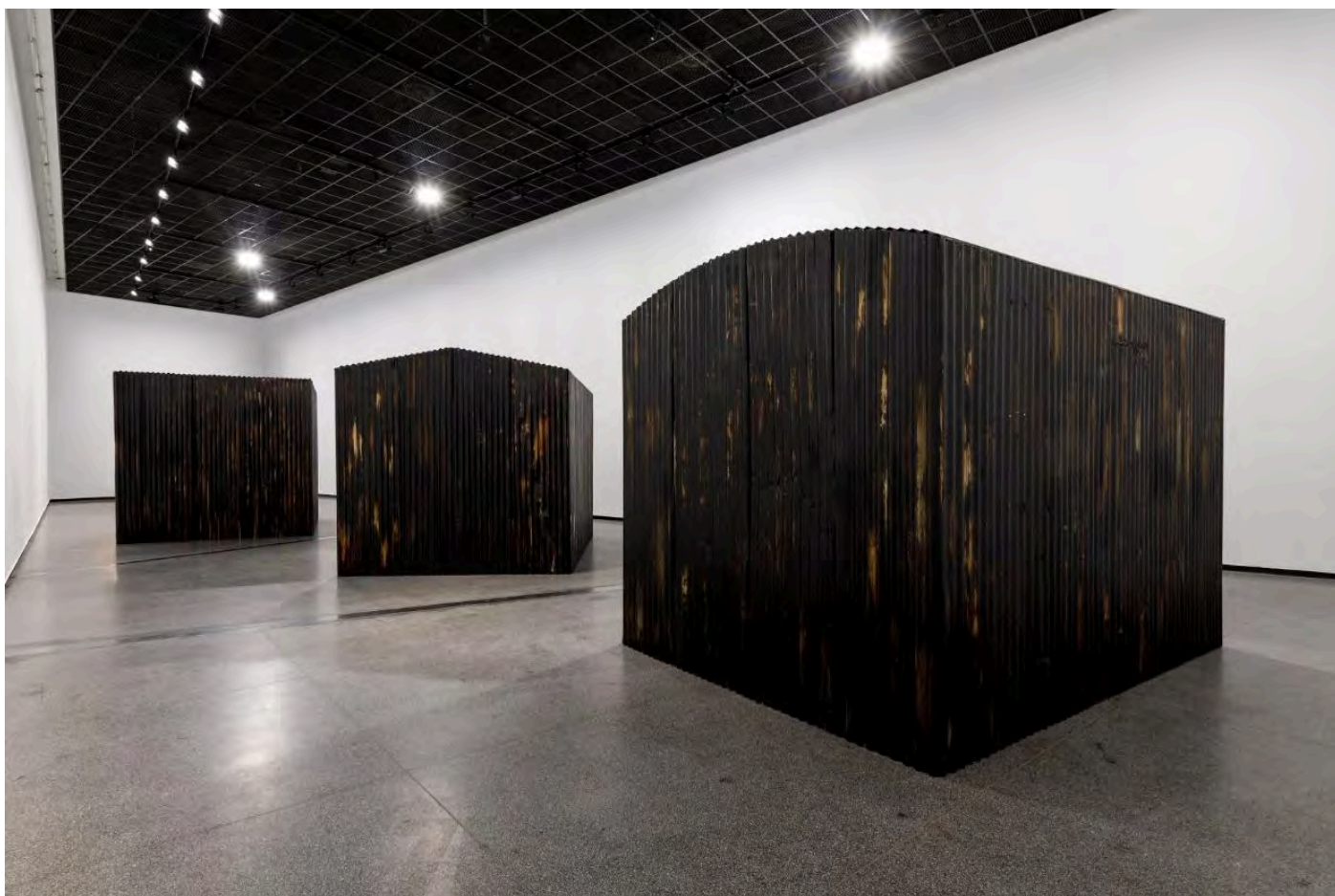


Australia's nuclear history explored through glass

Milly Mitchell-Anyon | [The Post](#)

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Yhonnie Scarce, *Missile Park 2021*, installation view, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne. Courtesy the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne. SUPPLIED

Milly Mitchell-Anyon is a curator at Lower Hutt's Dowse Art Museum

The Dowse Art Museum's latest exhibition, *Yhonnie Scarce: Night Blindness*, marks the artist's first solo exhibition in Aotearoa New Zealand. Scarce is internationally renowned for her large-scale installations, glassmaking, and the use of archival photography and found objects in her work.

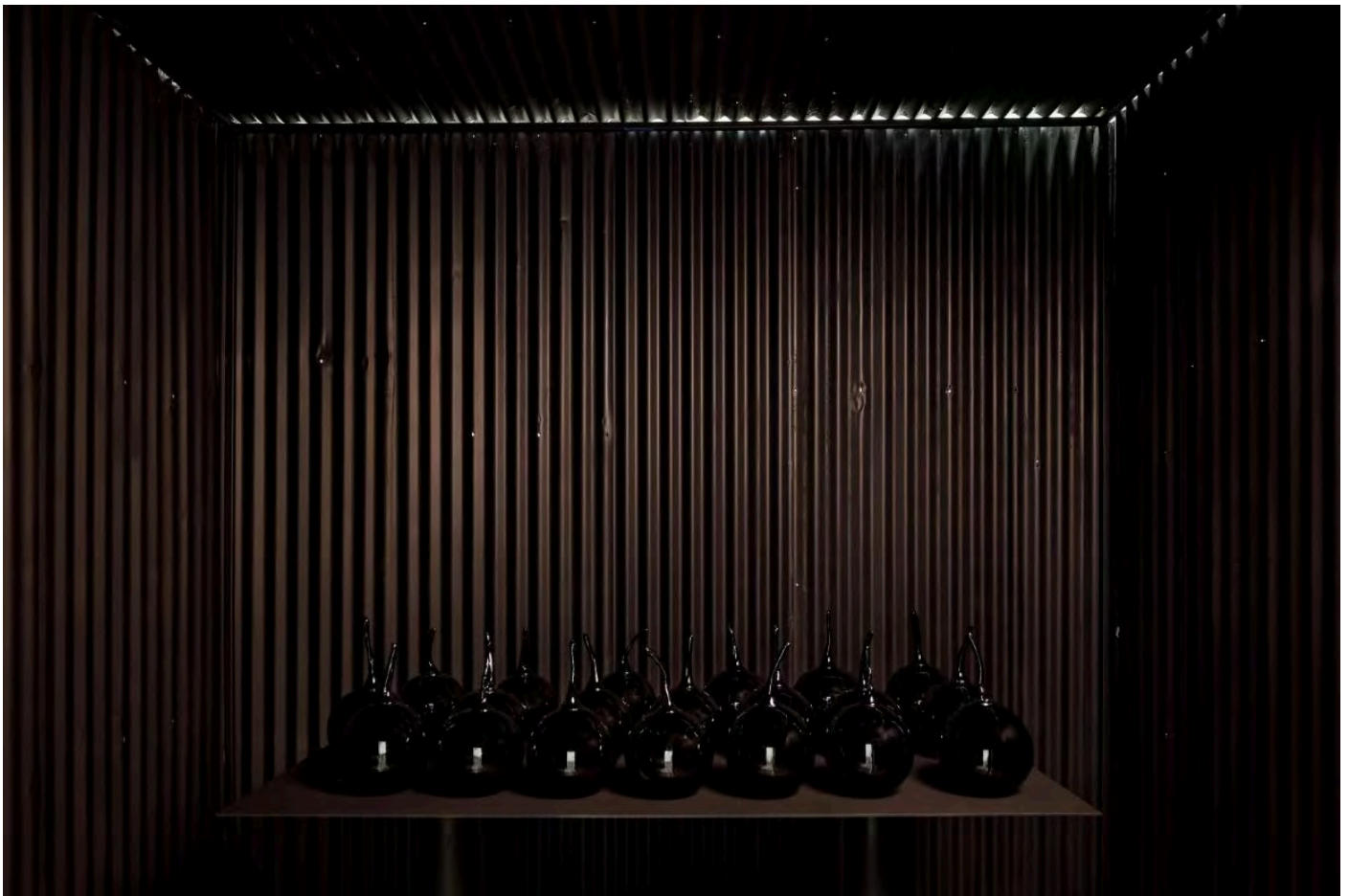
This exhibition is significant for the Dowse. Scarce has exhibited globally, including a recent survey exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, The Armory Show in New York, the Aichi Triennale in Japan, Gropius Bau in Berlin, and the Sharjah Biennale, which opens early next year.

Scarce was born in Woomera, South Australia, and belongs to Kokatha and Nukunu peoples. Woomera was where the British, with the blessing of the Australian government, tested their nuclear capabilities between 1953 and 1963. The sites of these tests, now designated the “Woomera Prohibited Zone”, is roughly the same land area as England and encompasses much of traditional Kokatha country. Today the land is deemed unliveable due to the widespread radioactive contamination of the soils.

Responding to this history of nuclear testing in South Australia is Scarce’s work *Missile Park* (2021) which is central to the exhibition at The Dowse. *Missile Park* comprises of three sheds constructed from found galvanised Zinalume, imitating the temporary shelters found around military bases during the testing. These tomb-like structures operate as both a monument and memorial to the lives lost. According to Scarce:

“While many Aboriginal communities were literally rounded up and removed from their lands prior to the commencement of testing, countless remained, ‘disappearing’ instantly in the blasts or later suffering the devastating effects of radiation on their bodies, land, and food sources.”

Inside each of the sheds in *Missile Park* are 20 hand-blown glass bush plums. The glass represents people being sheltered, as well as being metaphorical timebombs waiting to blow. Visitors to the exhibition can experience being inside one of the structures in *Missile Park*, to feel that same feeling of being sheltered, or lack thereof, alongside the glass.



Inside each of the sheds in *Missile Park* are 20 hand-blown glass bush plums. Photo courtesy the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne.

ANDREW CURTIS.

Bush tucker made from hand-blown glass recurs throughout Scarce’s work – it is a link between people and the land, having sustained people for thousands of years. Scarce notes:

“Every single bush banana, bush plum and long yam is a loving memorial through breath and body and remembrance. These fruits are fragile, resistant, and ever-present.”

It is this very physical process of hand-blowing glass that requires the intimacy of both the “body and the breath” of the person making it – capturing their DNA within the glass and imbuing it with its makers mauri [essence]. Glass, derived from silica or sand, is intimately connected to the land and materiality of the desert—like Scarce herself.

The title of the exhibition, *Night Blindness*, refers to the ongoing effects for the people living near the Woomera Prohibited Zone during and after the nuclear testing, including a rise in birth defects, stillborn births, and unexplained illnesses like sudden blindness. *Night Blindness* also notions toward the lack of foresight by the Australian government to allow such testing to take place in a populated area. Scarce aims to render these past histories visible:

“My artwork is a platform to tell these stories [...] It’s my responsibility, and for me that’s a really important part of being an artist.”

Scarce’s work engages with broader narratives of colonialism and the ongoing struggle for recognition and historical justice in Australia, but her practice is still grounded by her personal connection to these histories. Scarce reiterates: “I create work to not forget.”

Yhonnie Scarce: Night Blindness, [The Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt](#), to March 9, free

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