

NAVIGATING THE HYPHENATED SPACE BETWEEN CULTURES by TAMMY WONG HULBERT

HYPHENATED began as a conversation between two artists of different Asian heritages, discussing how our experiences were similar, but also completely different. We had both experienced living between cultural spaces as Australians of Asian backgrounds, the hyphenated space between Asian-Australian. We felt our perspectives gave us unique insights into the cultural complexity of Australian society. The conversation grew beyond the two of us into an expanded conversation to include other artists. It became the platform for our curatorial framework, a series of conversations between artists showing various insights, perspectives and experiences. The artists in this exhibition converse with multiple ideas; their various personal and cultural histories, the individual and the collective in society, loss and transformation through migration, the dynamics of power, race, place, displacement and their sense of belonging.

Each of the artists selected for this exhibition work in contemporary modes and identify as Australians of Asian heritage. The continent of Asia is a broad landmass constituting more than half the world's population, where thousands of cultures, sub cultures, art forms, languages and religions originate demonstrating astounding diversity. Mass migration to Australia has resulted in cities vibrant with transnational communities identifying

with many other cultures. Yet due to our colonial past, Australians have identified more closely with our colonizers, even though geographically our location is in the Asia Pacific region. Since the post colonial era, the conversation of how Australia re-imagines itself has been the subject of debate and discussion in both politics and the arts, particularly with the rise of Asian contemporary art since the 1990s. Our aim for this exhibition was to expand on this conversation from a Victorian perspective.

Rushdi Anwar, originated from Kurdistan, trained and practiced in Melbourne and now resides in Thailand. He works across media, reflecting on the socio-political issues of Kurdistan, Iraq and The Middle East, dealing with social equity in relation to social and political unrest of the region. *Irhal (Expel), Hope, Sorrow of Displacement* is a powerful work expressing the state of displacement through social and political forces beyond the control of individuals. The work uses domestic chairs usually representing home and safety. Now burnt and discarded, they express fragility, uncertainty and limitation as experienced by millions of people forced to flee their homes due to social and political disruption.

Iranian born Sofi Basseghi works across video, documentary, photography and installation. Migrating to Australia during her teenage years, Basseghi developed a fascination with the society in which she was raised. Her works often document the intimate lives of her female friends, presenting how they rebel in Iranian society, living between contemporary and traditional lifestyles, giving insight into the complexity of being between culture,

society and religion. *Elusive Paradise* focuses on Michka Mansour, presenting the multiplicities of her persona through fact and fiction. The work is developed in collaboration with artist and architect Ehsan Khoshnami.

Andy Butler is an Australian-Filipino writer, artist and curator, originally raised in Kalgoorlie and Perth, now based in Melbourne. Andy's interdisciplinary practice interrogates institutional whiteness in the arts through writing, performance, video, installation and curatorial projects. He critiques diversity discourse, inclusion and the distribution of power and autonomy determined along racial lines. *Model Minority* continues this exploration, critiquing whiteness in contemporary art, commenting on how artists of diverse backgrounds must assimilate into the white artistic cannon, ironically becoming the latest luxury trend.

Rhett D'Costa was born in Bombay and migrated to Australia at an early age. His artistic practice draws on his hybrid background of British, Australian and Indian culture and is extended across media. Rhett's work sits within the context of postcolonial theory focusing on the right to belong in the intersecting areas of migration, identity and nationalism. *Becoming Differently* (2018) is a series of images and objects questioning the migrant relationship to place in post-colonial Australia, woven together by a series of personal texts written by a cultural geographer. The work questions where the migrant belongs, when the conversation is usually between the colonized and the colonizers.

Tammy Wong Hulbert is an artist, curator and academic based in Melbourne, Australia, born in Sydney to Cantonese Chinese parents. In her practice she is concerned with the complicated, multi-layered and often fragmented space between cultures and is influenced by her families' intergenerational migratory connection to Australia since 1900. Her recent works have often involved a socially engaged practice working with urban communities to address issues of migration and belonging to encourage inclusive cities. *Transient Home City* evolved from collaborating with the VICSEG Iranian Asylum Seekers Social Health Group in Broadmeadows. Together, the group explored how migrants experience home as transient and mobile rather than fixed. By taking ownership of this renewed status, the work asks us to consider how a migratory society informs our globalizing cities.

Hong Kong born Nikki Lam is a visual artist and curator based in Melbourne, Australia. From video, installation, writing and performance, her practice engages in the complexity of belonging through exploration of the self, memory and space. She explores post-colonial identities and narratives in the hybrid world through rituals, language and their visual representations. *Falling Leaf Returns to its Roots* draws from the Chinese analogy used to describe the circle of life, referencing the iconic Australian image of *The Sunbaker* by Max Dupain (1937) to comment on the process of becoming through the lens of migration. *Still...what is left* reflects on the transformation of rituals, gestures, behaviors and habits, which become altered and re-imagined in a new social context.