

Moorina Bonini

We Were Never Meant to be Contained

Gertrude Glasshouse
17 April – 16 May 2026

Through this exhibition, Moorina Bonini presents a new body of work created in response to the writing of Aunty Hyllus Maris, an important Matriarch in her family. These works examine the ongoing expectation that Aboriginal people must continually prove their intellect and capability to the West.

In the 1975 poetic text, *The Concrete Box*, Aunty Hyllus, a significant Yorta Yorta activist, educator and writer, describes the shared struggles of Aboriginal people across so-called Australia. She writes of a 'concrete box' built and governed by the white man, and of a small mountain of keys through which Kooris search for the one that will unlock our freedom. The key itself will unlock the concrete box and the Aboriginal people who are trapped, sick and hungry within the concrete box will be free. This key, she says, will bring 'freedom, peace of mind, [and] health.' Through this exhibition, Bonini continues to build upon the critique of western discourse offered by Aunty Hyllus, as she also shares the same resisting drive, that one day 'our people will be free.'

We Were Never Meant to be Contained builds on Aunty Hyllus' critique of western systems and her vision of liberation. It asks: What is the key that will free us from the colonial project into which we have been forced? This new work considers the colonial mindset and the recurring cycles of power and ownership over Country, cycles designed to maintain Aboriginal people in a position of enforced inferiority within so-called Australia.

This new work comprises approximately 7,000 metal keys engraved with South-Eastern Aboriginal mark-making. For millennia, these marks have been applied to cultural material as expressions of Aboriginal knowledge. Engraving them onto metal keys explores the intersection between Aboriginal cultural practice and Western systems.

Selected keys are also engraved with words such as 'control', 'poor health', and 'racism', prompting critical reflection on colonial structures that have been used to regulate and oppress Aboriginal people. By incorporating language, the work interrogates persistent misconceptions about Aboriginal people and culture, aiming to challenge and dismantle such representations.

Artist Biography:

Moorina Bonini is a proud descendant of the Yorta Yorta Dhulunyagen family clan of Ulupna and the Yorta Yorta, Wurundjeri, and Wiradjuri Briggs/McCrae family. As an artist of Aboriginal and Italian heritage, her practice critiques and disrupts the eurocentric frameworks that shape institutional perceptions of Indigenous identity. Grounded in Indigenous Knowledge systems, Bonini's work challenges colonial narratives, re-centers Aboriginal perspectives, and examines the intersections of culture, history, and representation.

Bonini is particularly interested in practice-led research as a method for interrogating the western binaries and categorisations imposed upon Aboriginal peoples, both historically and in contemporary society. Through her work, she examines the ways in which Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being resist and transcend these imposed structures, creating space for self-determined representations of Aboriginal identities and experiences.

Working across installation, moving image and cultural practice, Bonini has exhibited both nationally and internationally, including at ACMI, The Shed (New York, USA), City Gallery Wellington (Aoteroa New Zealand), Gertrude Contemporary, the Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney) and the National Gallery of Victoria. Recent major commissions include *TarraWarra Biennial 2025: We Are Eagles*, and *RISING Festival (2025)*.

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List of works

1. Moorina Bonini
We Were Never Meant to be Contained 2026
hand engraved keys and sound installation
5:36 mins, looped

