

MEDIA RELEASE

7 April 2025



HEIDE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART UNVEILS MAJOR EXHIBITION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE TORCH

Blak In-Justice: Incarceration and Resilience



Heide Museum of Modern Art has unveiled a major exhibition developed in partnership with **The Torch**. On show until **20 July 2025**, the exhibition ***Blak In-Justice: Incarceration and Resilience*** calls attention to the pressing issue of Indigenous incarceration in Australia through a compelling selection of artworks by leading First Nations artists alongside participants of The Torch program. The Torch provides art, cultural, and arts industry support to First Nations people who are currently incarcerated or have recently been released from prisons in Victoria.

Curated by **Kent Morris**, Barkindji artist, curator and Creative Director of The Torch, ***Blak In-Justice*** presents works by acclaimed First Nations artists that address the overrepresentation of Indigenous Australians in the criminal justice system and the crisis of deaths in custody. Their powerful responses are shown alongside the remarkable creative achievements of former and current prison inmates, many of whom have connected with their culture and Country through The Torch program.

Generating powerful political commentary, the exhibition includes work by the internationally renowned artist **Gordon Bennett**, whose visceral triptych *Bloodlines* confronts colonial violence; provocative and darkly comic photographs by the trailblazing Kuku and Erub/Mer artist **Destiny Deacon**; Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman, and Gurang Gurang artist and activist **Richard Bell**'s painting *Walk On (Bell's Theorem)* that reworks words from the Old Testament to engage with the complex history of race relations in Australia; the major painting *Brush with the Lore* by Ngarrindjeri artist **Trevor Nickolls**, offering

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sharp social commentary on contemporary Aboriginal life; and emotive portraits by Badimaya artist **Julie Dowling** that draw from a range of artistic traditions, including icon painting and Renaissance portraiture, to individualise and elevate real-life stories about the incarceration of First Nations people.

A selection of works in diverse media by Walmajarri man and artist **Jimmy Pike** showcase stories of his Country. Pike's unique style was developed while he served time in Fremantle Prison, before rising to prominence as one of Australia's most significant national and international artists. Never before seen garments from his early Desert Designs range are also included in the exhibition.

From The Torch program, Palawa artist **Thelma Beeton** and Taungurung/Boonwurrung artist **Stacey Edwards** reflect on their shared and deeply supportive journey through prison and beyond; and **Sean Miller** explores his Gamilaroi heritage through a selection of his ceramic works, echoing the traditions of his ancestors who shaped and carved the ground and trees for ceremony. An installation of six carved wooden pelicans by **Daniel Church** titled *Pelican Mudjin (Family)*, represents the connections between all Aboriginal peoples from the south-east coast, and his own Darug family.

Curator and Creative Director of The Torch, Kent Morris said: *"A First Nations-developed and led project, the exhibition not only raises awareness of the mass incarceration of First Nations people but shines a light on what is being achieved to break the cycle of Indigenous imprisonment. The idea to present this exhibition in partnership with a major public museum has been formulating for many years and I greatly appreciate the support and enthusiasm from the Heide team for the project."*

By sharing the stories of those who have experienced incarceration and how connection to art and culture has provided trailblazing pathways to healing and self-determination, we hope that visitors to the exhibition become a part of the solution to this ongoing issue."

First Nations Australians make up less than 4% of the Australian population yet represent 33% of the national adult prison population. Indigenous men are 17 times more likely to go to prison than non-Indigenous men and First Nations women are 27 times more likely to go to prison than non-Indigenous women. Since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, incarceration rates for Indigenous Australians have more than doubled and deaths in custody have continued to increase. Of all young people in detention, 65% are First Nations who only make up 6.6% of the Australian population aged 10–17.

Blak In-Justice makes an engaging and important contribution to public discourse about First Nations injustice and the power of cultural practices, exploring the vital role of art in First Nations communities and Australian society in raising awareness, sharing stories and creating change.

This exhibition is supported by Principal Partners, the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, and the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body.

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List of participating artists include: Vernon Ah Kee; Tony Albert; Richard Bell; Gordon Bennett; Mia Boe; Trevor “Turbo” Brown; Ronald Bull; Robert Campbell Junior; Uncle Jack Charles; Destiny Deacon; Karla Dickens; Julie Dowling; Kevin Gilbert; Les Griggs; Ricky Maynard; Albert Namatjira; Trevor Nickolls; Jimmy Pike; Reko Rennie; Spinifex Gum feat. Briggs and Marliya; Gordon Syron; Judy Watson; Anwar Young; Unrupa Rhonda Dick; and Frank Young.

Artists from The Torch program include: Angus Abdullah; Christopher Austin; Thelma Beeton; Melissa Bell; Felicity Chafer Smith; Daniel Church; Sonia Sadler; Stacey Edwards; C.Harrison; Jeffrey Jackson; Kim Kennedy; Thomas “Marksey” Marks; Sean Miller; S.Morrison; Keith Ritchie; Robby Wirramanda; and Raymond Young.

Ends

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IMAGE CAPTIONS (L-R): Installation view, *Blak In-Justice: Incarceration and Resilience*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2025, photograph: Clytie Meredith

IMAGES available [HERE](#)

EXHIBITION DETAILS:

Blak In-Justice: Incarceration and Resilience

5 April - 20 July 2025

Heide Museum of Modern Art, 7 Templestowe Road, Bulleen Victoria 3105

<https://www.heide.com.au/exhibitions/blak-in-justice/>

ABOUT THE TORCH

The Torch is a not for profit First Nations-led arts organisation that provides art, cultural and arts industry support to First Nations people who are currently incarcerated or have recently been released from prisons in Victoria. Since 2011, The Torch has continued to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within Victoria’s legal system through its Statewide Indigenous Arts In Prisons and Community Program.

The Torch’s vision is to support First Nations people to reclaim cultural connections through art and cultural practice. This enables personal and community healing and empowerment coupled with economic elevation through connection to the arts industry. Recidivism rates have more than halved for those connected to the program.

The Torch assists artists to reconnect with culture and to earn an income from [art sales](#) (with 100% of the artwork price going directly to the artist), [licensing](#), [special projects](#) and exhibitions including their major annual [exhibitions](#).

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Confined and Future Dreaming. The Torch's gallery in Carlton is open for artwork viewings Tuesday–Thursday by appointment.

Discover more at <https://thetorch.org.au/>

ABOUT HEIDE

Heide is a public art museum and sculpture park located on a stretch of the Birrarung/Yarra River in Melbourne that has long served as a meeting point and as a creative hub.

Once a significant Wurundjeri gathering place, the site later attracted the artists of the Australian Impressionist School before becoming the home of art patrons John and Sunday Reed in 1934.

The Reeds and their circle of artists and writers embraced the brave and the new in art and ideas and their spirited legacy inspires the museum's activities today, from collaborating with emerging and mid-career artists to celebrating those who have made major contributions to Australian and international art.

Set on 6.5 hectares of parkland with five gallery spaces, award-winning architecture and a distinctive collection of more than 3,600 works of art, Heide holds a special place in the cultural landscape of Australia.

heide.com.au