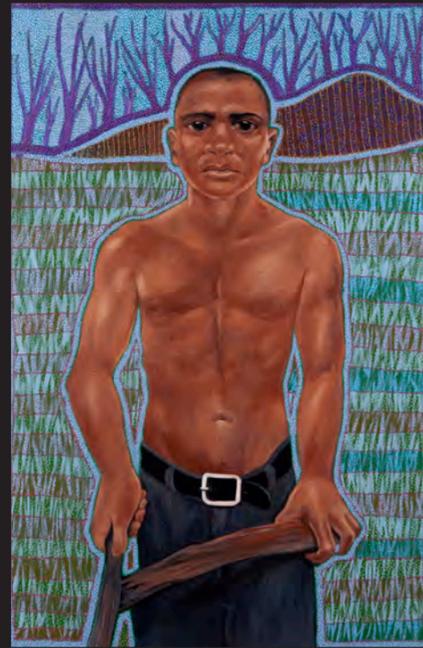




The machine 2010 160x160cm



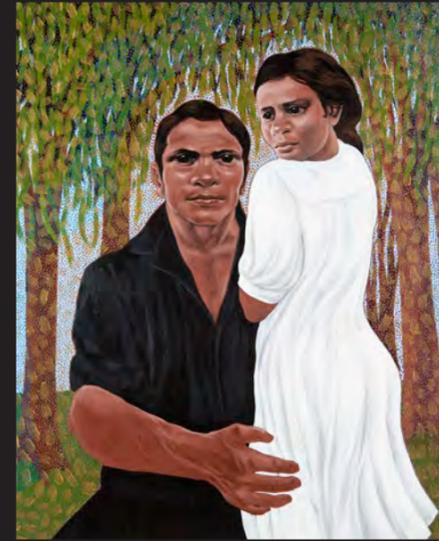
The wood cutter 2010 120x80cm



The fruit picker 2010 120x80cm



To the front 2010 110x90cm



The giant 2010 110x90cm



The king 2010 91x76cm



A simple lad 2010 100x60cm



Shamrock 2010 121x151cm

Julie Dowling  
Kuljak Djilba  
*(Black Swan in September)*

Exhibition  
31 July–21 August 2010  
Wednesday–Saturday  
1–4pm and by appointment  
BRIGITTE BRAUN GALLERY



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4 White Street Windsor 3181 Melbourne Australia  
P +613 9521 2324 M +61 417 184 260  
artplace@iinet.net.au www.artplace.com.au

## Wandhana Wonga Warnda (The Voice of Returned Spirits)

By Carol Dowling  
Twin sister to the Artist

Owning your own home was a fantasy that our family believed never would happen. Julie and I were raised as 'south of the river' girls where we were always moving from one state housing flat to another and always being inspected by government officials. Yet, exactly 10 years ago, after getting an ATSI loan, we moved into our three bedroom fibro palace in Maddington. Our home is a noisy and warm place with Mum, Julie and me raising my two young Noongar foster sons. We have a trio of camp dogs, one cat, three goldfish and one crazy crab. It is a home filled with artworks, music and toys.

Surrounding our house is a suburb filled with low income families. A large majority are Noongars families who we have come to know and work with. They have named our household "the vortex" simply because time passes so quickly as we discuss community politics, produce artworks or watch our kids play together. For some time many of these 'yarns' centre around what Julie will do for her future exhibitions. That is why "Black Swan in September" was developed following discussion with the Noongar community members we have come to love and respect. Using oral histories and archive research, Julie has developed a show that makes a statement about the large number of Aboriginal people living in and around urban centers such as Perth. Most live in state housing with low incomes. There is overcrowding created from rapid changes to their families caused by premature death, high imprisonment and drug dependency. Many of our friends are

foster parents or grandparents who have taken on kids who have nowhere else to go. Some are single mums struggling to provide for their little ones.

However, what is revealing is when you discuss their family's connection to Maddington and they talk about the 'early days' of this suburb. Almost like ghosts haunting the present, these stories reveal much about how random and uncertain their ancestors lives must have been after Wudjulas (white people) came to this place. Their ancestors died from acts of violence, many more were killed from contracting Western diseases. The resistance they made to invasion included burning crops and houses and even killing the settlers with spears. As we walked the country with many of our Noongar mates, they talked about the places where children were born and where the old people were buried. What is amazing is that new houses are being built around them as they keep these stories alive. These stories are for anyone who cares to listen but mostly these are a fragile and precious legacy for the next generation of Noongars. Part of this story now is how Noongars learnt to live within a white world last century. The paintings in this exhibition show these stories of engagement as a testimony of how important it is to get to know the Aboriginal sense of place up to the present.

The painting entitled "The Giant" is a story shared to us by Noongar Elder, Sharon Yarren. She described how one Noongar man, who worked during the time of land clearing in Maddington, was very tall, quiet and good-looking. Whenever there were dances put on for young Noongars, he was known to refuse the many girls who asked him to go on the dance floor. He was apparently keeping himself for one particular girl who worked away on

a station. She was known to practically ignore him whenever she was in town. The story goes that he had to work very hard to gain her confidence in him and they eventually married.

Another significant work is also about marriage. Entitled simply, "Love" is about how Noongars in Maddington adopted the western fashion of a white wedding mostly during the 1940s and 50s. This period was known for its heavily assimilationist push to make Aboriginal people live like white people. However, this is primarily about the bond of love between two people despite the external social pressures they experienced. This could also be seen in the large work entitled "The Machine" set in the period of industrialization of Maddington during the 1920's and 30's. It is set during the time when the use of blacksmith shops was disappearing due to the introduction of automobiles. The tension in the forge can be seen with the Wudjula (non-Aboriginal) proprietor looking at his business disappearing before his eyes. The majority of his workers were Noongar who were not paid as much as their non-Aboriginal colleagues. Julie wanted to depict these men as the human components of a large industrial machine and the way that industry utilized their physical strength.

Another industry that Maddington is known for is the extensive poultry farms employing Noongars and migrants especially following World War Two. The work named "The King" is a play on words surround the small Noongar boy holding a large healthy rooster. Julie toyed with the work 'paltry' compared to 'poultry' which literally means something not worth considering and connotes the way the boy's work was considered by the owner of the farm. This work is primarily about the inequality of labour conditions for many Aboriginal

children working in such industries. They were often paid with eggs or a chicken to feed their families. There are still poultry farms in Maddington up to the present. Other works in the exhibition also talk about this inequality especially when working in orchards and the clearing of land.

The legacy of this economic inequality can be seen in Western Australia today. Aboriginal people represent between 3 and 4 percent of the population and yet make up more than 42 percent of prisoners in custody. This is even worse for Aboriginal youth. In any of the detention centres throughout the state tonight, about 85 percent of the inmates will be Aboriginal. That is 50 times the rate for non-Aboriginal youth nationally. More recently, His Honour Wayne Martin, the Chief Justice of the WA Supreme Court reflected on the very high rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal women in Western Australia stating it "may well be the highest in the world". Julie's exhibition is about the impact of such a reality and the unpredictable consequences of such high incarceration rates.

For example, Julie and I personally know many Aboriginal people working as police aids. These strong community minded people see the trajectory of disadvantage for our younger generations. The police are often called anonymously to investigate disturbances at overcrowded houses. The reality is that many Noongar Grandmothers and Grandfathers provide care for up to eight or nine children at a time. Especially when their parents are inside prison or drug dependent, these homes are usually inadequately suitable to their needs. What the general public do not realize is that if the police are called out more than three times to these homes, these grandparents are reported to the state housing department. The result is eviction leaving

these already fragile families homeless and vulnerable children are often removed by the Department of Child Protection. That is why Maddington's main office of the Department of Child Protection has the largest number of Aboriginal children taken into state care. Our communities must be given the power to bring about change from within.

Noongars living in Maddington experience high levels of social disadvantage, with low educational achievement. If their reality is to change, then like many other urbanised Aboriginal people throughout Australia, we must have self-determination and human rights. Australia must comply with and effectively implement all their obligations as they apply to indigenous people under the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous peoples. In 2009, the Australian government decided to endorse this landmark declaration at the United Nations. Aboriginal people, no matter where we live in Australia, are equal to all other peoples, and at the same time have the right to be recognised as different, to consider ourselves different, and to be respected as such. "Black Swan in September" is a metaphor for a cataclysmic event experienced by Aboriginal people throughout Australia. That event was the advent of non-Aboriginal culture and society. Just as the early colonials doubted that black swans existed until they eventually saw one in Western Australia, so to Aboriginal people doubt that the rhetoric of human rights will ever exist for the next generation.

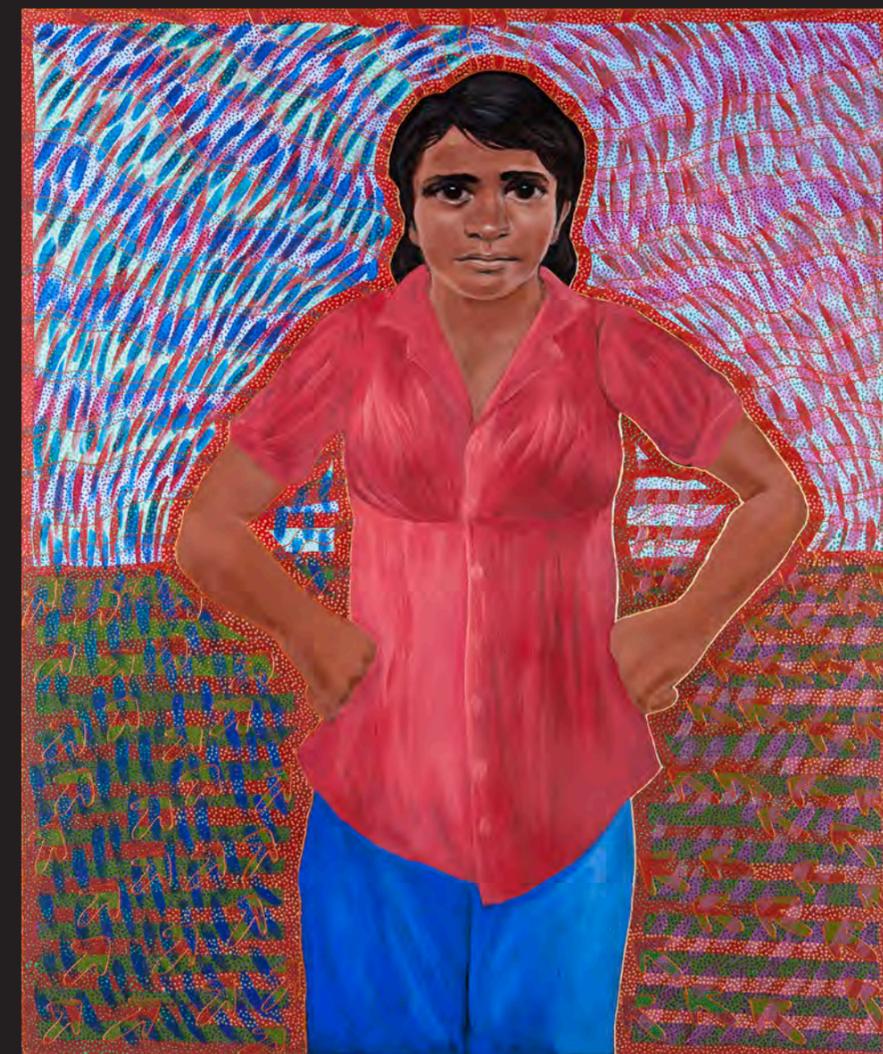


Self portrait: The circle 2009 120x100cm

## Julie Dowling Biography

Julie Dowling was born in Perth in 1969. She is a Badimaya woman. Julie graduated from Claremont School of Art in 1989 and Curtin University in 1992. Having exhibited widely in both Australia and overseas, Julie has been a finalist in many art awards including the Telstra, Archibald, Blake, Portia Geach, Raka, Premier of QLD National Art Award in New Media and the University of QL National Artists' Self Portrait Prize. She was winner of the painting section of the 2000 Telstra National Aboriginal Art Award and overall winner of the 2001 Mandorla Award for Religious Art. In 2007, Jeanette Hoorn curated a survey show entitled "Strange Fruit: Testimony and Memory in Julie Dowling's portraits" for the Ian Potter Museum of Art. Julie's work was included in Culture Warriors, the First National Indigenous Art Award.

Please download full CV from  
[http://www.artplace.com.au/CVs/cvpdf/Julie\\_Dowling.pdf](http://www.artplace.com.au/CVs/cvpdf/Julie_Dowling.pdf)



The nanny 2010 120x100cm

Cover image: Love 2010 160x160cm