

23 OCT -
9 APR



**EXTRA/
ORDINARY**



Fairfield City Museum & Gallery is situated on the land of the Cabrogal of the Darug nation. The texts in this catalogue reference localities on Darug land. We acknowledge elders past and present, and the elders of the future.

This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.



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EXTRA/ORDINARY

Curator's Note

A collection suggests a group of things purposely brought together, the individual item valuable enough to keep, but enhanced through its connection to other items gathered alongside it. We collect things we like, objects that are given to us, with special memories attached or strong associations.

The Fairfield City collection is made up of thousands of objects, photographs, textiles and documents that have been donated to the museum since 1983. Ranging from ordinary to extraordinary they transport us through time and connect us to previous owners and places long gone. However, most of the collection is permanently stored away, preserved, but never displayed or looked at. What unites these items is their connection to Fairfield - the place, the people, the past.

FCMG has invited artists and writers to take inspiration from or respond to our historical collection - to critically reflect on what is there, whose stories are told and whose are left untold. The result is Extra/Ordinary: the start of a conversation, asking questions rather than providing answers. The project is an investigation into the act of collecting, interrogating the value of objects and challenging the authority and future of a museum and its collection.

Tracing the journey of an object once it enters a collection, artist duo Make or Break (Connie Anthes and Rebecca Gallo) present *Ghost Notes*, marking the influence of time and loss of context, revealing a life spent in the dark.

Object Memory, a series of workshops and art making sessions facilitated by Liam Benson, highlighted the power of objects. The result is presented in a collaborative art installation exploring our intimate relationships with objects as vessels for connection and carriers of memory.

Taking inspiration from the historical photographs showing a changing suburban landscape, Dacchi Dang invites you on a walk in *Me & My Shadow*, musing over the impact of global migration on the local aesthetic.

Artist collective Re-Right (Dennis Golding and Carmen Glynn-Braun) faced perhaps the hardest task: how do you respond to a collection that is completely silent about your people, your past, your stories? Both commenting on the absence of Indigenous objects in Fairfield's collection and criticising colonial museum practices, *For the Record* is a powerful statement on ownership and authorship.

Trained in darkroom photography, Jennifer Leahy was drawn to the magic of photographs to capture a moment in time. *Years Ago* is a search for the human story once the image has faded or disappeared, like a foggy memory.

Four female writers from western Sydney collective Finishing School + Friends offer their creative pieces in this catalogue.

Struggling to reconcile her memories of Fairfield with the collection and its strong Anglo-Australian focus, Hajer asks: Donating to a museum - whose practice is it? Sheila Ngoc Pham finds representation

in some of the non-discriminating medical collection objects and writes about the collective experiences of womanhood whilst highlighting the differences all the same. Deniz Agraz presents deeply personal, reimagined and associative histories for two of our collection items, providing a solution for some of our items lost without context. Lastly, Masako Fukui encounters an apparition of the past whilst speculating on what the future might hold for a museum in a modern multicultural place like Fairfield.

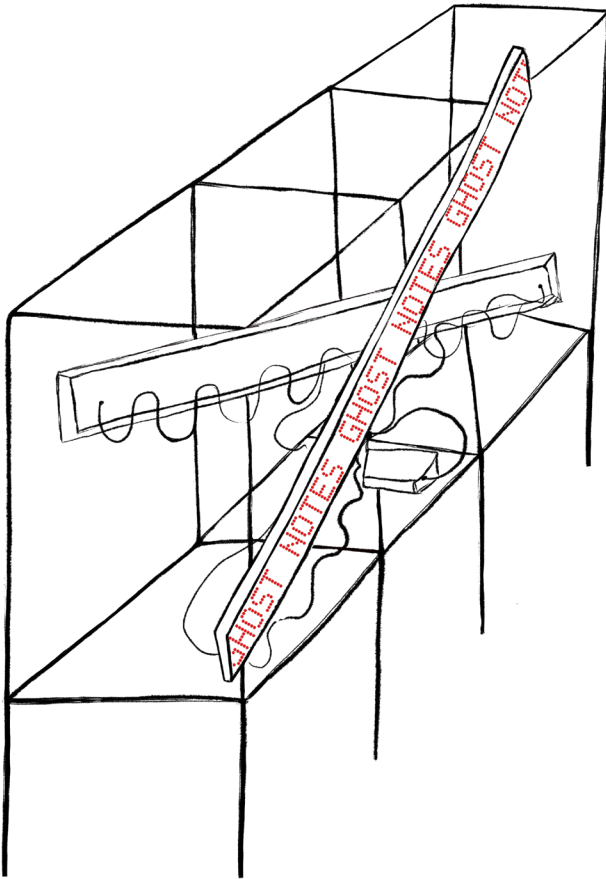
Each has also written a room text accompanying the art installations on display with a fifth text contributed by designer extraordinaire, Laura La Rosa.



This project has been about sharing authority, with artists, writers and now with you, the visitor. We invite you to think about the questions that shaped this project. What stories do our museum collections tell? Who is included and who is left out? And how do we shape our collections for the future?

MAKE OR BREAK

Ghost Notes, 2021



When an object or record enters a collection, it is catalogued, and removed from context and use. We are left with a series of textual stand-ins: lists of numbers and words that are supposed to correspond to or encapsulate the category, location, content and cultural value of an archive or object.

Much of Fairfield's collection has not been seen or touched for decades. Objects lay in shadows, in temperature-controlled, dust-free hermetic environments, shrouded in chemically stable soft wrappers that limit their erasure by light, air, moisture, time. And so we become reliant on written records. From handwritten notes and voiced stories from donors and families, we give titles to objects, photographs and other assets, updating them across decades to fit new systems and naming conventions. Ledgers and index cards are transformed into spreadsheets and databases; clunky

backend systems are stewarded in blocks of time by staff, volunteers and interns, and then migrated across to 'faster' platforms; information is reorganised.

In this way, objects and images become slowly disoriented from their origins. With every movement, there is loss.

In musical notation, a ghost note occupies space within a score, but its details are stripped away to the point of near silence. Make or Break's work *Ghost Notes* mimics the action of time on the Fairfield City Heritage Collection, and exposes the role of language in erasing the objects they seek to preserve. The digital stream of text describing every object in the collection slowly suffers the degradations of glitches, lost names, locations and other contextual connections, introducing confusions and alterations to their properties and meaning.

Artist Bio

Make or Break has worked across gallery, institution, festival and community contexts to produce a range of process-based projects that are co-authored with the communities they intersect with. These have included creating experimental economies that address precarity and privilege; unveiling speculative monuments; celebrating the invisible labour of strangers and facilitating conversations and workshops as alternatives to traditional forms of research. Make or Break is passionate about exposing invisible labour and deploying artistic methods to question and challenge the social and political systems that influence lives and livelihoods.

Make or Break is a collaboration between artists Connie Anthes and Rebecca Gallo, living and working on unceded Gadigal, Bidjigal and Burramattagal lands in Sydney, Australia.

LIAM BENSON, M. SUNFLOWER, MARY NGUYEN, GINETTE MORATO AND GAIL BARCLAY

Object Memory, 2021



Throughout April and May 2021 a group of artists with connections to the Fairfield region, met at Fairfield City Museum and Gallery to participate in the workshop series 'Object Memory'. In these workshops, artists M.Sunflower, Mary Nguyen, Ginette Morato and Gail Barclay, writer Deniz Agras, along with museum and gallery team Alinde Bierhuizen, Carmel Aiello and Kelly-Ann Standley collaborated with artist and facilitator Liam Benson to share and discuss the relationships we have with objects of personal significance.

The objects selected by the group included handed down and inherited family heirlooms, family photos, rare gifts, personal mementos and dedicated collections. Each object was collected, acquired, inherited or gifted because of its value as a connection and conduit to something or someone of great significance to its carer.

Often, we are left alone to deal with our history and pain, but this space of collaboration forged relationships that offered support for each participant as they engaged with traumas, difficult histories and experiences.

By meeting, listening and sharing the significance of each object, the group created a space for intuitive enquiry, which allowed participants to access memories and stories that require a unique space of dedication and focus.

The objects became a portal to the ethereal and the unsaid by allowing each person to

unravel and perceive their connection to the stories, history and memories bound within their collection.

The workshop series is a collaborative artwork shared and authored by each participant. Together, the group developed a process of empathy and response, where the artists have been able to transmute trauma, locate and connect with personal stories and reconcile the past with the present.

Artist Bios

Mary Nguyen is a Vietnamese Australian visual artist who is skilled in a wide range of media and styles. Based in Sydney, Nguyen has gained wide recognition for her creative practice. The blurring of both cultural sides in her art has become the synthesis for her works. Her body of work is a combination of her collected personal experiences that have been enriched by the Australian culture and environment, coupled with her memories of home.

M. Sunflower is a culturally diverse Australian artist who identifies as living with disabilities. A descendant of the Aboriginal Warmuli

people of the Darug Nation, Lebanese post-war migrants, Chinese gold rush miners and UK convicts, M. Sunflower embodies the diverse ancestral legacy of Australia's painful and complex colonial past.

Ginette Morato's work encompasses textiles, painting and drawing, and her works weave together ideas of heritage, memory and place and reflect the experience of living across two intertwined cultures. Her practice centres around a deep connection with the bushland where she lives in NW Sydney and straddles her strong connection with a contemporary Italy, the land of her ancestors.

Gail Barclay's practice is eclectic, reflecting a voracious drive to learn and integrate new skills. From painting to stitching, beading to sculpting with found objects, Barclay brings together diverse skills and materials in the creation of her work.

Liam Benson is a multi-disciplinary artist of Scottish ancestry, living and working on Darug Country, Western Sydney. Incorporating performance, photography, textiles and collaborative community process, Benson's practice engages with identity and culture as a multifaceted space of exchange and connection.



DACCHI DANG

Me & My Shadow, 2021

Inspired by the museum's historical photographs showing the changing landscape of Fairfield City, I travelled from the Museum & Gallery to Cabramatta, a journey of self-reflection, capturing the impact of migrant communities on my surroundings.

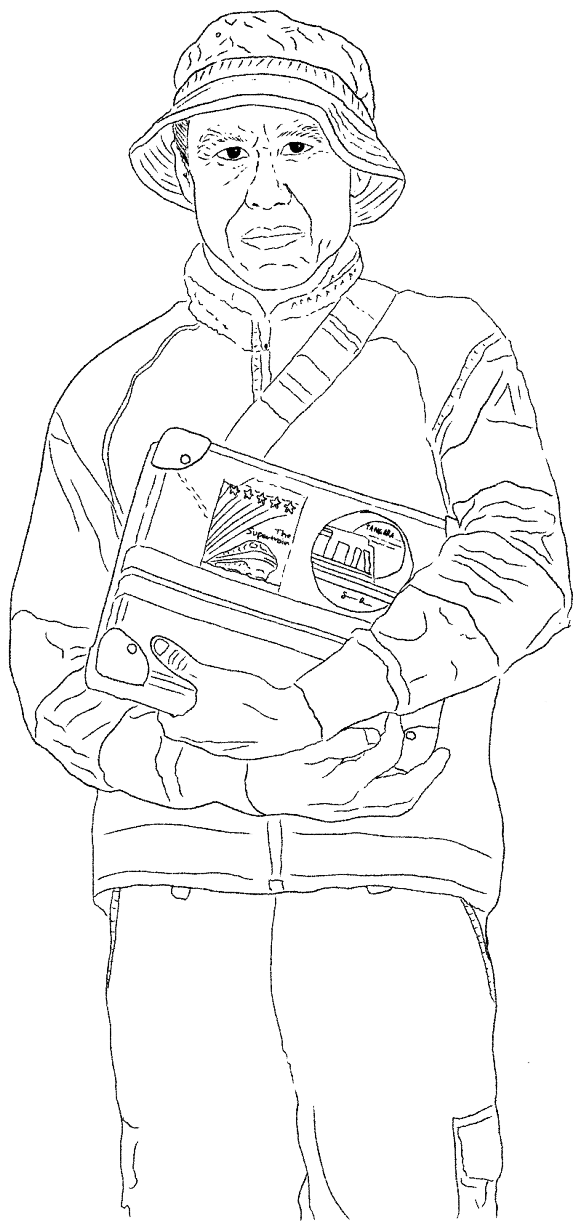
I was fascinated by the abstract patterns from everyday objects such as shadows created by the houses and fences - boundaries between private and public, some open, some closed. Fences represent the façade of protection, containing the cultural backgrounds of its inhabitants.

Walking through the streets of Smithfield, the landscape is altered by changing cultures, the houses echoing the cultural origins of the populations within. Bilingual signs can be seen, mirroring the merge between Australian and other ethnic backgrounds.

Local communities mark their own spaces reflecting their culture and stories. Diasporas to this new foreign land find refuge in these communities built on cultural diversity allowing them to connect emotionally with the heritage they left behind in their ancestral homeland.

“Walking through the streets of Smithfield, the landscape is altered by changing cultures, the houses echoing the cultural origins of the populations within.”

In this piece, I hold my suitcase in a similar position to a mother carrying her child. Parallels can be drawn with migrants travelling into a new homeland carrying their personal belongings and protecting their culture to an unknown environment. This also symbolises the endless possibilities for a child exploring and embracing the new world.



Artist Bio

Dacchi Dang is a Sydney-based photographic artist, independent researcher and a former board member at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. He has exhibited nationally and internationally and received numerous grants, residencies and commissions. Dang attained a Doctor of Philosophy degree, awarded by Queensland College of the Arts and a Master of Arts in Photography from the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales.

Dang's installations use aesthetic and poetic language to commentate on the life of Vietnamese and Chinese/Vietnamese diaspora. He draws on his personal experience as a refugee and the stories of the Australian Vietnamese community to present and preserve cultural memories and stories for future generations. Dang's work aims to break down cultural barriers in the sharing of diasporic voices to promote better understanding between communities in Australia.

RE-RIGHT

For The Record, 2021

Re-Right members Carmen Glynn-Braun and Dennis Golding present *For the Record*, a criticism of the institutional practices and methodologies of museums. The artists use casts of objects representative of personal memories and culture to draw attention to the museum's colonial practices of collecting and archiving Indigenous objects and materials.

The artists have presented the work on a circular plinth, inviting visitors to walk around the objects and see them as they form both shapes of a locational pin-drop and a teardrop. This reference is used to acknowledge histories of displacement, and whilst speaking from their own familial histories, the artists intend to honour them by highlighting their achievements and strength.

These significant objects have been reproduced in a bone white Hydrostone suggesting that the once vibrant objects are drained of their colour through the dispossession, absence and removal through museum collection processes.

Among the objects are casts of three bricks left behind from the now demolished Aboriginal flag mural in Redfern, broken fragments of Victorian lace fences from Sydney's inner-city Aboriginal community where Golding spent his childhood. In multiple stacked formations stand small pillars of cast cassettes and VCR tapes referencing Glynn-Braun's Mother and Grandmother spending decades recording pivotal oral histories, Indigenous songs and many endangered dreaming stories through film and music. Trickled alongside these objects are casts of river stones and native plant seeds that reference the connections to land and water.

Through *For the Record* Re-Right instigates a dialogue on the power of Indigenous objects as repositories of memory and culture and points to how this is heavily disrupted by colonial museum collection processes.

Artist Bio

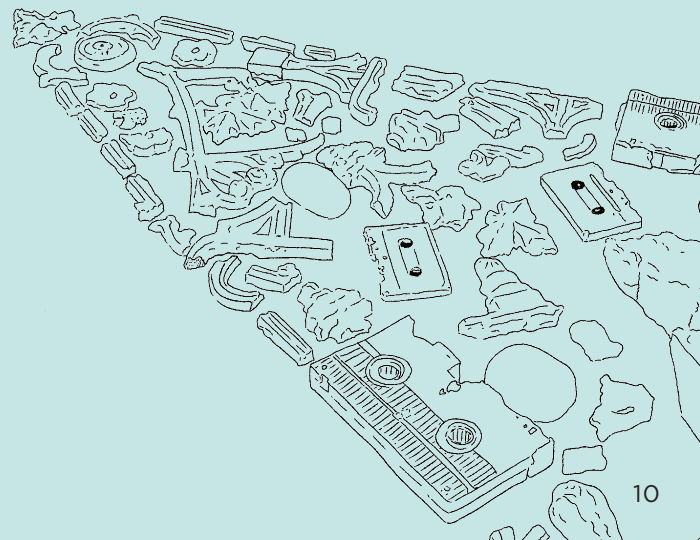
The re-right collective (Re-Right) is an artistic collective between Dennis Golding and Carmen Glynn-Braun that spans across artistic, curatorial, writing and research disciplines. The collective centres on stories of contemporary life with an approach to heal and strengthen the voices of First Nations history and experiences.

Eastern Arrernte, Kaytetye and Anmatyerr artist Carmen Glynn-Braun takes a trans-disciplinary approach across many mediums including painting, sculpture and installation. Her work predominantly explores lived experiences of Aboriginal women translated through gentle and experimental approaches to materials and form.

Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay artist Dennis Golding critiques the social, political and cultural representations of race and identity. Working in a range of mixed media including painting, video, photography and installation, Golding explores empowering notions of Indigenous

cultural identity by challenging the categorical boundaries from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous experiences.

The artists co-founded Re-Right to provide a safe space for emerging First Nations practitioners to form ideas and build a support network within the cultural arts sector. Re-Right strives to expand their creative practice through collaboration with a key goal to highlight resilience and truthful narratives of history and cultural identity.



JENNIFER LEAHY

Years Ago, 2021

The Magnifax Photographic Enlarger – an object of gravitas and history, creating photographs and printing memories.

Immediately I am drawn to this object in the collection. My mind delights in reminiscing on the hours spent in the red glow of the darkroom crafting monochrome memories in fractions of seconds. The magic of my vision adjusting to the dim light, the heady fumes of chemicals and sound of constant water trickle all flood back. Seduced by times past, the story behind this enlarger is quite enthralling.

The journey across land and sea, through time-zones and meridians is one many migrants have travelled. The original owners of this Magnifax Enlarger, Alfred and Adelheid Heumann, migrated to Australia in the 1950's packing this prized possession with them. How they travelled with this precious large object and what photographs were being printed through its lens are left to time. The story of the Heumann's quickly dissipates as they have no known descendants and the German-Austrian

Society has now closed its doors. Without a discoloured envelope containing negatives, no little box of prints or photographic evidence, this historical thread turns into a question of what is left behind?

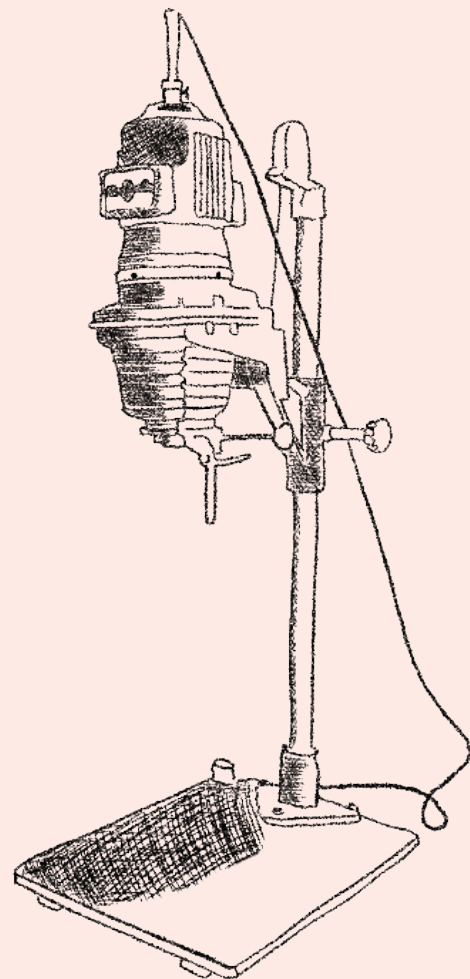
“It’s the absence of facts that frightens people; the gap you open, into which they pour their fears, fantasies, desires.”

- Hilary Mantel

Having grown up in a house with a coveted collection of family relics from the homeland – the familiar notations on the backs of prints shared stories across the continents. Years ago, as a child, the reception of an envelope decorated with foreign stamps and inscribed with delectable handwriting was always a trigger of excitement. The family had sent word! These words were often double sided pages of whisper thin paper wrapped around photographs of our kin that we eagerly pored over for hours. Every photograph had its own message on the back.

Delving deep into the photographic archives of Fairfield's Heritage collection my search became very physical. I looked not into the eyes and faces adorning the images but on the reverse side of these prints, foraging for markings and handwritten descriptors. Like channelling details from those that have passed, they seemed to be messages from the dead - notes on what to remember. Scrawled dates and names, places and instances. The scripts weave through time and memory - what is left and what is lost. The various letterings on the backs of these images felt to have a more direct connection to these people than the black and white likeness exposed on the front.

This diversion from darkroom enlarger to handwritten notations highlights processes fading before our eyes: the printed photographic memento and the art of penmanship. These treasured creations and links with our past are slowly and softly losing focus over time.



Artist Bio

Jennifer Leahy is an artist and photographer based in the Blue Mountains. A graduate of the University of Western Sydney in the 'golden years' majoring in traditional darkroom photography and video. She works across both film and digital media creating imagery that questions historical reality, memory and folklore. As a professional photographer she has had the opportunity to work closely with historical relics from our country's history through collections of local and national importance. Her interest and experience in photographic records and visual archives informs many aspects of her image making.

HAJER

Legacies of Nostalgia

I think about my legacy often. About whether it matters. Whether I'll have one. Who would even know about it? Where would it be recorded?

I think of the stories that have been passed down to me from my family. All the ones that have been lost. And all the ones that have been created as settlers on this stolen land. Invaded by the whites, settled on by every other colour of people.

Fairfield is a strange place. My earliest memories of Fairfield evoke the first sense of community I ever felt. The first time I got to participate in Iraqi culture, my family's culture, my culture.

For the longest time the only, or at least most well-known, Iraqi restaurant that existed in Sydney was on 13 The Crescent, Fairfield across the road from Fairfield station—Al-Dhiafah Al-Iraqi. If you ask any Iraqi, they'll tell you the fondest memories of the place.

Al-Dhiafah Al-Iraqi is run by a slim short Iraqi man who would run to and from the kitchen, frequently popping out for a cigarette with a cup of Arabic coffee in the other hand. I don't remember anyone else working on the

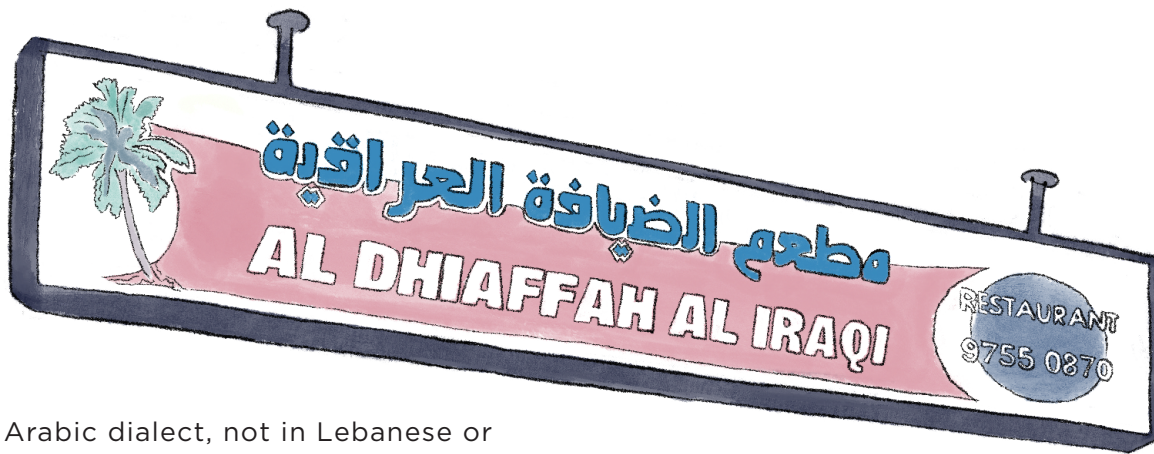
floor with him. I didn't know his name: he may as well have been part of the building. In my head he was 'Mr Dhiafah'.

Mr Dhiafah didn't need a pen when he came to take our order. He just said 'hala' to my mum, my mum would reply swiftly with 'maoon quoozy w maoon kebab w glasseyn leban'.

Mr Dhiafah would go behind the counter, slide the tiny window between the floor of the restaurant and the kitchen and repeat the order to the chef with no hesitation. My sister and I would always laugh at the foreignness of this kind of service. Mum would laugh back and say 'this is what most places are like in Iraq'.

Along the walls of the restaurant were images of the famous rivers in Iraq, the Tigris and the Euphrates, historical landmarks of the country and images of Iraqi women and children in villages in traditional Abayas and stacks of groceries on their heads. In my memories, all these images had a Sepia wash, the images of nostalgia.

When we went to Al-Dhiafah I felt so happy for my mum. I loved seeing her speak to 'Mr Dhiafah' with so much familiarity and in



her own Arabic dialect, not in Lebanese or Palestinian or Jordanian but Iraqi Arabic. A rarity in Australia.

Al-Dhiafah was a place where we could go and be completely at home. These days you can find a lot more Iraqi food in Fairfield, but they don't quite have the same presence of Al-Dhiafah. They don't hold the energy of resilience of being the first home for Iraqis in Sydney.

I speak to my friend, Kristina, who moved to Fairfield from Croatia at 11 years old. I ask what her memories of Fairfield are. She speaks with a bittersweet tone not looking at me but concentrating on the ground, mentally digging through her memories.

It reminds me of watching my mum at Al-Dhiafah, watching me and my sister laugh at Mr Dhiafah yelling orders to the chef, telling us this was her norm.

I tell Kristina about Al-Dhiafah, and she tells me she doesn't know of it.

She tells me about Tasic Hot Burek, a Serbian restaurant in Fairfield her family would go to when they first moved to Australia. I also tell her I don't know of it. She says it was the only place that sold Burek that was similar to Croatian Burek. I told her that Al-Dhiafah used to be the only place that sold Iraqi food. We laugh.

This is Fairfield to me. A place full to the brim with people from conflicted lands trying to find home in a land so far away and so culturally different.

Yet if you looked through the archives of the Fairfield City Museum and Gallery, these stories are nowhere to be seen. There are no images of Al-Dhiyafah or the Serbian convenience store of Kristina's childhood.

Their legacies of gracing our stomachs with warm Iraqi bread and cumin coated Kebab or Burek of their homelands to their homesick diaspora do not exist.

HAJER

Donating to a Museum: whose practice is it?

I walked through the archives at the Fairfield City Museum and Gallery (FCMG) in preparation for this piece. I see:

‘Gold swimming cap with chin strap fastened by white and silver metal clip.’

Formerly owned by Miss Sylvia Critchley.

From c. 1920

‘Framed black and white portrait photograph of Norman Hanbury dressed in Trench Mortar army uniform, prior to leaving Australia to fight in World War I.’

From 1914

‘Oval china meat dish with a blue willow pattern depicting a Chinese village, fishing boat in the background on the middle left hand side and fishermen on a bridge on the lower left hand side.’

This meat dish belonged to the donor’s mother, Mary Ann Jeffress (nee Garlick), who migrated to Australia in 1885. From c. 1880

Images:

‘Two female members of the Stimson family’

‘Nell Stimson at Rugby Village’

‘Members of the Stimson Family’

Notes:

‘William and Eliza Stimson arrived in Australia from England as young newlyweds. They amassed a significant fortune, mainly through the timber industry and successful property speculation. They had ten children, the last child was born around 1872.’

No record of First Nations history of so-called Fairfield or of the non-Anglo-Celtic immigrant history that I know Fairfield for now. Upon questioning the curators about this I was told that almost all the objects within the archive were actively donated to the Museum.

I could actually never imagine my own family donating anything to an Australian museum or any museum for that matter. Culturally, objects always remain strictly in the family. The family unit itself is the museum and the stories passed on from generation to generation tell the history of the objects.

On the FCMG website there is a section of ‘Oral Histories’ within which you can find a collection of video interviews from a past exhibition called ‘Treasures From Home’.

Description:

'Treasures from Home showcases personal belongings brought to Australia by individuals who migrated or sought refuge here.'

The interview that I was most drawn to was of June Ishtar Jako. In her interview, June is sitting beside a photo album propped up for display with 3 photos placed in front of the album. The photos are black and white with a few sepia photos. These photos are revealed to be an album of photos June put together before she left Baghdad. They are of cherished memories of her childhood in Iraq.

Strikingly, before she tells us anything about these images she prefaces herself by saying 'When I put together this album, my mother was upset and said 'You're taking all my photos and leaving me with nothing''. June goes on to laugh and say 'I didn't listen to her and took them'.

For June's mum, even losing her family photos to her daughter feels wrong and painful. Compare this with the many photos donated into the FCMG heritage collection, the Stimson family photos alone are a whole album. I don't think June herself would donate her photos to the Fairfield museum. They are evidence that she once existed in

her homeland. That she once lived and breathed its air. For non-anglo-celtic immigrants and refugees, donating anything of significance to an Australian museum would mean relinquishing artefacts of our ancestry and proof of the journey of migration, be it a photo album of cherished memories or a collection of special clothes. And if we were to let go of that, what would we be left with?

Writer Bio

Hajer is an Iraqi-Australian writer and actress. From prose to essays to plays, Hajer's work flirts with themes of womanhood within Arab diaspora identity formation. She is currently procrastinating on developing a story about a fraught mother daughter relationship. She has had her writing published and featured in an installation for Parramatta Lanes Festival, an audio installation for Unspoken Words Writers Festival, at Seventh Gallery and Queerstories. She's also been featured in Mudgee Readers' Festival and was a writer and actress for ABC webseries Halal Gurls. Most recently, Hajer produced and featured in an anthology webseries called This is What an Iraqi Looks Like, featuring video works from Iraqis all over the world. Hajer is also a member of the Finishing School Collective and the founder of the Iraqi Diaspora Creatives Network.



SHEILA NGOC PHAM

Invisible Vaginas

Invisible vaginas I

Once upon a time in a high school in the faraway land on the other side of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, a teacher standing in front of a room full of eager and conscientious young women set her students the following homework:

Use a handheld mirror to have a good look at your vagina.

It was nothing out of the ordinary, just an older woman passing on her wisdom, the way things have been since forever. Yet it was a radical act, a moment of transgression because it was about confronting your own vagina—and everything it stood for.

Perhaps I still recall this anecdote which I once heard in passing because, firstly, I had no idea teachers talked to their students like that, let alone set such ‘homework’. Hearing this story was when I realised going to an all-girls school must be different in ways

I couldn’t even fathom. How being there meant you existed further away from the perpetual gaze of men, which shaped my life in ways I did not yet realise.

But mostly I think the story stuck in my mind because it involves the power of female authority. Perhaps it made me confront an absence I didn’t even know existed in my life, and how the handing down of knowledge in my own family had gone awry.

When my first period arrived, I don’t remember what my mother said, though she must have helped me get on with it without much fuss.

Mostly I just have a vague memory of bà ngoại, who lived with us for a time, telling me I shouldn’t wash my hair whenever I got my period—and how I promptly ignored her because my education had warned me about the dangers of ‘old wives tales’.

Vaginas were taboo at home but nowadays I like to imagine that in other homes, girls were raised to not be afraid of their bodies. Perhaps some were told in a frank way that a vagina had been their passageway into the world. Though this is surely a story so mythical no child ever quite comprehends it; the enormity of what their mother did to create them.

As we grow older, we go on to develop new worries about our mysterious vaginas, if we dare think of them at all. We are taught to feel ashamed of our anatomy, that they're like delicate flowers—though if we had been allowed to see them as magnificent as a Georgia O'Keeffe flower, we might have drawn power from the idea.

If we might be so bold, we will come to (re)discover our vaginas as a site of pleasure. But they will still exist out of sight and we learn to cope with the way they become sites of intervention. Our bodies migrate away from the care of our mothers, grandmothers and other women, and into a realm ultimately still guarded by men: medicine.

Invisible vaginas II

'Vaginal rings' sound sexy—until you actually look at them. When you pick each one up in your hands, you can feel how they are hard, unyielding, inhospitable. It is impossible to imagine they belong anywhere near a woman's body. Just how were these rings used to treat prolapse? That became the theory, anyway, somewhere along the way.

Id Number: 2005.144 **Title:** vaginal rings

Receipt: R20.95

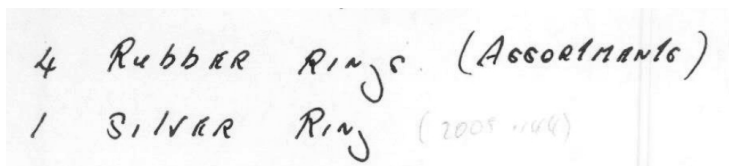
Item Class: Medicine

Type: MEDICINE

Current Location: Garage U4/3.

Description: Four rubber and one metal rings, assorted sizes. Two black, one off-white and one translucent. The metal ring is stainless steel, coiled.

The male doctor who donated them to the collection, Dr Virant, took over the practice at No. 6 Station Street in the 1980s from another male doctor, Dr Rickard—who, in turn, took over the practice in 1958 from Dr Innes (another male doctor). On the receipt of the donation dated 1 March 1995, there is no mention of vaginas.



4 RUBBER RINGS (Assortments)
1 SILVER RING (2005 11/11)

When I revisit the museum to look at the rings again, I pick one up and note the word on it: watchspring. It is an allusion to a device of some kind, reminding me how these rings were made by men with a mechanistic worldview—and how this view extended to women’s bodies.

References on antique medical equipment websites discuss how ‘pessaries’ were used to treat incontinence and prolapse. I look at a photograph of a pessary made from hard rubber, which is accompanied by an explanation of how it is bent by “covering the device in petrolatum and heating it with a

spirit lamp or immersing it in boiling water.” I am closer to solving the mystery, and try to imagine each of the five rings being bent into shape; the great force required to manipulate these alien objects to be brought into contact with a woman’s body.

It feels painful, even to imagine. But our bodies have already known pain.

Invisible vaginas III

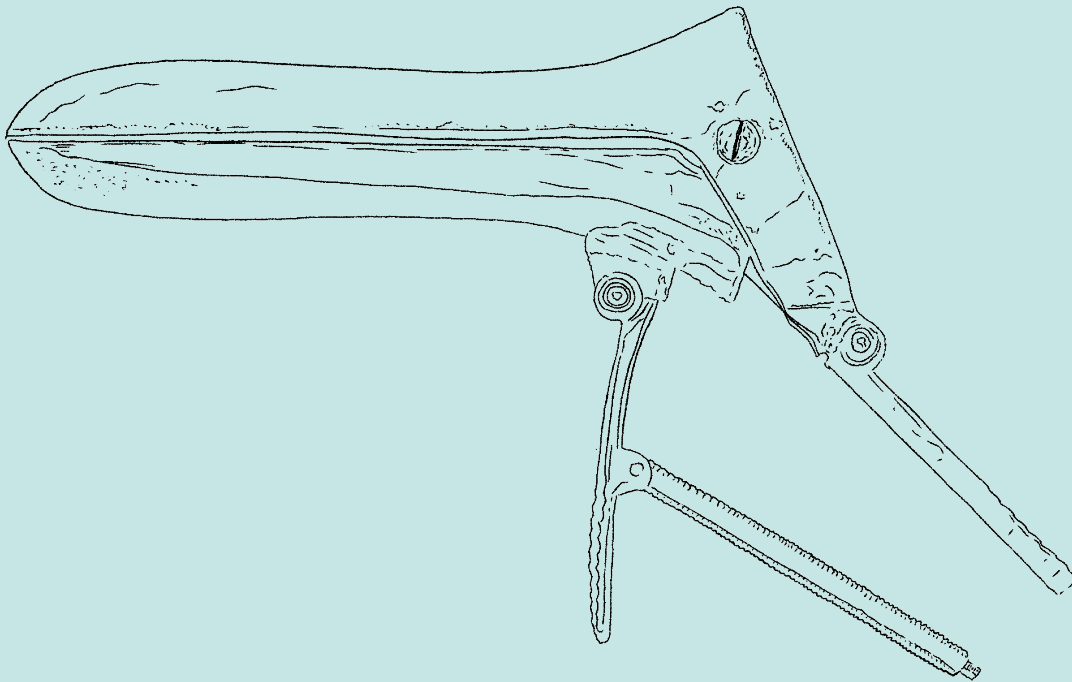
I am not represented in this collection aside from a tokenistic melamine bowl used to serve phở. When I say ‘represented’ here, I mean specifically my Vietnamese-ness, the most visible part of me. My people—if I can call them that—were not living around Fairfield when any of these objects came into possession of the local doctor. We came much later—and, actually, quite a few of us became doctors as well.

That’s not to say I am completely invisible in the collection. As Kwame Anthony Appiah writes, “We can respond to art that’s not ours; indeed, we can only fully respond to “our” art if we move beyond thinking of it as ours and start to respond to it as art. But equally important is the human connection.”

I am a woman, after all, both alike and not alike those who have come before me. My imagination is capacious so it can stretch right back through time. Which is why I flinch at the thought of the cold, metal speculum being inserted into a warm, soft vagina, as though it were my own body under examination at No. 6 Station Street.

There's a universal vulnerability, indignity even, of lying down on a hard bench with

your legs open while a speculum—plastic, nowadays—is inserted into your vagina so a doctor can scrape for cells to be tested. We understand that this is progress, that we do this because it helps us stay healthy. Relax, we are told. But mostly we just shut our eyes and breathe our way through the ordeal until it's over.



Invisible Vaginas IV

356 The Horsley Drive, Fairfield. This was where Family Planning NSW used to be, back when it was called FPA Health Multicultural Services, and where I worked almost twenty years ago. When I worked there, however, I don't know that I quite understood the full value of the service. After all, I barely knew anything about sex, far less than I knew my own body.

My work was to help develop a cultural competency module for health workers. It was a much-needed resource in an area like ours, one of the most multicultural in the world. Here, women's histories were shaped by forces that simply weren't necessarily well understood by the average worker—hence the module.

I undertook this project long before I began to witness the ways in which the idea of 'competency' is often commoditised and packaged up for delivery; as though the problem is simply one of education. It's a question I still think about a lot: can you formally learn your way through difference? Nowadays I'm just not sure it works like this, that you can sit in a classroom to understand others, rather than learning by being guided by curiosity and stumbling through the trial-and-error of human interaction.

Not all vaginas are the same. Yet all vaginas are similar in how they have been examined and treated, misexamined and mistreated. But there are vaginas—and then there are other vaginas.

Writer Bio

Sheila Ngoc Pham is a writer, editor and producer working in radio, print, online and film. She has written for a wide range of literary and mainstream publications, including Sydney Review of Books, Griffith Review and The New York Times, as well as publications from institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art and State Library of NSW. She was awarded a CAL WestWords Western Sydney Emerging Writer Fellowship in 2015.

Sheila has held digital and editorial roles at the ABC and continues to produce radio documentaries and stories for ABC Radio National, most recently co-producing with Masako Fukui on Tongue Tied and Fluent, a five-part series exploring multilingualism in Australia.

DENİZ AGRAZ

In Her Shoes

I sit behind the glass window of a vintage store in King Street where I am huddled between a polka dot rockabilly dress and a quilted Chanel bag. Every day, I see dozens of people stop by and admire me before they walk away. Whenever a customer asks about my origins, the shop assistant replies that I am either French or Italian.

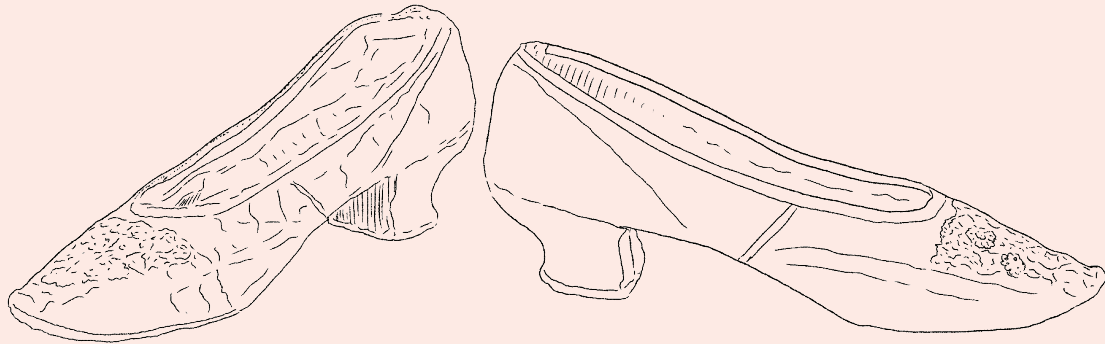
This isn't true.

I was sewn by Kemal, embroidered by Hicran, and purchased by Semra Karaduman at a shoe store in Isparta – a rural town in Southwestern Turkey which you've probably never heard of.

As Semra tossed up between me and the peep-toed black heels, her husband Ali and six-year-old daughter Leyla, tired from tailing her around the shops all afternoon, stood aside and waited patiently. I left the store in a sparkling red box, which Leyla insisted on carrying. Before heading back home, we stopped at a pastane where adults had tea and Leyla nibbled on warm simit.

When the Karadumans landed on Australian soil two weeks later, in February 1969, I was on Semra's feet. In the bus which transported us to an immigrant hostel, Leyla sat on Semra's lap where she soon fell asleep. Semra put her arms around her daughter's body and pressed her cheek against the bus window as she watched an unfamiliar scenery unfolding before her eyes. She saw men and women walking hastily on the pavements, crossing the road, waiting at the traffic lights side by side. She observed their serious faces, dark suits, and shiny shoes. As Semra watched these people walking in and out of giant buildings that ripped into the sky, she suddenly burst into tears. She buried her face into Leyla's neck and asked Ali what if Leyla went into one of these buildings and never came out. I could sense this thought making her heart feel even heavier than the 20kg suitcase we had been carrying around for the last two days.

In her first letter home, Semra wrote that she didn't like Australia. The snow they'd left behind was replaced by a sun so strong that



it made the telephone poles shimmy like the knees of a belly dancer. The humidity kept her up at night and the food tasted like chalk. She complained about people speaking a language that sounded like they were chewing on the wind. Whenever she tried to talk, she said, the same words turned into shards of glass inside her mouth. The deeper they cut into Semra, the quieter she became. Together, we tiptoed around the hostel as she avoided making eye contact with anyone.

The other rooms of the hostel were occupied by people from parts of the world that Semra hadn't even heard of before. She kept an eye on Leyla who played hide and seek with their kids. In the mornings she told Ali about the recurring nightmare she had, in which he and Leyla would disappear into a dense bush, leaving her behind on this strange land.

When Ali got a job at the steel factory and started working 10-hour shifts, Semra began locking their bedroom door from inside. She spent most of the day sitting on the bed with Leyla. I was kept hidden underneath their bed, waiting for Semra to put me on her feet and take a walk again. When Leyla got bored and wanted to play outside, Semra told her that there were monsters outside their bedroom door, waiting to feast on little girls.

One morning, we were all locked in the room again. Leyla was lying on the bed and Semra was penning another letter to her parents when she caught the sight of a spider emerging from between the floorboards. It was bigger than her hands and had fangs that resembled a large

bushy moustache. Having never seen such a grotesque creature before, Semra's legs started to shake. The spider was shuffling itself quickly towards the bed where Leyla was sleeping.

I heard Semra yell 'imdat!' before she swiftly grabbed me from the floor and smacked the spider, which crushed under my sole. When Ali returned from work that evening, Semra held me up over her head like a trophy she'd won at a race and recounted the events from that morning. The next day, she didn't lock the door.

I lived with the Karadumans for over a decade before I ended up at the bottom of a donation box. I was with Semra when she got her first job at the biscuit factory. And the day they moved into a two-bedroom flat by Horsley Drive. Then there was that Sunday morning when we caught the ferry to Manly where Semra saw the beach for the first time. As she stood at the edge of the water holding Leyla's hand, I enjoyed the warmth of the gritty sand rubbing against my leather. Leyla pointed at the line in the distance where the ocean met the sky and yelled: 'Look anne, that's where we used to live.'

Semra took me off her feet and walked into the water barefoot.

DENIZ AGRAZ

Amca: Uncle

As a Turkish-Australian woman and an outsider to the Assyrian community, I was surprised at the way that I found profound personal connection with a wall-hanging depicting Ashur, the divine embodiment of the Assyrian nation, when I came across it at the Fairfield City Museum and Gallery collection.

Until I moved to Australia as a teenager in 1998, I was oblivious to the extent of cultural and linguistic diversity that existed within the borders of Turkey. In school, year after year, my teachers had taught me that before the formation of the Turkish Republic, there were the Ottomans and before that the Byzantines and the Seljuks ruled Anatolia. The slogan 'Turkey belongs to the Turks' was engraved across the reception desk of my school. This was the dominant ideology in the country, which I had never bothered questioning. That was until I met Shabo amca.

Six months after arriving in Australia, I attended a community event in Western Sydney with my parents. There was a big crowd of people from all regions of Turkey and the band on the stage was playing traditional songs. As the only young person at the event, I had chosen to stand aside and watch adults dance halay to the songs. It was mesmerising to see men and women holding hands in a line and hop, stoop and pause at the same time as if they were a single person.

The person who was leading the halay dancers was a middle-aged man in a grey suit. He was holding a white handkerchief which he waved in the air as he leaped forward and back and swung side to side. When the band finished one song and moved onto another, he approached me with a wide smile and asked if I wanted to take the lead. Remembering that I had no sense of rhythm, I declined and told him I didn't know how to dance halay.

'It's easy' he said. 'First, take a step forward with your right foot. Then bring the left next to it. Now repeat...'

And that's how I met Shabo amca the first time, who later became a close family friend and honorary uncle to me for the

next decade. Shabo amca was an Assyrian from Mardin – a town in Southeast Turkey populated by Assyrians, Kurds, and Armenians. He was the person who told me about Ashur and its significance for the Assyrian community.

The first time I stumbled upon the image Ashur, I was fifteen years old. My parents and I were at one of those large gatherings at Shabo amca's place in Westmead, which used to take place every fortnight. In his living room, as adults drank tea and chatted away, I was curled up on the couch looking at one of the many books on his shelves about the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, which had the image of a feathered sun disc carving printed on its cover. Having never seen it before, I asked Shabo amca what it symbolized and learned about the ancient Assyrian Empire which used to stretch all the way from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean Coast.

Throughout our friendship, I attended countless Assyrian community events with Shabo amca. Even after two decades, I can still recall the taste of dolmah't tarpehs in my mouth, which I gulped down while watching people dance khigga, the Assyrian variation of halay, at an Assyrian wedding in Fairfield.

The first time I was disappointed in Turkey was when I find out that the name Shabo was replaced with Fehmi on his Turkish ID. This was because, under the Turkish law, his parents were not allowed to give him an Assyrian name. Years later, when I went to Istanbul as an exchange student, I became friends with Daniel. He was a fellow Assyrian-Swiss student visiting the university on an exchange program. He told me that many of his grandparents' family members were killed during the 1915 Seyfo genocide and he was on a spiritual journey in Turkey to reclaim his roots.

Despite all the dancing lessons I took from Shabo amca, I never mastered halay or khigga, but the memory of the friendship we had left me with a lasting feeling of kinship towards the Assyrian people.

Last year I was in the city late at night when I heard an Assyrian khigga song blasting out of a car stopped at the traffic lights. Its young driver was shaking his shoulders and head to the song rhythmically. I yelled 'Oii, this is an Assyrian song, isn't it', hoping he would hear me. He stuck his head out of the window and replied 'Yes it is. Good ears you have sista!' before he took off into the night dancing khigga on his car seat.

Writer Bio

Deniz Agraz is a bilingual writer and a former ESL teacher based in Sydney. Having arrived in Australia from Turkey as a teenager in the late 90s, Deniz's writing regularly draws on the experiences of migrants. In 2019, her short story 'Rosewater' was shortlisted for the Deborah Cass Writing Prize. The same year, she was selected to participate in the Citizen Writes Project led by Roanna Gonsalves. Deniz finds that writing fiction is a way for her to reach reconciliation between her first and second languages and negotiate her place in Australian society. She is currently studying Master of Arts in Creative Writing at UTS. Her work has appeared in Meniscus Journal, ABC Life and SBS Voices.

MASAKO FUKUI

Gas Mask

Shortly after my last visit to Fairfield City Museum I noticed I was being stalked by an apparition - that of a little girl, maybe seven, eight years old, wearing a WWII gas mask.

The rubber enclosing her face was crusty at the edges, attached to a metal air filter that resembled a sawn-off elephant's trunk. She was decidedly woolly in her hand-knitted pullover and thick grey socks, as if she'd been smudged in a retro Instagram filter.

At first, I wondered why such an unsettling vision had taken up residence inside my head. But I soon realised she was an escapee from the repository in my brain holding similar images of a blurry vintage - the ghostly gaunt POW, the men on the Kokoda Trail, the Japanese fighter plane zeroing in on Darwin in 1942.

In 1945, when the Japanese Emperor surrendered to end the War in the Pacific, my dad was 15, my mum nine. As a child I listened intently to their stories - how my mum's neighbourhood was annihilated in the firebombing of Tokyo, or how my dad

was forced to 'volunteer' to be one of the youngest trainee kamikaze pilots.

But these recollections of my parents living in existential fear never sat well with the other history I was taught at school growing up in Sydney, in which the Japanese were invaders - vile, violent, hateful. As a child I made a choice to embrace this version over my parents', because living with a dash of self loathing felt safer somehow than confronting the moral complexities of my own history.

Maybe I quite like being stalked too. It's an occasional reminder of the unfinished business that is my sense of belonging in Australia. What does the little girl in the gas mask think? She's about my age when I first arrived here from Japan, will she speak with me?

I imagine her voice to be clear, not muffled as you might expect, but resonant with the morning clarity of birdsong.

'Why are you wearing that mask?' she asks.

She gets in before me.

‘There’s a pandemic,’ I begin to explain, ‘a deadly virus has gone viral.’

‘Sounds more like you’re trapped inside a cliché?’ She’s obviously familiar with the term ‘going viral’, but something about her exaggerated upward inflection makes me think she’s mocking my flimsy metaphor, maybe even mocking my flimsy mask.

‘So, why are you wearing a mask?’ I ask.

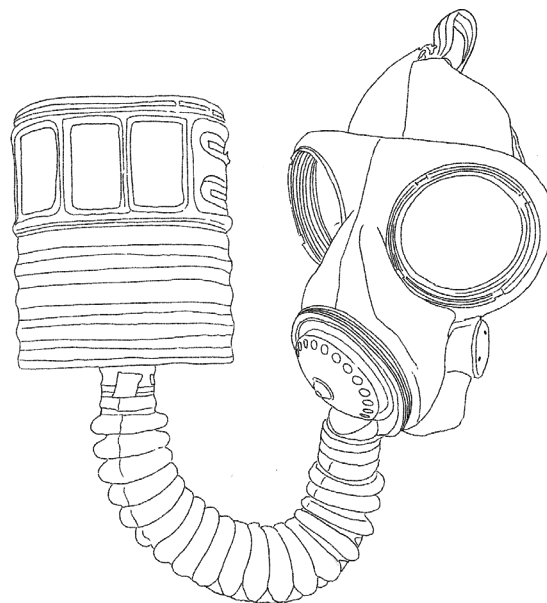
‘To protect me from the mustard gas the Japs might drop on us at any minute.’

I hadn’t heard the term ‘Japs’ in a really long time, and it makes me cold and tight inside. Are you scared of me?’ I ask.

‘It’s not personal,’ she shrugs, and the sawn off elephant’s trunk on her mask wobbles as a few dusty particles fall out of the grey canister.

Doesn’t she want to dig deeper? Accuse me of being vile, violent, hateful?

‘Hey, let’s play a game,’ she suddenly perks up. ‘Which would you rather...would you rather have lots of friends or lots of money?’



I remember this game. It was all the rage when I was in primary school. I was always an enthusiastic participant because I could never see the irony of impossible choices.

‘Lots of friends,’ I reply, only because that sounded like the right thing to say.

‘Here’s one for you,’ I say, ‘which would you rather, travel back in time without your memories, or into the future without your sight?’ The little girl looks stumped, but I’m on a roll.

‘Which would you rather,’ I continue, ‘make me cry, or have me laugh at you?’ I know what I’d say, have someone laugh at me. I’m used to that.

‘You really need to lighten up. You’re not much fun, are you?’ Her voice is different now, deeper, thicker, and kind of pissed.

‘It must be hard to breathe inside there,’ I proffer concern.

‘No, I stopped breathing ages ago.’

Bits of her are falling off now in wisps. She’s fading. She’s an apparition after all. Before she disappears completely, I call out to her, ‘which would you rather, live in fear, or be feared?’

‘Isn’t that the same thing?’ Her voice is now just an echo.

I touch my mask instinctively, the thing that keeps me safe, but also the thing that’s enclosing me in existential fear. And I hear myself say, ‘she’ll be back. We still have unfinished business.’

MASAKO FUKUI

Odour Wing

Of all our senses, smell is most closely linked to memory. The recognition of odours is processed partly in the lower brain or the

limbic system—the site of emotion and our sub-verbal selves, while the other senses are processed in the neocortex, or the higher brain. So whatever tickles our nose hairs has a direct link to our most intimate and submerged memories. Yet our sense of smell has always been considered second rate, unworthy even. Philosopher Immanuel Kant called it the most ignoble of senses, animalistic, and not worthy of cultivation. Perhaps that’s why human history is rarely olfactory history.

And that’s such a shame, especially for places like Fairfield. The diverse cultures and ethnicities that live together here means there’s also a diverse range of odours - from Assyrian spices to Iraqi bread to wafting incense - just lingering to be appreciated. Wouldn’t it make sense to have an Odours Wing added to the Fairfield City Museum and Gallery?

So, here’s what I propose: let’s open our nostrils and elevate the olfactory, perhaps start by mapping our neighbourhoods via the smells we encounter. We could follow the lead of British academic and designer Kate McLean, a pioneer in ‘smellscaping’ cities. Apparently known as ‘Smelly Kate’ among friends, McLean encourages people to actively ‘hunt’ for smells, not just passively breathe them in.

While sticking our noses into alleyways and random garbage skips may sound adventurous, one problem with odour mapping is that smells are constantly affected by seasons, weather, time of day, even the streetscape. A new fast food shop on a corner could alter the fragrance of a street with its transfatty, MSG top notes, just as a glossy new apartment building and a row of multinational chain stores could render an odourscape globally generic. But an even bigger problem is how to describe, capture, and preserve smells for posterity.

The audacious 'Odeuropa' project funded by the European Union last year attempts to catalogue historical smells and find ways to 'display' them in museums. Artificial intelligence will work alongside chemists, perfumers and curators 'to recognize, safeguard, present, and promote olfactory heritage'. An earlier project by Dutch researcher Caro Verbeek called In Search of Lost Scents was a collaboration between the perfume industry and historical institutions to 're-odourise', or to bring the fragrant back into our understanding of ourselves and our history.

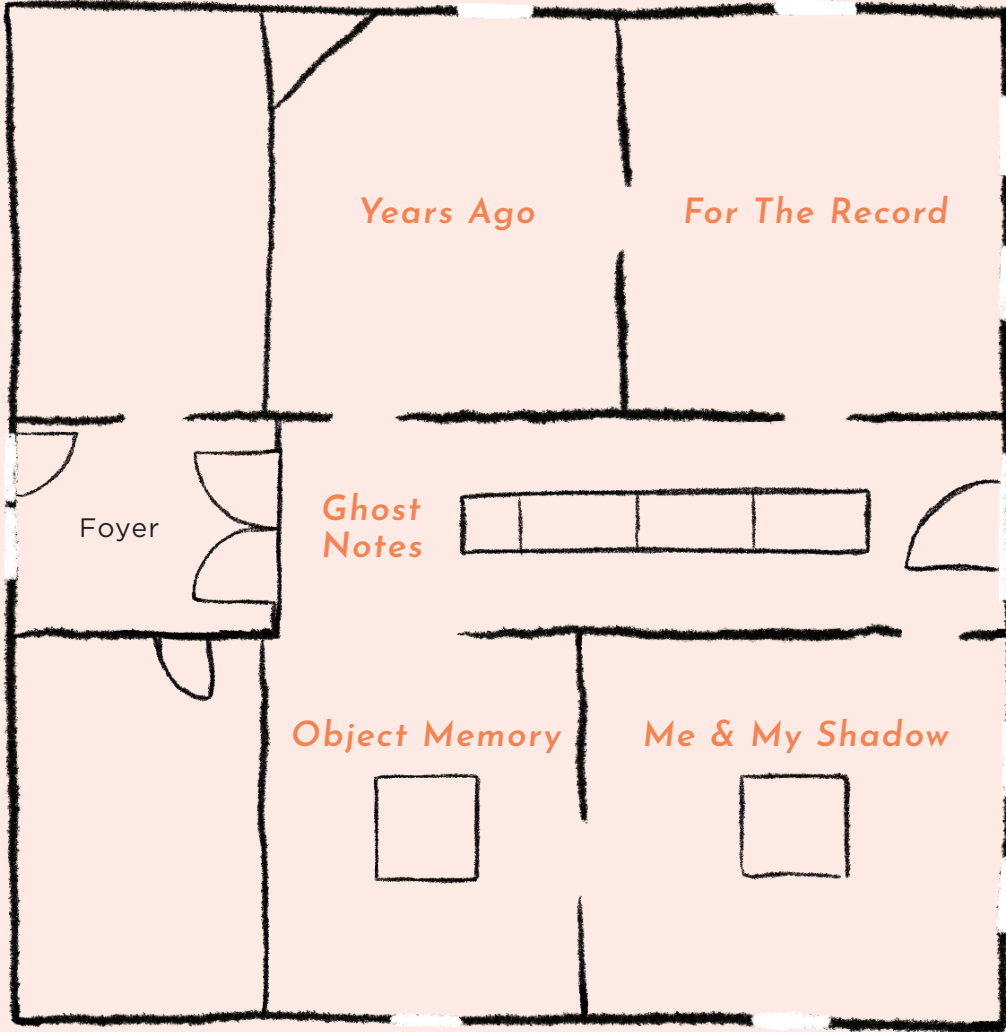
There are many ideas to beg, borrow and steal from these projects, but for me, the most exciting aspect of highlighting smell is that it tests the limits of our multiculturalism.

In Australia, we often talk about tolerating the other. But some of us who are 'the other' are pretty clear where the limits of this tolerance ends and intolerance begins.

For me, natto (sticky fermented soy beans) and stewed white radish, which lingers like a rank fart, are just beyond the border of what people consider tolerably ethnic. I hide these stinky foods, even though I continue to eat them. I know lots of other 'ethnics' who do the same, knowing full well that the smells ooze out of our pores as invisible particles. And by the time the odorant receptors in the nasal cavity have signalled the brain's olfactory cortex to involuntarily register disgust, these 'ethnic aromas' have already colonised public spaces, maybe even you, maybe even me.

Writer Bio

Masako Fukui is an independent writer, audio producer and bilingual journalist. She's a regular contributor to ABC Radio National and has won a number of international and Australian awards for her work in radio documentaries and features. In a previous life, she was a social worker and health/sexuality educator and worked with young people in the Fairfield area. She was born in India to Japanese parents.



EXTRA/ ORDINARY

This catalogue is published to accompany the exhibition Extra/Ordinary at Fairfield City Museum & Gallery, 23 October 2021 - 9 April 2022

Curators: Alinde Bierhuizen & Dana Guarnaschelli

Artists: Make or Break, Dacchi Dang, Jennifer Leahy, Re-Right Collective, Liam Benson, M. Sunflower, Mary Nguyen, Ginette Morato and Gail Barclay

Writers: Sheila Ngoc Pham, Masako Fukui, Hajer, Deniz Agraz (Finishing School Collective + Friends)

Designer, illustrator and writer: Laura La Rosa

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ISBN: 978-1-876629-15-1

Fairfield City Museum & Gallery

Opening hours: Tue-Fri, 10am - 4pm
Sat, 10am - 2pm

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