not as decoration, but as evidence of what she once knew.

She also remembers being someone’s daughter. That word—Gadyamurni—is all that’s left of that connection. Around her I’ve placed paste glass jewellery and plastic trinkets. They’re cheap, mass-produced, and deliberately chosen. Nothing of value was left for her, so I’ve used what remains.



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Mandala' (Cloud)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$7950

Icon to a Stolen Child: Mandala (Cloud) is about a child whose memories have thinned to vapour. She can hardly recall her life before she was taken—just fragments, impressions, nothing fixed. I painted her surrounded by moon stones and plastic trinkets. These objects aren’t precious, but they speak to what’s left behind when value is stripped away. They’re part of the visual language I use to mark what was lost and what remains.

The symbols around her—waterholes, trees, the moon—aren’t literal. They represent the intangible dreams of her early life. They’re the pieces of Country that linger in the mind even when everything else is gone.

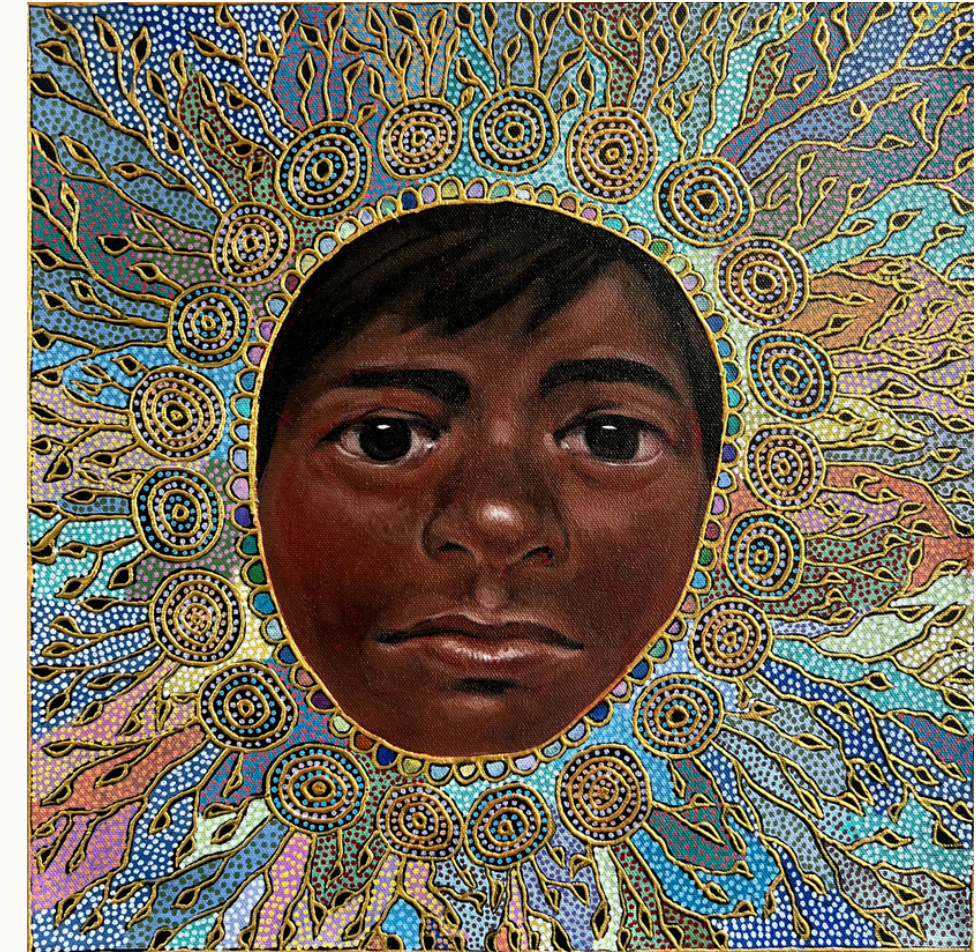


Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Gadya' (Offspring)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 40 x 40cm | \$5500

Icon to a Stolen Child: Gadya (Offspring) is about memory that refuses to fade. I painted this young girl as someone who remembers being part of a big family—mother, father, siblings—all swimming together in the ocean. She remembers the feeling of being free, of laughing in salt water, of belonging. That memory is sharp. It's what she holds onto.

Around her head I placed symbols of waterholes, rock pools, pearls, and trinkets. They swirl like currents, marking her connection to the ocean and to the people she was taken from. This is about the ache of separation and the quiet hope of return. She stands in the centre of that longing, still remembering, still waiting.



Icon to a Stolen Child: Nhuga (entering, going inside)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 45 x 55cm | \$5500

Nhuga means “entering” or “going inside” in Badimia. I painted this icon to honour the healing journey of those who were stolen and who found ways to begin returning to culture. The child in this painting carries fragmented knowledge—bits of language, memory, and story—but she's using what she has to repair the damage done.

The symbols of waterholes and kurrajong trees come from Badimia country. They represent nourishment, medicine, and connection to land. Traditional bush foods and healing practices are part of that return. They're not just remedies—they're a way back in. This painting marks the moment when someone chooses to step inside again, to reconnect with what was nearly lost. It's not a full return, but it's a beginning.

**Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Yaragula' (Dreaming)**

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 40 x 40cm | \$5500

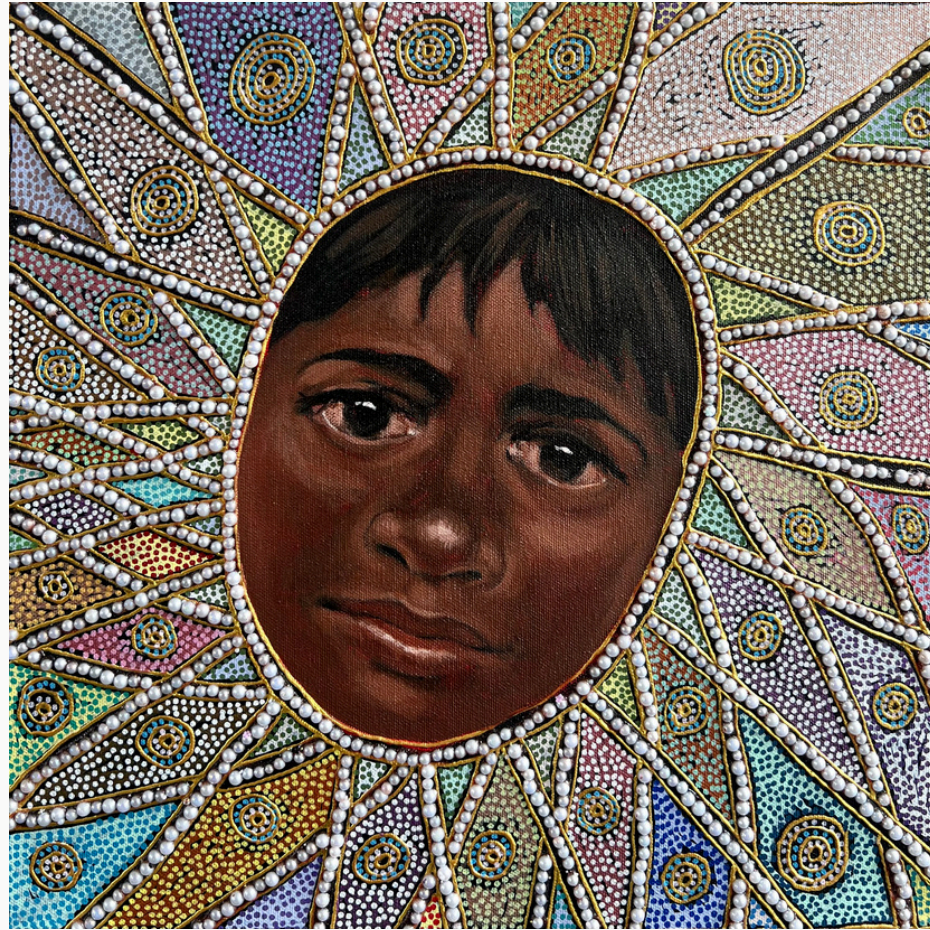
Icon to a Stolen Child: Yaragula (Dreaming) is about the dreams that come when you've been taken too young to remember who you belonged to. I painted this woman as someone who was stolen as a child and still hasn't found her way home. At night, she dreams of trees—but they're not just trees. They're the grown-ups she was taken from. In her mind, they stand tall, silent, watching.

**Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Gulgarda' (Forgetting)**

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 40 x 40cm | \$5500

Icon to a Stolen Child: Gulgarda (Forgetting) is about the disorientation that comes after being taken. I painted this child as someone removed from her loving family, then flooded with circles of information that never connected. Names, dates, files, case numbers—none of it made sense. It didn't help her remember. It only deepened the confusion.

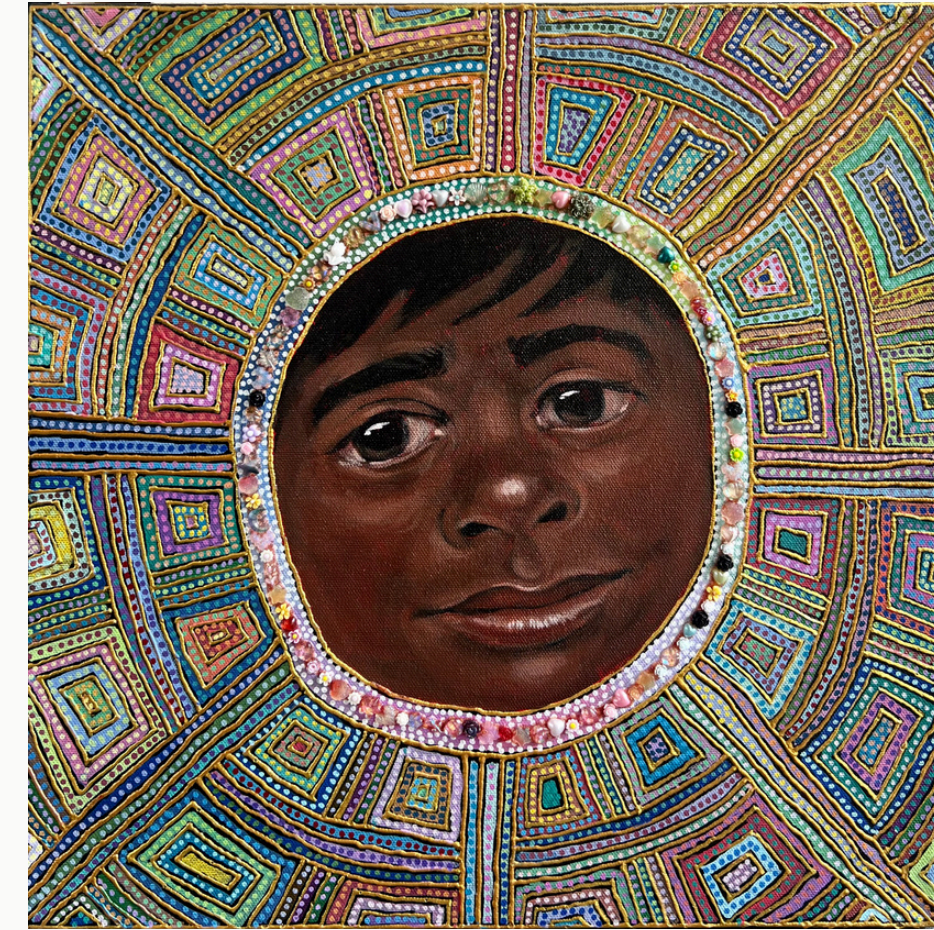
The gold lacework surrounding her head isn't decorative. It's the spine of a reptile, looping endlessly around her mind. It's a symbol of how memory twists when it's forced to survive without context. The loops don't resolve. They just circle. That fragmentation has affected her deeply—emotionally, mentally, spiritually. Gulgarda isn't about forgetting as release. It's about forgetting as damage. She stands in the centre of that loop, trying to hold onto something real.

**Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Bulamarda' (Short)**

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 40 x 40cm | \$5500

Bulamarda means “short” in Badimia. I painted this child to show how young she was when she was taken—too small to understand why, too far from home to find her way back. She was removed from Badimia country and sent to Cossack, a town tied to the early pearling industry in WA. That move left her disoriented, cut off from language, family, and place.

The pearls around her face are cross-hatched to resemble fishing nets from Broome. They speak to the industry that surrounded her, and the systems that caught her up in it. She looks out with confusion, trying to make sense of a world that never explained itself. This painting holds that moment—when a child is taken so young that even memory feels borrowed.

**Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Dhadhadya' (Strong)**

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 40 x 40cm | \$5500

Icon to a Stolen Child: Dhadhadya (Strong) is about the performance of survival. I painted this girl to show what our children had to do to stay safe—pretend to be fine, to fit in, to keep quiet. She was placed in foster care, sent into domestic service, dropped into suburbia like she was meant to belong there. But she didn't. She learned to read the streets, the houses, the rules. The grids around her head map that terrain—the criss-cross of suburban streets she had to navigate without a guide.



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Balndi' (Sweet)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 40 x 50cm | \$6500



Icon to a Stolen Child: 'Idya' (Taking)

Acrylic, red ochre & mixed media on canvas | 40 x 50cm | \$6500

JULIE DOWLING

October 16 - November 9 2025



Gallows Gallery Director: Kathryn Stafford

Gallery Hours: Tues - Thurs 10am - 4.30pm | Friday 10am - 3pm

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