



**LONG SHADOWS ...**  
Judy Watson's  
(clockwise from left)  
*string over water*  
(walkurrji kingarri  
wanami); *six moons,*  
*water sky* (balangarra,  
wanami bala); and the  
artist herself.

# Ripple effect

Still waters run deep in the works of artist Judy Watson

**Phil Brown**

**A** canoe paddling in the calm waters of Lawn Hill Gorge is a serene start to an exhibition that is always more than it seems.

In *boodjamulla wanami*, a five-minute 41-second video, Brisbane artist Judy Watson films what's ahead of her rather than behind. And yet it's history that informs this and so much of the work in her latest exhibition, Judy Watson – *Bodies*

*of Water and Melting Snow*, which is now showing at Milani Gallery in West End.

Judy is one of Queensland's most significant artists. She has an international reputation, travels widely, has exhibited abroad and is a prodigious worker.

Recently she has shown at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and gallery-goers at GOMA will know her wonderful work *tow row*, a sculpture referencing the

fishing nets of the Aboriginal people who used to fish the river just outside the gallery. That work sits at the entrance to GOMA as a constant reminder of our past.

That past echoes throughout Judy's work, and while Lawn Hill Gorge looks peaceful, there is a subtext – the atrocities of our colonial era. This is also reflected in another video work at the end of the show which is also deceptively peaceful.

That work, *witness tree*, depicts a forested hill that looks down onto the site of the infamous Myall Creek massacre at Myall Creek, near the Gwydir River in the central New South Wales district of Namoi. It involved the killing of at least 28 unarmed indigenous Australians by 11 colonists on 10 June, 1838.

It was one of the rare instances when the perpetrators were brought to justice. A suite of works on paper, *myall creek mourning caps* (yulurri kala), also refer to

that incident and Watson uses ochre, earth from the site, and acrylics to create something thoughtful and beautiful.

History is explored in other works in this substantial and rewarding exhibition.

She loves mapping and there are a couple of works that are quite literal with their use of it, including *great artesian basin springs, the gulf* (jiwil, wanami), which features the country of northwest Queensland where Judy's indigenous roots lie.

In these paintings, drawings and video works, as well as colonial history and current issues (including the plight of asylum seekers), Judy addresses ecological themes, inspired by bodies of water, snow melts and natural forms.

**JUDY WATSON – *Bodies of Water and Melting Snow*, until Jun 22, Milani Gallery, West End. [milanigallery.com.au](http://milanigallery.com.au)**