

# EVERYTHING IS TRUE

ABDUL - RAHMAN ABDULLAH



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**Opposite** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*Among Monsters*, 2017, stained wood,  
glass beads, 80 × 80 × 27cm.  
Artbank Collection.



# FOREWORD

<sup>1</sup> Email correspondence with the artist  
4 September, 2020.

I feel very privileged that the John Curtin Gallery is presenting *Everything Is True* – the largest ever assembly of sculptural work of Mundijong-based artist Abdul-Rahman Abdullah for the 2021 Perth Festival. Abdullah forces us to question the very truth of what we see. How is it that a piece of wood can look so eerily like soft folds of fabric? Viewed at close quarters, the grain of the wood, the seams, joins and other imperfections inherent to these objects reveal their cunning deception and the breathtaking skill of their artisanship.

Filling the entire John Curtin Gallery, *Everything Is True* presents a beguiling world assembled from the memories, dreamscapes and spiritual imagination of one of Australia's most compelling contemporary artists. Abdullah creates objects that are familiar, yet strangely disturbing, seamlessly moving between planes of existence, shape-shifting and time-travelling through the mercurial amalgam of lived experience and the distilled memories of cultural and familial history. Drawing on the narrative capacity of animal archetypes, crafted objects and the human presence, Abdullah aims to articulate physical dialogues between the natural world, identity and the agency of culture. Living and working in rural Western Australia, he provides unique perspectives across intersecting communities, foregrounding shared understandings of individual identity and new mythologies in a cross-cultural context.

The title of this exhibition subverts the phrase attributed to the 11th century Islamic mystical figure Hassan-i Sabbah: *Nothing is true, everything is permitted*. By deliberately inverting this phrase, the artist asserts with customary optimism that "everything is real and it all matters"<sup>1</sup>. In this world, lived experience with its boundless complexity and infinite richness is a limitless source of inspiration and paradoxically, becomes the ultimate and indefinable truth. Meandering through the galleries, *Everything Is True* is an embodied journey, where dreamlike narratives emerge from our own individual experience and imagination, reminding us that all human experience is valuable and 'true' as we perceive it. The memories, dreams and nightmares of our childhood may not constitute an objective reality but they do shape and inhabit us, and are nonetheless true.









**Previous spread** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*The Dogs*, 2017, stained wood and chandeliers,  
dimensions variable. Private Collection.  
Installation view: Pataka Art + Museum,  
Porirua NZ.

**Above** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*The Dogs* (detail), 2017, stained wood  
and chandeliers, dimensions variable.  
Private Collection.



## WITHIN A WEIGHT OF WOOD

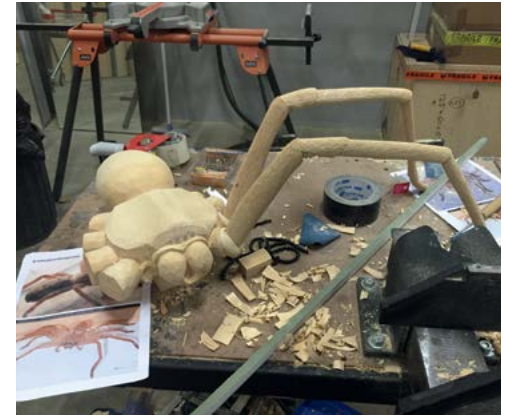
Abdul-Rahman Abdullah and I are trying, again, to get our phones to connect. He is in his studio, on a farm about an hour from Perth, standing on the side of the house that gets reception and I'm at home in Sydney persisting with substandard service from Vodafone. "You'd think they don't want us to talk!" Abdullah exclaims when we finally connect. "They're on to us," he continues, "and our plan to take over the art world." I laugh because he's funny but also because it is kind of true.

Abdullah works by stealth. With an open and effervescent personality, he is the perfect antidote to what can be a prickly establishment. When he talks it is almost always punctuated by giggles and he has the ability to disarm the haughtiest of the art world elite in mere seconds. Enveloped in his vivaciousness it is hard to not adopt his optimism and aspire to his inclusive manner. If Abdullah did ever take over the art world it would be with infectious collaboration rather than political wrangling.

I think he sculpts by stealth as well. I have never visited his studio and have only glimpsed it in the background of our FaceTime calls where it always looks impossibly tidy. Sometimes he sends me a photo of a new arrival of wood, "Look what arrived!" and then a few weeks later another photo of a finished sculpture, "Piggies!". His ability to manifest a menagerie of animals out of wood can only be described as magic. In early 2020, as the world plunged into Covid-19 induced disconnected lockdowns, Abdullah began to share via Instagram work-in-progress images entitled 'How to make a...'. Each series reveals a block of wood that slowly, over four work-in-progress images, transforms to become sculptures of a stingray, spider or pigeon. I devoured each series, scrolling first right and then back left in an attempt to uncover exactly how the animals emerged so animated from the static boxy wood. But, despite the behind-the-scenes nature of these images, the magic remains.

"Oooohh I don't know", Abdullah tuts when I tell him about new timelines for exhibitions compromised by Covid-19, "it'll be tight." As we attempt to nut out the logistics of the creation of a new work Abdullah gives in to exasperated joking, "Sometimes I wish I was a painter, they just whip them out." The laborious full-bodied demands of wood sculpting mean that each work requires extended focus and time. The sculptures become imprints of not only his hand but the entire exertion of his body. Abdullah has no studio assistants – unless you count his two infant daughters Aziza and Althea – so each of his works is the result of his physical toil and creative intuition. The magic that I so seek to understand is held within the strength of his hands and the flex of his muscle memory and will never be captured in a carousel of work-in-progress images. In the long period of endeavour, Abdullah creates a 'drawing in space' and, with each slice of the chisel, he impresses on the wood a vision in his mind.

Sometimes when I call Abdullah it is strangely quiet. "I like serenity," he claims, "and I am painting." I imagine him in his big studio, revelling in the quiet, rendering the details of a dog's coat with black paint and a fine paintbrush. "It's tedious!"



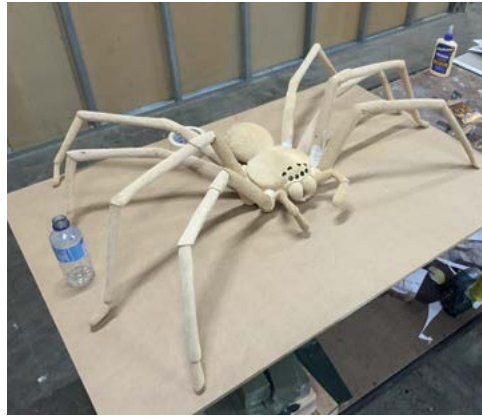
**Above** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, studio shots of *Among Monsters* in progress, 2017.

he exclaims shattering my illusion, “why do they have to have so much hair?!” As he nears the completion of the project, I am struck by the process of creation which starts at scale with a chainsaw and large, sweeping actions and ends with him in stillness perched on the edge of a rolling stool with an almost comically small paintbrush. Through each step in the process his artistic gesture becomes increasingly smaller and, by the time the work is completed, the evidence of his hand has almost been erased.

“Can I call you back in an hour? I’m just waiting for the guy who is going to slaughter a cow.” As I hurriedly agree to delay our chat, I am reminded of how the cyclical rhythm of farm life informs Abdullah’s work. Together with his wife, artist and curator Anna Louise Richardson, their children are the seventh generation in her family to live on the cattle farm. The day-to-day reality of living on the farm ensures that he is unable to retreat to a life of artistic imaginings but, instead, is forced to consider how they intersect. His sculptural interrogations of animals are implicitly linked to this experience, his ability to animate each creature even in stillness is informed by hours of watching animals move, respond and engage within and upon the landscape. An earlier work, *The Hunt* (2014) is carved from jelutong and depicts a dead kangaroo. Its awkward repose is instantly recognisable as roadkill that whizzes by on long country stretches but, presented in the formal confines of the gallery, Abdullah demands us to stop, look closer and for longer. Western culture has not conditioned us to sit with the reality of death and, shielded by customs, traditions and erasures, it can often become a somewhat esoteric concept rather than a rhythmic reality. But this rhythm is embedded throughout Abdullah’s practice.

In January of 2020, only three weeks after his youngest Althea was born, a fire ripped through the property. The flames grew quickly whipping through the paddocks and trees, causing Abdullah and Richardson to send their girls to safety while they stayed to fight the fire. I have visions of them both, perched on the back of a ute desperately pumping water into a fire unit under a pall of dark smoke. The fire came dangerously close but spared their house and studio. When they returned, Abdullah sends me videos of a scorched and steaming earth. We speak a few weeks later where both he and Richardson recount the experience in almost breathless awe, ‘frightening’ they both term it but also clearly inspiring, they both speak of an urgent need to create bodies of work in response.

Amidst the aftermath of the fire Abdullah is worried he will miss a grant deadline for our project. Having lost weeks of focus to ensuring the property and his family were recovering the impending due date is now upon him. We agree to workshop the text



<sup>1</sup> Robert Cook, *Lover, Fighter*, *Art Monthly* issue 278, April 2015.

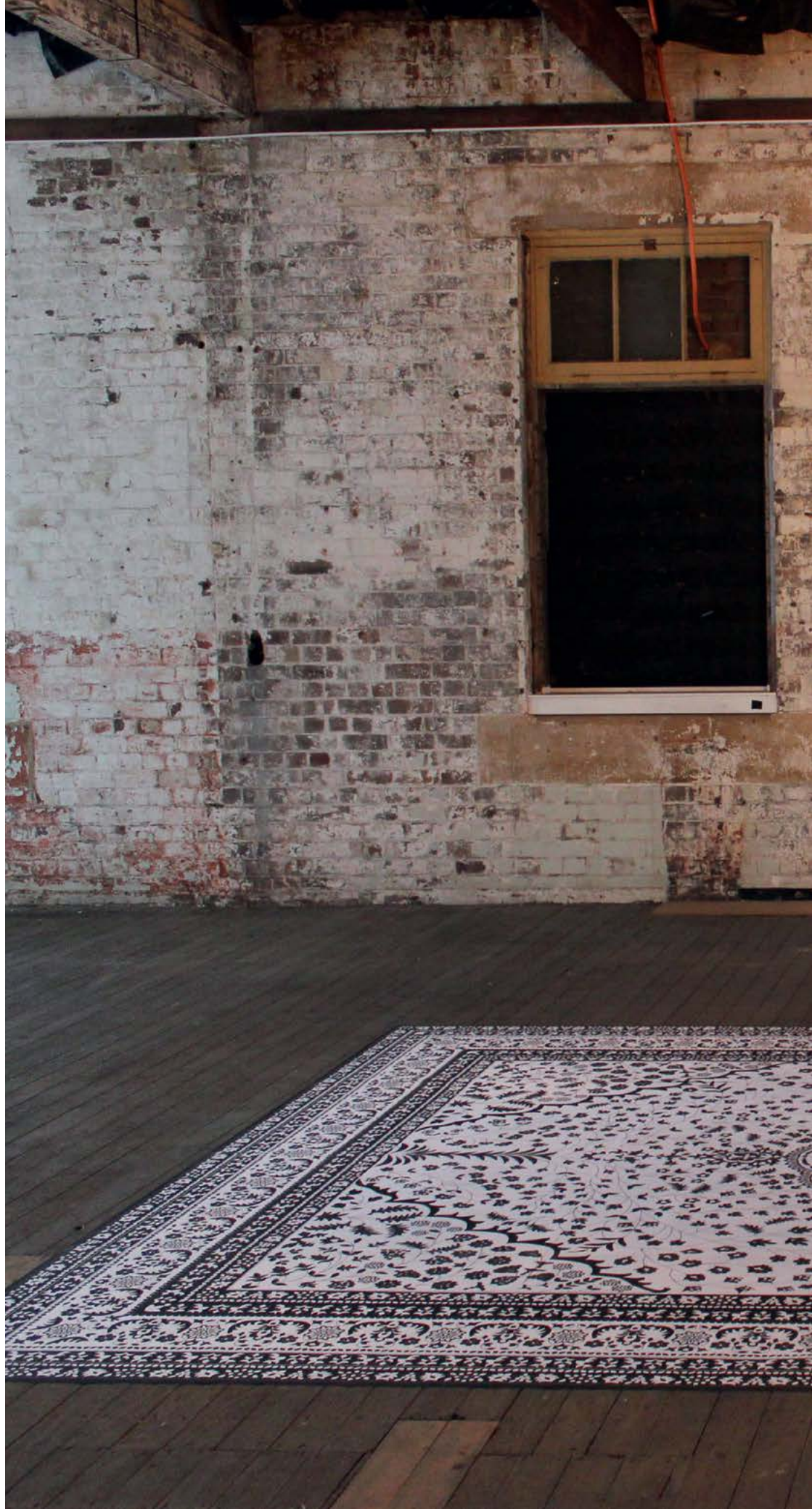
together and race towards submission. A day later he sends me a draft that is not only informative but poetic in its storytelling. Abdullah recounts the mythology of the winged horse-like creature *Buraq*, 'an enigmatic figure of Islamic lore.' He writes with the same dynamism in which he sculpts and, as he intertwines his own family's migrant story with that of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the *Buraq*, I am struck by the how, as he writes himself, 'a seemingly impossible journey' can be tempered by 'a divine precedence'. When I think of Abdullah and Richardson on a ute defending their home from the fire, I imagine it is the *Buraq* who accompanied them to safety.

A few months later we are discussing his work in an interview, "I want my materials to lie," Abdullah asserts with a gravelly elongated emphasis on lie. And it's true, there is trickery in his work. The final sculptures are, as Art Gallery of Western Australia curator Robert Cook deems, 'magic realism'<sup>1</sup>, they bear no resemblance to their timber materiality and instead appear as taut muscular dogs or weightless spindly spiders. But Abdullah adopts this lie in pursuit of truth. His uncannily still sculpted works enable the viewer to become intimately close with animals, to examine them and to marvel at their corporeal forms. While humanity has restrained and restricted the interaction between humans and the natural world Abdullah encourages us to, just for a second, abandon these boundaries and step closer. In the few moments the viewer draws near there is a collapse of predatory systems and an abandonment of fear that enables sparks of understanding. The lie of Abdullah's 'magic realism' forces humanity to marvel at the natural world and ponder its innate mysticism.

"Hold on a second," I wait as I hear Abdullah clicking off a vacuum and the humming slows to a bearable level, "just finished the last crate," he continues, "don't worry, I'm starting your work next." In a year of extraordinary circumstances Abdullah has ended 2020 on a high. With crates destined for shows opening almost simultaneously in Melbourne and Sydney and his solo at John Curtin Gallery imminent, he has had one of his busiest periods. Our talk is punctuated by blasts of the vacuum as he paces the studio while talking and I imagine him, with the crates up against the roller door, meticulously ridding the floor of sawdust. As he returns the studio to its scrupulous state, I imagine him trudging the 50-metres back to the house and the studio settling into its sleepy state. The next day, as he promised me on the phone, Abdullah will return, retracing his 50-metre commute, hoisting the roller door up and starting the process again where, with secret and imperceptible stealth, he will coax a new animal from within a weight of wood.



**Opposite** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*Wednesday's Child*, 2013, tinted resin, paper,  
chandelier, 400 × 300 × 490cm. Installation  
view: Underbelly Arts Festival 2013,  
Cockatoo Island, NSW.











# ABDUL-RAHMAN ABDULLAH

## EVERYTHING IS TRUE

<sup>1</sup> From the poem *You are the Truth*  
by Jalal-al-Din Rumi. Translated  
by Coleman Barks.

*You are the Truth from foot to brow.  
Now, what else would you like to know?*

~ JALAL-AL-DIN RUMI<sup>1</sup>

Standing in a near vacant gallery of a newly built museum in Melbourne, fixing the polished bronze figures of Abdul-Rahman Abdullah's sculpture *Big Jihad* (2011) into the custom-built plinth personally felt like one of those salient moments where a crashing crescendo of cymbals should have accompanied the installation. Finding the right words to describe art that gifts a voice to personal and cultural experiences which are normally dismissed as 'marginal', feels like both a tremendous burden and joy. Abdullah is a Perth based artist who creates art within a space that is both familiar and unfamiliar, entering an often unforgiving and fraught critical cultural discourse to present work that moves beyond the default 'White Australian' narrative. Almost a decade later, Abdullah is not only part of the growing critical mass that is redefining what contemporary Australian art looks like, but he is also deeply immersed as an individual artist and important voice within the cultural landscape. Beyond the national scope of Abdullah's practice which navigates multiple categories, his work is also demonstrably critical to the current global conversations and research about contemporary Islamic art, in particular the emergence of Islamic art in Australia and Southeast Asia.

For Abdullah, growing up in Perth as a Muslim Australian with a mixed Malay-Anglo heritage, the self-perceived ordinariness of this upbringing was jolted into a different kind of reality and thrust into the public domain in the aftermath of 9/11. Intimate familial customs and gestures that were once deemed mostly unremarkable, were now folded into a politically manufactured version of Islam that became central to the public debates regarding the supposed incompatibility of Muslims with 'Australian values'. In thinking about Abdullah's career to date, I began with his work *Big Jihad* because it came about at a critical time and during the politicking of the Muslim identity. It is an important work which encapsulates the Australian Muslim experience in a way that can be seen as historically relevant in the future.

*Big Jihad* is one of Abdullah's earliest sculptures. It explores the alternative meanings of the word *jihad* by reclaiming the personal and spiritual meanings to challenge the popular Western imagery of the Muslim 'savage' or 'terrorist'. In this work Abdullah created two identical figures modelled on his younger brother Abdul Abdullah and placed them in a mirror like stance 'squaring up' against themselves. This small-scale sculpture attempts to defuse a highly provocative term, and as noted in the original artist statement accompanying the sculpture, where the work

**Opposite** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*In the name*, 2015, tinted silicone,  
steel gambrel, galvanised chain,  
140 × 65 × 25cm, edition of 3.  
Installation view: Alaska Projects,  
Sydney NSW.

<sup>2</sup> Exhibition label for Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *Big Jihad* (2011) curated in 2013 by Nur Shkemi into the permanent gallery of Islamic Art at the Islamic Museum of Australia.

<sup>3</sup> Abdul-Rahman Abdullah interview in Asian Curator. Source: <https://asiancurator.com/abdul-rahman-abdullah/>. Accessed online 8 November, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Abdul-Rahman Abdullah interview with the ABC Art x West "The Bad Guy" Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/arts/ArtXWest/video/Abdul-Abdullah-The-Bad-Guy-140808/default.htm> Accessed online 8 November, 2020.

is on permanent display at the Islamic Museum of Australia, *Big Jihad* explores the meaning of the greater jihad, which for many Muslims is the internal or personal struggle with one's own *nafs* (desires). Abdullah describes this concept of "dealing with one's own faults through the recognition of one's own humanity as forming the basis of his relationship to Islam." This sculpture addresses the collapse between the spiritual and political, an important distinction for the many Muslims caught in the crossfire after 9/11. However, it also provides an alternate understanding for those outside this experience, and it is perhaps in the familiarity and ordinariness of the figure of a young man wearing a shirt and dropped crotch jeans that makes this usually sensitive subject matter so very accessible.

Through his art practice, Abdullah references the socio-political climate that often pushes his identity to the margins, "Australians have this self-image of being relaxed and easy going but we are consumed by institutional racism, government corruption and hard-edged politics. In this country Muslims are regarded as foreign, despite my father's family being here for over 200 years. My name and identity are always assumed as peripheral." Despite this, Abdullah amplifies the experiential and poetic nature of his art through the often raw and deeply personal narratives of his own familial and cultural heritage.

Abdullah is a master of his craft. There is a type of joy present in experiencing his work, in seeing the meticulously carved objects defying their own materiality, and where the extraordinary is often posing as something ordinary. In terms of the perpetual undercurrent of politics that sticks to his work, there is a propensity for Abdullah to mostly draw upon his experiences as a Muslim Australian in the pre-9/11 era, which is explained in this quote by Abdullah in relation to his younger brother Abdul Abdullah, also an accomplished artist, "A lot of his work is to do with similar topics, but in a different timeframe. We both talk about a Muslim experience, but his approach is very politicised and very post-9/11. To put it simply, mine is pre-9/11."

The American curator Thelma Golden shares a critical approach to contemporary art that implores us to consider art as extending beyond the potential latency of curated exhibitions. She suggests that rather than viewing artists merely as content providers, we need to understand the inherent value of artists as catalysts of culture. When considering markers of contemporary art as a catalyst for culture, we can perhaps better understand the importance of the necessary pulse Abdullah brings to our own cultural landscape. In Abdullah's artistic practice, one can observe a type of visual language which draws on the knowledge systems that sit outside the Eurocentric classification of anthropocentric perspectives. However, in a radically complex cultural, social and political landscape such as Australia, where the brutal colonial history and occupation of Indigenous land is further complicated by the





<sup>5</sup> See the TEDx Talk (2014) presented by Thelma Golden: "How art gives shape to cultural change" Source: [https://en.tiny.ted.com/talks/thelma\\_golden\\_how\\_art\\_gives\\_shape\\_to\\_cultural\\_change](https://en.tiny.ted.com/talks/thelma_golden_how_art_gives_shape_to_cultural_change) Accessed online 8 November, 2020.

**Above** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *Big Jihad*, 2011, bronze, 60 × 60 × 60cm. Installation view, Islamic Museum of Australia (IMA). Collection of the IMA. Photographer: Misheye.

presence of the coloniser-migrant, these types of important discussions and the revelation of multiple histories often first find their way through contemporary art. Even in the seemingly 'unfamiliar' memories that Abdullah shares, there is an undercurrent of familiarity in the truth of a fractured nation in denial of its own history. Art historian and critic Geeta Kapur so eloquently and importantly stated: "it is a commitment to see the history of art in conjunction with the history of humanity — a proposition that is humble, self-evident and audacious." Kapur is speaking of art and humanity as being inextricably linked, in other words, artists are central to our cultural ecology, and as Golden suggests, they should also be seen and valued as catalysts of it.

Abdullah's silicone sculpture *In the name* (2015), a life-like 'freshly slaughtered' carcass is suspended from the ceiling by a butcher's gambrel, was first shown at Alaska Projects in 2015. The sculpture was hung in a clinical white space which was purposely designed to evoke the 'bright recesses of Abdullah's childhood memory', and the type of starkness, or visual silence that one might imagine accompanies death. Abdullah's family has unique and curious beginnings, with his father's journey through Asia in the early 1970s landing him in Malaysia, and into the Islamic faith. His parents carried their faith and sense of uncomplicated and autonomous living across many aspects of their lives. Abdullah shares this in the narrative behind the work, "The pragmatic nature of life and death in the service of dinner became an unspoken ritual of the home, a bloody expression of the sacrosanct enacted behind



- 6 Geeta Kapur from a transcript of the keynote lecture 'Recursive narrative: ways of producing art history' held at Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany 14 October, 2016. Published online. Source: <https://postwar.hausderkunst.de/en/blog/recursive-narrative-ways-of-producing-art-history-by-geeta-kapur>. Accessed online 9 November, 2020.
- 7 Abdul-Rahman Abdullah text from the accompanying exhibition label for *In the name* (2015), ALASKA Projects, Sydney NSW, 2015.
- 8 Mignolo, Walter. *Sensing Otherwise, A Story of An Exhibition*, published online in IBRAAZ; Contemporary Visual Culture in North Africa and the Middle East. Source: <https://www.ibraaz.org/projects/57/#author201>. Accessed online 8 November, 2020.

**Opposite** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *Everything is true*, 2012, resin, enamel, timber plinth, 154 × 46 × 120cm, Edition 2/3.

closed doors.” He then goes on to describe his vivid memories of wiping snot from the yearling’s nostrils, the smell of wet wool followed by a spasm of black shit and blood spraying against the asbestos fence.

The imagery of Abdullah’s hanging carcass evokes my personal memories of growing up in Christchurch in the 1970s, with few other Muslim families around at that time, no halal butchers and my own parents’ foray into backyard slaughtering. I have lucid recollections of sitting at the kitchen table watching freshly home slaughtered meat being cranked through mincing equipment. As a child I of course did not recognise the unusual social circumstances that fed this practice at that time, nor did I understand my mother’s determination to ensure we had a pork-free diet. However, *In the name* is not merely a glimpse into domestic Islamic rituals happening in ‘Aussie’ backyards, it is pointing to something much more substantial: Abdullah is providing us with the necessary visual language that describes a unique circumstance here of being both Western *and* Muslim.

Abdullah’s accompanying narrative foregrounds another critical point, one which he describes as the ‘sense of duality’ which is embedded within the Muslim Australian experience, along with the “innate understanding that axioms of the home tend to falter at the front door.” This notion of the ‘front door’ offers an important understanding of the cultural threshold, one that no doubt is familiar to many migrant and non-White families. The ‘front door’ in a way embodies the duality of migrant consciousness, or of what de-colonial theorist Walter Mignolo refers to in terms of art making, as the aesthesis of non-European migrant and diasporic artists who create work with the awareness of a ‘socio-genetic’ condition. According to Mignolo, this condition characterises the sensibility of ‘migrant’ or ‘diaspora’ artists as being grounded in non-Western memories that are only rendered familiar by the appropriation of Western visual codes. Abdullah curiously finds himself both inside and outside these categories of aesthetics and between the visual codes of the East and West.

In a time when so-called alternate realities or experiences are expected to fold into or assimilate to a seemingly endless mono-cultural landscape, Abdullah’s ability to breach the perceived boundaries is also met by the generosity of contemporary art audiences and their ability and willingness to suspend ‘reality’. Although art is said to have the ability to hold truth, or in the way in which Picasso famously stated, “We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realise truth”, Abdullah refrains from asking the audience to belie their own truth. Rather, he is offering an entry point to explore alternative truths by making visible the cultural threshold that one can readily move across.

However simple or joyful this notion of truth in art might seem, the Eurocentric perspectives of Western knowledge systems of the contemporary era have claimed

- 9 Pablo Picasso, published letter to Marius de Zayas dated 1923.
- 10 Mignolo, Walter (2009) *Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom, Theory, Culture & Society*; SAGE, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore, Vol. 26 (7–8): 1–23 p.8.
- 11 El-Zein, Amira (2009) *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, Syracuse University Press, New York, p. xvi–xvii.

otherwise. These systems have claimed ‘Enlightenment thinking’ as reason and evidence-based knowledge. It is also utilised as a marker that distinguishes itself from the so-called second and third worlds; and any such truth which defies the Western notions of ‘reason’ are thereby devalued. Mignolo has stated in relation to the ‘centralisation’ and subsequent delineation of knowledge, “the First World had indeed the *privilege of inventing the classification and being part of it*.” It is well known that at the heart of this delineation, which was designed to be both geographical and corporeal, is the influence of the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Rene Descarte. Amira El-Zein, author of *Islam, Arabs and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, states in relation to Descarte, “since that time Westerners in general have the tendency to see things through opposite pairs: logo versus mythos, sensation versus intellect, metaphorical versus literal, inner versus outer, object versus subject, spiritual versus supernatural...” The collapsing of these opposites is seen most poignantly in Abdullah’s sculpture *Everything is true* (2012). In this work Abdullah references his childhood imagination and perception as a reminder that deep within us the poetic vestiges of the unseen, of the unreal, and of the necessary act of relying on all our senses is not an all too unfamiliar thing. Abdullah offers the viewer the ability to hold on to such ways of knowing and reignites the notion that humanity can flourish outside of such single-minded classifications of knowledge.

In Australia, this of course then radically shifts the way in which many non-White communities and their knowledge systems are viewed, and subsequently operate, in a type of disconnected and muted condition within their own cultural geographies and diasporic landscapes. However, Abdullah’s work seems familiar enough to audiences to hold their imagination and draw in their curiosity. This is something that is achieved through the materiality of his subject matter and how that may be deemed *unreal* is in fact anchored in the ‘realism’ of his work. Abdullah’s work has been described as magical realism, drawing on mythology and animal archetypes, “The presence of animals is fundamental to my visual language. Animals have the capacity to move between domestication and wildness, serenity and violence, intuition and logic, interior and exterior embodied within a physicality that is both familiar and foreign.”

For Abdullah, both the supernatural and natural worlds play a major role in transmitting the most intense of human experiences. Livestock, wild and domestic animals of various kinds feature throughout Abdullah’s practice in works such as *Among Monsters* (2017), *Snake Dream* (2018), *Black Dog* (2017), and *The Obstacle* (2014), an exquisitely hand carved buffalo placed atop a hand knotted carpet, a meditation on his childhood visits to his mother’s home village in Kampung Linggi, Central Malaysia. Some of these animals are present in Abdullah’s daily observances on the cattle farm where he lives with his wife Anna and their two







**Above** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *The Days*,  
2017, painted wood, light fitting, 30 x 140 x 140cm.  
Campbelltown City Council Collection.

12 Abdul-Rahman Abdullah interview in Asian Curator. Website: <https://asiancurator.com/abdul-rahman-abdullah/>. Accessed online 8 November, 2020.

13 Artist Statement by Abdul-Rahman Abdullah for *The Days* (2017), in the exhibition, *Another Day in Paradise* curated by Michael Dagastino and Ben Quilty at the Campbelltown Arts Centre, NSW, 2017.

daughters, Aziza and Althea; some are of dreams or memories, whilst others represent omens, or fateful tales as demonstrated in his installation *The Days* (2017). This work was shown as part of the exhibition *Another Day in Paradise*, curated by Michael Dagastino and Ben Quilty at Campbelltown Arts Centre during the Sydney Festival in 2017. Abdullah, along with a group of leading Australian artists, created works in response to the paintings produced by Myuran Sukumaran during his incarceration awaiting execution at Bali's infamous Kerobokan Prison. Abdullah's installation is solemn, yet powerful, a solitary figure of a dove, sitting under a single light globe, on top of 3665 wooden eggs, with each egg representing a single day of Sukumaran's life in incarceration. Abdullah met with Sukumaran's family and recalls the family's pain and the sombre reality of living life as marked days, "Every day is a gift. After meeting with Myuran's family it became very clear to me how important individual days become when facing mortality as a finite experience of years, months, weeks and days. They spoke of good days and bad, the days that changed them, the ones that stayed in their memory and most of all the last day. There was always another day until there wasn't."

Humanity and truth delivered through the materialisation of marginal subjectivities continue to feature throughout Abdullah's practice in both overt and subtle ways. In the work titled *The men who sold lies* (2018), 'cloths' appear to drape over three paintings. The works allude to a series of paintings by Joseph Lycett, a twice convicted forger who was commissioned by Captain James Wallis in 1818 to document the newly established penal colony in the area of Mulubinba in Newcastle. The skilfully crafted wood sculpture appears soft and malleable, acting as both a physical and metaphorical covering. In this work Abdullah describes Lycett as an opportunist in continuing his practice of deceit in service of Empire through the idyllic landscapes and panoramic views that hid the truth of the occupation, and as Abdullah states, "served to blanket the proceeds of invasion, displacement and occupation beneath idyllic lies."

The enduring nature of Abdullah's practice can be seen in his remarkable skill creating ordinary objects to share extraordinary narratives, and somewhat extraordinary objects sharing the everyday business of being human. Abdullah's installation *Pretty Beach* (2019), first shown for *The National 2019: New Australian Art* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, is a recollection of the artist's childhood memory of viewing the spectacle of a fever of stingrays gliding elegantly under the jetty at his grandfather's home on the Brisbane Waters, Central Coast NSW. The eleven beautifully hand sculpted stingrays appear to glide dreamlike under a downpour of shimmering crystals. The beauty of this scene collapses into the jarring reality of a deeply personal tragedy, the suicide of Abdullah's paternal grandfather. Through sharing the familiar narrative of family and personal memory,

Abdullah breaches perceived cultural divides by creating a subtle disruption through the shared human experience and understanding of death and grief. With work imbued with such personal anecdotes, Abdullah offers audience various points of connection through both the familiar *and* familial, and perhaps as a way forward through such connections to a possible cosmopolitan future.

Abdullah's work has the ability to not only delight audiences, but to also act as a catalyst and rupture the confines of culture, time and place. With Abdullah's practice primarily mediated through his personal memory and mythology, the socio-political climate in which his work is received, reveals and documents important truths about the tension between marginalised histories and politics in the current moment. Abdullah's ability to create art that folds subjectivity into truth, and personal memory into the broad cultural landscape, affirms the place of his work in the discourse of contemporary art in Australia.



**Below** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *Black Dog*, 2017, bronze, 37 × 79.5 × 303cm. Edition 1/3 (+1 AP). Private Collection of Evelyn Hall.

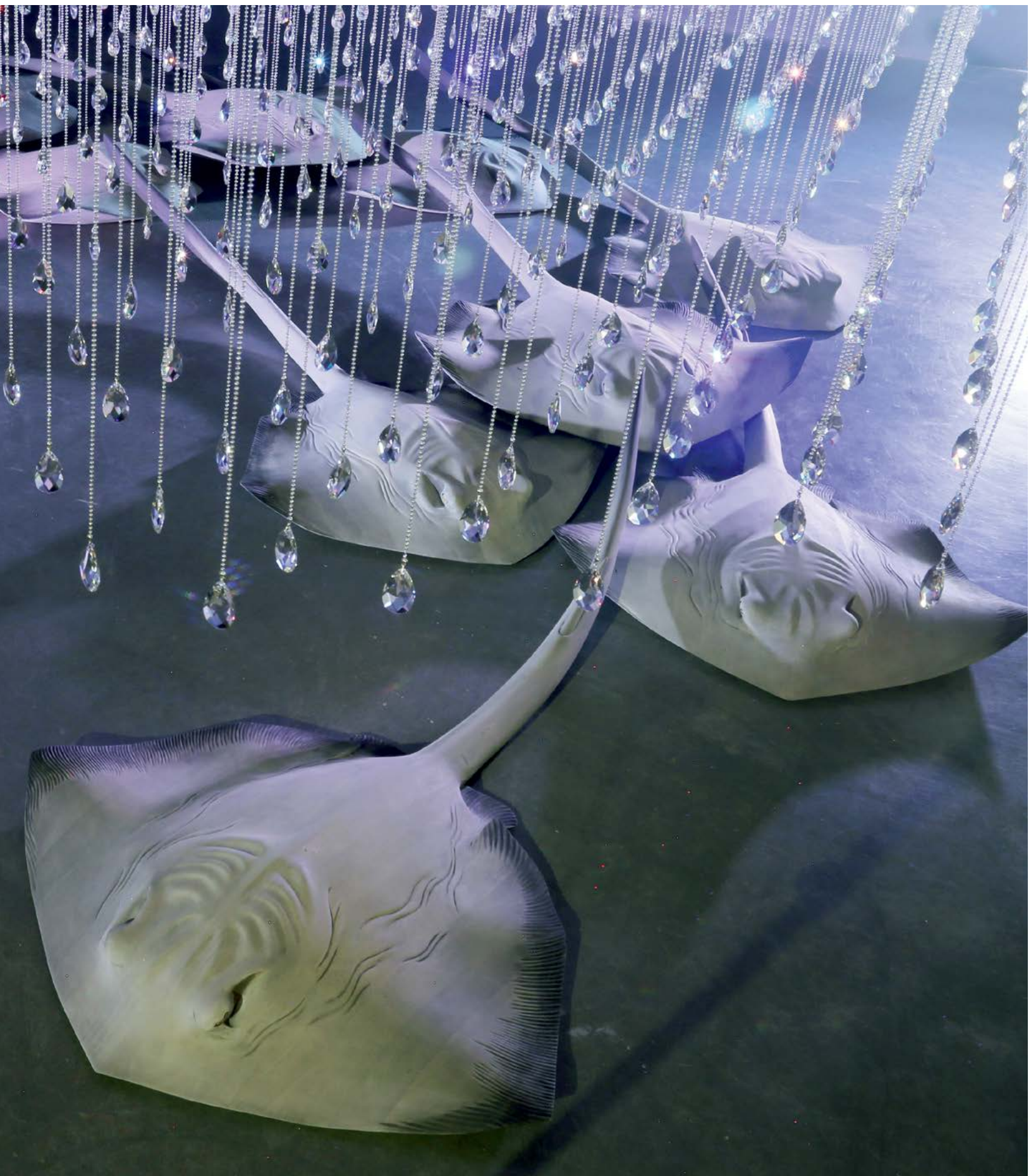
**Following spread** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *Pretty Beach*, 2019, painted wood, silver plated ball chain, Swarovski crystal, audio, 400 × 480 × 480cm. Installation view: Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney.











# NŪR THE LIGHT

<sup>1</sup> Robert Cook, Lover, Fighter, *Art Monthly* issue 278, April 2015.

Carving wood is not, characteristically, a gentle discipline. There is no slow, seeping motion of paint falling onto a canvas; no tentative trace of ink or graphite across a page. Instead, there is a direct and deliberate process of shearing away the substance of an object to give rise to another — unearthing the artist's vision, creating by taking away. Each paring, too, carves away the noise, the burden and the expectation, the artifice, of modern life. This is carving as ritual, as analogy. As the offcuts fall away, with every layer shed, the artist edges ever closer to a purity of self we carry with us in childhood, long before learning the ways of the world. The artist arrives at something true. A boy on a jetty, yet to learn of loss, but learning of disappearance all the same.

Abdul Rahman-Abdullah is an artist. He is a storyteller. He is a communicator. And a communicator, even a writer, knows that there are some stories for which there are no words; at least, no words sufficient for evoking the essence of the story to be told. Here, the story is a meditation; the story is the opening to a world.

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## Reverence

It is Pretty Beach, the 1980s. From the Central Coast of New South Wales, the water is clear, crystalline. It is here that Abdullah's grandfather Cliff lives, in a home by the bay. A young child now, Abdullah stands on the end of a sprawling jetty, watching a group of stingrays glide through the water below. They swim in arcs, tranquil. As the rain begins to pour, the stingrays disappear from view, submerged below the water — its surface obscured, opaque.

The making of a memory is a curious thing.

Much of Abdullah's work explores memory: autobiographical and familial. From early sculptures like *Wednesday's Child* through to *Pretty Beach* today, glimpsing Abdullah's work is akin to stepping inside his internal world, past evoked in the present. Art Gallery of Western Australia curator Robert Cook once described his style as "realistic, but loaded with narrative and personal investment."<sup>1</sup> Could there be a more accurate description of memory itself? A memory is not a literal, internal encapsulation, it is a representation. A memory is filtered through our perception, its making a process. Memories are realistic, but selective in their realism — shaped by emotion, by narrative, by personal investment. Abdullah captures the nuances; more importantly, he translates them, creating a closed circuitry of space and time, shape and form.

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<sup>2</sup> Snell, Ted. *In Abdul-Rahman Abdullah's Pretty Beach, a fever of stingrays becomes a meditation on suffering*. The Conversation, 2019. <https://theconversation.com/in-abdul-rahman-abdullahs-pretty-beach-a-fever-of-stingrays-becomes-a-meditation-on-suffering-114427>.

### **He died holding photos of us as children.**

Grief is long, heavy, inexorable. It rolls over a life like storm clouds approaching a shoreline, certain and unrelenting. Grief speaks in a language that no one else seems to understand until they, too, are engulfed by it.

*Pretty Beach*, however, is not an elegy.

When Abdullah's grandfather Cliffy passed away in 2009, Abdullah was no longer a young boy. A death that occurs by choice is, for some, impossible to understand. Other times, it embodies a true notion of death 'with dignity', an ease of suffering, a pain lessened ever slightly by the knowledge of another's pain released.

---

### **Soft echoes**

We talk of souls, and signposts. A slow afternoon in September, Abdullah shares the impetus of *Pretty Beach*, and the conversation turns to a tangent: a word can mean whatever we want it to mean. Words like *soul*, like *afterlife*, sit like hollow vessels ascribed their meaning only when we choose to imbue them.

The term *soul*, then, is a placeholder. To someone raised in our shared heritage, this is *rūḥ* — the part of a person that cannot die, that goes on, unseen.

In *Pretty Beach*, the rain forms a circle, floor-to-ceiling of hanging chain; the stingrays, eleven in number, lay along the same line, curved like a crescent moon. In Islam, the circle itself has many connotations: unity, monotheism, harmony, *infinity*.

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### **Radiance**

Since its first presentation in *The National* at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, *Pretty Beach* has inspired many thoughtful, written responses. A piece for *The Conversation* last year<sup>2</sup> wrote of "revelation, terror and insight" in the confrontations with death inherent in its central subject matter. However, for all that has been written, *Pretty Beach* is misunderstood, much the way that death itself is misunderstood; or, rather, *misshapen* in the Western imaginary. Death is not an end, not something to be feared. It is a continuation, a transmutation. It is easy to say that a work about loss wrestles with darkness. It is harder to find the light.

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### **On the edges**

For many years, Abdullah worked as a commercial sculptor and a model-maker, honing his skills. Earlier this year, he described carving as 'drawing in space.' The foreword of *Everything is true* describes technical virtuosity. And yet, atop

<sup>3</sup> Mudivarti, Priyatam. *Blue Flame*. The Baltimore Review, 2013. [http://baltimorereview.org/index.php/winter\\_2013/contributor/priyatam-mudivarti](http://baltimorereview.org/index.php/winter_2013/contributor/priyatam-mudivarti).

<sup>4</sup> Kumar, Amitava. *Pyre*. Granta, 2015. <https://granta.com/pyre>.

the bedrock of these abilities, the true genius of Abdullah's work emerges from his capacity to transport the audience into a liminal space through objects so tangible — to *create* the ethereal.

In *Pretty Beach*, light flickers from crystal to crystal of hanging raindrops like whispers that echo as they flit around an empty room. There is the sense that the work knows something we do not — that it is self-contained, and irrevocably complete; a space we are stepping into, as guests and observers. We are afforded the opportunity to exist in this memory; to narrow the interstices between a past and present reality. To anyone whose life has been marred by loss, the days begin to bleed into each other; distinctions between what *was* and what *is* feel arbitrary. In the mind, it is all the same. And yet, this work embodies an anti-solipsism; an ode to the recognition that what we cannot see does not cease to exist because of our imperception.

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### Light above and below

In *Blue Flame*<sup>3</sup>, South Asian writer Priyatam Mudivarti wrote of his father's passing, of putting flame to bone, of death and ritual; in *Pyre*<sup>4</sup>, Amitava Kumar wrote of his mother's death: "There can be so much pathos in accounting. All the dumb confusion and wild fear of our lives rearranged in tidy rows in a ledger. One set of figures to indicate birth, and another set for death: the concerted attempt to repress the accidents and the pain of the period in between. Entire lives and accompanying histories of loss reduced to neat numbers." The hollow bounds we put around a life *in memoriam* risk erasure — recording the facts of life and death, discarding the meaning, the *magic* that existed in between. To this, *Pretty Beach* is an antithesis. Much like the soul continues on, so too does true memory, with all its emotion and complexity.

Abdullah trades in microcosms — each memory a world. The ability to carve these worlds into manifest being and present them as physical space, as object and vision exported from his mind and into our immediate reality, is indelibly rare. *Pretty Beach* is immense for its scale and power, for its technical execution, but more so for its encapsulation of beauty. *Pretty Beach* is light in darkness, it gives rise to a gentle and unspoken radiance. In Arabic, this is *nūr*.

# ARTIST STATEMENT

**Below from left** Pretty Beach, New South Wales, Central Coast region, 1987. | Pretty Beach, New South Wales, Central Coast region, c1987. | Portrait of the artist's grandfather, 'Cliffy', c1987. | Jetty at Pretty Beach, New South Wales, Central Coast region, c1977. All images courtesy of Abdullah family archive.

*Pretty Beach* is a meditation on the suicide of my grandfather. Grandpa Cliffy lived in a rambling fibro home on the Central Coast NSW, in the waterfront community of Pretty Beach. We'd visit every few years, making the long trek over the Nullarbor in the old XR Falcon. Cliffy didn't talk much, he'd chain smoke Log Cabin and chuckle at us kids with a beer in his hand. He'd spent his working life in Sydney, delivering potatoes to the Chinese wholesalers in Paddy's Market where he was known as Honest Cliff, the man who couldn't lie.

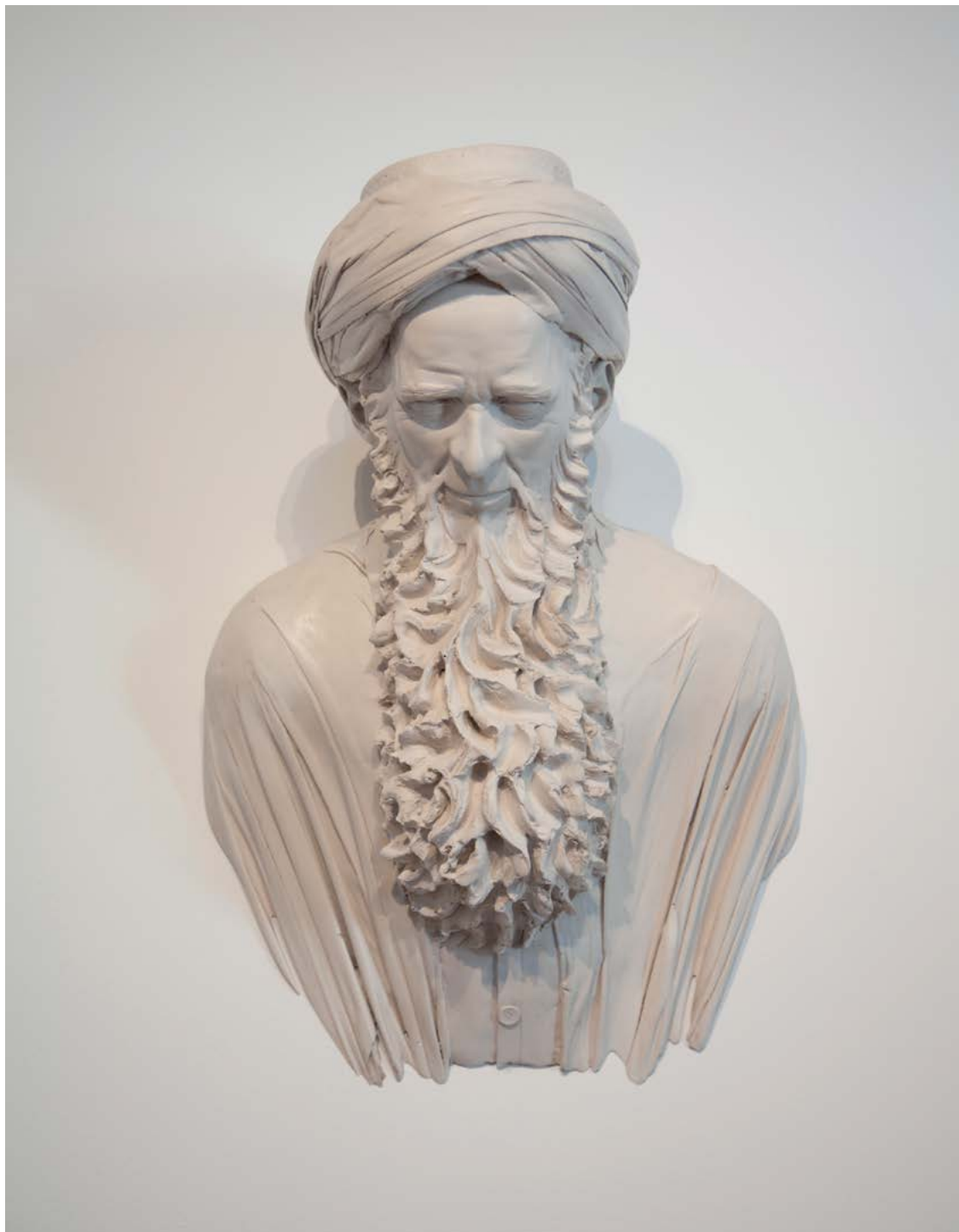
Cliffy's home had a jetty out the front and high tide brought the water lapping up beneath the house. I remember standing out on the jetty as a kid watching groups of stingrays glide beneath me, tracing arcs through the shallow water. The rain drifted in like a soft curtain drawing across the bay, obliterating the rays from view as the surface of the water crumpled above them. I ran inside.

In 2009 we got the news that Grandpa Cliffy had passed away. For the past few years cancer and diabetes had eroded his body. When his legs went, he dragged himself into his EH Holden, hooked up the exhaust and faded into sleep. The choice to end his life reflected the independence with which he'd always conducted himself. While it took the wind from us there was a sense of easement in his decision that we understood. He died holding pictures of us kids and letters we'd written. I hadn't visited Pretty Beach for many years, and then he was gone.

The rain had come.







**Above** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*Al Falaq*, 2013, tinted resin, 75 x 45 x  
42cm. Photographer: David Collins.

**Opposite** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*I have been assured you will go to heaven,  
my friend*, 2013, tinted resin, satin ribbon  
180 x 75 x 38cm. Murdoch University Art  
Collection. Photographer: David Collins.









**From left** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *The men who sold lies II*, 2018, painted wood, 89 x 86 x 40cm. Private Collection of Jeff and Di Hay. Installation view: Newcastle Art Gallery.

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *The men who sold lies I*, 2018, painted wood, 123 x 113 x 21.5cm. Newcastle Art Gallery Collection, Purchased through the Gil Docking Bequest 2019. Installation view: Newcastle Art Gallery.

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *The men who sold lies III*, 2018, painted wood, 107 x 67 x 21.5cm. Private Collection of Franklin Gaffney and Milica Lilic. Installation view: Newcastle Art Gallery.





**Opposite** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*Offerings*, 2017, charred wood,  
40 × 120 × 6cm.

**Above** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*Watching, Waiting (cat)*, 2013, tinted  
resin, mirror, shelf, 60 × 60 × 20cm.  
Photographer: David Collins.







**Opposite** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *Practical Magic*, 2016, stained wood, nylon rope, 65 x 150 x 150cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 2016.

**Above** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, *The Obstacle* (detail), 2014, waxed wood, buffalo horn, hand-knotted woollen carpet, 48 x 130 x 235cm. State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia. Gift of the Artist under the Commonwealth Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2016. Photographer: Bo Wong.



# ARTIST CURRICULUM VITAE



Abdul-Rahman Abdullah.  
Photographer: Alessandro Bianchetti

## Education

2012 Bachelor of Art (Art), Faculty of SODA, Curtin University. (WA)

## Solo Exhibitions

2021 *Everything Is True*, John Curtin Gallery, Perth Festival 2021. Perth (WA)

2018 *The Dogs*, Moore Contemporary. Perth (WA)

2017 *Among Monsters*, This Is No Fantasy. Melbourne (VIC)

2015 *In the name*, Alaska Projects. Sydney (NSW)

2013 *Maghrib*, Venn Gallery. Perth (WA)

2012 *Inside the little kingdom*, Fringeworld Festival 2012, Kurb Gallery. Perth (WA)

## Selected Group Exhibitions

2020 *50fifty:2020*, Curated by Chris Malcom & Lia McKnight, John Curtin Gallery. Perth (WA)

*Peripheries* (with Abdul Abdullah), Yavuz Gallery. Sydney (NSW)

*Slime & Ashes*, Curated by Matthew Harris, West Space. Melbourne (VIC)

*Hyper Leisure*, Moore Contemporary. Perth (WA)

2019 *The National 2019: New Australian Art*, Curated by Anna Davis & Clothilde Bullen, Museum of Contemporary Art. Sydney (NSW)

*Dead Things*, Curated by Dr Kent Wilson (with Anna Louise Richardson), Castlemaine State Festival. Castlemaine (VIC)

*Concrete: Art, Design & Architecture*, Curated by Margaret Hancock-Davis, Jamfactory. Adelaide (SA)

*Ritual*, Curated by Ted Snell, There Is. Perth (WA)

*Kaseh Ibu*, Cool Change Contemporary. Perth (WA)

*The real and the imagined – Spring 1883*, The Establishment Hotel. Sydney (NSW)

*Us. (Universal Stories)*, Curated by Meryl Ryan, Lake Macquarie City Gallery. Lake Macquarie (NSW)

*Talismans for an uncertain future*, Bendigo Art Gallery. Bendigo (VIC)

2018 *Safe Space*, Curated by Christine Morrow, Logan Art Gallery. Brisbane (QLD)

*Lucky Charms*, Curated by Vipoo Srivilasa, Bayside Arts & Cultural Centre. Melbourne (VIC)

*Animaze*, Curated by Dr Ric Spencer, Fremantle Art Centre. Perth (WA)

*The 1818 Project*, Curated by Sarah Johnson, Newcastle Art Gallery. Newcastle (NSW)

*Imago Mundi*, Curated by Claudio Scorretti & Irina Ungureanu, Salone degli Incanti. Trieste, Italy

*Directors Cut*, Curated by Chris Malcom, John Curtin Gallery. Perth (WA)

*Waqf al-Tagheer; Time of Change*, Curated by Nur Shkempi, ACE Open. Adelaide (SA)



- The Trace*, Curated by Grace Partridge, Wellington Street Projects. Sydney (NSW)
- Khalas – Enough!*, Curated by Phillip George, UNSW Galleries. Sydney (NSW)
- Couplings*, Curated by Alanna Irwin, Dominik Mersch Gallery. Sydney (NSW)
- 2017 *WA Journey; 1970–present*, Curated by Robert Cook, Art Gallery of Western Australia. Perth (WA)
- Dark Horizons*, Curated by Reuben Friend, Pataka Art + Museum. Wellington (NZ)
- We are all affected*, Curated by Nur Shkembi, Fairfield Museum / Peacock Gallery. Sydney (NSW)
- Everybody clapping on the one and the three*, Curated by Andrew Christie, Paper Mountain ARI. Perth (WA)
- Every dog will have it's day*, Curated by Sophia Cai & Kathleen Linn, Casula Powerhouse. Sydney (NSW)
- 50fifty:2020*, Curated by Chris Malcom & Lia McKnight, John Curtin Gallery. Perth (WA)
- Another day in paradise*, Curated by Ben Quilty & Michael Dagostino, Campbelltown Arts Centre. Campbelltown (NSW)
- 2016 *Invisible Genres*, Curated by John Mateer, John Curtin Gallery. Perth (WA)
- Dead Centre*, Curated by Abdul-Rahman Abdullah & Anna Louise Richardson, Spectrum. Perth (WA)
- The Fraud Complex*, Curated by Denise Thwaites & Peter Johnson, Westspace. Melbourne (VIC)
- HERE&NOW16*, Curated by Hamida Novakovich, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery. Perth (WA)
- 2016 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Magic Object*, Curated by Lisa Slade, Art Gallery of South Australia. Adelaide (SA)
- 2015 *Sydney Contemporary, This Is No Fantasy*, Carriageworks. Sydney (NSW)
- Spring 1883*, Curated by Dale Buckley, The Establishment Hotel. Sydney (NSW)
- PICA Salon 2015: Epic Narratives*, Curated by Dr Leigh Robb, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art. Perth (WA)
- Post-Hybrid: Re-imagining the Australian Self*, Curated by Lia McKnight, John Curtin Gallery. Perth (WA)
- Arcadia*, Curated by Diane Soumilas, Glen Eira Council Gallery. Melbourne (VIC)
- Windows to the sacred*, Curated by Robert Buratti, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery. Mornington (VIC)
- HERE&NOW15*, Curated by Andrew Purvis, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery. Perth (WA)
- WA Focus; Abdul & Abdul-Rahman Abdullah*, Curated by Robert Cook, Art Gallery of Western Australia. Perth (WA)
- Subiaco pARK*, Curated by Gemma Weston, Perth International Arts Festival. Perth (WA)
- 2014 *Menagerie*, Curated by Juliana Engberg, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. Melbourne (VIC)
- Sealed Section*, Curated by Miriam Kelly, Artbank. Sydney (NSW)
- Outland*, Melbourne Art Fair 2014, This Is No Fantasy. Melbourne (VIC)
- The List*, Curated by Michael D'Agostino, Campbelltown Arts Centre. Campbelltown (NSW)
- Form and Substance*, Curated by Alex Seton. Jan Murphy Gallery. Brisbane (QLD)
- Tropaeum*, Curated by Abdul-Rahman Abdullah & Andrew Purvis. Fremantle Arts Centre. Perth (WA)
- Worth It's Weight In Gold*, Curated by Anna Louise Richardson. Moana Project Space. Perth (WA)
- Dear William; Public Project*, Curated by Andrew Nicholls. FORM. Perth (WA)
- 2013 *Summer Show*, Venn Gallery. Perth (WA)
- Riding Bicycles*, Curated by Benjamin Rodin. Seventh Gallery. Melbourne (VIC)
- Islam Contemporary*, Curated by Aziz Sohail. Whitney Centre for the Arts. Pittsfield (MA) USA
- Project HOME*, Underbelly Arts Festival 2013, Cockatoo Island. Sydney (NSW)

### Appointments

2018 Board member of Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (ongoing)  
City of Perth, East End  
revitalisation working group

### Residencies

2016 4A Beijing Residency, Beijing.  
China  
2015 Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur.  
Malaysia  
2014 Campbelltown Arts Centre,  
Campbelltown (NSW)  
2013 Underbelly Arts Lab, Cockatoo  
Island. Sydney (NSW)

### Selected Grants, Awards and Shortlists

2020 Australia Council for the Arts;  
Arts Project Grant  
Dept of Local Govt, Sport &  
Culture; Development Grant (WA)  
Winner, Australian Muslim Artists  
Prize 2020 (VIC)  
2019 Finalist, Wynne Prize (NSW)  
Finalist, Joondalup Invitational  
Art Prize (WA)  
Dept of Local Govt, Sport &  
Culture; Development Grant (WA)  
2018 Australia Council for the Arts;  
Arts Project Grant  
Dept of Local Govt, Sport &  
Culture; Development Grant (WA)  
Shortlisted, 58th Venice Biennale  
2017 Winner, Pro Hart Outback Art  
Prize (NSW)  
Mayors Award, Woollahra Small  
Sculpture Prize (NSW)

Highly Commended, Churchie  
Emerging Artist Prize (QLD)  
Finalist, Sovereign Asian Art Prize  
(Hong Kong)  
Finalist, Harold Tribe Sculpture  
Prize (NSW)

Australia Council for the Arts;  
Arts Project Grant  
Dept of Local Govt, Sport &  
Culture; Development Grant (WA)

2016 Winner, Multicultural Recognition  
Award – Visual Arts (WA)  
Finalist, Bankwest Art Award,  
(WA)  
Department of Culture and the  
Arts; Development Grant (WA)  
Highly commended, Waterhouse  
Prize for Natural History (SA)  
Finalist, 64th Blake Prize (NSW)

2015 Finalist, The Wynne Prize (NSW)  
Finalist, Churchie Art Prize for  
Emerging Artists (QLD)  
Department of Culture and the  
Arts; Development Grant (WA)  
Australia Council for the Arts;  
Arts Project Grant  
Department of Culture and  
the Arts; Artflight  
Winner, Leonora Art Award;  
Sculpture Prize (WA)

2014 Winner, Fishers Ghost Sculpture  
Prize (NSW)  
Department of Culture and the  
Arts; Development Grant (WA)  
Finalist, 15 Artists 2015, (QLD)  
Finalist, Bankwest Art Award,  
(WA)

Finalist, Deakin University  
Small Sculpture Prize, (VIC)  
Department of Culture and  
the Arts; Artflight (WA)  
Winner, Art & Australia /  
Credit Suisse Private Banking  
Contemporary Art Award  
Australia Council for the Arts;  
JUMP Mentorship

2013 NAVA: Sainsbury Sculpture Grant  
Winner, Qantas Foundation  
Encouragement of Australian  
Contemporary Art Award  
Finalist, Fishers Ghost Art Prize  
(NSW)  
Finalist, Substation Contemporary  
Art Prize (VIC)  
Finalist, 62nd Blake Prize (NSW)  
Australia Council for the Arts;  
Artstart  
Constantine Family Foundation  
Emerging Artist Program;  
Artsource (WA)  
2012 Department of Culture and the  
Arts; Development Grant (WA)

### Collections

Art Gallery of South Australia  
Art Gallery of Western Australia  
Artbank  
University of Western Australia  
Curtin University  
Murdoch University  
Latrobe University  
Islamic Museum of Australia  
Wesfarmers  
City of Broken Hill  
City of Bendigo  
City of Campbelltown  
Newcastle Art Gallery



**Above** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*To dream a good luck dream*, 2020, painted  
wood, sheepskin rug, 25 × 140 × 140cm.  
Private Collection.



# LIST OF WORKS

*The men who sold lies I*, 2018, painted wood, 123 × 113 × 21.5cm. Newcastle Art Gallery Collection, Purchased through the Gil Docking Bequest 2019.

*The men who sold lies II*, 2018, painted wood, 89 × 86 × 40cm. Private Collection of Jeff and Di Hay.

*The men who sold lies III*, 2018, painted wood, 107 × 67 × 21.5cm. Private Collection of Franklin Gaffney and Milica Lilic.

*Among Monsters*, 2017, stained wood, glass beads, 80 × 80 × 27cm. Artbank Collection.

*Calendar*, 2014, digital video, 60 second loop.

*The day the world was still*, 2014, stained wood, light fitting, 130 × 44 × 31cm. Curtin University Art Collection.

*Snake Dream*, 2018, painted wood, hall stand, 110 × 40 × 42cm.

*Al Falaq*, 2013, tinted resin, 75 × 45 × 42cm.

*To dream a good luck dream*, 2020, painted wood, sheepskin rug, 25 × 140 × 140cm. Private Collection.

*Little Ghost*, 2019, painted wood, 125 × 78 × 52cm. MARS Collection.

*Black Dog*, 2017, bronze, acrylic rug, 37 × 79.5 × 303cm. Edition 1/3 (+1 AP). Private Collection of Evelyn Hall.

*Watching, Waiting (cat)*, 2013, tinted resin, mirror, shelf, 60 × 60 × 20cm.

*The Obstacle*, 2014, waxed wood, buffalo horn, hand-knotted woollen carpet, 48 × 130 × 235cm. State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia. Gift of the Artist under the Commonwealth Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2016.

*In the name*, 2015, tinted silicone, steel gambrel, galvanised chain, 140 × 65 × 25cm, edition of 3.

*Offerings*, 2017, charred wood, 40 × 120 × 6cm.

*Practical Magic*, 2016, stained wood, nylon rope, 65 × 150 × 150cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 2016.

*Wednesday's Child*, 2013, tinted resin, paper, chandelier, 400 × 300 × 490cm.

*Everything is true*, 2012, resin, enamel, timber plinth, 154 × 46 × 120cm.

*The language of the birds*, 2019, painted wood, hand knotted rugs, timber plinths, 112 × 22 × 180cm. Wesfarmers Collection.

*Red*, 2019, painted wood, ply, tinted epoxy, 16 × 80 × 85cm. Date-Lyon Collection.

*The Dogs*, 2017, stained wood and chandeliers, dimensions variable. Private Collection.

*Silvergulls*, 2019, painted wood, 8 × 37 × 30cm, 8 × 37 × 40cm, 15 × 38 × 30cm. Private Collection of Nathan Giles.

*The Days*, 2017, painted wood, light fitting, 30 × 140 × 140cm. Campbelltown City Council Collection.

*I have been assured you will go to heaven, my friend*, 2013, tinted resin, satin ribbon 180 × 75 × 38cm. Murdoch University Art Collection.

*Pretty Beach*, 2019, painted wood, silver ball chain, Swarovski crystal, audio, 400 × 480 × 480cm.

*Iftar*, 2017, concrete, gold-plated almonds, plinth, 110 × 22 × 22cm. PICA Edition.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost I would like to thank the artist, Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, for his generosity and devotion to his practice and for the enthusiasm and commitment he brought to this exhibition. It is a privilege to share so much of the artist's work with Western Australian audiences during the 2021 Perth Festival – for which I must acknowledge the generosity of the many lenders from around Australia that have all contributed to *Everything Is True*.

Thank you to our three writers: Somayra Ismailjee, Nur Shkempi and Mikala Tai, for sharing their compelling insights that greatly enrich our understanding of the artist's practice and provide an edifying foundation from which to consider *Everything Is True*.

In developing this exhibition, I would like to sincerely thank my John Curtin Gallery colleague Lia McKnight for her curatorial support during a very challenging 2020 and for working so tirelessly on this publication in recent months. I would also like to acknowledge Margaret Moore for her unwavering support and guidance.

A sincere thank you to Gemma Weston and Iain Grandage from the Perth Festival for their continuing support, which of course is made possible through the generosity and vision of the Festival's long-time Visual Arts Program Partner, Wesfarmers Arts.

Finally, to all John Curtin Gallery staff and especially those who have contributed specifically to *Everything Is True*: Patti Belletty, Brad Coleman, Olivia Jones, Jane King, Lia McKnight, Jacqui Monks, Xavier Pardos and Samantha Smith; as well as the Gallery's installation crew: Graeme Burge, Matt Dickmann, Sean Mitchell, Bjoern Rainer-Adamson, David Reid, Leah Robbie and Bridie Weaver – thank you all for the commitment and energy that made this such a special exhibition for the Gallery to launch our 2021 program.

Chris Malcolm  
Director, John Curtin Gallery

This publication supports the exhibition  
**Everything Is True**

**Abdul-Rahman Abdullah**

John Curtin Gallery  
5 February–23 April 2021

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**Following page** Abdul-Rahman Abdullah,  
*Iftar*, 2017, concrete, gold-plated almonds,  
plinth, 110 × 22 × 22cm. PICA Edition.  
Photographer: Alessandro Bianchetti.

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**PERTH FESTIVAL**



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John Curtin Gallery



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