



Home Stories

Adelaide Central
Gallery



I am so pleased that the South Australian Migration Museum embraced the concept for *Home Stories*, the exhibition introduced to the Adelaide Central School of Art in mid-2009 by independent curator Vivonne Thwaites. I acknowledge the great partnership that has developed between the School and the Migration Museum and Vivonne's excellent concept for the exhibition. I congratulate the dedicated team of curators from the Migration Museum, the staff from ArtLAB who undertook conservation work on a number of works, and ACSA Gallery Manager Prue Gramp, who so competently managed the project over the past 12 months.

The artists were all enthusiastic participants, inspired by the opportunity to explore their cultural heritage, and I thank them for their exciting new work. For some, the work is quite a departure from their usual art practice, which is one of the reasons why exhibitions such as this are important, as they provide impetus and opportunity for South Australian artists to develop new ideas that are then translated into new work.

This significant exhibition is the one of a series that is part of the Adelaide Central Gallery program. On this occasion, it has brought together artists, a museum collection and an art school. I wish to make special mention of the financial assistance we received from the State Government through Arts SA, as without this grant we would not have been able to support the artists to develop this work, and also the support of a private benefactor who assisted us to produce this catalogue.

In addition to the showing at the School's Gallery as our contribution to the Adelaide Fringe Festival for 2011, this exhibition will also be shown at the Migration Museum later in 2011.

Ingrid Kellenbach

Chief Executive Officer
Adelaide Central School of Art

The Migration Museum is delighted to partner with artists and staff from the Adelaide Central School of Art in presenting the exhibition *Home Stories*. Using objects as diverse as the cultures to which they belong, the artists have created new artworks exploring their individual cultural identities and sense of community.

Dried meat from an expedition of a Scottish explorer who was the first to cross the continent in 1861–2; a winepress made by an Italian grandfather a century later; a German costume from the nineteenth century; a banner made by the Estonian community in South Australia in the 1980s. These are some of the objects from the collection of the Migration Museum chosen by the artists to inspire their production of new works.

While we look and compare the artworks with their sources, we also learn about the methods of history. That history can be interpreted in many ways from different perspectives. That history is not just about the past—it is also about the present and its connections with the past. And that the past is both familiar and strange. I congratulate and thank all who have contributed to making the exhibition a success—the curators of the Migration Museum, Vivonne Thwaites, artists, and staff of the Adelaide Central School of Art.

Christine Finnimore

Director, Migration Museum



History is never distant from the present...

Object Lessons, Archaeology and Heritage in Australia
Jane Lydon and Tracey Ireland
Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2005, p 71

In *Home Stories* a number of South Australian artists from different ethnic backgrounds were invited to select historical objects from the Migration Museum, and to create artworks inspired by or responding to the objects and their histories. The exhibition comprises both sets of objects, the old and the new, exhibited side by side with accompanying stories and reflections. The project aims to remind us that the local population is characterised by a great diversity of cultures.

Many artists come to reflect on life through sets of cultural mores inherited as children from parents, grandparents or great grandparents who were migrants to this country. Growing up in suburban Australia, family rituals involving home making, food preparation, religious practices, recreation, language, dress and gardening brought from elsewhere were inevitably influential on them. The children of migrants often feel drawn to return to, and explore, the lives of their forebears and the rituals that came with them to Australia. The past is a prism through which they see the (new) world. If those children become artists, then this exploration of the past becomes a rich vein to explore in their contemporary practice

Cultural inheritance adds value and meaning to a modern day take on contemporary life in Australia. It can help explain how we became who we are as a nation. By extension it can also function as a bridge between people, and a gentle plea for cultural tolerance.

Objects are primary markers of cultural significance in that they are repositories of tradition and meaning. Such objects, collected by museums, contain untold memories and act as triggers into past lives. *Home Stories* aims to draw out the connections between these objects and modern day life.

It is part of the contemporary Australian psyche that many of us sense we are from elsewhere, but have made a home here. Many of us have not had an opportunity to explore the culture of our forebears individually, but slowly we have travelled out to explore it through the lives of others, and increasingly we have come to appreciate those rituals and activities that once may have been a source of embarrassment. We now feel a sense of pride in our multicultural mix, our diverse foods, rituals and religions.

The wonderful responses in this exhibition by the artists to particular objects in the Migration Museum has awakened those objects and given them greater provenance and personal significance. The objects act as reminders that beneath the façade of the suburban sprawl in Australia, there are a multitude of cultures. The contemporary artists' responses open up a discussion on what this can mean to Australia as a nation, and act as timely reminders that many new arrivals to Australia today face the same difficulties and prejudices as earlier immigrants.

Vivonne Thwaites
Curator, *Home Stories*





Estonian Banner
HT 86.400 (S), 1986
machine sewn applique work
117 x 71 cm

Chris Aerfeldt
Holden Hill (detail), 2010
acrylic and oil on linen, 40 x 60 cm

Chris Aerfeldt

Both of my parents were born in Estonia and their families left when the country was invaded by the USSR. They arrived in Australia after the Second World War, via years spent in displaced persons' camps. My mother was aged 16, my father 24. Adelaide at the time was dominated by British culture and I grew up with a slightly uncomfortable awareness of living in one culture whilst coming from another. I would have preferred to be British and with a surname that everyone could pronounce.

My paintings reflect a personal vision of my Estonian-ness as a child growing up within Adelaide suburbia. I had never been to Estonia, but mentally conjured up a rich fantasy world—an idyllic fairy tale land of birch forests, lakes, wild berries, romantic snowscapes and beautiful women in folk costumes. This was largely based on tales that I was told by my grandparents, being shown old photos of the family farm, and the little souvenir objects that were resident in our home—dolls in folk costume, a miniature wooden tower with a flag on top, and various models or depictions of Viking boats. Images such as these appear on the Estonian banner in the collection of the Migration Museum. These are the symbols that are typically used when one is forced to condense a culture into a few basic emblems, and contributed to my own romanticised vision and longing for belonging. They provided a convenient contrast to my everyday reality of growing up in some of the more working class areas of Adelaide. A self-indulgent fantasy that was, in some ways, my parents' and grandparents' reality.



False Beard
HT 95.59 E (S)
date of use, 1936
brown paper backing,
fleece, black bias binding tie
23 x 14.5 cm

Roy Ananda
Chin Supports (detail), 2010–11
plaster, balsa wood, pins, acrylic paint
dimensions variable

Roy Ananda

The strange specimen of a false beard in the Migration Museum collection seemed to embody so many of the qualities that I strive for in my work: something daft, playful, lovingly made and idiosyncratically human. To an archivist or museologist, the actuality of this object's past life is of great importance. As an artist however, I have carte blanche to conjure any kind of fictional history for this remarkable item. Indeed, one of the things that most attracted me to the object was how it evoked a range of fictional tropes that periodically crop up in my work: the world of childhood make-believe, the improbable disguises adopted by the likes of Tintin and Maxwell Smart and the moustachioed villains of the silent movie era.

In addition to these narrative considerations, its craft and materiality (at once seductive and repellent) captivated me, as did the beautiful redundancy of a bearded man coveting a fake beard. The pseudo-functionality and ergonomics of fake beards in general have also proven to be very rich areas, prompting me to consider other possible chin accessories or works that might be considered site-specific sculpture for chins.

While not explicitly dealt with in my work, the history of this particular fake beard is of interest to me. My understanding of the object is that it was worn by a small boy as part of a parade commemorating the majesty of the British Empire. Seen through this lens, this innocent object of play becomes loaded with uncomfortable imperialist baggage. This invariably leads me to think about the experiences of my Tamil relatives growing up in Malaysia, which remained a British colony until 1963.



Espresso Coffee Machine

HT 99.69 A-D (S), c 1940
metal alloy on stand
21 x 12 x 19 cm

Carolina Facelli

The Fortune Teller (detail), 2011
archival board, glue and coffee
dimensions variable

Carolina Facelli

The Italian espresso maker in the Migration Museum's collection caught my attention not so much because of the object itself, (albeit, it is a beautifully crafted and wonderfully functional thing) but because of the narrative that partnered it. The tale of its journey across the seas intrigued me; this is an object which qualified as an 'essential'. I wondered how many others believed the ritual of coffee to be essential on such a long journey from home. I soon discovered a vast range of coffee customs from across the world, each accompanied by the objects that are necessary for their practice. These objects seem to become infused with the rituals they are made for and are treasured by the families that own them. Many migrants brought their own unique blends and customs to our city. Today in the Adelaide Central Markets one can find coffee blends from every major continent. The concept of reimagining the objects used in the ritual of making coffee appealed to me as in reconstructing these objects I am in some ways memorialising those who have migrated to this city. I know that when my family moved from Argentina to the USA and then to Australia, our coffee paraphernalia was definitely one of our essentials, and we have continued our customs in our new home like so many others. The choice of archival matt board to make my work seemed fitting because it is a material that the true objects may one day be encased in. The slow process in which these objects are made gives me, as a maker, the chance to contemplate the narratives and rituals of other immigrants: it is a way of showing my respect towards the people and their objects.



Wine Press

HT 2009.89 (S), c late 1950s
found objects, sleepers, wood, wire,
chains and fasteners, 152.5 x 126 x 104 cm

Lee Salomone

circle works (detail), 2010–11
wood, metal, timber, wire, veneers,
foam, bread boards, metal cut-of-wheel,
shower rose, River Torrens Ash
130 x 250 cm

Lee Salomone

My parents immigrated separately to Australia in the 1950s from the Province of Benevento, Italy. They lived on opposite sides of the large valley created by the Calore River, but found each other in Adelaide... by chance. The Migration Museum acquired my grandfather's hand made wine press for their collection in 2008. My grandfather, Giovanni Zotti, constructed the wine press around 1960 with the philosophy of using what is at hand. My mother often retells this story; when her parents and two sisters went walking, her father would make them pick up everything along the streets, always reminding them that they never knew when it might be required. After his death, my grandmother removed two lorry loads of found objects from their backyard. I have collected the elements for these sculptural works from many different continents, over many years, but always with the belief that they will be of use someday. When given the opportunity to respond to this exhibition, these same individual elements seemed to fit together effortlessly. Circle works created from found materials collected by chance. It is a body of work that references human activities based around the different phases of the moon... knowledge that my grandparents made use of daily, especially when creating wine. *Home Stories* has provided the opportunity to respond to an object that is part of the development of this country and at the same time, part of my family's history. It has allowed me to foster chance and create art from what I have collected, or more to the point, create art from what has collected me.

**Blouse**

HT 2010.93 (S), c 1840–1900
cotton fabric, mother of pearl, metal
72 x 56 cm

Kylie Waters

Passed (detail) 2010
ceramic and paper
dimensions variable

Kylie Waters

In 1866 my great, great grandparents, Georg Adam and Anna Heidenreich arrived at Port Adelaide on the *Sophia*. They had been married not long before in Hanover, Germany. On arriving in South Australia, Georg and Anna were sent to Bethany in the Barossa Valley where Georg served as the pastor for 44 years. In 1875 Heidenreich was responsible for establishing the Hermannsburg Mission in Central Australia and was the Superintendent between 1875–1894. Lutheran settlers held objects and activities associated with cultural traditions and the homeland in high regard, especially those associated with the domestic environment. The cup and saucer I have made for *Home Stories* references objects that have been passed down through my family, in particular crockery, textiles, letters and postcards. These new works also allude to conversations and stories shared about family or the church. Postcards sent to family members and black silk fabric hold strong links to cultural traditions and practices. Black cloth was used to make clothing and old German script can be seen in letters to and from home, in diaries and notes. Decoupage is an old technique, decorating the old with new clippings, a temporary covering for plates and cups and saucers. The black, hand sewn lady's shirt and cape, once belonging to Anna Heidenreich, have been in the family for generations. In responding to these objects, a link has been created between the past and present; over time, understandings of these objects have shifted, their stories have been redescribed as histories are unravelled and yet these objects remain the thread that connects us to the past.

**Hunting Bag**

HT 86.955 (S), c 1861
hide and hooves of calves feet
15 x 31 x 31 cm, strap 81 cm

Sera Waters

Blinding (detail), 2010–11
stones, branch, beads, wood,
contact, PVA, paint, cotton, wool
approx 60 x 20 cm

Sera Waters

In considering new works for *Home Stories*, I reference challenges faced by my ancestors, some of whom were early settlers in South Australia. My ancestor George McKay and his family arrived in Port Misery in 1838, after a trying journey by ship, and were forced to live in caves and sand dunes for survival. Their risks of venturing to a new place and sustaining life were brave, hopeful, fraught and explorative. My new works refer to notions of struggle, hardship and repetition in the early exploration of Australia. Migration Museum objects have been selected that offer reminders of these earlier hardships both through the materials and functions of these items. Two of Australia's most compelling exploratory expeditions; John McDouall Stuart's expedition of 1860–62 which successfully crossed Australia South to North, and the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition of the same period. Three meat-related items were selected from the Museum collection; a hoof, the only remainder of Billy the horse who was consumed by the party of Burke and Wills, a calf hunting bag that belonged to John McKinlay who set off in search of them, and some jerked meat in a tin that remains from McDouall Stuart's travels. Historical records return again and again to exploration as relentless: relentless walking, relentless heat, relentless hunger, relentless thirst, and relentless worry. Aside from water, flesh, both dried and fresh, was critical to these unfathomable undertakings. Able horses, camels and men carried and dragged weighty items across challenging terrain breaking down their bodies and minds in the process. As they collapsed, animals (and as one story goes, people) that were not able to continue became meaty sustenance for those still standing; turned into stew or jerked, or their body parts usefully transformed. My interest lies in the physical and emotional blurriness that occurs when life is threatened; how loving gestures merge with bloody mindedness and brutality to enable survival and endurance. I am particularly taken with the details of these extreme Australian stories... from the comfort of my home. My domestic language, consisting of mini-versions of endurance and relentlessness, makes time to wonder into these expeditions.



Workshirt

HT 2003.47 (S), c 1940–1970
ribbed wool, printed cottons, knit fabrics,
tablecloth fabrics, button
75 x 53 cm

Irmina van Niele

Crude Comfort (detail), 2010–11
found worn cotton household linen,
silk and cotton thread, plant dyes
180 x 115 cm each

Irmina van Niele

Crude Comfort has been made as a tribute to human tenacity. It is a work of emotional response to a small collection of faded and patched undergarments, simply sewn in rudimentary fashion. The patches are artless, they appear haphazardly chosen and it is tempting to suggest even deliberately chosen for their random brightness. Hidden below and within these layers are the remnants of original garments, decayed to mere shreds. Far from artless are the beautifully knitted, traditionally patterned mittens. Made for warm protection, these mittens are pathetic in their uselessness; they have hardly been worn. Their potential value has been impossible to realise. As familiar signs of comfort, their meaning has shifted from objects of nurture to objects of loss.

There are immediate surface associations with migrant survival in the face of adversity. Who made this effort, and for whom? What lives were lived inside these garments? Was the wearer also the mender? Were bits of cloth salvaged, and this or that little scrap chosen each time further mending was required? These imagined acts of protection are of great importance; they serve in their simple way towards keeping destitution at bay by ensuring the survival of an undershirt, the continuation of its function of protection and even before that, of basic human dignity: one must be clothed. Questions follow questions in this paradox of survival and decay.

How to approach such intensity? I find cloths: worn and faded, yellowed, threadbare household linen left for years on the shelves of little charity shops in my neighbourhood. I want these cloths to reflect, beyond words, something about this ambiguity—of memory, tenacity, necessity, scarcity, decay, fragility, frivolity, hope. What I hope to generate in the work is a capacity to reflect these qualities. There is in the making process a peculiar reversal, a moving backwards and forwards simultaneously—the old cloths found in Adelaide, scoured, soaked and coloured with dyes from my own garden and street, coaxing the plants to release their soft colours into the cloth. The stitching, however, was done in northern Europe, working on the floor of a small room in poor light, building up the work piece by piece. There is not only a reversal of the process of salvage and decay but also a sense of re-experiencing the migration process. In this cold European location the need for protection in bitter conditions is clear. A process of patient persistence ensues, and a dream-like quality emerges between these layered fragments.

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11 February–19 March 2011
The Migration Museum
31 March–8 June 2011

Roy Ananda's work courtesy the artist
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