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ENTERTAINMENT ART & DESIGN

Cold comfort from ancestors as Indigenous monument revealed

By [Nick Galvin](#)

Updated 7 August 2018 –
10:57pm, first published at 3:48pm



As an icy southerly gale tore across the northern end of the Domain, a small crowd gathered on the Tarpeian Lawn yesterday to hear about plans for a massive new public artwork celebrating Australia's First Peoples.



As most of those present – dignitaries, arts figures, politicians and a scattering of confused tourists – regretted not bringing along an extra coat or scarf, compere Hetti Perkins pronounced herself more than happy with the Arctic conditions.



Artist Judy Watson with John Blair at the announcement of her new work at the Domain.

Photo: Louise Kennerley

"I attended a big event up where I come from in Central Australia and it was blowing a gale like today," she said.

"I said to people, 'What's happening?' and they said it was just the ancestors. When they are happy on big occasions they pound their digging sticks into the earth. It's their way of showing their appreciation through nature.



An artist's impression of the artwork *bara* that will be installed in the Domain.

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"This wind is full of ancestral presence. It's a way for them to show their support and blessing. It's very auspicious."

The work that had excited the attention of those ancestors will be called *bara*: two towering, crescent-shaped pieces modelled on shapes of the bone fish hooks manufactured for thousands of years by Gadigal women.

Made of stone, the six-metre sculpture will have a pearlescent finish so as to resemble the hooks that can still be found around the harbour. Work is expected to be completed by mid-2020.

Bara is the work of distinguished Queensland Indigenous artist Judy Watson, who represented Australia in 1997's Venice Biennale.

"The idea came from the history of this place. I wanted to do something which was emblematic of the Eora journey, something that would be very iconic," she said.

"I was looking at a number of different motifs and this is the one that really spoke to me. They have a very luminous quality to them and the design and the fabrication of them is a beautiful example of Indigenous technology."

Viewed from the Domain, *bara*, commissioned by the City of Sydney, will be book ended by the Opera House and East Circular Quay's "Toaster", with the Harbour Bridge as a backdrop.

Emerging sentinel-like from Gadigal country, it will also be visible from all over the harbour.

"The curve of the shell I feel will be an embrace to everyone who sees it," said Watson. "I think it is very emblematic of the shape of the harbour bridge, of the sails of the opera house and of the

"It's talking about two lores, two cultures and the fact we are all gathered on the same ground."

And with that the crowd gratefully followed Governor-General David Hurley back to Government House for a cup of tea as the Indigenous ancestors continued to signal their chilly approval.

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