



SOUVENIRS

from

Elsewhere

Sara
IRAN NEJAD

Alicia
LANE

Carol
McGREGOR

Sally
MOLLOY

Mika
**NAKAMURA-
MATHER**

Vanghoua Anthony
VUE

curated by Pat
HOFFIE



SOUVENIRS FROM ELSEWHERE

Opening

Fri 9 September 6pm—9pm

Exhibition Dates

Tues 6 to Sat 17 September 2016

Curated by Pat Hoffie

Woolloongabba Art Gallery

 **Griffith** UNIVERSITY
Queensland College of Art

GRIFFITH CENTRE FOR
CREATIVE ARTS RESEARCH

...Here in the chaotic piles of souvenirs....
Boxroom of the forgotten or hardly possible.¹

Generally speaking, the term 'souvenir' relegates an object or image to a particular category: perhaps as a memento of memories, a knick-knack; a relic, a gee-gaw, a gift.²

Unencumbered by the more weighty metaphorical and intellectual responsibilities of objects and images canonised as 'art', souvenirs skip lightly across boundaries of definition and delineation. They can perform the role of hyphens of connection that conjoin the disparate together in a shared exchange. If the 'international art world', such as it is, tends to impose a largely unstated hierarchical structure to relegate objects and images into categories of ascending value, it's pretty safe to say that souvenirs might be assembled and stored somewhere among the lowest rungs of that aesthetic and intellectual ladder.

Yet in the fields of anthropology and ethnography, souvenirs have not been designated such a throw-away status. Instead, they have been identified as objects that are passed between cultures to signal different desires, and that are valuable receptacles for understanding culture and exchange.³ "Their value lies in their capacity to signal to the purchaser or collector something about the creator (or the community or the culture) that produced the object. They act as little signposts of difference between those in the transaction – differences that the creator(s) are proud to embody

in the artefact; and differences that are recognised and desired by the individual (or community or culture) on the other side of the exchange.

Such objects embody the principles of giving and recognition; welcoming and acceptance; pride and acknowledgement. They are the conduits that link cross-cultural exchanges, and that signal the simple satisfaction that a difference does exist; a divide; a transaction point at which the difference produces desire.⁴

Importantly, also, souvenirs are used to prompt memories of places and times that lie somewhere beyond the here and now – that lie out there beyond in the vast realms of 'elsewhere'. As spatio-temporal touch-stones, they act in an almost magical capacity to transport us back to those elsewheres, so that we are able to be – for brief moments – in two places at once. And while it is true that our memories alone can occasionally transport us back to prior experiences, the souvenir brings us material evidence of those connections - it acts as a tangible participant in our capacity to understand and experience things in contingent and comparative way.

It can also be argued that there are times when artists use their own work as souvenirs to link aspects of their own experiences and yearnings. At times they may bind



Souvenirs in a Hmong village on the outskirts of Luang Prabang, Laos.
Photo: Vanghoua Anthony Vue.

¹ Quote from James' Fenton's poem "The Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford" in Clifford, James, *On Collecting Art and Culture* (<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Clifford-OnCollectingArtandCulture.pdf>).

² cf Stewart, Susan, 1984, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Duke University Press.

³ Cf. Graburn, Nelson H.H (ed.), 1976, *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, University. In this volume this particular category of souvenirs from the 'fourth world' are characterized by their modification by the minority group for consumption by the majority or dominant society.

⁴ For a deeper analysis of the desire of European collectors in terms of assembling souvenirs from the Pacific region, see Thomas, Nicholas, 1991, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*, Harvard University Press.

the past to the present; their memories from the past to the hopes for the future; their yearnings to their fears.

This exhibition has been put together with the idea of 'portability' in mind - for the most part, these objects could be carried away in a case – could be transported just like their makers have been. The fact that the works have been created from deeply personal experiences make them all the more rich as tiny vessels for prompting new connections in the viewer. In this way they are souvenirs in two senses – as objects of

personal and inward reconciliation for the makers of the work – and as objects of translation between the artist and the viewer.

Many of these artists work between two cultures, others work between the fragile strands of local histories towards more ecologically informed understandings of the region; others work from the burden of an unwritten past to possibilities of working towards a more connected future.



Garden Pools, 2016.
Resin, ink, Pyrography, LED light, approx. 30 x 30 x 6 cm each.

Sara Iran Nejad

As an Australian artist of Persian heritage, the wonder and awe with which Sara Iran Nejad has approached her new experiences in this country are evident in the works she has produced since her arrival in Australia. Iran Nejad weaves references from her extensive scholarship into ancient Persian mythology and story-telling⁵ together with objects and images she encounters in the Australian environment.

In this series, titled, *Garden Pools*, she embeds a tiny image of an impossible garden of paradise within the rings of a felled species of Australian hardwood. The image of the garden is central to Persian culture – as a constructed space of contemplative coolness, ordered fecundity and serenity, it is a metaphor for earthly paradise. But Iran Nejad's version is a hybridised earthly paradise – a realm where Australian flora and fauna cohabit with djinns and spirits from Persian dreamings. These tiny floating versions of an other-world coalesce like temporarily congealed water-imagery from within the trunk of Australian native species. The images warp and mutate within their trapped pool of invention. Encased within the expanding rings of the tree-slice, their existence appears to initiate ripples of influence –rings that expand beyond and into a landscape that has transformed and is transformed by the delicate details of the artist's Persian heritage.



Artist Statement

Sara Iran Nejad is a multidisciplinary artist, who has called Australia home since 2012. She investigates re-evaluations of 'place', 'belonging' and 're-establishment' through a multidisciplinary practice including painting, pyrography, installation and video. She is currently undertaking a Doctor of Visual Art at Queensland College of Art. Her thesis 'A Thousand and one Interconnections' explores experiences of Persian diasporic identity through investigating the dynamic experiences of 'relocation' by pushing the boundaries and avoiding the conventional expressions of displacement experience. As an Iranian-Australian, her works create a bridge of dialogue between her past and present states through exploring the elements of Australian nature and history and juxtaposing visual elements of traditional Persian painting and mythology.

www.sarairanejad.com

⁵ Francesca, Leoni, 2008. "The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/shnm/hd_shnm.htm



Sara Iran Nejad, 2016.
Garden Pools
(detail view).



Reef Ghosts Ceremonial Cups (top image - detail view), 2016, *Rainforest Ceremonial Cup*, 2016 & *Crows Ash Series*, 2015 (bottom image - detail view).
Porcelain & copper, dimensions variable.

Alicia Lane

Lane's experience of the Australian landscape is generationally deep. But the artist chooses not to use this as a 'birthright' – an automatic claim to knowledge and authority. Rather, her research into the use of ecosystems in South-East Queensland proceeds with a meticulous humility that takes nothing for granted. She looks into the experiences of her forebears, the works of historians, and the knowledges passed on from the Indigenous custodians of the region, to bring light to the rich heritage of particular species. She weaves these into accounts of their integral roles in our everyday lives here – of how they provided materials for the sprung floors for the dreaming spaces of rural dance floors, or for the perhaps more mundane spaces of domestic laundry sheds.

But if Lane is a scrupulous scholar, her understanding of form and process, and her innate understanding of the ineffable material properties of what she works with are equally evident in the work she produces. Her work involves a great deal of physical as well as intellectual labour, and the objects she creates – no matter the scale or medium she chooses (she often practices as a jeweller) are evidence of the co-existence of the thinking and practice that lie at the core of artistic production.

For this series, titled *Reef Ghosts* and *Rainforest Ghost*, she has created a range of fragile porcelain goblets – objects that suggest high-end celebration and ceremony. Their forms, however, are encrusted with more humble details taken from from antipodean species that, on discovery by the western world, challenged the scientific authority and inclusiveness of the Linnaean classificatory system at its very foundations. As such, Lane's goblets seem to subvert hierarchy and prestige – as domestic objects tattooed with the wildness of heritage of ancient Gondwana legendry.

Artist Statement



This series of work reflects the progression of my research into local rainforest timber trees and the integral roles they have played in the shaping of our sense of place and identity. The *Reef Ghost Ceremonial Cups* are, in part, spawned from an earlier series that reflected on the demise of the Great Barrier Reef due to human impact. Their trophy-like form is a response to colonial era silver and gold epergnes that celebrated the conquest of the land and new-found wealth. The classical decorative styles that were often awkwardly juxtaposed with Australian native fauna, flora and Indigenous peoples often unwittingly exposed uncomfortable realities of the impacts of settlement. This slant is continued in the *Rainforest Ceremonial Cup*, and its accompanying *Crows Ash Series*. These often overlooked rainforest trees are embedded in the architectural fabric and urban environment of our region.

⁶Low, Tim, 2002, *The New Nature, Winners and Losers in Wild Australia*, Penguin Books Australia.



Alicia Lane, 2016.
Reef Ghosts Ceremonial Cups
(installation view).



dilly cartography (detail view), 2016.
Copper, brass, natural fibres, Aboriginal Australia map, dimensions variable.

Carol McGregor

Carol McGregor draws from her Indigenous Wathaurung heritage, and from her identity as a Pakeha woman from New Zealand, to produce works that seek connections with the past and present, and with her Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry. Her motivations for making these connections are not borne from a sentimentality towards recovering a more perfect past, but, rather, towards the possibilities for working towards a more richly informed future. Much of her scholarship has focused on retrieving Indigenous knowledges and practices that have all-but-been-forgotten in South East Queensland. With fellow artist Glenys Briggs, her *Art of the Skins* project⁷ involved a collaborative process where individuals and community members worked together to revive traditional approaches in contemporary lives. The outcomes of the project were manifest as much through connections between the past and the present as between individuals with each other and with their heritage. And the objects produced act as deeply nuanced material where the richness of our past has been recreated into our contemporary present.

For this current project, titled *dilly cartography*, McGregor has chosen the Indigenous dillybag as the inspiration for tiny objects that are, in part, baskets of – and for – connectivity. Woven from a range of metal threads, they sit upon or above little maps of country, as if the meridians of longitude and latitude have woven their way into the material production of their context. For Indigenous Australians, place is culture; the material synthesis of both production of relationships between each other and between each other and land. McGregor offers us fragile, miniature mementos of what might these dillybags might hold in terms of new understandings of place and belonging in contemporary Australia.

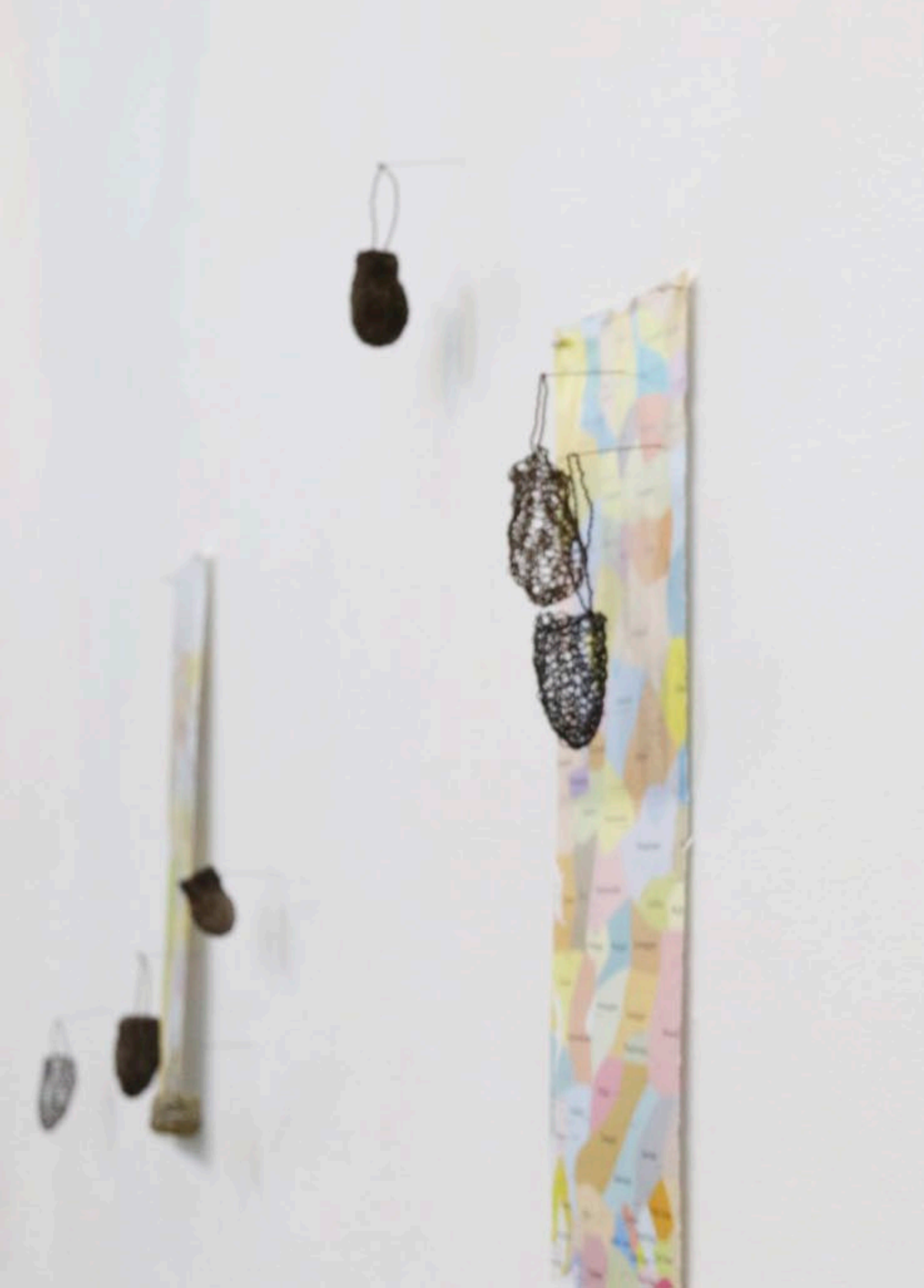
Artist Statement

Carol McGregor is of Wathaurung (Victoria) and Scottish descent – a multi media disciplinarian: including working with ephemeral natural fibres, metal, and paper. Her recent art practice involves the revival of the traditional possum skin cloak as an art form and a way to strengthen community and individual identities.

www.carolmcgregor.com.au



⁷ <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/about-us/media-releases/2016/new-take-on-historic-indigenous-practice-now-showing-at-state-library>.



Carol McGregor, 2016.
dilly cartography
(installation view).

Sally Molloy

Sally Molloy uses a range of materials and objects to search for ways of reinscribing her place as a non-Indigenous person within Australian history and in the present. Often working with painting, she uses the implied hierarchies of mediums and approaches to question what might have been left out of the privileged accounts of Australia's cultural history. For this reason her subject matter is often that of the 'back-yard' and the domestic objects that are frequently overlooked as important signifiers of value and meaning. Drawing from historical accounts, critical theory and personal experience, Molloy works towards mediating the intellectual and emotional burden of producing culture as a non-indigenous artist within a country that has not yet legalised recognition of prior ownership of the land by Indigenous people.⁸

As a result, her imagery is often infused by a sense of 'disappearance', of absence, of an at times disconcerting 'incompleteness'. At other times the non-indigenous subject matter (often Molloy herself) seem to flicker and shimmer like white ghosts. At other times the works pose the protagonist, with wry humour, on the brink of environmental immensities that seem both impossibly daunting and audaciously possible.

For this work, titled *Stitching In Details*, Molloy takes a linen tea-towel featuring a calendar produced in the year of her birth. Surrounding the months of the year, a range of readily identifiable icons of Australiana promote an easily-consumable ideal of inclusiveness. Molloy has worked over this simple object of domesticity in an approach that, on first look, appears to continue traditional processes of female domestic craftwork. But her needlework does not conform to any traditional palette – the day-glo yellow seems more suited to associations with hi-vis safety-wear and warnings of trespass. And her embroidered words are at once a personal lament marking her own birth-date into her historical inheritance as a non-indigenous Australian, and a broader reminder of histories that have been laundered in other ways.



Stitching In Details, 2016.
Synthetic thread on cotton tea towel and synthetic felt, 45 x 72 cm.



Artist Statement

Sally Molloy is an emerging artist whose interdisciplinary practice deals with issues relating to colonial histories, landscape, and the complexities of her non-indigenous claims to belonging. Molloy is a PhD student at Queensland College of Art where she is exploring the relationships between her Aussie backyard and notions of transculturation.

⁸ cf. McLean, Ian, 2016, *Rattling Spears: A History Of Indigenous Australian Art* (London: Reaktion Book Ltd. and Moreton-Robinson, Aileen, (ed.) 2004, "Whiteness, epistemology and Indigenous Representation," in *Whitening Race*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, ACT.

October

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April

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Looking After My Younger Sister and Brother (Postcards From Home Series), 2016 (front and back view).
Japanese Umbrelliform Yew, transparency photo sheets, natural Japanese pigments, ink, used stamps,
10 x 15 cm. Japanese indigenous timber stand, 10 x 15 cm.

Mika Nakamura-Mather

Mika Nakamura-Mather draws from her memories of her home in Japan, and of her adopted homes in Britain and Australia. Her Japanese heritage is immediately evident in her fine attention to detail and finish, an approach that brings a poetic wistfulness to what she produces. For some time Nakamura-Mather has chosen wood as her principal material. Wooden objects are venerated in Japan, and the exquisite traditional wooden houses are fast disappearing from Japanese cities as metropolitan areas become increasingly congested.

Nakamura-Mather's sensitive interest in the capacity of wooden domestic items (furniture, architectural details) to harbour and 'breathe' traces of their former occupants has also been brought to bear on the way she has collected and re-deployed old worn wooden fragments and details from Queensland homes. She uses imagery from personal photos from the past in processes where they seem to leach out from between the very grains of wood onto which she floats them. Nakamura-Mather tampers with these images – using processes of printing and erasure to further emphasise their fragility.⁹ The result are 'whispering images' – images from which those who once inhabited the places and spaces have been erased. Their delicacy is extended through their small scale and their preciousness through Nakamura-Mather's sensitive colour palette.

For this series, titled *Postcards From Home*, the artist presents a series of little wooden postcard sized images taken from her earlier life in Japan. Their presence is continuous with the stands on which they are presented – as if they are 'part of the furniture' of the present – as if these imperfect memories are as much part of the architecture of our everyday lives as is the stuff of the materials that surround us.



Artist Statement

Mika Nakamura-Mather is a Japanese artist living in Brisbane whose work is primarily concerned with exploring the process of memory and the manner in which the fragmentary glimpses of our past that we recall (with varying degrees of clarity and trustworthiness) form the route markers of our personal history. Often using materials directly connected with her Japanese homeland, she examines the notion that memories are by definition incomplete, smaller parts of a greater whole that have become disconnected from the flow of narrative structure by the passage of time. She is currently completing a Doctor of Visual Arts degree at Queensland College of Art.

www.mikanakamuramather.com

⁹The artist quotes the words of Susan Sontag to describe her use of photographs: "A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence. Like a wood fire in a room, photographs –especially those of people, of distant landscapes and faraway cities, of the vanished past – are incitements to reverie." Sontag, Susan, 1973, *On Photography*, Penguin.



Mika Nakamura-Mather, 2016.
Postcards From Home Series
(installation view).



(Howzat) Home Sweet Home, 2016.

Installation using cricket bat from *Hmussie Willow (Green & Gold)*, pre-printed canvas, photographic print, stocking, cricket ball, synthetic grass, mats, acrylic spray paint, and foam flower,.

Vanghoua Anthony Vue

Of Hmong heritage, Vue's childhood in north Queensland informs his playfully intelligent re-interpretation of Australian cultural icons. The Hmong's adeptness at making the most of what is, on the whole, a diasporic existence, is harnessed by Vue as a way of 'working in the margins' to produce cultural forms and artefacts that are wilfully transcultural, intentionally non-mainstream. This gives Vue the licence to adopt mainstream codes and practices to his own making. He does this with an informed criticality, one that extends identity and that makes room for other 'others'. With no traditional 'homeland', the Hmong have developed an expertise in transforming their exile into productive, highly creative outcomes. Vue works between his cultural homelands in ways that develop new communities and new ways of harnessing traditional skills and knowledges. By so doing he has extended his role as an artist into that of cultural worker, writer, designer and project manager who always keeps a firm hold on his personal production. Vue is as adept as a painter and photographer as he is a maker of objects, and he chooses the tools and genre of his production according to the context and audience into which they are aimed.

For this project, titled *Hmussie Willow (Green & Gold)*, Vue re-works the iconic Australian cricket bat with marginal design icons based on traditional Hmong glyphs that were once part of a written language and that today are utilised in contemporary embroidery much sought by tourists in South East Asia.¹⁰ He gouges out the glyphs and fills them with pigmented wax to produce objects that are part artefact, part trophy. Next to these are displayed two-dimensional images featuring selected vignettes of exotic 'otherness' – places and objects that signify the kind of pre-packaged, easily digested experiences of elsewhere commonly sold as part of tourist experiences. For Vue, however, the 'other' is integrated into the everyday. It's here around us – in the objects and spaces that we take for granted. It's part and parcel of what it is to be Australian today, and his art reminds us that the complex layers of our contemporary Australian culture is not as fixed and predictable as we might think.



Artist Statement

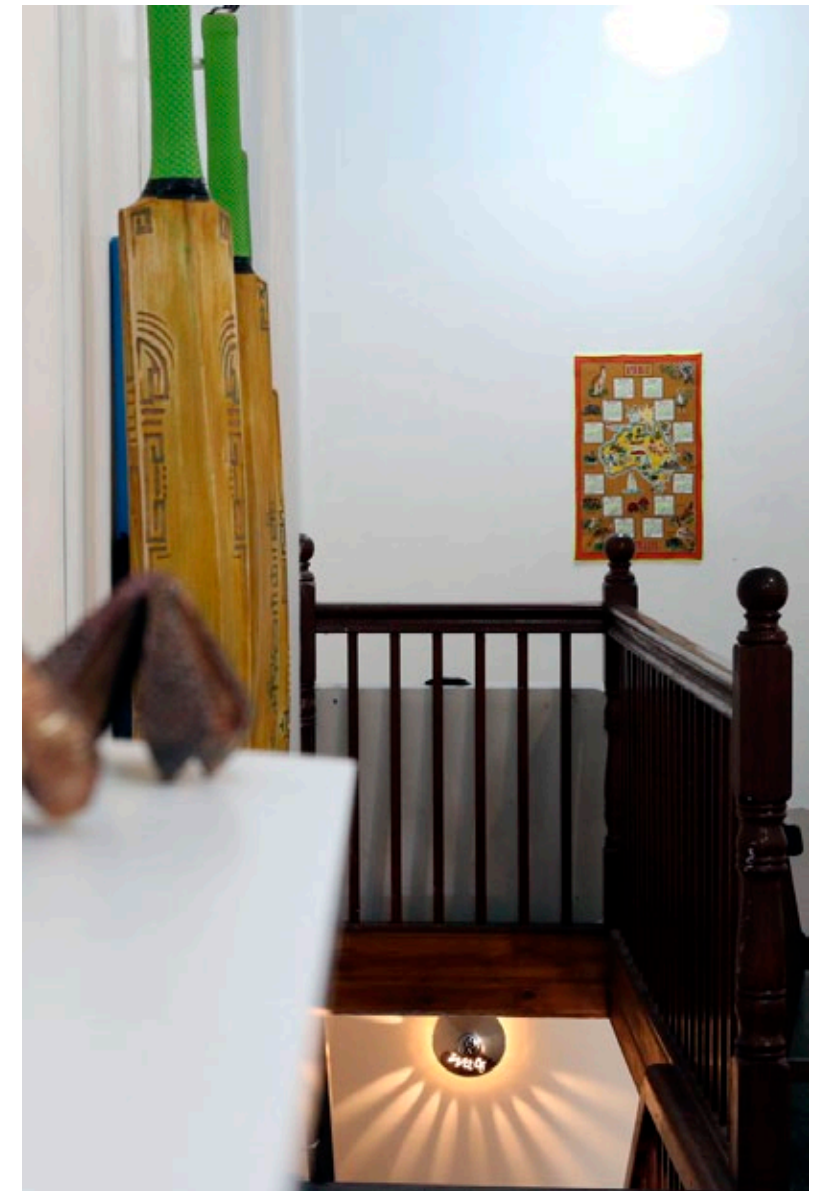
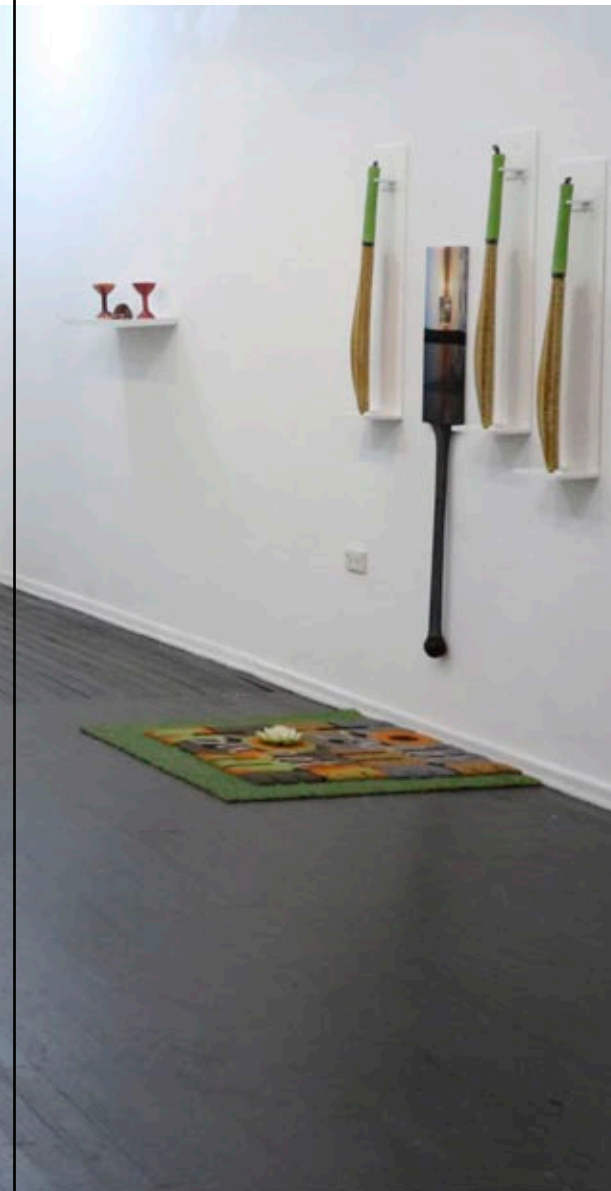
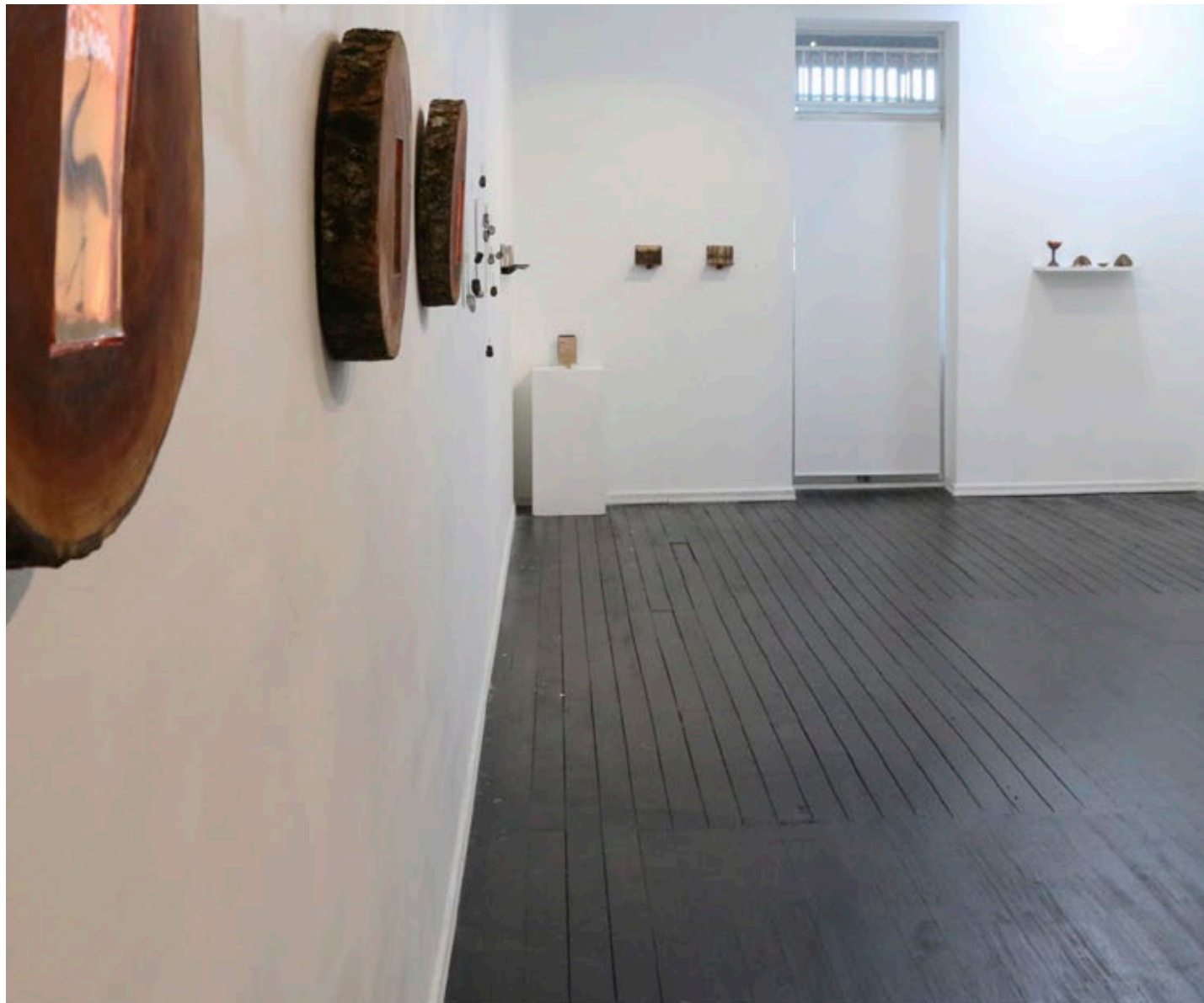
Vanghoua Anthony Vue's eclectic practice recontextualises his Hmong heritage within his Australian upbringing and experience. Focusing on Hmong history and traditions, Vue takes an abstract and autobiographical approach to their reinterpretation and reinvention through an array of materials, influences and processes. Working in fine arts, new media, and public and collaborative projects, Vue's process-based practice departs radically from notions of 'cultural traditions' whilst rejecting established definitions of cultural and national identity, craft, design and high art. Among Vue's practice are investigations of 'The Other' and their representation within nation-states, postmemory as mediated through faded visual forms and oral history, and the reinvention of cultural traditions to explore their continuing relevance and potential to be transformed and diversified into new cultural contexts.

www.vanghoua-anthonyyvue.com

¹⁰ Lee, Gary Y. and Tapp, Nicholas 2010, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, Also cf. "Ancient Hmong Writing System" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20F5ZmiSNAs>. Vue notes: "although this writing system, and many others, have not been confirmed, they contribute further to the agency of cultural capital which the Hmong have engaged in throughout their diasporic experience."



Vanghoua Anthony Vue, 2016.
(Howzat) Home Sweet Home
(detail view).



Together these artists have produced an exhibition that is much larger than the sum of its (small) parts. When considered together, each of these artist's riffs on the idea of the tourist artefact or 'souvenir' reminds us of the multiple hyphens that connect us to each other and that form a mesh of interconnection that is part of our place in Australia today. For non-indigenous and Indigenous Australians alike, recognition of the presence of the past and the custodianship of the country remains as a challenge that must be

recognised. And for those born here and for those who have moved here, the idea of Australia as a 'place' is one that must be continuously re-articulated, re-dreamed, re-imagined in order to weave the richness of these heritages into the full potential they collectively offer.

Pat Hoffie

Installation view, *Souvenirs from Elsewhere*, Woolloongabba Art Gallery.

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- Curator: Pat Hoffie
- Front cover image: Vanhoua Anthony Vue, *Hmussie Willow (Green & Gold) # 4*, detail view, 2015. Carved English willow cricket bat, coloured beeswax and French varnish.
- Front inside image: Sara Iran Nejad, *Garden Pools*, detail view, 2016. Resin, ink, Pyrography, LED light, approx. 30x30x6cm
- Back inside image: Sally Molloy, *Stitching In Details*, detail view, 2016. Synthetic thread on cotton tea towel and synthetic felt, 45 x 72 cm.
- Back cover image: Mika Nakamura-Mather, *Katsuko's Visit (Postcards From Home Series)*, front view, 2015. Japanese Cherry, transparency photo sheets, natural Japanese pigments, ink, used stamps, 15 x 10 cm. Japanese indigenous timber stand, 15 x 10 cm.
- Catalogue design: Vanhoua Anthony Vue
- Photography: Vanhoua Anthony Vue

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