



Family photo: Julie's mother Veronica, Aunt Patricia and Tiger Moth Coorow, 1959



Family photo: Julie's mother Veronica, Aunty Patricia, Uncle Robert and Aunt Barbara, outside Mary Latham's (Granny) bedroom, Coorow 1958.



Julie Dowling, 2008

Cover image depicts the path of the Beemara creation serpent, Coodingnow

All images: Julie Dowling, *Oottheroongoo (Your Country)*, 2008 (DVD stills)
Courtesy of the artist and Brigitte Braun Gallery, Melbourne

Digeridoo performed in *Oottheroongoo (Your Country)*
by Jarra, Karak I & Karak II, 2008

Julie Dowling was born in Perth in 1969. She is a Badimaya woman and currently lives and works in Perth. Dowling graduated from the Claremont School of Art in 1989 and Curtin University in 1992. She has exhibited widely in both Australia and overseas and has been the recipient of several art awards including the *Mandorla Award for Religious Art* (2001). Dowling has held numerous solo exhibitions including *Strange Fruit: Testimony and Memory in Julie Dowling's portraits*, at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, (2007); *Contrary Marban (Magic)*, Caruana Reid, Sydney (2006); *Nidja Widi (This is wild)* works on paper, Brigitte Braun Art Dealer, Melbourne (2006); *Widi Boornoo (Wild Message)*, fortyfivedownstairs, Melbourne (2005) and *Winyarn Budjarri*, fortyfivedownstairs, Melbourne (2005). She has also participated in various group exhibitions including *Private Treaty Sullivan + Strumpf* (2008); *Culture Warriors*, inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007); *Prism-Contemporary Australian Art*, Bridgestone Museum of Art, Japan (2006); *Stories: Country Spirit Knowledge & Politics*, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Booragul, NSW (2006) and *Dreaming their Way*, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington USA (2006). Dowling's works are held in most of the key collections around the country.

The artist would like to thank her sister Carol Dowling for her contribution to this project and her invaluable ongoing support. She would also like to thank Carol's child James, their mother Veronica and grandmother Mollie Dowling, Bev Slater and family, Robert Eggington and family.

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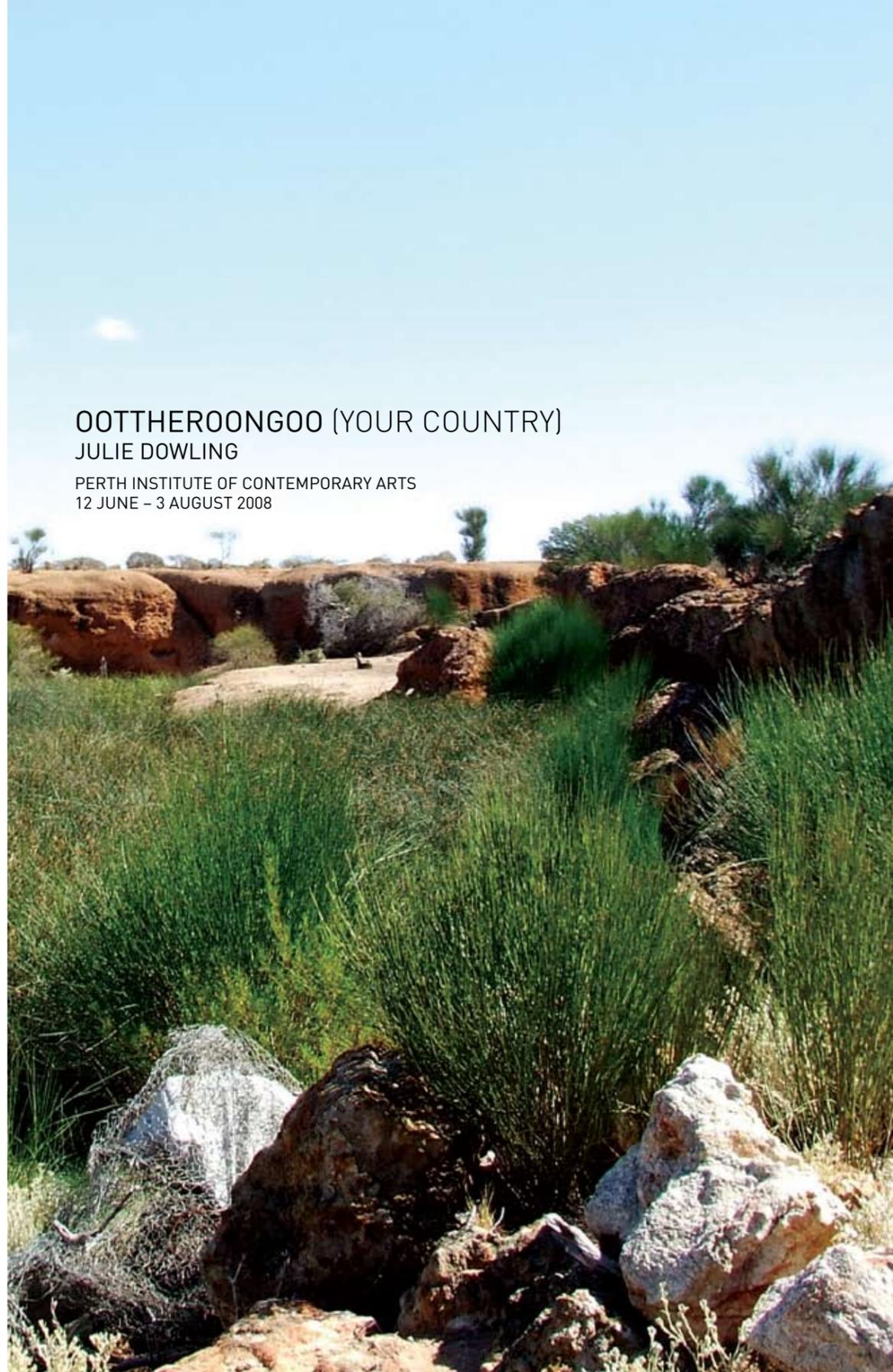
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OOTTHEROONGOO (YOUR COUNTRY) JULIE DOWLING

PERTH INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS
12 JUNE - 3 AUGUST 2008





Julie Dowling, *Mount Gibson* 2005
acrylic on canvas (DVD still)

Alla Na Oottheroongoo! (That Very Thing is Your Country!)

In 2005, my twin sister, Julie Dowling was the recipient of the Australia Council Fellowship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts. This prestigious Fellowship is presented to a national calibre Aboriginal artist each year. Julie planned to undertake a two-year long project documenting her journey to ancestral country through painting and new media. This complex and layered media work, titled *Oottheroongoo (Your Country)*, is one of the significant outcomes of this major personal, cultural and historic project.

Oottheroongoo is devised to be overwhelming. The visuals and sounds used in the work combine to express the transformative enormity of the experience of Julie's return to our family's ancestral country. Our country is called Coodingnow and is located in the Central West of Western Australia. Coodingnow is found to the north east of Lake Moore and is not far from the small town of Paynes Find. Our people are called Badimaya. Badimaya territory extends westward as far as Dongara and as far north as Mount Magnet. This place is significant to our family because our great great-grandmother, Melbin, was the first person to have contact with white people in our family and she is buried on Coodingnow in an unmarked grave. Her spirit rests with generations of our ancestors also buried at this place.

It is very emotional for us to talk about our country because our grandmother, Mollie, was taken away by her white father and placed into Saint Joseph's orphanage in Wembley. She was 12 years old at the time, and her younger sister Dot, was only 10. Their mother, our great-grandmother, Mary, was illiterate and was totally disempowered and unable to intervene. She visited her daughters at the orphanage once over the next 10 years. Our grandmother still weeps at missing her mother. Nana is 90 years old this year. From the time she was 12, until she was 21, our grandmother worked in the orphanage washroom along with 9 other girls of 'mixed blood'. They did not improve her education past her original grade 6 level. The orphanage made her ashamed to be Badimaya and taught her that it was better to pass as white. This desire to push aside what it was to be Badimaya was passed to her children and to her grandchildren. Julie and I were the first people in our family to ask questions and to push against such assimilationist ideology. We are now proud Badimaya women working to decolonise our family and to strengthen our language and culture for future generations to come.

This media work is an expression of Julie's strength as a Badimaya woman who respects her country, knows her family's story and lore, and practices her language. The visual component includes images from the bush near where we live in Maddington along the Stirling Range escarpment, Coodingnow, Wydgee Station, Ninghan Station, with self portraits of Julie and images of my child James. The soundscape made for this work includes bird song from the bush near Maddington and Ninghan Station. It also features James repeating Noongar and Badimaya words, tapping sticks, boomerangs struck together, and colonial era music. The music used in this installation includes pieces by Noongar digeridoo player Jarra about the sacred *Karak* or red-tailed black cockatoo. Additional music was compiled by Julie and I to represent the emotional journey back home. The combination of sound and visuals is organised to retell a journey from Noongar country where we were raised, to our Badimaya ancestral country, before returning to Noongar country where we continue to live. The emphasis is upon evoking a sense of wonderment, mourning, and ultimately transformation.

Julie's first move into multi-media art has been influenced by other leading Aboriginal artists such as Leah King Smith, Destiny Deacon, Rea, and Michael Riley. The soundscape has been influenced by Angelo Fraietta. Julie has attempted to marry her painting practice of portraits and landscapes with digital photography. Several of these photographs have previously been used as research material and have influenced the portraits she has produced.



Coodingnow (ceremonial meeting place)

Wonderment

When we returned to country we gained a deeper and richer perspective on the contemporary realities for Badimaya people. Surprisingly, we discovered that the Native title process undertaken by the Badimaya nation had not been successful. Two applications by the Badimaya nation were rejected because of lack of evidence of continual connection to country. Coodingnow is now an outstation for a larger sheep station called Poolagaroo which has meant the process of returning to country was dependent upon gaining permission from property owners. These leaseholders had a limited knowledge of Aboriginal people. Our desire to maintain contact with country was dependent upon the relationship they had already developed with the Badimaya family called Clinch. The Clinch family had previously held Coodingnow but due to financial pressures sold the property in 1960. This did not mean that traditional connection had ceased. This country is rich in Badimaya lore and much of its landscape still bears the mark of generations of community gatherings and ceremonies.



Carol's child James

Behind the current homestead on Coodingnow is a natural spring and waterway cut out of the rich red earth. Along its borders are breakaways formed in the Dreamtime by the Beemara, the creation serpent. The sacred Beemara still lives at the bottom of the fresh water spring and you must pay your respects to him before you enter his country. By scattering the earth upon the water, you appease the spirit of this sacred creator. In early 2006, Julie, our Aunt Barbara, my four year old child James and I were shown how this ceremony is performed by Beverley (Bev) Slater (nee Clinch). Along with her elders, Aunt Elvie Clinch and Uncle Owen Clinch, we were shown gravesites, ceremonial sites and more sources of water. We shared and confirmed our family stories with theirs, namely, that Coodingnow was a significant meeting place for tribes from far and wide. Noongars from the South-West, Wongis from Kalgoorlie, Amangu from Geraldton and local Badimaya all gathered here to trade goods, for exhibition fighting and marriage arrangements. What remained is a very large area of flattened ground devoid of scrub. Bev told us that around its circumference white farmers have found artefacts such as grinding stones and spear heads scattered far into the bush. Hundreds of people would gather at Coodingnow from generation to generation. Our ancestors gathered there too, and walking upon that earth immediately gave us all a sense of being home.

We stayed at Ninghan station which is now owned by Leah and Don Bell. Leah was once a Clinch and she gladly pulled out boxes and boxes of photographs helping us trace our ancestors. We found our great grandmother's brother, Sam Winmar who was old and missing an eye. We saw female relatives who had married into the Clinch family and realised that the Clinch mob were our mob too. We recounted stories about how our grandmother would travel with her mother and younger sister to Ninghan station back in the 1920s to visit relatives confirming that one of the key matriarchs of the Clinch family was sister to our great grandmother.

My sister, our Aunt, my son and I traveled to a sacred women's site known as Wardagga rock. The story of this place has been passed down to us through generations and is very important. Visiting this place was a very moving experience because it was where generations of women gave birth to their babies. We had never seen this place and had only ever known about it through spoken stories passed down through our family. Before us was an impressive limestone range pitted with natural caves trickling with water – a perfect birthing place. Badimaya still camp here every year hunting *bungarra* (goanna) and *yowerda* (kangaroo). We were invited to return again, and to call this place, our place too.

I am now writing my doctorate in Social Sciences at Curtin University. My research is about the line of four generations of women in my family. I am investigating how stories of connection to country have been passed down and how our Badimaya identity was pulled away from us. The stories of Melbin, her daughter Mary, my grandmother Mollie and my own mother, Veronica, all demonstrate how the often callous and systematic government and religious interventions shaped their lives. My story is a continuation of their stories. What was once spoken, will now be written down. What was once silenced, will be given a voice. *Alla na oottheroongoo!* That very thing is your country! *Alla na waw-wooloo!* That very thing is medicine/magic!

Carol Dowling
2008