



FONDATION OPALE

PRESS RELEASE: EXHIBITION

## BENEATH THE REFLECTIONS OF THE WORLD

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARNDAL SALLY GABORI x FORREST CLEMENGER BESS

15.06 – 16.11.25

From 15 June to 16 November 2025, Fondation Opale presents *Beneath the Reflections of the World*, a landmark exhibition bringing together two visionary painters: Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori (c.1924–2015), a celebrated Kaiadilt artist from Bentinck Island, Australia, and Forrest Clemenger Bess (1911–1977), a reclusive American painter and mystic from Bay City, Texas. Though separated by time, place, and culture, both artists forged singular, symbolic visual languages rooted in solitude, memory, and metaphysical experience.

This is the first time these two artists have been shown together—marking not only a world-first pairing but also the first instance of Forrest Bess being exhibited in direct dialogue with an Aboriginal artist. The exhibition exemplifies Fondation Opale’s mission to connect contemporary Aboriginal art with broader currents in global art, and to stage meaningful encounters that reflect on the human condition. Through its programme of exhibitions, commissions and cultural exchange, the Fondation seeks to deepen institutional recognition of Aboriginal art within a European context.

“This exhibition emerged from a deeply moving curatorial vision, uniting two bodies of work that speak of memory and solitude with singular force,” says Bérengère Primat, founder of Fondation Opale. “Bringing Sally Gabori and Forrest Bess together offers a space where their silent visions can enter into dialogue.”

Curated by Samuel Gross, Head of Exhibitions at the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire in Geneva, and featuring around fifty works, the exhibition unfolds as a poetic encounter between two self-taught artists who transposed inner visions into painted form. While Gabori worked in expansive, gestural abstractions, Bess painted in small, symbol-laden formats—yet both sought to map psychic terrain rather than physical geography.

“This exhibition allows everyone to see that painting is one of the possible spaces for the poetic expression of our identity.” — Samuel Gross, Curator

Sally Gabori began painting in 2005, at the age of 81, following the displacement of her Kaiadilt community in the mid-20th century. Over the final decade of her life, she produced more than 2,000 works—vivid, large-scale abstractions that reimagine ancestral Country through light, tide, and emotion. Though her work defies conventional classification within Aboriginal art, it has gained increasing international recognition, including a major retrospective at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain (2022) and inclusion in the central exhibition of the Venice Biennale the same year. This exhibition marks her most extensive presentation in Switzerland to date. Gabori was previously represented in a single-work presentation at Fondation Opale, and will be included in *Elles*, an exhibition of women artists from the Opale Collection at the Musée Rath in Geneva (December 2025).

Across the Pacific, Forrest Bess developed a complex personal cosmology that he channelled into cryptic paintings—rooted in dream symbolism, alchemy, and Jungian archetypes. Despite exhibiting with the influential Betty Parsons Gallery in the 1950s and 60s, Bess remained largely unknown until a posthumous retrospective at the Whitney Museum in 1981. His work received renewed critical attention through a 2012 Whitney Biennial project curated by Robert Gober, which drew attention to the painter's esoteric theories and underscored the psychological stakes of his practice. Rarely shown in European institutions, many of Bess's works in the present exhibition are drawn from private collections and have not been previously exhibited.

Though the two artists are presented in clearly delineated spaces—accented by distinct wall colours and rhythms—*Beneath the Reflections of the World* creates moments of resonance between their practices. The scenography invites viewers to consider contrasts in scale and format: Gabori's sweeping linen canvases, imbued with place and memory, meet Bess's small-format oils that evoke vision, isolation and encoded desire. The works do not intermingle, but rather reflect toward each other, inviting contemplation of two radically singular approaches to the invisible.

*Beneath the Reflections of the World* continues Fondation Opale's commitment to showcasing Aboriginal artists alongside global contemporaries. Founded in 2018 and located in the Swiss Alps, Fondation Opale is Europe's only contemporary art centre dedicated to Aboriginal Australian art. Its programme is grounded in the Bérengère Primat Collection—one of the largest private collections of Aboriginal art in the world, comprising over 1,700 works by more than 350 artists.

### **Visitor Information**

Fondation Opale is located in Lens/Crans-Montana and is easily accessible via Geneva International Airport (approx. 2 hours by train to Sion, followed by a 20-minute car transfer). Press visits can be arranged upon request, with travel and accommodation support available.

### **Press Contacts**

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### **Editor's Notes**

#### **About Fondation Opale**

Established in 2018, Fondation Opale is located in the Swiss Alps in Lens/Crans-Montana and is Europe's only contemporary art centre dedicated exclusively to Aboriginal Australian art. Through exhibitions, commissions and cultural dialogue, it fosters greater understanding of Indigenous perspectives and nurtures exchanges between Aboriginal artists and the wider global art world. Its work is rooted in the Bérèngère Primat Collection—one of the largest private collections of Aboriginal art worldwide.

#### **About Samuel Gross**

Samuel Gross (b. 1976) is Head of Exhibitions at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva. He has held curatorial roles at MAMCO, the Istituto Svizzero in Rome, and Galerie Evergreene, with a curatorial practice that explores cross-cultural and transhistorical frameworks. He holds an MA in Art History from the University of Geneva.

#### **About Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori**

Sally Gabori (c.1924–2015) was a senior Kaiadilt woman from Bentinck Island in Queensland, Australia. She began painting in 2005, aged 81, developing a bold, abstract visual language that stands apart from prevailing Aboriginal art traditions. Over a decade, she created more than 2,000 paintings, many of them large-scale and deeply rooted in memory and Country. Her work has been shown widely, including at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain (2022), the Venice Biennale (2022), and now for the first time extensively in Switzerland.

#### **About Forrest Clemenger Bess**

Forrest Bess (1911–1977) was an American painter and visionary who lived in near-isolation on the Texas coast. His small-format paintings drew from dream imagery and esoteric theory, blending Jungian psychology, alchemy, and personal myth. Though overlooked in his lifetime, his work has since been reassessed through exhibitions at the Whitney Museum (1981) and a major curatorial project by Robert Gober in the 2012 Whitney Biennial. His works are now held in major public collections including MoMA, the Menil Collection, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.