

# STILL SACRED AND GOLDEN



**DEANNE GILSON**  
18 JUNE — 18 SEPT 2022

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**The Koorie Heritage Trust  
acknowledges and pays respect  
to the Traditional Custodians  
of Naarm, the Wurundjeri Peoples  
of the Greater Kulin Nation,  
on whose lands we operate.**

**We also pay respect to  
the Wadawurrung Peoples,  
the Traditional Custodians  
of Ballarat, and acknowledge  
Deanne as a proud Wadawurrung  
woman and emerging Elder.  
We also pay respect to all  
First Peoples and celebrate  
their continuing culture.**

# FOREWORD



**TOM MOSBY**  
**CEO, KHT**

***Still Sacred and Golden* is an exhibition of seventeen new paintings by Dr Deanne Gilson, a proud Wadawurrung woman and an emerging Elder from Ballarat, Victoria.**

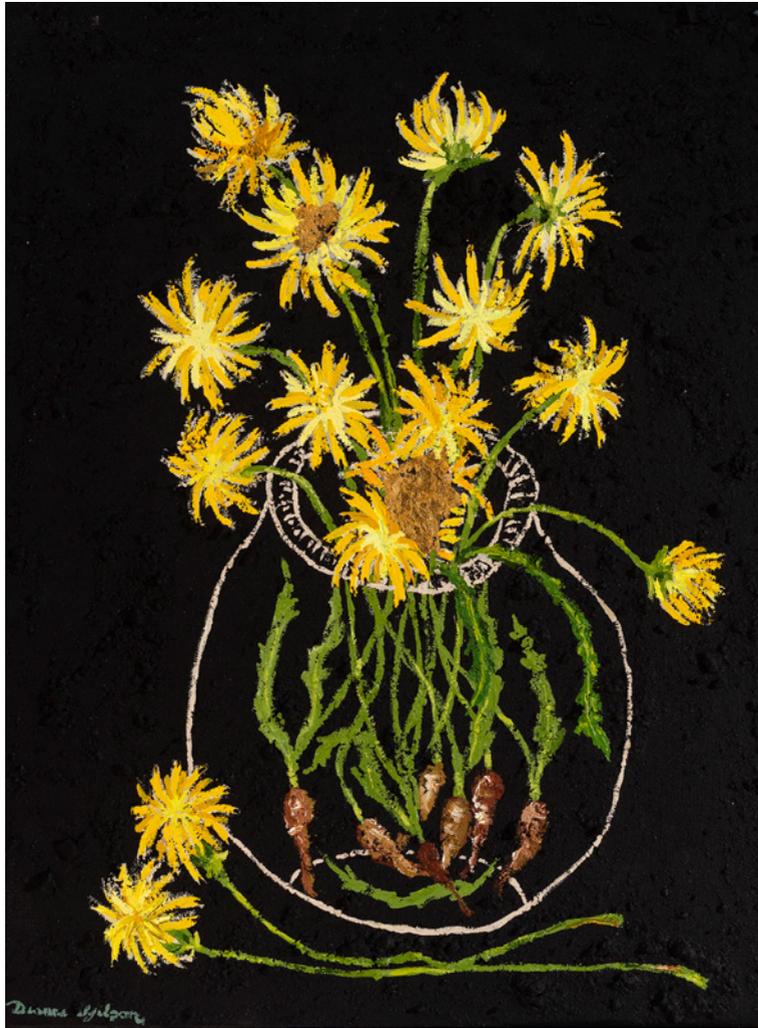
It is both an honour and a privilege to present a solo exhibition by such an accomplished artist who has been practicing for over 35 years. Deanne has previously exhibited with the Koorie Heritage Trust in the Koorie Art Show and in group exhibitions, most notably alongside her mother Marlene Gilson in 2017.

*Still Sacred and Golden* embodies the strength and resilience of First Peoples and the endurance and continuity of culture, specifically in relation to women's business. The flowers Deanne depicts in this new body of work honour the beauty and resourcefulness of Country. Most importantly, the baskets and woven items depict knowledge held by women that is transmitted across generations. *Still Sacred and Golden* showcases works of art that affirm the sacredness of culture and cultural practice.

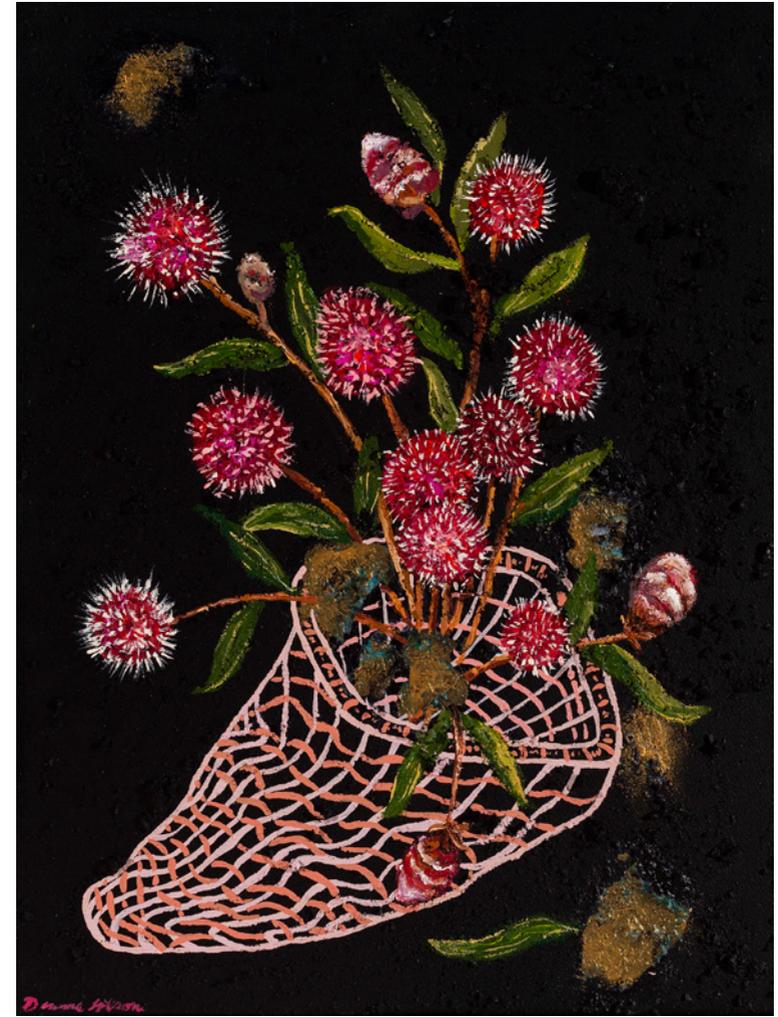
At the same time, Deanne's works continue to highlight the ongoing presence and impact of the colonial gaze and the objectification of First Peoples, both of which are depicted in the kitsch objects featured in Deanne's paintings. The kitsch objects are devices that ask us to reflect on who is representing us, and question how we are portrayed and why. Deanne's works of art remind us that *Still Sacred and Golden* is Country, ourselves, and our connection to Country through cultural practice.

The Koorie Heritage Trust is proud to showcase contemporary Victorian art and artists through our annual exhibitions program. I wish to acknowledge and thank Deanne for sharing this incredible new body of work with our audiences at the Koorie Heritage Trust. I also wish to acknowledge our exhibitions and collections team for their dedication and support of Deanne in presenting the exhibition.

I also acknowledge the generous support of our programming partners: Australia Council for the Arts, Creative Victoria, City of Melbourne, and the Federal Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support Program.



**DEANNE GILSON**  
 (Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Murnong (Yam Daisy) Dilly Bag 2022*  
 charcoal, acrylic and 18ct gold  
 leaf on linen  
 400 x 300 mm  
 Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
 (Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Hakea (Pin Cushion) Dilly Bag 2022*  
 charcoal, acrylic and fools gold  
 on linen  
 400 x 300 mm  
 Collection of the artist

# STILL SACRED AND GOLDEN

—  
DEANNE  
GILSON

The bonds between one's ancestral Country, mother and each other must be healed and reconnected for our children to be healthy and connected once again.

**We are joined to the earth;  
it is our mother.**

**We are the caretakers of the land.  
Mother Earth. We are the land.**

—Gillian Hutcherson in conversation  
with women from Yirrkala  
(Hutcherson 1998, 25).

The above statement from the women of Yirrkala represents the truth and deep spiritual connection to place and one's ancestral Country, and is spoken by women for women. Somewhere along my ancestral line, many of my own women lost their spiritual connection to place, Country and each other. I hope my artwork aids in some small way towards the awakening of my women's spirit once again. The bond for me is "still sacred"; it is not broken, but has been just quietly resting until now. Each painting is one step closer to my Mother Earth and each other.

Traditional Aboriginal culture in Australia has been eroded by colonisation. This has resulted in the loss of identity of Aboriginal women. Colonisation transformed them into nothing more than an object. Liz Conor refers to terms such as 'lubra', 'native belle', 'sable siren', 'spinifex fairy', 'stud' or 'gin' to reflect the reality that these women were not considered to be a girl or a woman, but something else, something less than the white woman (Conor 2016, 1).

Throughout the early 20th century in Australia, an industry of curious objects became popular, further oppressing First Nations peoples and creating a false sense of what is to be an Aboriginal person and what Aboriginal people represent. The creation of kitsch objects, or *Aboriginalia* as these came to be known, often depicted sacred symbols and marks used for ceremonies or men's and

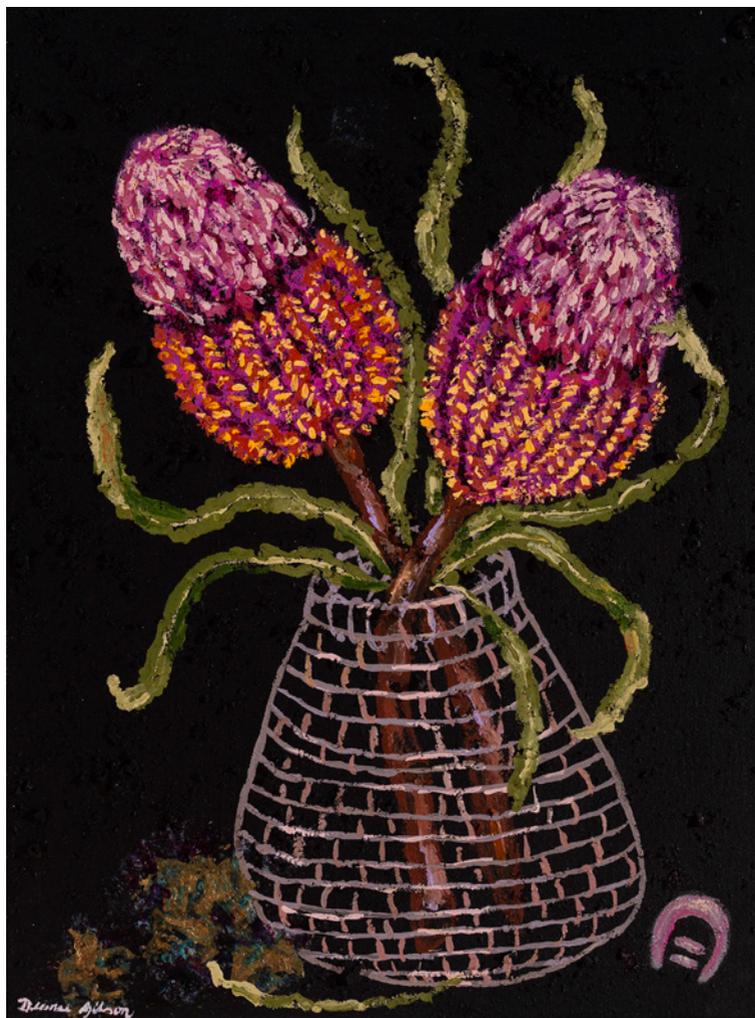
women's private business. These symbols and marks were appropriated and painted by non-Aboriginal people and artists such as Margaret Preston. They were incorporated into artworks, and on ceramics and homewares. Many pottery studios like Martin Boyd Pottery, and Anna Studio in Sydney did not take into account this misappropriation that witnessed sacred symbols taken out of context, and somewhat misunderstood and disconnected from the original marks. This particularly occurred with the appropriation of sacred bone images. Symbols, art objects and designs originally created by Aboriginal people for ceremony, body markings, scar trees and artefacts found their way onto everyday objects like ashtrays, ceramics and homewares.

I have taken these objects and used them in my artwork to highlight this practice as disrespectful and wrong. I extended this critique by developing personally significant symbols and traditional marks to create my own version of the truth. My works insert a new style within the contemporary Australian still life genre – one that emerges from an Aboriginal women's standpoint. Central to this standpoint is the addition of ochre as a reference to kin, skin and Country. My use of symbols and ochre exposes colonial objectification and misrepresentation of sacred symbols. They also expose the continuing appropriation of our cultural symbols, marks and people in the production of decorative objects and artworks due to a lack of understanding and examination within Australian contemporary art discourse and practice. Included in such practices are images of Black naked women and men that continue to be painted by colonisers without any sense of the trauma it causes us to see our men, women and children naked and exploited on coffee mugs and ashtrays.

The objects depicted in my paintings are remnants and reminders of a time when the white male and white female gaze were used as governance over us, suggesting

## **'MY USE OF SYMBOLS AND OCHRE EXPOSES COLONIAL OBJECTIFICATION AND MISREPRESENTATION OF SACRED SYMBOLS.'**

**DEANNE GILSON**



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and  
Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Pink and  
Orange Banksia Dilly Bag 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and fools gold on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist

Aboriginal identity was purely tribal. Aboriginal people were presented as exotic others, and their bodies as something to be trivialised – as curious kitsch. Although no longer in common use today, the attitudes implied by such objects still exist.

The artworks created for this exhibition challenge colonial patriarchal views, including those expressed in the arts and crafts of early Australia. My contemporary art practice is an attempt not only to revive and regain the presence of cultural identity, but also to play a deeper role in preserving and highlighting cultural practices and symbology, thereby awakening culture once again. Furthermore, my practice aims to demonstrate the way in which contemporary Aboriginal women's art and business, including sacred and spiritual aspects, is evolving in response to the current social and political environment. We are reclaiming, reinvigorating, teaching our children, and unravelling the trauma caused by the invasion of our Country.

Country is an extension of who we are. We are Country and all is connected on a level that is not seen. Country exists in a space known as the 'spiritual', which we draw from in our lived experience. We also draw from those who have passed as they move through to the Dreaming consciousness after death. We acknowledge them as if they are here and with us always, still connected to us and our ancient ways that are sacred to our wellbeing and existence.

It is also through the feminist critique of what was termed the "male gaze" that I position myself as an artist. My stance is one where traditional women's business runs parallel with feminist ideologies in relation to the empowerment of women. However, the latter does not fully or correctly appreciate the Aboriginal women's viewpoint. Western feminism does not take into account white privilege, and racial and cultural difference.



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
Post Joseph Banks, Still Sacred and  
Golden 2022  
pink and white ochre, acrylic and  
18ct gold leaf on linen  
800 x 1000 mm  
Collection of the artist

**'WHEN GATHERING OCHRE, PLANT SPECIMENS AND SAPS, MULTIPLE VISUAL IMAGES THAT VARY ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT SEASONS AND WEATHER CONDITIONS FILL MY HEAD.'**

**DEANNE GILSON**

As an Aboriginal woman, I embrace a cultural notion of the “feminine” understood as simply being a woman and conducting her daily business not as an object, but as a continuation of her story through connection to Country and kin. Feminine in this cultural context involves being female – equal to all and not divided through sexuality and gender. Contemporary Aboriginal women are finding new ways to preserve and extend traditional culture and knowledge and to re-learn lost language, artefacts and symbols that maintained our traditional ways of being, doing and knowing.

This knowledge is further shared among women through yarning and performing ceremony. For me art is ceremony. Ceremony begins the moment I step onto Country and walk. When gathering ochre, plant specimens and saps, multiple visual images that vary according to different seasons and weather conditions fill my head. I use the colours of Country and four specific traditional marks my ancestors used on artefacts such as shields, stones, trees and possum skin cloaks. I retell their stories in my Ballarat studio by connecting to their knowledge. I live on what is referred to by Western people as the Goldfields. My ancestors had no use for real gold. Instead, I celebrate ancestral knowledge, oral stories – such as our creation story and knowledge of Country – firesticks, and basket and adornment-making as gold. My art is the gold, as are my people and family, the birds and animals, the waterways, the cosmos, and the sky. What lies under Country is all gold. We cannot be replaced.

Moving beyond surviving the male and female gaze of colonisation together with the threat from climate change, bushfires and war are the contemporary issues facing us all for survival. My paintings explore the Rosella's loss of colours and fading vibrancy due to climate change. In the painting *White Poison, Post Climate Change* (2022) the threat of war is evoked through images of poisons used on my people in the past. However, the hope that is Country is evoked through the use of ochre. Ochre and Country are

alive. The ochre has microorganisms that breathe, just as we do. My paintings breathe and come to life through my love of Country and the touch of my ancestors through me. The ochre becomes the skin and the body all intertwined as one. Objects considered Western artefacts as well as birds, flowers, the sky, and stars infer loss and remind us that if we don't take care of Country, Country too will become objectified like my people were through the *Aboriginalia* of early Australia. Such objects often portrayed women as the flora and fauna, and our children as naked muses to be looked upon as savage beasts wandering around the bush. The truth of living from the land and caring for the land with firestick burning and plant farming was not acknowledged. The truth of who we are as highly intelligent, cultured people was not acknowledged.

Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson talks of the body and "herstory" as being the link to the past, present and future of Indigenous culture and their/my people. This encapsulates the importance of our shared memory and experience that takes into account historical and cultural experiences. It also encompasses the traditional ways of the past and brings them forward into today. My voice forms part of the resistance to what prevents us from being us.

We are Still Sacred and Golden.

Nyatne.

Deanne Gilson, with the love and writing support from my dear friend and mentor Professor Estelle Barrett.

#### REFERENCES

Conor, Liz. *Skin Deep: Settler Impressions of Aboriginal Women*. Crawley, WA: UWA Publishing, 2016.

Hutcherson, Gillian. *Gong-Wapitja - Women and Art from Yirrkala. Northeast Arnhem Land*, Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1998.

Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. *Talkin' Up to The White Woman, Indigenous Women and Feminism*. Brisbane, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2000.



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets  
and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge,  
Biyal, Orange and Red Gum  
Blossom Dilly Bag 2022*  
charcoal, acrylic and 18ct gold  
leaf on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wodawurrung)  
*Kunuwarra Ngarrimili (Me, Dancing  
the Black Swan Dance at Murrup  
Laarr) 2022*  
yellow and red ochre, charcoal,  
acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
660 x 660 mm  
Collection of the artist

# ARTIST BIOGRAPHY



## DEANNE GILSON

Dr Deanne Gilson is a proud Wadawurrung woman and an emerging Elder from Ballarat in regional Victoria, Australia. Deanne spent her early years growing up in Naarm (Melbourne). At the age of seven, Deanne, her parents and three siblings relocated to her Ancestral Country which encompasses Ballarat and surrounding areas. Deanne has a deep appreciation for the bush and the Indigenous plants, trees and flowers that surrounded her as a child, all of which feature prominently in her artwork. Deanne is an award-winning multimedia visual artist with a practice spanning 39 years. Her mother is Aunty Marlene Gilson, a painter with her own award-winning art practice.

Deanne recently completed her PhD at Deakin University which examined the objectification of Aboriginal women by the male and female colonial gaze and how this has affected Aboriginal women and traditional women's business. Deanne's recent artworks feature themes about colonial disruption; loss of family, culture, language and traditional women's practices; and, the continuing impact of loss on Aboriginal women today. Deanne creates contemporary art that assists in healing, disrupting, and challenging the gaze through a reflective process.

Deanne's art practice uses ochre sourced from her Wadawurrung Country, and draws on history, and the lived experiences of her family and ancestors. Her works position traditional marks alongside contemporary ones, referencing women's business and its links to ceremonial practice. Deanne has stated that "all of my artworks use ceremonial ochre and are links to my ancestors and their ceremonial and traditional practices, thus forming deeper connections to Country and culture that were missing from my childhood".

Deanne is passionate about painting the many plants of the Australian bush and Country, along with objects that surround her home such as pots, baskets made by friends, and family and cultural belongings. All hold stories and knowledge that is unseen and all are important to her practice.



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Nan's Chocolate Lily*  
*Watching Over Me* 2022  
pink and white ochre,  
acrylic and 18ct gold leaf  
on canvas  
505 x 405 mm  
Collection of the artist

**'ALL OF MY ARTWORKS USE  
CEREMONIAL OCHRE AND ARE  
LINKS TO MY ANCESTORS AND THEIR  
CEREMONIAL AND TRADITIONAL  
PRACTICES, THUS FORMING DEEPER  
CONNECTIONS TO COUNTRY AND  
CULTURE THAT WERE MISSING FROM  
MY CHILDHOOD'**

**DEANNE GILSON**



**DEANNE GILSON**  
 (Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets  
 and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge,  
 Silver (Yellow) Banksia Dilly Bag 2022*  
 charcoal, acrylic and 18ct gold  
 leaf on linen  
 400 x 300 mm  
 Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
 (Wadawurrung)  
*Queen Mary, After Her Removal from  
 the Ballarat Goldfields 2014*  
 black stoneware clay, fool's gold  
 285 x 140 x 145 mm  
 Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Still Sacred and Golden*  
(Sacred Kingfisher and Golden  
Wattle) 2022  
pink ochre, acrylic and 18ct  
gold leaf on linen  
660 x 660 mm  
Collection of the artist

# LIST OF WORKS

Photography by  
Christian Capurro



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Queen Mary, After Her Removal from the Ballarat Goldfields* 2014  
black stoneware clay, fool's gold  
285 x 140 x 145 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Billy Buttons and Silver Banksia Dilly Bag* 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Biyal, Orange and Red Gum Blossom Dilly Bag* 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Red Bottle Brush Dilly Bag* 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and fools gold on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Red Waratah (NSW plant) Dilly Bag* 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and fools gold on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Silver (Yellow) Banksia Dilly Bag* 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Hakea (Pin Cushion) Dilly Bag* 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and fools gold on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Murnong (Yam Daisy) Dilly Bag* 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Pink and Orange Banksia Dilly Bag* 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and fools gold on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Tjatjarang (Elder Sister) Orange Banksia Dilly Bag* 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Wurrak; Three Fire Lighter Banksias in Dilly Bag* 2022  
charcoal, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
400 x 300 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Delama Wurrak Ba-gurrk (Celebrating women's business and banksia knowledge)* 2022  
white ochre and acrylic on canvas  
355 x 275 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Don't Gang Gang Up on Me Ya Galah (Post Preston Ongoing Series)* 2022  
pink and white ochre, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
660 x 660 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Kunuwarra Ngarrimili (Me, Dancing the Black Swan Dance at Murrup Laarr)* 2022  
yellow and red ochre, charcoal, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
660 x 660 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Nan's Chocolate Lily Watching Over Me* 2022  
pink and white ochre, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on canvas  
505 x 405 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Post Joseph Banks, Still Sacred and Golden* 2022  
pink and white ochre, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
800 x 1000 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*Still Sacred and Golden (Sacred Kingfisher and Golden Wattle)* 2022  
pink ochre, acrylic and 18ct gold leaf on linen  
660 x 660 mm  
Collection of the artist



**DEANNE GILSON**  
(Wadawurrung)  
*White Poison, Post Climate Change* 2022  
white ochre, acrylic and silver leaf on linen  
660 x 660 mm  
Collection of the artist

**DEANNE GILSON**  
**STILL SACRED AND GOLDEN**  
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