

# PROJECT 32

## Jonathan Jones

### 2016

*barrangal dyara (skin and bones)*

17 September – 3 October 2016

Royal Botanic Garden Sydney

*Sydney's Forgotten Ancestor*

Historic Photography Exhibition

17 September – 3 October 2016

Palm House, Royal Botanic Garden Sydney

## BIOGRAPHY

Sydney-based Aboriginal artist Jonathan Jones, a member of the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi nations of south-east Australia, works across a range of mediums, from printmaking and drawing to sculpture and film. He creates site-specific installations and interventions into space that use light, subtle shadow and the repetition of shape and materiality to explore Indigenous practices, relationships and ideas. Jones often works with everyday materials, such as fluorescent lights and blue tarpaulin, recycled and repurposed to explore relationships between community and the individual, the personal and public, historical and contemporary. He has worked on several major public art commissions, including the Commonwealth Parliament Offices in Sydney and Wagga Wagga Regional Airport.

## FACTS

- At the heart of the project a meadow of native kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) was planted to recall the position of the Garden Palace's central dome.
- The installation was layered with soundscapes of eight Aboriginal languages –Gamilaraay, Gumbaynggirr, Gunditjmara, Ngarrindjeri, Paakantji, Wiradjuri and Woiwurrung.
- Jones received permission from community to develop shields based on four traditional designs from Aboriginal nations of the south-east.
- The shields were cast from gypsum, a material used by Aboriginal women across the south-east to create headdresses worn during mourning ceremonies.
- Jones worked with Roger Mitchell at Cineart studios, Melbourne, and his team of 10 craftspeople to complete the 15,000 shields in just four months.
- The shields were installed over 9 days within the Gardens and nearby Shakespeare Place and Macquarie Street to define the Palace's original footprint.
- The shields were placed in a specific pattern— dense at the outside edge of the building, becoming more widely spaced across 10 metres towards the centre of the building.
- Following the project 3,000 shields were salvaged and donated to the Art Gallery of NSW. The grass was donated to the Botanic Garden and planted at Mrs Macquarie's Chair.
- Sharing the story of the Garden Palace with Aboriginal communities and reflecting on the significance of the loss of cultural objects was essential to the project.

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#### PROJECT OVERVIEW

For the 32<sup>nd</sup> Kaldor Public Art Project, Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist Jonathan Jones presented *barrangal dyara* (*skin and bones*), a vast sculptural installation stretching across 20,000 square-metres of the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney.

The Project recalled the 19<sup>th</sup> century Garden Palace building where it originally stood in the Royal Botanic Garden, before it burned to the ground along with countless Aboriginal objects collected along the colonial frontier. The project was Jones' response to the immense loss felt throughout Australia due to the destruction of these culturally significant items. It represented an effort to commence a healing process, and a celebration of the survival of the world's oldest living culture.

Thousands of bleached white shields echoed masses of rubble—the only remnants of the building after the fire—and raised the layered history and bones of the Garden Palace across the site. A native kangaroo grassland formed the heart of the installation, and was enlivened by presentations of Aboriginal languages, performances, talks, special events and workshops each day.

The project connected directly with many Aboriginal communities throughout the south-east of Australia, who collaborated to reframe local history. The artwork took its name, *barrangal dyara*, meaning 'skin and bones,' from the local Sydney Gadigal language, on whose country the project took place with approval from the community.

Kaldor Public Art Project 32:  
Jonathan Jones,  
*barrangal dyara*  
(*skin and bones*),  
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Photo: Pedro Greig



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