

A Whisper Echoes Loudest

26 August 2023 — 10 February 2024

A Whisper Echoes Loudest

26 August 2023 — 10 February 2024

A Whisper Echoes Loudest reflects on individual and collective experiences of colonialism by those who have always and those that now call Australia home. Through gentle and resilient artistic practices, the artists involved in the exhibition explore difficult and often violent narratives that are otherwise concealed from public view and concern. In sharing these difficult narratives, the exhibition seeks to foster a sense of empathy, understanding and community.

Rosell Flatley
Carmen Glynn-Braun
Dennis Golding
Mehwish Iqbal
Shivanjani Lal
Nadia Refaei
Roberta Joy Rich
Sha Sarwari

**Exhibition curated
by Nikita Holcombe**

**FC
MG**


FairfieldCity
Celebrating diversity

Acknowledgement of Country

Cabrogal gulbangadyu
ngurrayin wadyimanwa
Fairfield City Council
Ganunigang wagulra
gulbangadyidyanyi
miwanaba Dharugngai yura.

Fairfield City Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Cabrogal of the Darug Nation and recognises their ongoing relationship to land, place, culture and spiritual beliefs. FCMG pays respects to Elders, past, present and emerging and acknowledges the importance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People continue to play within our community.

Contents

- 06 — Essay by Nikita Holcombe
10 — Rosell Flatley
12 — Carmen Glynn-Braun
14 — Dennis Golding
16 — Mehwish Iqbal
18 — Shivanjani Lal
20 — Nadia Refaei
22 — Roberta Joy Rich
24 — Sha Sarwari
26 — Curator's Biography

A Whisper Echoes Loudest

I would like to acknowledge the stolen lands of the Wangal People of the Darug Nation, on which I live and work and the lands of the Cabrogal People of the Darug Nation, where *A Whisper Echoes Loudest* is presented. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and this is and always will be Aboriginal land.

The Australian colonial narrative is one that, despite first beginning over two centuries ago, continues to be intolerable to the broader Australian public today. The Australian colonial narrative did not cease at the turn of Federation, 1 January 1901, but continues to echo through contemporary Australian education, attitudes and actions.

A Whisper Echoes Loudest recognises the narratives of those who have always, and those who now call the continent so-called Australia home. The narratives presented are not exclusively from the point of invasion, but include ones that intersect, are tangential, and implicate the carefully constructed and upheld image of Australia. *A Whisper Echoes Loudest* is an attempt at an antithesis to the colonial perspective of Australia by inserting personal and familial stories of those often pushed to the peripheries within the gallery space. These stories are not isolated to historical events, but ones that stretch into and infiltrate the present.

The difficult narratives within the exhibition have previously been concealed from public view and concern, which has been aided by their cavernous absence in the Australian education curriculum. The artistic explorations are a means to not only disseminate the narratives, but through their material manifestation, act as both archival and evidential documents. Artists within the exhibition undertake a process of undoing and remaking, of breaking, tearing, fracturing colonial narratives apart and reassembling them, weaving not a new narrative, (possibly one to you), but one that sits alongside, combats and re-rights.

Despite the difficult, and sometimes violent narratives, a softness permeates through the works. This ties them to a site and place as well as fostering a sense of belonging. The artworks reject graphic and violent representations and instead employ soft and beautiful techniques, or what Carmen Glynn-Braun articulates as 'gentle aesthetics'. Through this artistic process, the artists seek not to inflict harm on the viewer, but instead elicit a sense of empathy, and consequently understanding.

The artworks' insertion into the gallery space means that the narratives they depict can no longer be refuted. The works reinsert these discarded narratives into the dominant discourse, one that has typically been inundated with western perspectives and ideology. The artworks subsequently act as archival repositories, as well as temporary memorials and monuments.

The Australian colonial project first encountered this continent at the point of invasion. Its historical and ongoing implications on Australian First Nations People was recently acknowledged in 2008 through the National Apology by former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. Kamilarori and Gamilaraay artist Dennis Golding and Southern Arrernte, Kaytetye and Anmatyerre artist Carmen Glynn-Braun insert personal and collective experiences of colonial violence into the gallery space. Whilst embodying resilience, these works also call for an empathetic reaction, one not previously or willingly granted.

Dennis Golding's work *Remnants [Shields]* (2023) interrogates the colonial marker of ownership – the fence, whilst also straddling its ideations of home and protection. *Remnants [Shields]* is composed of multiple fence fragments moulded on those that enclosed his childhood terrace houses in “The Block”, Redfern. The fence fragments are arranged in formations that resemble traditional Aboriginal shields. This process of fragmenting and remaking acts not only as a reclamation of the land, but also the protection and safekeeping of culture.

Seal of approval (2023) by Carmen Glynn-Braun consists of four hanging single black sheets. Several marks have been made on the sheets using bleach, stripping the fabric of its deep pigment. This process reflects the implementation of various governmental assimilation policies, in which children were stolen from Aboriginal families between 1910 and 1980 to ‘breed out’ their Aboriginality. Rather than leave the bleach marks as is, Glynn-Braun has concealed them by applying various shades of makeup. In *Seal of approval*, Glynn-Braun draws attention specifically to the women who were taken from their families and sent to ‘white’ homes for indentured servitude.

The concept of a ‘white’ Australia is well within living memory and is one that has not only devastated First Nations communities, but also those fleeing conflict from other nations. The works of Sha Sarwari, Mehwish Iqbal, Nadia Refaei and Rosell Flatley challenge the perception of those who now call Australia home.

Sha Sarwari, an Afghani refugee now based in Logan, Queensland, interrogates Australian photographer Max Dupain's infamous photograph *Sunbaker* (1937) in his work *National Icon* (2015). Upon first look, Sarwari assumed the man in the photograph had just been saved from drowning, not a man soaking up the sun on one of Australia's many beaches. At a time under the Howard Federal Government (1996-2007), those fleeing conflict and persecution from foreign nations to Australia were denoted as ‘boat people’, and in the newspapers the term ‘asylum seeker’ felt synonymous with ‘terrorist’.

Ideas of belonging and migratory experiences are echoed in the intricate, illustrious works of Mehwish Iqbal. Her works *Infiltration of a Foreign Entity* (2022) and *The Inferior Body* (2022) traverse time and space, navigating her own migration from Pakistan to Australia. Iqbal adopts detailed and repetitive mark-making practices that allude to people and their unbreakable connection to the natural world. In doing so, Iqbal's works weave personal and collective narratives and perspectives on the process of finding a place to call home in a new land and navigating placemaking in colonially steeped Australia.

۲۰۱۱-۱۹۹۸ by Nadia Refaei, pieces together familial histories through personal photographs taken during her childhood in Syria. Now living in nipaluna (Hobart region), ۲۰۱۱-۱۹۹۸ is a personal response to the ongoing Syrian conflict and an attempt to maintain connection to family and country. Created through the laborious and unpredictable process of papermaking, constructed to a similar size of a typical family photograph, the papers are carefully stitched together to form several threads. The threads pinned to the wall cascade gently downwards, a reference to both the creation and maintenance of an archive as well as the fragmentation of personal memory over time.

Rosell Flatley's installation *The Pedicab* (2023) employs the traditional transportation device as a vehicle for storytelling and dialogue of migratory experiences. In particular, women from the Philippines migrating to Australia, leaving their families by necessity in search of more financially fruitful opportunities. Flatley's alter ego 'Ate Indai (ahh-thay In-dye)' carries passengers on the traditional pedicab, and records their conversations that allude to personal and collective experiences of migration. Ate Indai's steadfast presence and her iridescent pedicab, disrupts the otherwise comfortable obliviousness towards colonial attitudes to migratory people.

A Whisper Echoes Loudest carries intersecting and diverging narratives, to act as a reflective, meditative space for memorialisation and understanding. The artistic renditions of difficult narratives by Shivanjani Lal and Roberta Joy Rich adopt the role of temporary memorials. These ephemeral moments of reflection and remembering sit outside of 'colonial' formations of memorials and monuments.

Shivanjani Lal's work *Grief is a mirror* (2023) speaks to histories of loss initiated by the British colonial project. Lal reflects on the experiences of those forcibly taken from India to Fiji as indentured labourers to work on sugar plantations in service of Australia. Along with friends and family, Lal hand-built Mala (prayer beads) composed of terracotta and turmeric. In the gallery space, the Mala are not fixed or draped around a particular figure but are suspended alone in honour of those who are no longer present. Here, *Grief is a mirror* adopts the role of a memorial and quiet monument to those who have slipped between the cracks of Australian colonial history.

Nascent gestures; an ode to displaced ancestors (from Nusantara to the Kaap) (2023), forms Roberta Joy Rich's gesture to ancestors who maintained resilience whilst enduring colonial violence and silencing. The two-channel video work depicting a sunrise and sunset, is accompanied by an offering of silky incense, which permeates through the gallery space. The work is one manifestation of Rich's embarkment on an archaeological dig through her South African heritage, collecting whispers and then piecing them together. The installation is one that honours the past and memory, while simultaneously a moment captured of continual learning.

In sharing these difficult personal and collective narratives using soft, gentle aesthetics, the exhibition seeks to foster a sense of empathy, understanding and community. *A Whisper Echoes Loudest* holds space whilst also refuting the dominant colonial discourse in an attempt to stir those from the comfort of their ignorance. Throughout the exhibition there is a process of breaking apart, of dismantling colonial records, structures and rules and piecing them back together, creating new objects, archives and memories.

Rosell Flatley aka Ate Indai (ahh-thay In-dye)

“The Pedicab” is a thought-provoking art installation created by Ate Indai, an alter ego and social commentator created by the artist, Rosell Flatley. This unique artwork delves into the critical issues faced by migrant women from the Philippines who leave their families behind to seek better opportunities abroad. Ate Indai utilises the traditional pedicab as a symbol to shed light on the experiences of these courageous women.

The pedicab, a traditional mode of transportation still in use today, serves as a powerful vehicle for storytelling and dialogue. The pedicab acts as an interactive platform for people to first engage in conversation about its construction and design and subsequently about the social issues surrounding immigration. The choice of recycled materials and vibrant colours employed highlights the resourcefulness and skill of Filipinos in creating practical items with limited materials and resources, all done in an effort to support their families.

An intriguing aspect of this artwork is the incorporation of consentually recorded conversations with passengers in the pedicab. The discussions that unfold are candid, personal, and enlightening. They offer a genuine glimpse into the lived experiences and emotions of those affected by migration. These raw conversations serve as a testament to the profound impact of the pedicab as a catalyst for connection and understanding.

The Pedicab encapsulates the artist’s dedication to addressing social issues, showcasing the resilience of migrant women, and fostering dialogue and understanding. It raises awareness about the challenges faced by migrant women and invites viewers to contemplate the broader themes of immigration, resourcefulness, and familial sacrifice.

Rosell Flatley’s creative practice is driven by her desire to initiate conversations around cultural identity and representation. Her multidisciplinary approach allows her to experiment with different forms of expression, using live performance, installation, video, sound and 3D work to convey her ideas. Through her art, Rosell aims to challenge and strengthen her connection to her Filipino heritage, while also exploring the migrant experience of being a first-generation Australian.

Rosell’s work is deeply personal, and she uses her artistic practice to narrate the struggles that she and her family have faced. By sharing her experiences, Rosell hopes to create a sense of community and solidarity among those who share similar backgrounds. Her work is not only visually striking but also emotionally resonant, leaving a lasting impact on those who encounter it.

Rosell’s creative practice is a testament to the power of art to inspire empathy and understanding. Through her work, she encourages us to examine our own identities and to consider the stories of those around us.

Pedicab



—
Rosell Flatley aka Ate Indai (Ahh-thay In-dye), *Pedicab*, 2021.
Bicycle and accessories, passenger interviews on iPad.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Carmen Glynn-Braun

Unpacking themes of identity, 'Seal of approval' guides us through the devastating impacts of the Assimilation Policy. A government policy designed to obliterate Indigenous bloodlines entirely through the process of breeding out the 'black' over four generations. By the end of the four generations, they believed that the skin colour would be fair enough to receive the Seal of approval to be considered white. White enough to be acceptable in Australian society. Four black bed sheets are hung out like laundry, referencing the forced indentured servitude of Aboriginal women during this time; as well the four generations they believed it would take to wipe out Black Australia. Each sheet has been stripped with house bleach, leaving a permanent unrepairable mark. Whitewashed and stripped of its colour, Glynn-Braun uses makeup to recolour each mark with the flesh tones of Indigenous Australia, who are still defiantly present today.

Carmen Glynn-Braun is a Kaytetye/Anmatyerre/Arrernte transdisciplinary artist. She has developed unique and contemporary methods to capturing generational First Nations storytelling. Her work predominantly explores the lived experiences of Aboriginal women, translated through gentle and experimental approaches to materials and form. Glynn-Braun seeks to use her work as a platform to uplift, empower and ensure First Nations storytelling is preserved for many generations to come.

Carmen is also one half of Re-Right, a First Nations led artistic collective, focusing on contemporary storytelling, public art, curation, and grassroots community engagement.

Seal of approval



—
Carmen Glynn-Braun, *Skin Deep* (2021). Dyed silk panels. Installation view,
Make Yourself At Home exhibition, Cement Fondu, 2021.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Dennis Golding

For Dennis Golding, fences have multiple and tangential meanings. Golding, a Kamilaroi and Gamilaraay man, grew up in Redfern, Sydney, in an area known as ‘the Block’. The Block was considered to be the urban centre for Aboriginal people in Sydney. There, Golding had an abundance of friends and family and lived in several terrace houses. Sadly, these homes no longer exist, having been demolished to make way for gentrification to support ongoing colonial expansion.

In the sculptural work ‘Remnants [Shields]’ (2023), Golding has fabricated a series of shields constructed from clay and epoxy, modelling fragments of the lace fences that once enclosed his Redfern homes. The fence and shield have both diverging and intersecting meanings. While the fence is a colonial marker of territory and a barrier to restrict access, both the fence and shield carry associations of protection and safety.

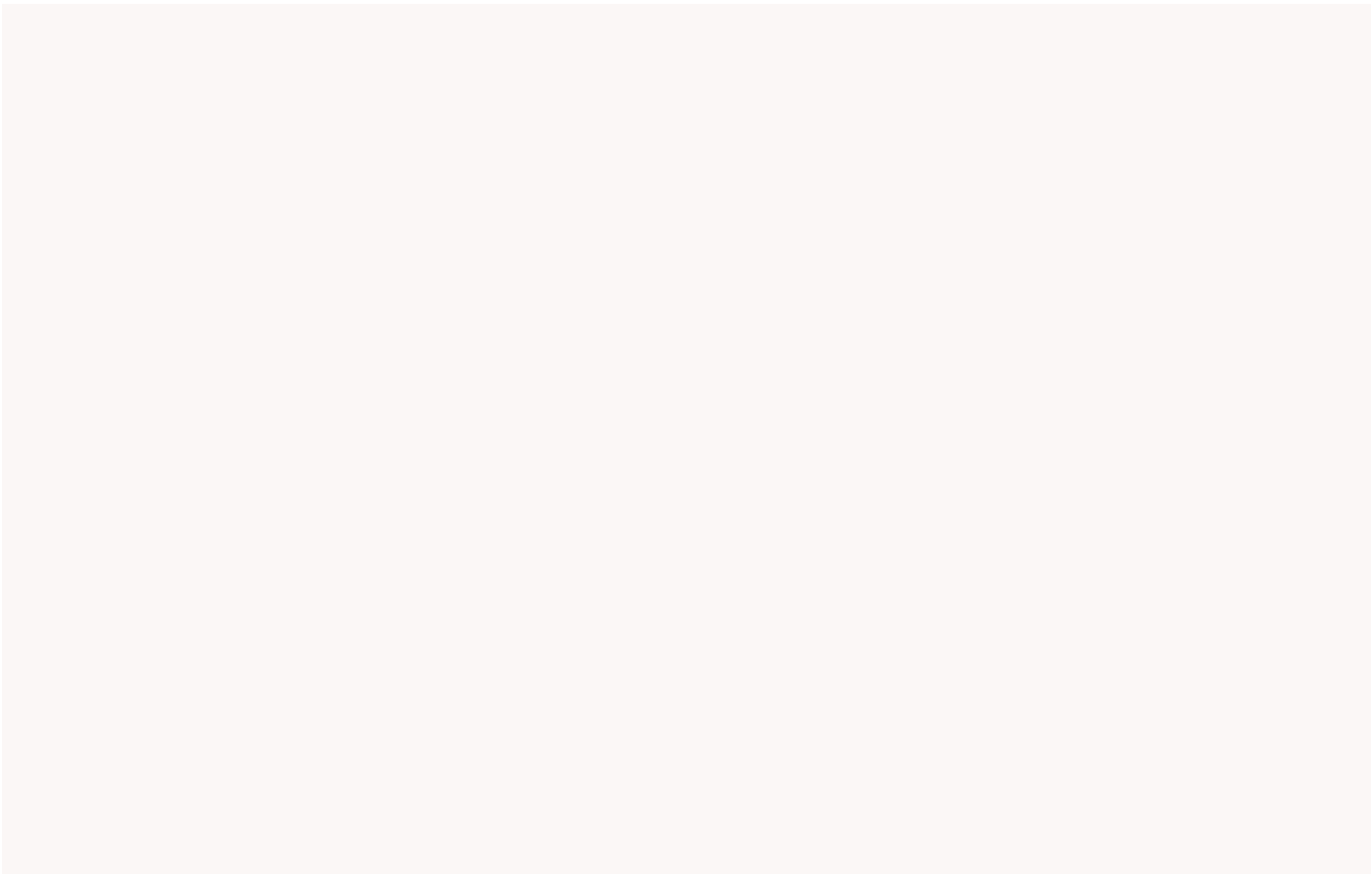
The shields are adorned in various, iridescent hues. A reference to the colours of the house she grew up in as well as his Gran’s simple act of reclamation by repainting her home multiple times in peachy pink, green, purple and pastel yellow. Through the process of fracturing and reforming colonial architectural forms into shields, Golding refuses to submit to the colonial expansion and absorption of Aboriginal place and history.

Dennis Golding is a Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay artist from the north west of NSW and was born and raised on Gadigal land (Sydney). Through his Mother’s lineage, Dennis also has ancestral ties to Biripi country along the mid-north coast of NSW. Working in a range of mixed media including painting, video, photography and installation, Golding critiques the social, political and cultural representations of race and identity. His practice is drawn from his own experiences living in urban environments and through childhood memories.

Golding was surrounded by art from his urban upbringing living in an Aboriginal community in Redfern (often referred to as ‘The Block’). As a young child, he often watched his mother and grandmother paint on large canvas and sheen fabrics depicting Australian native plants and animals, cultural motifs and human figures. Golding developed his professional practice in art school through mentorships with leading curators, educators and artists. Golding graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) at UNSW Art & Design in 2019 and now works independently as an artist and curator.

Through his artistic and curatorial practice, Golding aims to present powerful representations of contemporary Aboriginal cultural identity that inform narratives of history and lived experiences.

Remnants [Shields]



—
Dennis Golding
Remnants [Shields]
Image courtesy of the artist.

Mehwish Iqbal

“This body of work cultivates a parallel between the human and natural world, through the dichotomy of interdependent relationships. The works explore survival strategies, coping mechanisms and challenges posed by host culture, in a matrix of layered images that celebrate religious iconography, poetry, philosophy and human resilience through a constantly evolving landscape. As an artist I am interested in highlighting the voice of minorities by incorporating a visual vocabulary that encapsulates the role of language, identifiable landscapes, an individual’s personal history, ancestral knowledge and love of land to generate a shared experience.”

– *Mehwish Iqbal, 2023*

Mehwish Iqbal works across painting, printmaking, textiles, ceramics, sculpture and installation art. Her work provocatively explores notions of womanhood, courage, liberation, and power. She experiments with themes involving migration, influx of refugee and migrant diaspora, monopoly of power-play, commodification of human agency, hybrid identities, and unfolding, fragile and complex state of individuals.

Iqbal holds a Masters of Art from COFA, UNSW with High Distinction in Printmaking (2011). She has participated in several prestigious residence programs, New York Artist League (2011) USA, Megalo Print Studio (2013) Australia, Halka Arts Projects (2014) Turkey, Bundanon Trust (2014) Australia and Blacktown Arts Centre Residency (2015). She has been a finalist in many art awards and prizes including: Hobart Art Prize, Blake Prize, Fisher’s Ghost Art Award, Paramor Art Prize and International Emerging Artist Award. She has also been the recipient of the Viktoria Marinov Award UNSW, Ian Potter Travel Grant, Australia Arts Council Grant and Public Art Commission thecoLAB.

Mehwish Iqbal’s work has been shown widely across Australia, Pakistan, USA, Turkey and Hong Kong. Her work is held in prestigious collections both locally and internationally. She has participated in Contemporary Istanbul, Art Central Hong Kong, Karachi Biennale and Sydney Contemporary Art Fair.

Infiltration of a Foreign Entity



—
Mehwish Iqbal, *Infiltration of a Foreign Entity*, 2022.
Silk screen, etching, collagraph.
Image courtesy the artist and Yavuz Gallery, Sydney.

Shivanjani Lal

*“Grief is a clock that has its own time.
It knows no end point.*

*In many ways my work is about the holding on of love across time and across loss.
It ebbs and flows and tells me in its waning that I am growing, gloaming; shape shifting
as I process time.*

*From Late November 2022, to late January 2023 I lost three men who I care about. This is a loss that
I am still processing. A ghost of a future grief I am unwilling to navigate. A place of hollow mirrors. A
reminder that we are built by the sum of our parts and the small moments in between. An uncle reading
me a story, another giving me a camera, another finding masi (barkcloth) in order to support my work
even though he didn't know what it was I was making. These small moments reflecting a life lived.*

*I never knew my Aaja or my Nanna but they loom large in the homes of my family – idols furnished
with garlands, individual images marked and commemorated. Stained across time, no stories, just
their image. Images, of my Aaji and Nanni next to them, of youthful womens' saris and braided hair...
women I never met. A different life filled with another story.*

When I remember, I want to picture all the possibilities known and unknown. I want to honour both.

*In leaving space, I am considering absence as a place that can make a monument to all these in between
moments. Of all of the life lived.”*

- Shivanjani Lal, 2023

Shivanjani Lal is a Fijian-Australian artist whose work uses personal grief to account for ancestral loss. Recent works have used storytelling, objects and video to account for lost histories and explore narratives of indenture and migratory histories from the Indian and Pacific oceans. Between 2017-18, she sought to globalise her arts practice with a prolonged stay in India, which led to periods of research in Nepal, Bangladesh and Fiji. Lal's work has been exhibited across Australia, and internationally in New Zealand, India, Barbados, France, Indonesia, the United Kingdom and Italy. In 2021 she graduated with distinction from Goldsmiths, University of London with a Masters in Artists' Film & Moving Image. In 2022 she received a Create NSW Visual Arts Commissioning grant to develop new work for *The National* to be shown at Campbelltown Arts Centre, in 2023. This year she will participate in the Carriageworks Clothing Store Artist Studio Program and the City of Sydney's Creative Live Work program for 2023-2024.

Grief is a mirror



—
Shivanjani Lal, *Grief is a mirror*, 2023.
Masi, terracotta, air-dried clay, haldi, jute thread.
Photography by X.

Nadia Refaei

Nadia Refaei's iterative installation ١٩٩٨-٢٠١١ forms part of her ongoing exploration of how family photographs act as vestiges of 'homeland'. Situated within the context of the forced distance from her paternal homeland and fragmentation of Refaei's family by the Syrian conflict, the installation acts as an evolving personal and familial archive.

١٩٩٨-٢٠١١ is composed of a series of small rectangular sheets of handmade paper, sewn from end to end, to form long, delicate threads. The paper is constructed using Refaei's own familial photographs through a process of disassembling and reassembling, to create new forms of family archives, with new meanings. The laborious and methodical production process allows Refaei to move through feelings of reflection, grief and recognition.

Through these familial photographs, the work traces personal and collective memory of moments from Refaei's childhood in Syria and flickers of summertimes spent in their grandfather's village Tel, up in the mountains of Damascus. In using her own family photos, Refaei posits how we attach meaning to objects of sentiment and record, how these objects may manifest and how their ascribed meanings change over time. In this case, these records are imbued with associations of loss, and form an accidental archive that represents a time and place that can no longer be returned to. The photo assumes the role of both object and record, emphasised by each piece of paper being the same size as a traditional family photo.

As time passes, the work expands and contracts, germinates, and shifts, mirroring the fragmentation of both personal memory over time and the physical separation from land and family. The work not only operates as a family archive, but within a greater archive documenting experiences and memories before and during the ongoing Syrian conflict.

Nadia Refaei is an artist based in nipaluna (Hobart region). Her multidisciplinary practice draws on both personal and collective histories to explore ideas around cultural dislocation and negotiation. Layered histories of familial migration have informed her interest in the relationships between migration, memory and mythology. Nadia uses installation, video and other media, as well as everyday cultural practices like cooking and gardening, to examine these complexities through the lenses of her overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, Arab- Muslim- and Greek- "Australian" identities.

Nadia is also an arts worker and co-chair of Constance ARI.

٢٠١١-١٩٩٨



—
Nadia Refaei, ٢٠١١-١٩٩٨, 2020 (detail). Paper handmade from torn photographs, linen thread.
Installation view, ١٩٩٨-٢٠١١ exhibition, Moonah Arts Centre, 2020.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Roberta Joy Rich

“For many diasporic and continent based Southern Africans, our lineages carry a beautiful plurality. For some, whether one chooses to acknowledge or delve deeper with such heterogeneity beyond identity designations such as “Coloured,” is dependent on the experience of colonialism and its traumatic mechanisms to create dissonance. These same mechanisms employed globally by white supremacist rule, are starkly evident in my experiences within settler nation contexts of Australia and South Africa.

In Southern Africa, acknowledgment and pride of our Indigenous and Afro-Asian histories were at times heavily compromised because of classist and racist regimes that made it shameful to acknowledge a lineage tied to slavery. Furthermore, our experience of de-Africanisation, ethnocide, Apartheid and forced removals evoke memories of pain, loss and shame.

As a diasporic Southern African woman born and raised on stolen lands, the capacity to assimilate and forget feels impossible. I have spent a sustained period and continue to research and learn about the histories of my family and connection to place. It took time for me to look outwards across the Indian Ocean, and focus on Nusantara. After two recent months of research in Java, an abundance of discoveries continues to weave our complex and murky past to inform and empower connections within our present. Traces of their legacies shine, carried forth by exiled and enslaved bodies, from Islamic scholars, brightly painted houses and deleted ‘Malay’ words surfacing, spurring excitement and the familiar. These connections across oceans of my ancestors wait patiently, somehow muted though distinctly audible. I revel in recognising their character through distant lands that have survived generations of silencing and violence.

Nascent gestures; an ode to displaced ancestors (from Nusantara to the Kaap) is an installation that hopes to honour, remember and pay respect to ancestors, and their resilience and memory through a portal of departure and arrival.”

– Roberta Joy Rich, 2023

Roberta Joy Rich is a multi-disciplinary artist who utilises historical archives, storytelling, photo-media, text and sometimes satire in her video, sound, installation and mixed media practice. Often referencing her own diaspora southern African identity and experiences, Roberta engages in a process of re-framing materials to unearth silenced narratives and the possibilities they conjure. Drawing from various epistemes, she is interested in notions of “authenticity” and challenging singularity in constructs of race and gender identity, with the hope of deconstructing colonial modalities and proposing sites of self-determination within her practice.

Since completing her Master of Fine Arts at Monash University (2013), Roberta has exhibited projects across eastern Australia as well as South Africa. Exhibitions include, *Deny/Denial/Denied*, Blak Dot Gallery, Melbourne (2017); *One Colour at a Time: Contemporary Screen Prints*, Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg (2017); *M/other Land*, Arts House, Melbourne (2018); *Transmissions*, Gallery MOMO, Cape Town (2018); *The Fairest Cape? An account of a Coloured*, Bus Projects, Melbourne (2018), Firstdraft, Sydney (2019); *WE KOPPEL, WE DALA*, Metro Arts, Brisbane (2019), *Incinerator Art Award*, Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne (2020); *The Purple Shall Govern*, Footscray Community Arts (2022); *The Churchie Emerging Art Prize*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2023) and was an artist and the co-curator of *And she was wearing trousers*, Arts House, Melbourne (2022), presenting work by local and international African artists. Roberta’s practice has been supported by NAVA, The Freedman Foundation, Australia Council for the Arts, Creative Victoria, ACMI and the Ian Potter Cultural Trust.

*Nascent gestures; an ode to displaced ancestors
(from Nusantara to the Kaap)*



—
Roberta Joy Rich, *Nascent gestures; an ode to displaced ancestors
(from Nusantara to the Kaap)*, 2023 (detail). Video still, 2 channel HD video installation
with bamboo woven basket, soil from Country and incense.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Sha Sarwari

“My first impression of the ‘Sunbaker’ (1937) was that the man in the photo had been rescued from drowning. After learning more about the photograph and how it has shaped Australia and the Australian way of life, I wanted to place my narrative as a refugee in this historical context.”

– Sha Sarwari, 2023

National Icon is an appropriation of Australian modernist photographer Max Dupain’s infamous photograph Sunbaker (1937). Sarwari’s reinterpretation of Sunbaker invites the viewer to reconsider the dominant narrative surrounding Australia’s identity and shed light on the complexities and contradictions within the nation’s history and present-day policies towards refugees and migrants. In National Icon, Sarwari challenges the social narrative that Sunbaker is known for, that is, an iconic image of the Australian way of life. Sunbaker was used to pitch Australia as a destination to live to the world, particularly to the western world, as a vast land with welcoming and relaxing warm beaches. This heavily contradicts recent times, as Australia has not been welcoming to those who seek refuge from conflict and persecution.

Sha Sarwari, a Hazara born in Afghanistan, is a multidisciplinary visual artist whose practice encompasses a diverse range of mediums. Through his work, Sarwari intricately weaves together allegorical layers, which results in a visual experience evocative of poetry.

His art captures the essence of a liminal space, a realm suspended between two worlds, straddling the tension between longing and belonging. His works have a pointed reference to the sociopolitical discourse around migration, identity, place, memory, nationhood, as well as personal lived experience.

In his recent works, Sarwari intentionally imbeds the visual aesthetic of Farsi script ‘Nastaliq’. By incorporating this distinctive script into his art, he not only pays homage to his cultural heritage but also utilizes its visual language to convey deeper conceptual meanings and narratives.

Sarwari holds an Honours degree in Visual Arts from Victoria College of Arts, Melbourne University (2018), a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Queensland College of Arts, Griffith University (2015), and a Diploma of Graphic Design from TAFE (2005).

In 2015, Sarwari received a Highly Commended award for the The Churchie National Emerging Art Prize and in 2016 was the recipient of the inaugural ‘Home’ art prize for the Walker Street Gallery & Arts Centre. In 2017, he was awarded the ‘Most Critically Engaged Work’ for the Australian Centre for Photography. In 2018, Sarwari was awarded the Fiona Myer Award for excellence at VCA, Melbourne University, and in 2020 Sha was one of the recipients of the Incinerator Art Award; art for social change.

National Icon



—
Sha Sarwari, *National Icon*, 2015.
Digital print on archival paper, 87.5 x 72.5 cm.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Nikita Holcombe

Nikita Holcombe is an independent writer, curator and researcher living and working on Wangal land. Her research looks at the legacies of colonisation within Australia and the depiction of violent acts using subversive techniques in contemporary art to induce empathy, understanding and community. She holds a Bachelor of Art Theory (Honours, First Class) from the University of NSW.

A Whisper Echoes Loudest

This catalogue was published to accompany the exhibition
A Whisper Echoes Loudest at Fairfield City Museum & Gallery,
26 August 2023 – 10 February 2024.

Curator: Nikita Holcombe

Artists: Rosell Flatley, Carmen Glynn-Braun, Dennis Golding,
Mehwish Iqbal, Shivanjani Lal, Nadia Refaei, Roberta Joy Rich,
Sha Sarwari

Project Manager: Vanessa Jacob

Graphic Designer: Kevin Vo

Museum & Gallery Programs Officer: Sandra May

FCMG Coordinator: Carmel Aiello

Written, designed, edited and printed in 2023,
across unceded Darug, Wangal and Bidjigal lands.
Printed by ecoDesign ecoPrint.

Copyright © Fairfield City Council and the authors 2023.
ISBN: 978-0-6457851-2-8

**FC
MG**

Open Tuesday-Friday 10am - 4pm
and Saturday 10am - 3pm
FREE ADMISSION

634 The Horsley Drive,
Smithfield NSW 2164

T: 02 9725 0190

E: fcmg@fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au

W: fcmg.nsw.gov.au

[f](#) [@](#) @FairfieldCityMuseumGallery


FairfieldCity
Celebrating diversity

