

TOWARDS SHARED SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND VISUAL PRODUCTIONS

NYANDA SMITH

Butter-yellow wool lettering — hand-cut, all caps — is tacked to utilitarian grey segments of hospital, or emergency blankets. The roughly-stitched composition, fibres left to gently trail, rests upon a soft, ornate tapestry. The words spell out a declaration: *Why you are here*. With a flip of inflection, the statement could also be a question.

The work by Olga Cironis, evokes the layered, subjective experience of migration: the intersections of the past, with the lived reality of the present. It gestures to the deep threads of cultural practice that continue to ever-inform this reality; to the profound ongoing processes implicit in re-location; and to what, indeed, constitutes the 'social and psychic geography'¹ of the 'here'.

Cironis' installation can be seen to articulate the premise that lies at the heart of the exhibition *Antipodean Encounters: Western Australian artists and Taiwanese Culture*, which is part of a broad project by curator Ashley Yihsin Chang. Chang wished to engender connections between two disparate groups that she herself inhabits: the Taiwanese, and the contemporary art communities of Perth.

Launched in July 2017, *A Portrait of Taiwan in Perth: Reflection, Connection, and Collection*, has comprised a series of events to forge intercultural relationships between the two, beginning at the personal level. Chang's aim, to 'create dialogue, interaction and collaboration'², focuses on increasing understanding between individuals towards social outcomes of cultural awareness and adjustment.

The works in this exhibition are the output from relational activities designed to facilitate this intention. Over the course of a year, local Taiwanese women and artists were invited by Chang to informal gatherings at her home. Taiwanese participants were asked to share the story of an object of personal cultural significance — an artefact, or memory — with the group; artists tasked to choose those that personally resonated, whether it be a conceptual, aesthetic, or 'chemical'³ response.

Twenty-two pairings of Taiwanese women and artists were formed, with duos subsequently undertaking collaborative processes of visual and written documentation and translation. Group arts and cultural workshops and tours extended burgeoning relationships; posters featuring narratives and portrait photographs were co-produced; and lastly, a body of works created in response by the artists.

The central role of conversation and dialogue aligns the project with forms of socially engaged art practice that have emerged over the past two decades. Art historian Grant Kester uses the term 'dialogical aesthetics' to describe a global rise in the early 2000s, of relational approaches 'concerned

with collaborative, and potentially emancipatory, forms of dialogue and conversation'. Kester suggests that positioned as an integral part of the work itself, 'conversation is re-framed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities and official discourse'.⁴

Here, artists are also positioned as subjects: all participants part of a dialogical process towards social, cultural and visual production. As Kester suggests, such a collaborative approach can provide a discursive space for a speaking of unrepresented voices, of diversity, multiplicity, and intersectionality.

In her writing on the representation of difference, sociologist Avtar Brah suggests that an 'individual narrator does not unfold but is produced in the process of narration'.⁵ In this way, it can be seen that Chang's creation of a dedicated forum for self-narrativisation, listening, discussion and response, provides an important opportunity for speaking, and for being heard.

Through the sharing of identifications, memories, and meaning — differences and commonalities between the women's stories and interests appear. Stories articulated by the women — over cups of tea, in artist studios, and from working closely together in the production of content — diverge and overlap.

The resulting artworks, which encompass paint, stitch, objects, and installation, exist as visual responses within this dialogue — each referencing the specific human interactions experienced between two people.

For accountant Belle Hsiung, who moved to Perth from Taiwan over two decades ago, a calligraphy copybook of her father's provides a tangible emotional anchoring amid the ongoing negotiation of her new environment. Hsiung explains that the book — which her father used for many years, sharing the traditional writing technique with his daughter — signifies her cultural and familial ties, providing her 'the courage to take on this self-searching journey'.⁶

In response, Vanessa Wallace's artwork *Transcribed*, draws from her own paternal family traditions of script and books. The hand-bound book borrows process elements from both Hsiung's copybook, and a family archival book made by Wallace's grandfather in the 1970s. Pages are comprised of copied and



Vanessa Wallace, *Transcribed*, 2018. Artist book: solvent transfer, chalk and carbon transfer on washi paper on table.

recopied grids, handwritten text, and photographs: intimating a back-and-forth between memory and the present. The images document the physical environment that Wallace inhabited during or after her meetings with Hsiung, with the work delicately encapsulating both the narrative interplay, and the embodied experience of their conversation.

Eva Fernández explores both cultural specificity and universality, in her work, *Cabbage, melon, bitter melon after Juan Sánchez Cotán, Quince, Cabbage, and Cucumber, 1602*. The artist's pairing with May Tsai, who lives between her homes of Taiwan and Perth, saw the recognition of a shared interest in the role of food as a vital tie to culture. Fernández' photograph replicates the Spanish painter Juan Sánchez Cotán's dramatic sparse bodegón of fruit and vegetables from a 17th Century table.

However, Cotán's ingredients have been replaced by ubiquitous East Asian vegetables. The amalgamation references the traditional aesthetic of Fernández' Spanish cultural background, with the lived dinner-table milieu of Tsai's. Fernández' representation of her personal cultural identification is part of an ongoing investigation into her family history; for Tsai, the role of food in her traversing between two cultures is described as a 'magic glue'.⁷ Like Cotán, the work points to the pedestrian rituals of food: to the everyday, daily role that it has in the maintenance of culture, and to its position as an entry-point to understandings of culture.

Whilst Chang's project began at the individual level, the ramifications will extend far more broadly, as the effects of the time spent, and knowledges shared, continue to generate. This fruition is alluded to by the artwork by Nalda Searles, which exists as a sculptural archive of personal moments and stories from across a decade. The multi-strand necklace carries objects found, collected and given to the artist. Beads by the late ceramic artist Eileen Keys, a close friend and mentor of Searles', settle close to stones collected in the Great Sandy Desert, near to a glass disc from Afghanistan, circa 10th Century.

The latest addition marks the time Searles spent with Nicole Yang, denoted by a handful of stones and shells collected by Yang from her homeland of Taiwan. Each additional 'grafting'⁸ by the artist symbolises a new conversation, connection, inquiry and grounding — a manifold action that represents the fecund personal and societal impacts of this project.



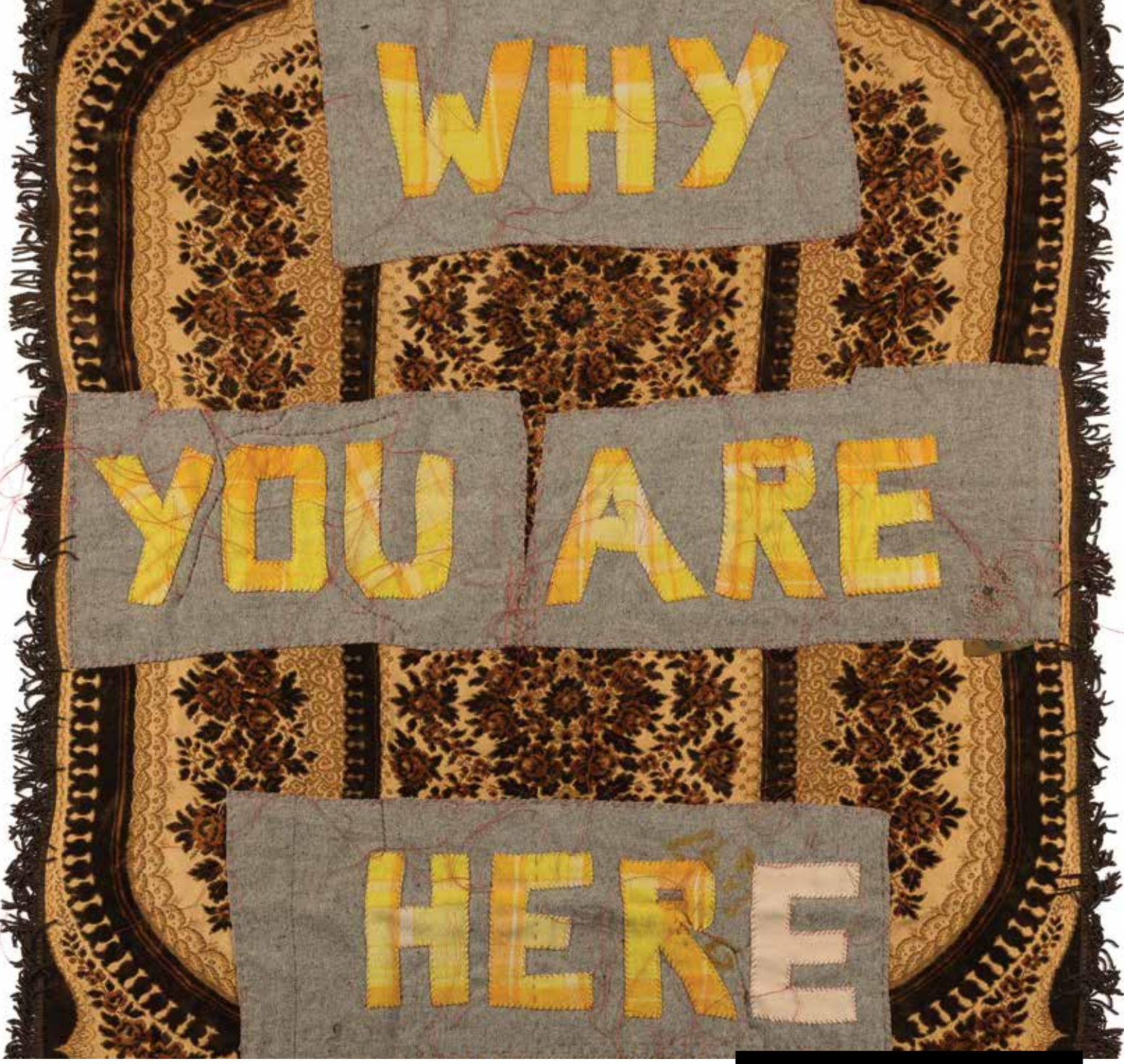
Nalda Searles, *Neckpiece Stranded*, 2018. Multi-strand construction of plant-dyed silk, steel wire, linen thread and beads

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End notes

1. A. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Routledge, New York, 1996, p. 4.
2. A. Y. Chang, *A Portrait of Taiwan in Perth: Reflection, Connection, Collection* (unpublished exhibition collateral), 2018.
3. A. Y. Chang, Email correspondence with author, July 2018.
4. G. Kester, 'Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art', in *Socially Engaged Practice Forum Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, Kucor, Z., & Leung, S. (eds), Blackwell, New Jersey, 2005, p. 2.
5. A. Brah, *ibid.*, p. 10.
6. B. Hsiung, Participant statement, in Chang, A.Y. *A Portrait of Taiwan in Perth: Reflection, Connection, Collection* (poster), 2018.
7. M. Tsai, Participant statement, in Chang, A.Y. *A Portrait of Taiwan in Perth: Reflection, Connection, Collection* (unpublished exhibition collateral), 2018.
8. N. Searles, Artist statement, in Chang, A.Y. *A Portrait of Taiwan in Perth: Reflection, Connection, Collection* (unpublished exhibition collateral), 2018.

Front cover: Olga Cironis, *Why are you here?* (cropped), 2018. Recycled grey and yellow woollen blanket, red thread and recycled domestic cloth



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BEVERLEY ILES

Thinking about Jenny's home ancestor shrine and meeting the women involved in this project has led me to explore my own fractured links to a past family and country, with the dislocation and sense of otherness that family separation and migration can induce. Human scaled and domestic, this shrine-of-sorts helps us examine the precarious relationship between ourselves, our pasts and our present place. Cobbled together from an assemblage of parts of old furniture with an undisclosed history, the sculpture creates new and somewhat disjointed connections, reflecting how we create belonging and identity in our new lives.

After all, these years, still I yearn, 2018
Timber, found objects, incense ash, gold leaf
160 x 60 x 90 cm



CANDY (CHIAO-YUN) LEE

This work is inspired by Chinese paper-cutting. The artwork used to decorate the windows, therefore often referred to as Window flower (chuāng huā). In Taiwan, people use it on Lunar New Year and some special occasions, such as Weddings. The pattern usually adopts flowers, coin, Chinese zodiac animals, some regions cultural elements, and some Chinese character...etc. Red is the main colour used because it is associated with happiness and luck in Chinese culture. This work applied the fibre art technique, needle felting to recreate it in a different form.

Lucky and Wealth, 2018
Wool, fabric, embroidery thread
30 x 30 cm

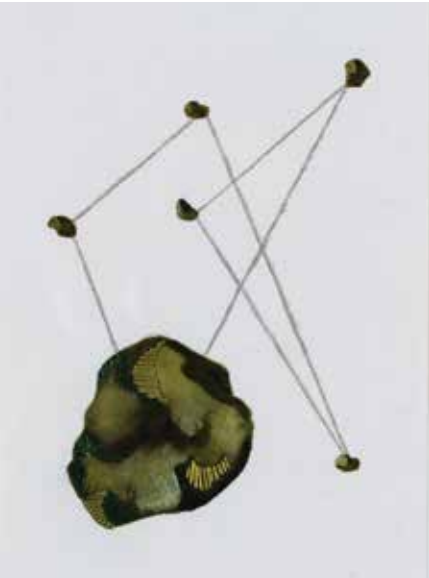


CARMELA CORVAIA

In my art practice I explore identity and links to places, cultures and the natural environment. In developing the work 'Tether' for the exhibition, I have drawn upon traditional (Sicilian) basketry and combined olive sticks with felting and string-making (which I associate with contemporary Australian art).

In responding to the hand-made Cheongsam (wedding dress) for the project 'A Portrait of Taiwan in Perth', connections to my family history emerged: memories of flax cultivation, wool-spinning and hand-loom weaving. We shared the common experience for those living between cultures, of continually evaluating aspects of each culture (choosing to accept, reject or modify) in order to affirm identity.

Tether, 2018
Olive sticks, dyed fleece, plant fibres, cotton thread, metal wire
95 x 120 x 25 cm



CLAIRE BUSHBY

A string figure is an ancient game played throughout many different cultures around the world. It is played by making shapes with a piece of string strung between one's fingers, often with multiple peoples hands. Stories can be told through string figure making. For this project I have chosen to think using the notion of string figures as a cross-cultural dialogue that tells stories beyond spoken language.

String figures III, 2018
Watercolour on Arches paper
40.5 x 34 cm framed



DENISE VIOLET BROWN

This artwork brings together the love of our mothers, and the emotion we feel at being so far from them. Our mothers are from different countries and cultures, and may never actually meet, but will be joined together metaphorically in an artwork which is the result of Annie and I meeting and connecting. Making an ocarina and having Annie tune it means that we can share this exchange in a tangible object. The use of blue and white on porcelain also holds a historic cultural link through commerce at the time when the world was opening up and European countries had discovered the beautiful blue and white ceramic works being created in China.

Mother's Love, 2018
Porcelain
40 x 40 cm (on plinth)



EMILY TEN RAA

The Taiwanese Lantern Festival is held at the closing of the Lunar New Year, which welcomes the coming of spring, and hope for the coming year. Circular lanterns are the most traditional, mimicking the shape of the moon, symbolizing union and togetherness for friends and family as the new season arrives. Nature, and the changing seasons, supports and enriches human life all over the world and is something that binds us as a species. Familiarising oneself with nature is an important part of getting to know a new place, and I hope that the Taiwanese migrant community will feel enriched here.

Banksia Bush Walk Illumination, 2018
Cane, masking tape, tissue paper, acrylic paint, satin varnish, wire gauze, LED tealight, lamp, glue
110 x 115 x 75 cm



ELIZABETH DEVLIN (NEE WHEELER)

The two paintings are my personal response to the process of cultural exchange. The first painting uses the outlines of my partner and myself as children (on opposite sides of the world/canvas) as an underlying structure, and the second uses the outlines of us as adults (friends living in the same city and therefore in the same plane on the canvas). This underlying structure holds a network of forms and colour. The interplay and relationships of colour on the canvas reflect the complexity and connections of our human relationships: a celebration of our lives and friendships.

Two girls, 2018
Acrylic on canvas
91 x 122 cm



ELIZABETH MARRUFFO

The deep connections Monica has to her mother's paintings, resonated with me as I am also witnessing my own mother begin her artistic explorations. The paintings are a compelling example of the power of the handmade, especially if made by someone you love. A special painting for Monica is one that her mother painted of their family dog. I often paint a small white dog and so for this cross cultural exchange I decided to paint a scene which imagines the possibility of both of our dogs meeting.

Wayfinder I, 2018
Acrylic, pastel and oil on canvas
80 x 80 cm



EVA FERNÁNDEZ

May (Yu Tsan Tsai) transverses Taiwan and Australia, as she lives within both cultures. Her passion is food and as she negotiates the differences between the cultures, she creates hybrid fusions. Food represents much more than sustenance and enjoyment, but the act of sharing and connecting people, what she describes as a 'magic glue'.

Having been displaced from my original culture, I constantly seek connection through the cuisine of Spain and its representation through art. My artworks draw from the rich culture of typical bodegón Spanish still life painting.

This series brings together the foods typical of May's culture with the aesthetic of Spanish bodegones, creating a unique and somewhat surreal imagery and representing our shared experience.



JANINE MCCAULLAY-BOTT

The Family Tree is a step back in time, for relatives, so they will know their descendants, and value the knowledge - traditions and objects that have been passed on. I have my mother's smile; she used it often. That and the Family Tree are some of the things I treasure the most, and will pass on through my story telling and weaving. The other thing my mother left me, is the memory of her strength and ability to cope in hard times, and to share all she had: knowledge - food - shelter - possessions - and a good laugh. The gift of heritage and tradition should be valued, and passed on always.

Boab Family Tree, 2018
Palm fronds, grapevines, palm branches
99 x 62 cm (180cm C)



LOUISE MONTE

Like the ebb and flow of tides, The overflow of tea soaks the cloth, Spreading with time.

Flowers and leaves steep in water, Reds and golds carried as if with the tide. Creating stain lines with every drop, Measuring the distance of time.

Like waves washing up flotsam on shores close and far, Every overflow revealing objects once loved and lost. Objects found by Carol and I, now shared in the making of this tea. The ritual of taking tea is to slow down time, To share changes, from one moment to the next, Revealing the ebb and flow of life.

Tides of Tea, 2018
Fabric, water, glass vessels, 2 found objects, table, plants/herbs: Hibiscus Roselle flowers, Gardenia Jasmonides seeds and Pu-erh leaves
Two parts: 1). 180 x 120 cm, 2). 50 x 50 cm



MEL DARE

As Shirley and I shared our stories we revealed thick red threads running through our lives. The more we discussed our vast differences the more the other's story felt familiar, echoing our own. When we share patterns are revealed; areas are unpicked or embellished. We become part of eachother's larger tapestry.

When our stories begin we borrow loose coarse threads from family and culture. As time goes by the threads become more delicate. These are the maps we navigate by. The filters we look through. The nets which stop us falling. The blankets we wrap around ourselves for comfort.

Reflections on Red I (detail), 2018
Acrylic paint and ink on Belgian Linen
Various sizes

NALDA SEARLES

Being is a series of graftings. I am an espalier rooted to the land resisting but embracing new growth with mute acceptance.

This neckpiece reflects that turmoil. It shows my need to become whole, complete, and needing no footnotes.

Lapis lazuli from India. Hand drilled ancient Camellian from North Africa. Two worn stones and two shells from Taiwan covered with old corduroy from China. Beads made by West Australian ceramic artist, Eileen Keys, using ground minerals from local clay, c. 1970s and 80s. Ceramic cross made by Eileen Keys with native copper glaze, c.1970s. Ancient glass disc using Roman style casting from Afghanistan, c. 900 AD. Stones with natural holes collected by the artist in the Great Sandy Desert.

Neckpiece Stranded, 2018
Multi-strand construction of plant-dyed silk, steel wire, linen thread and beads
Length 50+ cm

OLGA CIRONIS

In her art practise Olga is concerned with personal and collective identity and what identity can mean in today's Cultural Globalization. From a strong migrant feminist foundation Olga scrutinises ideas around belonging and place by highlighting cultural and social norms. Her art practice is a poetic expression of the spiritual and physical spaces between bodies. Often inviting public participation and story sharing Olga succeeds in seducing the public to further explore, reflect and question our own place in the world.

Why are you here?, 2018
Recycled grey and yellow woollen blanket, red thread and recycled domestic cloth
200 x 130 cm



PERDITA PHILLIPS

When presented with the carved Bwa Bwei/Jaobei moon blocks that are used in Taiwanese temple divination, I was entranced with the way that they fitted so snugly into the hand. I thought about when two hands are brought together and about how two nations are separated by much water. The two artworks explore the notion of exchange and transference between people and places and between the human and nonhuman worlds. *Things are Things to help birds and people and Things to help people and birds: The space of an ocean; the space between two hands.*

Things to help birds and people. Things to help people and birds, 2018
Woodblock prints on mulberry paper, silk thread
90 x 120 x 50 cm and 2 x 20 x 20 cm

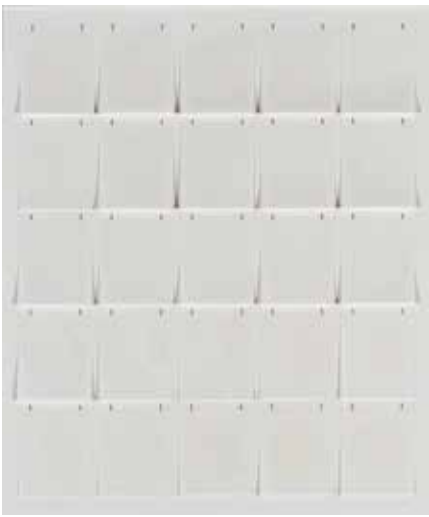


SARAH TOOHEY

Pincushion Hakeas in Red Vases takes its palette from Taiwanese floral fabric, popular in Taiwan in the Sixties for quilts and pillowcases.

The optimistic peony is substituted with the West Australian Pincushion Hakea. Free-form paper stencil prints and natural fibres were popular in the Sixties and Seventies in Australia. Into the wool rug, dyed in eucalyptus, are stitched Chinese knots and cross-stitch, and rough stitches to anchor the backing cloth. I've tried to create harmony between the raw and the refined, earthy colours and the acid brilliance of the Taiwanese floral fabric.

Pincushion Hakeas in Red Vases, 2018
Plant dyed wool blanket, cotton Taiwanese floral fabric, wool, cotton and synthetic thread, fabric paint
121 x 141 cm



SHARON CALLOW

There and Here attempts to simplify the essence of the lunar calendar. Lunar cycles in this context are auspicious for the influence they are believed to have. The moon is a mysterious, yet constant presence in our skies, but also a symbol of change: a full orb that is diminished seemingly to nothing, yet in time is renewed to fullness. For the Taiwanese women, and for many migrant peoples relocating to Australia for work and family, theirs is a journey of loss and gain. With the distance of Taiwan from Perth, Sue's lunar calendar acquires a new potency, providing a link between there and here.

There and Here, 2018
Woodblock prints on mulberry paper, silk thread
94 x 105 cm framed



SHONA MCGREGOR

The need to belong is a deeply ingrained human trait that urges individuals to search for familiarity in those around them in order to understand their place in the world. But what happens to our sense of self when we choose or are forced to live amongst a community that is different to our own, when we feel caught between two cultures?

Using the textiles and traditional costumes of the Taiwanese Indigenous tribes as inspiration, *Blurred Lines* is an exploration of the importance of connection with one's culture and the part it plays in the development of self-identity.

Blurred Lines, 2018
Acrylic on marine ply
20 x 22 cm

VANESSA WALLACE

Transcribed came about in response to Belle Hsuing's father's calligraphy copy book. Photographic images of the ground taken at the time of the various meetings, form a layer on which grids and text float. The red grids, makes overt reference to the grids found in the calligraphy copy book, onto which characters / letter forms are written. The blue grids signify the gridded book hand made by my paternal grandfather. Both handwritten text (Taiwanese and English, 6360 words in total) and the 636 pages of the concertina book reference the approximate distance between Taipei and Perth.

Transcribed, 2018
Artist book: solvent transfer, chalk and carbon transfer on washi paper on table
11 x 16 x 18 cm (book when closed) 97 x 21 x 33 cm (table)

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