

Judy Holding is a painter and sculptor who creates complex, energetic narratives inspired by the natural world. The rich imagery that adorns Holding's works is drawn from her lived experience of the remote northern Australian landscape and the southern goldfields of Victoria.

For over 40 years, Holding has habitually travelled to the Northern Territory, especially to the monsoonal escarpment country of the Kakadu region. She has been privileged over time to form close familial relationships with both Gagadju and Murrumburr Traditional Owners that continue to the third generation today.

It is through these relationships that the artist has been able to observe, document and celebrate indigenous ritual practices, spiritual beliefs, and social structures. This has influenced her works which engage with the natural world and present a spirited reflexion on the flora and fauna found in the Australian landscape. Holding is particularly focused on representing birds within her works, which were a source of 'optimism' for her during the 'long and gruelling lockdowns' of 2020 and 2021.

Australia was the home of the world's first songbirds – the birds we see today evolved over 25 million years ago when the landmass of Australia broke away from Gondwanaland. We are hearing the same sounds today.

During Colonisation, images of Australia's extraordinary birdlife were of extreme importance helping to create and maintain interest in Australia, forming part of its national 'Settler' identity. These early images were not simply decorative but were used to encourage Britain to continue its fiscal encouragement of Australia, and create a glorified notion of the distant, sun-drenched land full of promise.

Holding refers to these historical images in her works, connecting her oeuvre to artists travelling with James Cook such as Joseph Banks, William Hodges, John Webber and George Raper and later to John Gould. Through her works, Holding challenges her audience to consider the complexity of Colonisation's impact and role in Australian art since 1788.

What began with the 'commodification' of birds in an attempt to strengthen empire, morphed into a desire to preserve our country's natural fauna in a culture that places dollar-value above environmental or spiritual value.