

**Multiculturalism and Identity: A Visual
Investigation through the Medium of
Printmaking**

by

Karen L. C. Lunn, BFA (Hons.), Dip. Ed.

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requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

JTAS

Signed statement of originality

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ABSTRACT

The catalyst for this project has been my father's migration from Croatia to Australia in the 1950's and my experience of his European heritage within my Australian environment. My father and the material artefacts he brought from Croatia, such as photographs and textiles, created a small but strong presence of this heritage for me within my family and the domestic interior of my home. From the moment I recognised their 'difference', which had been disguised by their familiarity as objects that were part of my daily life, and saw them as representations of the exotic, their presence intensified. They have since been the object of my curiosity and desire - a curiosity with the familiar made strange; and a desire to know more about their original context: the past, the homeland, and the people depicted in the photographs. My connection to this heritage is via these artefacts and is enriched by my father and his stories, memories and descriptions that project an idealised version of his homeland.

This project investigates these artefacts as forms of representation from which knowledge and perception of the homeland are derived for the first-generation. An important aspect of the project is the migrant and his/her verbal testimony which is integral to the development of the first-generation's perspective since it is the migrant's idealised version of the homeland that is passed down to and explored by their children. The artefacts are a tangible connection to the past and the homeland. They are explored as the only means of access to that world for the first-generation, who have no first-hand experience of the actual place.

This project is autobiographical in that it stems from my own personal experience, although it is also representative of the dilemma faced by all first-generation children of migrants. It reveals an unbridgeable distance between the place that was left by the migrant and the concept of the homeland from the perspective of the first-generation.

The significance of this research is where my works have reinvented the artefacts and their specific cultural references, changing and distorting them, rather than simply illustrating them, incorporating them visually, as if to reclaim a repressed heritage or a lost history. It is the way in which the source material is manifest in the work, in their distorted form, which can be seen as a sign of this repression and the irretrievable past. The nature of the works submitted reveals an obsession that characterises the position of the first-generation – an obsession that is entirely dependent on the futile pursuit of the homeland. The outcomes of this investigation reveal the first-generation's perception of the homeland to be their own fetishised projection which is the result of the lack or absence of materials and knowledge from which they can build up and develop their own exploration of their cultural heritage.

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INTRODUCTION

This research project has been influenced by my father's migration from Croatia to Australia in the 1950's. He left under duress and came to Australia in search of a better life. Given the time that has passed, he has said that he can not always trust his memories of Croatia. He recalls the fertility and beauty of the homeland, the relative wealth of his family, and the close relationship he shared with a number of them in particular. Whilst my father is realistic about the situation he left, at times his descriptions of Croatia have been embellished with a richness that supersedes the reality. Although he talks of the freedom he has gained, there is a detectable sense of loss in his descriptions: the loss of paradise; his family and his homeland. I have understood his embellishment to be a product of this sense of loss, along with his cultural displacement as a migrant, and the effect that time has had on his memory.

A small number of artefacts are the only material evidence of his homeland and the past. These consist of: some black and white photographs of my father's family; articles of costume; some textiles - table cloths, doilies, and a colourful woven rug - and some small wooden objects - a carved cigarette box, a flute, and a donkey.¹ My father acquired these items approximately fifteen years after his arrival in Australia when he returned to Croatia following the death of his brother. Their arrival in Australia preceded my

¹ Throughout this exegesis I refer to these photographs and objects collectively as artefacts. I have used this term because it is both a concise and objective description of these things and allows me to discuss them prior to my subjective interpretation of them in chapter two where they are discussed in relation to the souvenir and the fetish.

birth by two years. By this time they were part of the domestic interior that was to become my home. If given any function at all, these artefacts were used to adorn and to beautify the home, or simply to exist as curios in their own right. Like all other furnishings and objects, I had an intimate relationship with them as the materials which circumscribed the private space of the home.

Approximately seventeen years ago someone commented to me on my father's accent, to which I replied, "What accent?". Like the items he brought back from Croatia, I had come to know his voice, never perceiving it as 'different'. From this point on I started to become aware of other 'differences', such as the Croatian coat of arms and the Croatian and Australian flags that decorated the mantelpiece in our living room. I discovered a book on Croatia, Croatian music and the small wooden trinkets that were displayed in a cabinet behind glass. I noticed the textiles that decorated table surfaces, and the costume that was kept among the bath towels and flannelette sheets. Inside the cover of a well-fingered Australian-Croatian dictionary were a few small black and white photographs of my father's family. For a long time these photographs were kept separately from the ones that filled a suitcase, documenting my family's life and history in Tasmania. Only recently have they been placed together in a photographic album.

From the moment I recognised their 'difference' their presence intensified. There was a tension between the intimacy and familiarity of these artefacts and their foreignness through their cultural displacement. As artefacts of a culture that was different to the Australian culture of my birth, I saw them as representations of the exotic. They now seemed to resist a comfortable

integration into my domestic interior, as if to stand out in protest against the present overshadowing the past, refusing to remain in the background. Their cultural displacement, their reference to an irrecoverable past, and the way they blurred the distinction between the familiar and the strange, was overwhelming and fuelled my curiosity and desire.

As material connections to the homeland and the past, these artefacts presented a means by which the homeland could be (re)visited and the past reawakened – bridging the gap and void that had been created by time and displacement. I therefore ascribed significance to these artefacts based on their ability to transcend their material worth. The association I made between these objects and loss and the irretrievable enhanced this significance.

This is an autobiographical project which investigates these artefacts as forms of representation upon which knowledge and perception of the homeland are based for the first-generation children of migrants. The migrants and their verbal testimony play an integral role in the development of this perspective and this is an important aspect of the project. Where this influence is acknowledged it is my own inflated projection of the homeland that is at the centre of this investigation. This project does not simply draw from these artefacts and their specific cultural reference, incorporating them visually as if to reclaim a repressed heritage or recover a lost history. Rather, it reinvents this material – changing and distorting it – which itself may be seen as a sign of its repression and unattainability.

The theoretical context of this investigation can be divided into two areas and these are discussed in

chapters one and two respectively. In chapter one I consider writings on cultural identity as they relate to the migrant experience focusing in particular on recent discussions by cultural critics Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Nikos Papastergiadis. These contemporary arguments have been important to this investigation as they reveal how the migrant's account of the past is mediated by their present situation and it is this mediated knowledge of the homeland and the past that is passed down to the children of migrants. In the final part of this chapter I turn to the perspective of the first-generation, focusing on the way in which knowledge of the past and the homeland is passed on. I liken the relationship between the children of migrants and their parent(s) to that of the mapmaker and traveller in *A Mapmaker's Dream* by Australian author James Cowan. This serves to establish the perspective from which this research was undertaken.

In chapter two, I explore photographs and other artefacts as material condensers of memory and the presence attributed to them which elevates them beyond the ordinary. Beginning with photographs, I consider writer Marianne Hirsch and her discussion on family photographs as the things which bind first- and second-hand remembrance, which I relate to my own situation. For more general and related issues concerning the photograph I consider the writing of Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin. Through their discussions, intrinsic qualities of the photograph are explored – its relationship to reality, the irrecoverable past, and death – and this is used in order to express the significance of the photographs explored through my investigation.

The second part of chapter two considers objects of ascribed significance. Here I turn to writer Susan

Stewart's thoughts on the souvenir. She identifies the souvenir as an object that serves as a trace of experience which, consequently, becomes a powerful aid to memory and is activated through the use of narrative. Stewart's discussion serves to identify the position of the migrant in relation to the artefacts, and the role of the migrant's verbal testimony in enhancing their significance as objects.

A discussion of the work of art historian Hal Foster concludes this chapter. There are two areas of his writing that have been relevant to my investigation. Firstly, his writing on the anthropological understanding of the fetish as an object endowed with an independent life force is related to my inflated projection of the homeland through the artefacts. The second aspect of Foster's writing is where he considers the practice of the Surrealists. Foster argues that the recovery of repressed historical material is a feature of the Surrealists' practice and that, when it resurfaces in their work, it takes on a new 'demonic' guise. This is relevant to the outcomes of my research with the confronting and, at times, discomfiting aspects of the works produced.

Chapter three provides a detailed account of how the project was pursued in the studio. I begin by considering the lines of enquiry that were pivotal to the project and important to its outcomes. Following this is an analysis of the work submitted for examination, detailing its conception and progress, and the evaluations that took place which shaped its final outcome.

Finally, in chapter four, I discuss the artistic context for this project. I begin by providing a context for this investigation within printmaking practice, and continue by focusing on two groups

of artists who have been of particular relevance to my research. First are the artists: Elizabeth Gertsakis, Wilma Tabacco and Domenico de Clario who form a group of artists whose practices can be seen to be informed by their own cross-cultural perspectives. Second are the artists: Christian Boltanski, Joseph Cornell, and Ann Hamilton. The second group have influenced this project in terms of the materials they employ in their works, such as photographs, found images and objects, and clothing; the way in which they are used – often obsessively and with reverence; the spaces they create; and the worlds to which they allude. Domenico de Clario's practice bridges the two groups and is also discussed in the context of this second group.

The conclusion provides a summary of the concerns of this project and its contribution to the field.

CHAPTER ONE

Cultural Identity and the Migrant Experience

The migrant experience, particularly its effect on cultural identity, has been an important aspect of this project. For the purposes of my argument, migration is used herein to refer to the act of an individual leaving his/her place of origin, where she/he shared the same culture as the members of that community, and arriving in a place that is culturally very different. This difference presents an immediate barrier to communication, as there is no mutual understanding between migrants and the members of their new community with whom they do not share a common language. Further differences may relate to the migrants' physical traits or style, or their practice of rituals and customs that are different to those of the community they have entered. In contrast to their cultural identity pre-migration, their post-migration experience is such that their association with the community is seen in terms of their difference, rather than similarity, to others. The individual has gone from being one of many, that is, a member of an homogenous group, to being one of few - an outsider to an homogenous group and consequently is seen as 'other'.

With substantial numbers of migrants in the world, definitions of cultural identity that rely on the containment of culture and identity to one source have been reevaluated. This research project has been influenced by contemporary theories that consider how cultural identity can be formed across more than one cultural group. These theories suggest that cultural identity is not simply extended by the grouping together of the

influences of two or more different cultural groups, but rather, is reconstructed out of the relationship between these different influences and the tensions associated with their difference.

Until relatively recently, the predominant way in which cultural identity has been conceived has been in terms of organic unity in which the homogeneity of a people has been emphasized. This is evident in writer T.S. Eliot's definition of culture.

In his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), Eliot attempts to provide a definition of the term 'culture'; to take it beyond its common use to describe the sum of the practices and arts of a group of individuals. Eliot argues that to describe culture as something tangible is too simplistic. Rather, Eliot prefers to view culture as something immaterial in nature, and suggests that culture is that which comes from:

...people who live together and speak the same language ... (which) means thinking, and feeling, and having emotions, rather differently from people who use a different language.²

Eliot's definition suggests that culture is the product of individuals who share the same geographical home, language, thought processes, and emotions. Whilst there is merit in his attempt to understand culture as something quite complex, his definition implies that culture is dependent on unity and homogeneity. Eliot's definition has proved too limiting in recent times as it fails to take into account the cultural diversity within communities, and perhaps more

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Eliot, T. S., *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, London, Faber and Faber, 1948, p. 120

significantly, within families, which is the product of large-scale migration across the world.³

I was born in Australia to an Australian mother and a Croatian father, and it is this experience of two different cultures that has informed my research. I have been particularly interested in how my father's culture and his memories of the homeland have been affected by his experience as a migrant, and how I have been in receipt of knowledge, memories, stories and descriptions of my heritage that have been shaped by my father's cross-cultural position.

It can be argued that from migration, a new culture develops on 'new soil' and that it does so out of the need to compensate for the loss of the homeland. This new culture may retain similarities to the migrant's original culture, and, at the same time, be different from it because it is inevitably shaped by the culture of the migrant's new home. By way of further explanation, in continuing to practice in their 'old' culture, their 'parent' culture becomes stagnant through its separation from the homeland, as it is not affected by the natural evolution that takes place back home.

Contemporary cultural theories explore cultural identity as something that is subject to change and transformation. The following discussions, offered by a selection of these critics, are relevant to my reasons for undertaking this research project because they describe how the migrants' account of the homeland that is passed down to

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Although of no consequence to his argument, Eliot briefly considers the effect of migration on cultural identity, and suggests that from migration a new hybrid culture is created, one that is '... bafflingly alike and different from the parent culture'. See Eliot (1948), p. 64

their children is mediated by their cross-cultural position.

One writer who has explored the concept of cultural hybridity more thoroughly during the 1990's is cultural critic Homi Bhabha. In an interview, Bhabha (1990) defines particular terms he uses in his work, such as: cultural translation, cultural hybridity, and 'third space'. The definition he provides of his use of these terms shows the development in this area of thought since the time of Eliot, where cultural identity is no longer seen as reliant upon a fixed and stable centre.

Bhabha explains that by cultural translation he means that there exists a relationship between cultures, which is evidenced by the fact that degrees of translation or simulation between different cultures can occur. It is this relationship which facilitates cultural translation. He says that this relationship is not the product of a similarity in contents of cultures however, but rather, all cultures relate to each other because they all have an underlying 'structure' to their practice.⁴ Cultural translation therefore implies that, although all cultures have their own unique contents, no culture has impenetrable boundaries that secure it from the representation by, or influence of, other cultures. Bhabha refers to cultural translation as a form of mischievous imitation, arguing that through the imitation of the original, the authority of that original is not reinforced but disputed by the fact that it can be simulated.⁵

⁴ Rutherford, Jonathan, "Interview with Homi Bhabha", in Rutherford, Jonathan, *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*, London, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1990, pp. 209 - 210

⁵ Rutherford (1990), p. 210

The importance here is not whether a direct or exact interpretation between different cultures can occur, but that *some* degree of simulation occurs. Bhabha's use of cultural translation suggests that cultural identity need not be fixed to a particular origin as it can always be defined in relation to a different cultural group. Since cultural translation denies authority to an original source, Bhabha suggests that no culture is pure or unique in itself and that 'all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity'.⁶

Bhabha sees the position of the cultural hybrid as valuable not because it gives equal weight to two or more cultures in the formation of an identity, but rather, because it sets up a new position that can exist both outside and inside of culture. He describes this as an identification with a 'third space'. Bhabha writes:

...hybridity ... is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority ... But the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices that inform it [without giving them] the authority of being prior in the sense of being original.⁷

From cultural hybridity a third space emerges, one which is not necessarily a more representative, inclusive reality, but one that is positioned in such a way as to sceptically consider the mechanisms through which cultural totalisation or notions of authority which depend on origin occur. From the 'third space' one can judge critically, and with some authority, those practices that work to maintain impenetrable barriers between cultures.

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Rutherford (1990), p. 211

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Rutherford (1990), p. 211

This concept of a 'third space' – a new position which emerges from cultural interaction, bearing the traces of both cultures - past and present – and the concept of cultural hybridity – are important aspects of this project because they describe the effect of migration on the cultural identity of an individual. For the migrant, cultural identity is no longer bound to his/her place of origin but rather, is reconstructed out of the relationship between his/her place of origin and his/her place of arrival. A tension arises from the differences between the two cultures, resulting in the migrant's feelings of displacement and alienation. Through this, migrants gain an acute sense of their unique place in the world, a heightened self-consciousness, where they are constantly aware of their difference to others, which is both self-imposed and imposed by others. They therefore take up the position *between* cultures from which they negotiate their identity.

In this research I have been interested in how, in light of a new position emerging between cultures, the migrant's account of the self, and of the past or homeland, is articulated. This is considered in the work of Stuart Hall (1990) who has written extensively in the area of cultural identity. Hall explains that his perspective on the issue of cultural identity has been informed by his own experience of two different cultures. At the beginning of his essay, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Hall states:

What we say is always 'in context', positioned. I was born into and spent my childhood and adolescence in a lower-middle-class family in Jamaica. I have lived all my adult life in England, in the shadow of the black diaspora.... If the paper seems preoccupied with the diaspora experience and its narratives of displacement,

it is worth remembering that all discourse is 'placed', and the heart has its reasons.⁸

Hall's statement that 'all discourse is 'placed'', and the 'heart has its reasons' indicates that when migrants talk about themselves and their homelands, they speak from their cross-cultural perspective which is inevitably shaped by the feelings that arise from their displacement and alienation. In this way, what they end up describing is not so much the place they left, but an idealised version of the homeland that is then passed down to their children.

As all discourse is placed, so too are identities, and when identities are mediated by different cultures, they need to be understood in terms of the effect of these differences. I had never learned to speak Croatian, with the exception of only a few words, and whenever my father spoke in Croatian with visitors, on the telephone, or when we attended Croatian Club functions, I was immediately aware of a cultural difference. Although I could not comprehend what was being said, I learned to recognize this language in films or when I encountered people speaking it in the street or in shops or delicatessens where I would go with my mother when she bought particular things for my father. Despite the familiarity of its sounds and intonations, it remained something that was part of my life that I would never fully understand, something that would continue to serve as a point of difference.

Other aspects of my father's culture had a particular presence about them due to a difference

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Hall, Stuart, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in Rutherford, Jonathan, *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*, London, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1990, pp. 222-223

in their qualities, although they did not have the effect of displacement. These were food, music, and the smells and décor that were particular to many of the homes of my father's Croatian friends. Their difference was not something that was so easily understood – it was something that I was part of but knew that it was different to my 'Australian' culture. As aspects of this 'other' culture were not overtly part of my life, I became more curious. Despite having spent more of his life in Australia than Croatia, my father continues to experience cultural differences. I have learned about cultural difference through my father and his experience, but also through my own experience in my interaction with him, and cultural difference has shaped my own understanding of identity.

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Hall looks at how we might understand cultural identity as something that is shaped not so much by a particular origin, but by a number of 'presences'. In developing this concept he distinguishes it from that view which sees cultural identity as something that is a stable core of the self and remains the same, or 'true', over time. In this view, the core is the 'true self' which is 'hiding inside the many other, superficial or artificially imposed "selves", which people with a shared history hold in common'⁹. Hall argues that such a view of cultural identity is too limiting since it does not take into account the changes that occur in the history of a culture or an individual's personal history.

Alternately, Hall suggests cultural identity should be seen as never finite, but as always having the potential to change and be altered, as something

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Hall (1990), p. 223

that continues to shape itself in relation to forces such as history and migration. Hall looks at how identity need not always be formed on the basis of similarity but can also be constructed out of difference. He states:

... as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened - 'what we have become'. ... Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming', as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical they undergo constant transformation.¹⁰

This second position looks at identity as an ongoing production. This view does not dismiss the role of place of origin in identity formation for the migrant, but rather, it displaces the authority that the first conception of cultural identity gives the past over the present.

Hall argues that the second conception of cultural identity does not impose the same restrictions as the first view of identity. The first is restrictive because it takes into account only one perspective, or the influence of one cultural group. The second view however, encompasses several viewpoints at once without imposing a hierarchy that gives authority to the original or prior culture. The second view considers both past and present cultural influences in identity construction and leaves room for any future influences to be included also. This view is open-ended, and does not lock identity into a fixed position.

This second view, as expressed in Hall's argument, is relevant to this discussion not only because it better describes the migrant position, but also because it can be used to show how the migrants' recollections and representations of the past are affected by their experience of two or more cultures. Hall argues that the past remains important because all identities have histories. However, he states that what is recalled from the past is always mediated by the present:

The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past' ... It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth.¹¹

Hall is suggesting that the past is as constructed as identity itself, because when it is recalled through memory, it undergoes transformation and reinvention. This is significant to the concerns of this research project because it suggests that the migrants' recollection and description of the past and their homeland are not entirely factual. The past is told through the eyes of the present, that is, the migrant's perception of the homeland is influenced by their cultural displacement, which exaggerates the desirable qualities of home. Furthermore, it shows the subjective nature of the information that the migrants pass on to their children.

The migrant is constantly involved in the movement back and forth, between different cultural groups, between past and present. His/her position is not one from within the boundary of any culturally specific group, but rather, from the boundary between cultures. This idea has featured in the writing of Nikos

Papastergiadis (1993), who, like Hall, says his own experience of cultural diversity has informed his appreciation of the complexity of these issues:

... [My] own sense of oscillating between and against the coordinates of Greece-Australia-Britain - this situational identity ... has sharpened my awareness of the constant process of translation and negotiation between the foreign and the familiar ...¹²

In a lecture titled, "The Ends of Migration", Papastergiadis looks at the migrant as someone who has crossed cultural borders and speaks from the boundary in between. He considers how migrant identity is formed across borders through the experience of cross-cultural interaction.

Papastergiadis says that in the process of migration, identity becomes fragmented, that at the end of migration, 'the journey forks delta-like'¹³. This split, he explains, can be seen in the migrant's self-representation, which is informed by the effect that this migration has had on their cultural identity. He establishes his argument by citing the two ways of understanding cultural identity as presented in the work of Stuart Hall. Papastergiadis describes the first concept in terms of symbol, and the second in terms of metaphor. Papastergiadis says that cultural identity as symbol emphasises unity and homogeneity, and presents it as a timeless concept, remaining unchanged throughout history. He argues against this conception of cultural identity stressing that it is too limiting.¹⁴

¹² Papastergiadis, Nikos et al, *Art and Design Profile No. 43: Art and Cultural Difference: hybrids and clusters*, London, Academy Editions, 1995, p. 7

¹³ Papastergiadis, Nikos, "The Ends of Migration", in *Agenda: Contemporary Art Magazine*, Issue 29, March 1993, p. 7

¹⁴ Papastergiadis (1993), p. 8

By way of contrast, metaphor implies that there is more than one way of representing cultural identity - that it is not fixed to one source. Papastergiadis argues that metaphor does not give preference to origin but rather gives equal voice to the past and the present in the creation of identity. He writes:

Metaphor stresses the inventiveness in the inventing of one's past. ... Metaphor acknowledges that cultural identity comes from the past but it also gives voice to the transformation that occurs in ... its coming to the present. ... Cultural identity is found ... in the way we represent ourselves in relation to a particular construction of the past.¹⁵

This conception of cultural identity when applied to the experience of migration suggests that cultural identity becomes a construction that is based on not one cultural group, but two (or more). Cultural identity is therefore transformed through this process since it now involves moving back and forth between two cultural groups, and past and present. Furthermore, the migrant has become aware of him/herself as 'other'. These things together constitute what Papastergiadis has described as a split or fragmentation that occurs through migration. Papastergiadis argues that the migrant perspective, which is confronted with 'the other within the self', further complicates the already unstable concept of self-representation or autobiography. He writes:

There is no doubt that all autobiographical accounts of the self reveal the instability of memory, that is, the oscillation between history and self-recollection and fiction as self-invention.¹⁶

¹⁵

Papastergiadis (1993), p. 9

¹⁶

Papastergiadis (1993), p. 9

Papastergiadis reveals the complexity of what is transmitted in the relationship between migrants and their children, when on a separate occasion he states:

Migration is a process which is not completed by the arrival of an individual in a foreign place. Arrival rarely means assimilation. Migrants are often transformed by their journey and their presence is a catalyst to new transformations in the spaces they enter. Similarly their relationship to their original 'homes' is rarely erased. Departure seldom entails forgetting and rejection. The narratives of modern migration are often intricate patterns of criss-crossing between various communities and across various generations. The migrant's sense of restlessness, insecurity and ambivalence, as well as their attachments and memories of 'home' are often transmitted to their children.¹⁷

The migrants' narratives of the past are often more revealing of the situation they have found themselves in since their migration, and as such, they are a combination of knowledge and sentiment. The children of migrants are the recipients of these narratives, and this is how they learn of their history and the place of the homeland.

The Perspective of the First-generation Children of Migrants

The position of the first-generation children of migrants as the recipients of the migrant's narratives is the perspective from which this research has been undertaken. Central to this investigation is the argument that the first-generation are not passive listeners and that the

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Papastergiadis, Nikos (ed.), *Annotations 1: Mixed Belongings and Unspecified Destinations*, London, Institute of International Visual Arts in association with the John Hasard Gallery, Southampton, 1996, p. 14

homeland as an imaginary construct is a product of their own projections. This position of the children of migrants can be described in relation to the book *A Mapmaker's Dream* by Australian author James Cowan. This book developed from a journey Cowan made to Venice with the aim of furthering his research on Lord Byron. At this time he came across the journal of a sixteenth century Venetian monk by the name of Fra Mauro. The journal consisted of unusual stories and reports that Fra Mauro had interpreted from travellers who had visited all known parts of the world. Cowan's book takes the form of an adventure story narrated by a monk who never leaves the confines of his own cell. Fra Mauro is also a specialist in cartography and he chooses to represent the information presented to him in the form of a map of the world. The book is a descriptive account of newly discovered lands, inspired by the allure of the exotic in the travellers' experiences. Fra Mauro's position can be likened to my own with my father having the role of visitor and informant, and I the role of cartographer and listener, driven by the same intrigue for the exotic and unfamiliar in the 'homeland'. Fra Mauro states:

Every box I compass in my mind directs me toward an imaginary land. I am seeking new ideas, visions. I do not wish to confirm what I already know. Each map I draw is made up of information I have received from visitors to my cell, as well as those ideas of my own that have been inspired by their sage and often noble remarks. Strangely, though, I find myself living in the presence of what for them is already a retrospective moment. By speaking to me they are able to regain all that they might have thought forever lost.¹⁸

¹⁸

Cowan, James, *A Mapmaker's Dream: the mediations of Fra Mauro, cartographer to the court of Venice*, Australia, Random House, 1997, p. 6

My father's 'homeland' can be likened to the imaginary land to which Fra Mauro is directed. It is comprised of fact and fantasy and is a collaborative construction between narrator (my father) and listener (me). The act of narration is an attempt to regain an irrecoverable past and is confined to the realms of the imagination. That which is described is not a realistic geographical location but rather an imagined space that exists somewhere between fact and fantasy. I see the act of self-invention that is employed by my father, as his attempt to compensate for his loss, and this is also revealed to Fra Mauro by a Jewish man who had fled his home in Rhodes. Fra Mauro stated that having been 'separated from his origins as both a man and a Jew, he had discovered in his rootlessness how to inhabit a region in his own mind'.¹⁹ The Jewish man later confirmed the insight of Fra Mauro's observation when he said:

I know that the boundary between myself and nature sometimes wavers and melts away, so that I can no longer be sure whether what I see with my own eyes springs from outward or inner impressions ... if the outside world were perchance to perish (as it did for me in Rhodes) I know that anyone of us would be capable of rebuilding it.²⁰

In an attempt to impart knowledge of my family history and cultural heritage to me, my father has revealed the 'homeland' as it has been affected by his feelings of displacement and loss as a 'new' Australian. Likewise, the creation of Fra Mauro's map assumed a dimension that was not part of his initial considerations, having not expected to receive so much 'meditative' knowledge²¹. Fra Mauro discovered that his representation of the world was not composed from the objective

¹⁹ Cowan (1997), p. 27

²⁰ Cowan (1997), p. 28

²¹ Cowan (1997), p. 59

information he had originally thought, but rather, it was composed of his visitors' emotional and psychological responses to the world that they had imparted to him. Fra Mauro realised that the world he was representing through his map was not a geographical place, but the world as it had been internalised by his informants²². Likewise, my father's description of his family and the Croatia he left is inevitably shaped by his emotional attachment to home, and so instead of giving a descriptive account of an actually existing place, he ends up describing an idealised sense of space.

The construction of a place that does not exist in geographical terms is not solely the work of my father – it is equally my own projection. This realization also struck Fra Mauro where he states:

Though I was seeing the world through the gaze of others, I somehow believed that the world they had seen, I had seen also. In the act of recording their experiences I was translating for them what had been indecipherable ... Although I had appointed myself (the map's) unofficial cartographer, I had no way of knowing whether I was reflecting the earth's existence or my own.²³

In this regard, the imaginary 'homeland' is also part of my self-representation as it signifies the distance between my knowledge and my father's experience. Just as Fra Mauro's experience of the world is second hand, so too is my knowledge of the homeland, and this part of my family history. Likewise, just as Fra Mauro's map gives form to something that is 'not of this world'²⁴, the works submitted for examination are not representations of places or things that exist in real terms, but

²² Cowan (1997), pp. 59-60

²³ Cowan (1997), p. 61

²⁴ Cowan (1997), p. 40

rather places and things that exist in memory and the imagination.

My father's memories, stories and descriptions of the homeland are important sources of knowledge for me and provide me with an indirect access to this lost world. The photographs and objects that my father brought to Australia also provide a means of access to the past.

The following chapter discusses the particular significance the artefacts from the homeland carry for me, and the significance I ascribe to them, as the only material connection I have to my heritage.

CHAPTER TWO

Artefacts as Items of Ascribed Significance and Condensers of Memory

At some point in most peoples lives individuals define who they are in relation to their family and the history they have inherited. This may be a relatively simple task for those who have access to an extensive archive and oral history passed down by family of several generations. However, there are those who know very little of their history and have little access to it, and if there are any material remains at all, they prove to be a too insubstantial basis from which one can build-up and develop one's own exploration of the past. This investigation argues that this is the dilemma of the first-generation children of migrants who are severed from the past and the homeland of their parent(s).

For what is often a forced migration - one which is undertaken as a matter of physical or emotional survival, or in the pursuit of freedom - the migrant has no desire to return to the place of the past, or to revisit the trauma of the events that took place. The migrant is driven by the need to rebuild and to move forward without looking back.

Migrants who flee from their homeland depart with such haste that all the belongings and keepsakes they take are those they could manage to fit into one suitcase. For their children, this suitcase with its contents, and the oral history of their parent(s), is the only connection to, and source of knowledge of, their heritage and the homeland. These artefacts have not simply been the lucky survivors of the past - having stood the test of time - they have been chosen to be the

stubborn remains, and thus not only do they affirm the past's existence, but they also signify loss and absence.

Individuals who are surrounded by their family history and the material remains of the past may have little interest in it. I argue however that the children of migrants have an obsession with the past and a desire to know more about their heritage and the homeland which is generated by the fragmented remains and the lack of real knowledge and first-hand experience. Furthermore, this is fuelled by the allure of the unknown and the exotic in the past and in this heritage. Consequently, for the first-generation, the few artefacts that exist become substitutes for all that has been lost, and thus, as fragments of the past and the homeland, they come to stand in place for the whole. To the first-generation these artefacts refer beyond the confines of their own literal representations and as such are imbued with a significance that far exceeds their material worth. The overvaluation of these artefacts is therefore a projection by the first-generation onto these material forms.

This investigation has explored these artefacts as the basis for the first-generation's knowledge and perception of the homeland; their history and heritage – that which contributes to their own being. The artefacts that my father brought to Australia have provided the source material for this investigation and comprise of images - photographs - and objects such as costume, textiles and small curiosities. Whilst it is the collective presence that these artefacts hold for me, that is the basis of this investigation, the works for this project are predominantly responses to two photographs.

Both photographs were taken in a photographer's studio and on each occasion the same formal pose was taken. The first of these images is a full-length portrait of my grandparents (fig. 1).



fig. 1

Portrait of my Grandparents,

Katica and Stjepan Stivicic, c. 1925

They stand side by side and stare, with serious expressions, directly at the camera. My grandfather is neatly dressed and is smaller in stature than my grandmother. My grandmother's skirt has the greatest allure - its expanse of white attracts my eye every time it is viewed. The volume and form of the skirt, its abundant use of material and many layers give it an unreal dimension, where its size appears disproportionate to the rest of her body. Each skirt is edged with intricate lace creating a mass that hovers just above the floor.

I am constantly drawn to my grandmother's skirt in this photograph. Where this image depicts the

skirt's incredible density and tactility, its flat, two-dimensionality denies its experience to the senses other than sight. What is denied by the photograph feeds my obsession with the image and makes it necessary for me to engage with my imagination. The absence of the skirt in real or physical terms intensifies the presence of this image for me.



fig. 2

Group Portrait

Back, left to right: Katica and Stjepan Stivicic and my great-aunt. Front: my great-grandmother and my aunt, Marica Stivicic (baby), c. 1930.

In the second photograph, an atmospheric studio backdrop is used (fig. 2). This image depicts my grandparents and great-aunt standing around my great-grandmother who nurses my aunt - my grandparent's first child. As with the first photograph, the state of dress of my grandmother, and great aunt, is elaborate. The backdrop is

shadowy and vaporous with a suggestion of foliage and light beyond; the sense of mystery this creates draws me into the image. I imagine that if I were to physically enter that space I would find myself in the sensuous garden of the Jean-Honore Fragonard painting, *The Swing* which sits at odds with the expressionless faces of the figures in this photograph (fig. 3).



fig. 3.

Jean Honore Fragonard

The Swing

c.1766

oil on canvas

83 x 66 cm

Fragonard's painting depicts, just below its centre, a lady dressed in a voluminous pink dress worn over layers of white underskirts. She is seated on a swing that is being worked by a male figure in the lower right-hand corner. Lounging in the lower left-hand corner against the blooming foliage is a man gesturing romantically toward her with an extended hand. The light is soft and romantic. The garden is at the peak of perfection - everything is in bloom and full of life, captured forever by the painting. This painting has the

same fertility about which my father has spoken of his homeland, describing it as a rich and plentiful paradise.

If these photographs were more telling of the reality that they hide, they would not have so much allure and would cease to be the subject of my curiosity. There is little information to be gathered from these images and this feeds my desire to know more about the place and the people they depict. These images are seductive in their depiction of intricate and decorative surfaces and the setting of a mysterious landscape. They are depictions of reality only in the sense that they show the figures as they actually existed before the lens of the camera. These photographs are not accurate depictions of the homeland and my father's family - they are not expressions of the mundane or everyday - rather, they are representations of the romantic and extraordinary.

Through these photographs my father is able to recall his past, his family and his homeland from his memory. As I have no first-hand experience of this past or of the homeland, what I recall through these images is my experience of learning of this heritage through my father and his recollections, stories and descriptions. As these images are the source of my visual knowledge of the figures they depict and the landscape they refer to, they are the basis for my creation of an imaginary homeland.

Marianne Hirsch, the author of *Family Frames: photography, narrative and postmemory*, looks at the role of the family photograph and its accompanying narratives in facilitating remembrance and in connecting different generations to a shared history, and this has been an influential text in this investigation. Hirsch

identifies two forms of remembrance: first-hand remembrance, or memory, and second-hand remembrance, which she refers to as postmemory, and she considers their respective relationships to the photograph. Hirsch argues that for memory the photograph is a trace of a past moment that was experienced first-hand by the individual, and so it acts as a trigger to that individual's memory.²⁵ By contrast, Hirsch argues that in postmemory the individual was not there to witness the past first-hand because they were not yet born, and hence the past cannot be recalled through the photograph but is constructed out of an 'imaginative investment' in the photographic image.²⁶ Hirsch describes postmemory as 'often relentless and obsessive' and states that:

Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated.²⁷

Hirsch relates the obsessive nature of the generation of postmemory to their desire for an irrecoverable past. I argue that this generation's struggle to rebuild or piece together from the fragments of that past a more complete picture, is their way of trying to regain what was lost and to acquire some understanding of how the past has shaped their own life. The concept of postmemory can be used in relation to the first-generation children of migrants who develop a second-hand 'memory' of the homeland, the past, and the migrant experience through their parent(s). As photographs are part of the only

²⁵ Hirsch, Marianne, *Family Frames: photography, narrative and postmemory*, London, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 22

²⁶ Hirsch (1997), p. 22

²⁷ Hirsch (1997), p. 22

remains that can connect the first-generation to their cultural heritage, they become the objects of their obsessive attempt to rebuild in order to access the past.

Hirsch fully develops the concept of postmemory in reference to the comic book *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by graphic artist Art Spiegelman. *Maus* is a story told in collaboration between father and son, Vladek and Art Spiegelman. This work tells three stories concurrently: the story of Vladek's holocaust survival; the story of Vladek and Art's relationship as father and son; and, Art's life as it has been dominated by his obsession with his parents past. All three stories intersect each other as there is a constant movement back and forth from past to present, present to past, and likewise between the individual stories of Vladek and Art.

The text in *Maus* is largely based on Vladek's story of survival, which Art tries to include with great accuracy by capturing it on tape, and transcribing it complete with Vladek's broken English. Art's lack of understanding of the events of the past, and perhaps the lack of physical evidence that remains, drives his obsession for accuracy where he insists on greater detail from Vladek in his recollection.

The visual component of *Maus* is predominantly Art's contribution where he draws the Jewish as mice, the Germans as cats, and the Polish as pigs. A much smaller visual component of the story, yet an intensely powerful one, is the reproduction of three of the Spiegelman's family photographs.

The three photographs that appear in *Maus* do not, in themselves, have the capacity to re-tell the

past. This is articulated by Vladek and is prompted by Art and the questions he asks about his family history. The photographs that are reproduced consist of an image of Art as a boy with his mother Anja, a portrait of a young child with short, neat blonde hair, and a portrait of Vladek. It is only through the narrative in *Maus* that these photographs are placed in the chain of events that construct the Spiegelman's family history. It is also through narrative that these images transcend the ordinariness of the family snapshot to become signifiers of immense loss.

The photograph of Art and his mother is the first to appear and could be seen as a familiar holiday image if it were not for Art's accompanying narrative which reads: "When I was 20, my mother killed herself. She left no note"²⁸ (fig. 4).



fig.4
 photograph of Art and Anja
 Spiegelman, reproduced in
*Maus I: My Father Bleeds
 History*, p. 100

Art's narrative transforms the image from a generic family photograph to a powerful symbol of loss and absence. The power of this image as a condenser of memory is made apparent when we

²⁸

Spiegelman, Art, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*, London, PenguinBooks, 1987, p. 100

learn that it is one of the only traces of Anja's existence that survived Vladek's attempt to destroy all of her belongings after her suicide, as they possessed 'too many memories'.²⁹

Similarly we learn of the connection of the other two photographs to the past and their respective function within the Spiegelman family. The second photograph to appear is on the dedication page of the second volume which reads "For Richieu and for Nadja" (fig. 5).

F O R R I C H I E U



A N D F O R N A D J A

fig.5
photograph of Richieu Spiegelman,
reproduced in *Maus II: And Here
My Troubles Began*, dedication
page

We learn through the text that Richieu is Art's brother who died prior to Art's birth and that Nadja is Art's daughter. Eventually some insight is given as to whom the photograph may represent. It is revealed through the story that a

²⁹

Spiegelman (1987), pp. 158-159

picture of Richieu was hung on Vladek and Anja's bedroom wall, which Spiegelman works into his illustration in the final pages of this volume. The child in Art's illustration wears the same overalls as the child in the photograph on the dedication page. From this illustration and Art's comments that his parents didn't need a photograph of him because he was alive, Hirsch argues that the photograph on the dedication page is of Richieu.³⁰ Based on Art's comments as to why a picture of Richieu hung on his parents' bedroom wall, this photograph could be seen to deny the loss of the son by functioning as a substitute for the real.

The final photograph reproduced in *Maus* depicts Vladek dressed in a concentration camp uniform. The uniform looks new and clean, and Vladek appears defiant, fit and healthy – an image which is contrary to the conditions of Auschwitz that Vladek has just reported (fig. 6).



fig. 6
 photograph of Vladek Spiegelman,
 reproduced in *Maus II: And Here
 My Troubles Began*, p. 134

Vladek's explanation of this image reveals that it was taken after his release in a shop that took souvenir photos.³¹ As with the other photographs

³⁰ Hirsch (1992), p. 37
³¹ Spiegelman, Art, *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*, London, Penguin Books, 1992, p. 134

in *Maus*, the true significance of this image is revealed through narrative as it is only through Vladek that we learn of his actual Auschwitz experience.

There are two features of *Maus* that can be related to the concept of postmemory. Firstly is the manner in which the photographs function within this work. They function as a trigger to memory and provide a basis for the narration of a family history and a structure upon which this history is recreated. Vladek's narrative has been necessary to fill the gaps left by their incomplete representation of the past and has been vital to Art's understanding of the events that have shaped his family's history. The narrative in *Maus* has extended the meaning of these photographs beyond their surface and has been necessary in reconstructing the past - through the photographs themselves we would not have learned of Anja's suicide, Richieu's death, or Vladek's 'real' Auschwitz survival. Art's reliance upon Vladek in order to recover the past, and his use of the photographs to support it, confirms what Hirsch has said of the photographs and postmemory, that they 'affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal it's unbridgeable distance'.³²

Secondly, the movement between past and present, the juxtaposition of the drawn image with the photographic, and the fictitious depiction of factual events, can be seen as symbolic references to the generational distance between postmemory and the past, and the incongruity of this position. The fictitious manner in which Art Spiegelman has chosen to represent factual events also serves to support Hirsch's assertion that in

³²

Hirsch (1997), p. 23

postmemory, the past is not recalled but is constructed through an imaginative investment in the photograph by this generation.

Several comparisons can be made between *Maus* and my investigation. Both respond to past events in our respective family histories that have been formative to our own sense of identity. In both cases, the photographs and narratives provided by our fathers are vital to our construction of the past and our understanding of our heritage. Spiegelman's creative representation of the past can be likened to the way in which my work has reinvented and distorted the artefacts that are my source material. My project is not concerned with an accurate depiction of the past - it is concerned with the way in which my father's account of the past is mediated by his migration experience, and how this mediated knowledge is passed down to me and distorted further by my own projections.

The particular presence that my father's photographs hold for me is attributed to the photographs capacity to testify that the past was real, and that because it is a representation of the past, it signals what is no longer and what can only be returned to via the photographic image.

Roland Barthes, in his book *Camera Lucida*, addresses the poignancy of the photograph as an image that elicits some of our most profound emotional responses to the world and to people - especially family. Barthes sets out to discover the 'essence' of photography, that is, that which distinguishes photographs from other forms of visual representation. *Camera Lucida* details his quest to uncover this through his consideration and analysis of many photographs. In the first part of the book Barthes' study is predominantly

that of images for public consumption, such as an image of Queen Victoria for example. It is not until the second part of the book where he turns to images of a more intimate nature – those of his mother - that he is able to articulate photography's 'essence'. One photograph in particular becomes the determining image for Barthes – a childhood image of his mother that he recovers shortly after her death. Of the many photographs that are reproduced in *Camera Lucida*, this image is absent. Barthes justifies this by arguing that only he could realize the poignancy of this image and that many would dismiss it as an ordinary, generic childhood image.³³ Barthes calls this the 'Winter Garden' photograph and explains that it depicts his mother and her brother as children standing in the winter garden of their parent's home. For Barthes this is the quintessential photograph both in its depiction of his mother and because it becomes the one photograph from which he derives the 'essence' of all photography.

Barthes says that upon looking at the 'Winter Garden' photograph he was 'overwhelmed by the truth of the image'.³⁴ However, the 'truth' of the image that overwhelms Barthes is not so much that it is an accurate representation of his mother, but that from it he cannot deny that she actually existed in front of the lens of the camera.³⁵ From this Barthes concludes that the 'essence' of photography is that there can be no denying that the 'thing-has-been-there'.³⁶ It is therefore photography's unique relationship to reality where it is dependent on the real or actual existence of its subject before the lens of the

³³ Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated from the French by Richard Howard, London, Vintage Books, 1993, p. 73

³⁴ Barthes (1993), p. 76

³⁵ Barthes (1993), p. 77

³⁶ Barthes (1993), pp. 76-77

camera in order for it to be produced, which accounts for its poignancy as an image.

Where the photograph captures reality in an instant, Barthes adds that it is also a record of the past - an instant to which one can never return. Barthes writes that when he looks at the photograph he sees the subject, which 'has-been-there', and realises that it is 'immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred'.³⁷ The past tense of the subjects 'having-been-there' indicates that it is no longer - which not only suggests photography's relationship to reality, but also hints that it is also inextricably linked to the past. The pastness of the photograph foreshadows the eventual death of its subject, and as such, the photograph serves as a ghostly trace of its subject, reinforcing the irretrievability of the past.

My father's photographs are poignant reminders that the homeland is lost, if indeed it existed at all as he recalls it, and that it only survives in his memories, stories and descriptions of the past. Their significance within this investigation is related to their capacity to signify both presence and absence, and life as well as death.

Furthermore the images that my father brought out from Croatia, have made it possible for me to contemplate what is otherwise unseeable due to time and geographical distance. These images do not depict the homeland in realistic terms - showing the hardship, the political situation, or the effect of war. They are not 'snapshots' of the day to day life in Croatia as my father knew it. Rather they are posed and deliberate depicting a decadence, wealth and beauty of the inhabitants of

a mysterious, evanescent world. I have been intrigued by the way in which these photographic representations enshroud their subjects in mystery as if to conceal the truth behind the image. My fascination with the subjects of the photographs and their original context, and the allure of the atmosphere created within these images, is a direct consequence of their presentation in this form.

This is contrary to the argument regarding photographic reproduction and 'deauraticization' as presented by Walter Benjamin in his essay, "The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Benjamin claims that the photographic reproduction of a work of art is damaging to the 'aura' it holds as an original work. He attributes the 'aura' of an original work of art to its uniqueness and authenticity as an original work; its physical and material presence in its original form; and, its presence as an historical object as it exists in its original context.³⁸

Benjamin says that prior to its mechanical reproduction, an original work had the power to lure an audience, and that a reproduction eliminates the need for an audience to travel to the work as a reproduction 'enables the original to meet the beholder halfway'.³⁹

Benjamin sees that a further threat to the 'aura' of an original work is where photographic technologies have the capacity to reveal aspects of

³⁸ Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, New York, Schocken, 1969, p. 220

³⁹ Benjamin (1969), p. 220

a work of art that would have otherwise gone undetected by our natural, unaided vision.⁴⁰ Benjamin is concerned that the original work loses its authority through such technologies as these processes are the only way to access this experience of the work. Where Benjamin claims that photographic processes alter our perception of reality by revealing what is otherwise concealed, and stripping away the aura of that depicted, by contrast, I argue that the photographs explored in this investigation alter my perception of the reality of the homeland by what they conceal rather than reveal. These images present a view of the homeland that is more aligned to the idealised version I have inherited from my father and the distortions I add to it, and as such, they have the power to transcend reality. The 'aura' of the subjects of the photographs for me is therefore inextricably linked to their having been photographed.

My father did not bring the photographs and objects from his homeland when he first arrived in Australia. He acquired these upon his only return home following the death of his brother. He has recalled how during this return home he became aware of how the language of his home had changed and evolved in the years he had been away, and how because of his accent he was regarded as a tourist in the country of his birth.

⁴⁰ Benjamin (1969), p. 220. Here Benjamin gives the example of enlargement as one such technique. This is expanded further by Joel Snyder in his reading of Benjamin's essay where he suggests methods of photographic examination such as photomicrographic and photofluorescopic investigations which have the capacity to reveal that which lay beneath the surface and between the layers of an original work. See Snyder, Joel, "Benjamin on Reproducibility and Aura: a reading of 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility'", in *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. XV, No. 1 - 2, Fall/Winter, 1983 - 84, p. 134

Not only was he displaced, this Croatia was not the same place as he remembered it to be.

My father believed this would be his last return home, which to this day has remained true, and so he said goodbye to his family for what he believed would be the last time. The items that he collected to bring back to Australia can be seen as souvenirs of a journey that would never be repeated, but also as souvenirs of his homeland at the time when he first departed Croatia – not the Croatia he had returned to.

As souvenirs, these photographs and objects have the power to evoke my father's memories of his homeland at any given moment. For me, these things come to life when they are accompanied by my father's memories, stories, and descriptions, through which I also partake in an imaginary form of travel. One vivid memory I have of such an instance was when, several years ago, I entered the living room to find my father sitting in his chair listening to one of his Croatian records. I sat in a chair next to his listening in silence for some time. While I could not understand the lyrics, I gathered from the fast rhythm and the uplifting beat, that it was a happy, festive, celebratory song. Despite this, there was a heavy emotional atmosphere in the room as my father sat motionless, very deep in thought and silent. When the music stopped, there was a short pause before my father 'awakened', got up from his chair and put the record away in its place in the glass cabinet alongside other items he brought from Croatia. I recall our conversation starting when I asked him what Croatia was like. He described it as an immensely fertile land where you could grow anything you needed or desired, saying, 'you could grow plums and all sorts of fruits the size of my hand! (My father has enormous hands!) And

the taste and smell – so strong and sweet! Nothing like what we have in Australia’. He described it as a country of great natural beauty where his family owned a considerable portion of land that was like a beautiful pine forest. From their farm, my grandmother would make her own salamis, cakes, breads, and other delicious foods. My father said I had his mother’s hands and that I reminded him of her. We looked at a photograph – the group portrait with the backdrop – and he spoke of his mother with great affection, describing her as a very gentle and generous woman. I asked him about the dresses she wore in the photographs and he said he knew little about them except that she would make many of her own textiles and clothing by hand. I asked him about the old lady that was seated in the photograph nursing the baby. His face changed as he spoke of her, calling her his ‘bully’ grandmother, saying that he had never, in all his life, met anyone as nasty as she. He recalled a time when he and his brother were sent to do some cleaning for her, and no matter how meticulous they were, it was never good enough when they had finished and she would make them continue to work. He said in the end they would run away from her and she would chase them, yelling and screaming with all her might after them. My father said he hated the noise she would make more than the sounds of bombs dropping.

The capacity of these objects to serve as traces of my father’s experience and past, and to provide a means of access to the homeland for both of us, is, for me, the measure of their worth. Their value as objects is not in their materiality but rather in their ability to transcend it, and their significance is not innate but ascribed.

This research has been influenced by texts that have considered objects of ascribed significance. Among the writers is Susan Stewart and her discussion of the souvenir in her book *On Longing*. Stewart identifies the souvenir as an object that exists as a trace of experience and argues that it functions by fulfilling the desire of its owner to return to an irrecoverable past moment or an event 'whose materiality has escaped us'.⁴¹

Through her argument, Stewart reveals two aspects of the souvenir that are important sources of its power. Firstly she argues that the use of narrative is an important source of the souvenir's power as it is only through narrative that the souvenir's significance as an object, connecting its owner to an experience or event, is realised.⁴² Stewart is suggesting that in the absence of narrative there would be nothing distinguishing the souvenir from objects of insignificance. Narrative is thus vital in preventing the object from slipping into the realm of the ordinary, which Stewart says is the souvenirs ultimate fate, stating that:

The souvenir is destined to be forgotten; its tragedy lies in the death of memory, the tragedy of all autobiography and the simultaneous erasure of the autograph.⁴³

Stewart connects the souvenir to memory and this may be used to describe my father's relationship to the objects he brought out from Croatia, and to suggest how they facilitate his remembrance of his homeland, his past and his family. Stewart

⁴¹ Stewart, Susan, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, London, Duke University Press, 1993, p. 135

⁴² Stewart (1993), p. 136

⁴³ Stewart (1993), p. 151

describes a reciprocal relationship between the souvenir and its owner – the souvenir is dependent on its owner's memory and narrative to bring it to life, and in turn, the perpetuation of its owner's memories is dependent on the souvenir.

The first-generation's interest in the artefacts of the homeland gives to these objects a second-life through which they hope to reach the past.

Secondly, Stewart argues that for the souvenir to maintain its power it must always remain incomplete, because it is its incompleteness that gives it its generative power - that is, its power to generate narrative.⁴⁴ Stewart explains this with the example of a ribbon that is saved from a corsage worn to a dance. She argues that the ribbon does not only refer to the corsage of which it was a part, but to the event and experience of that which took place - that is, the ribbon comes to represent the dance, the summer, and the romance - an experience which cannot be repeated.⁴⁵ Stewart has suggested that the souvenir exists as the partial remains of an event or a past which cannot be returned to, and that as such it comes to stand in for all that cannot be regained rather than simply signifying what has remained. Likewise, the artefacts from the homeland have a 'presence' as the only remains of the past, but also because they signal all that is lost and irretrievable. With an incomplete representation of the homeland, I have no choice but to fill in the gaps my father's souvenirs leave, creating an imagined totality rather than a factual construction of the past.

⁴⁴ Stewart (1993), p. 136

⁴⁵ Stewart (1993), p. 136

For my father, these artefacts function like the souvenir, that is, they are reminders of a precious past, place or persons. For me, their significance is different in that they operate as a substitute for what is lost and left behind, for what can never be returned to – a substitute for the past, the homeland, and my father’s family. These are the only things that can offer me a tangible experience of the things they signify. These artefacts echo the presence of my father’s family – the photographs signify their presence before the lens of the camera, and the costume and textiles echo the trace of the hand of the maker, and the body of the wearer. This presence resonates from them, and as such, I ascribe significance to them which takes them beyond their ordinariness as material forms. In this regard, these artefacts are best described, from my perspective, in relation to the concept of fetishism.

Fetishism can be viewed from various perspectives - anthropological, Marxian or Freudian, each of which have their own specific concerns, but commonly, according to art historian Hal Foster, they all refer to the fetish as an object that is endowed with a special force or independent life.⁴⁶

The word ‘fetish’ comes from words used in relation to the cult objects of West Africa, the objects used in witchcraft, and, the sacred status of objects within Catholicism.⁴⁷ Given the origins of the term, it can be deduced that the significance of the fetish as an object or material form is highly subjective. This subjectivity may be that of a group – such as the members of a cult or a religion

⁴⁶ Foster, Hal, “The Art of Fetishism: Notes on Dutch Still Life”, in Whiting, Sarah, *Fetish*, New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, p. 6

⁴⁷ Foster (1992), pp. 7-8

as the origins of the term suggest – or it may also be that of an individual. Essentially, the significance of the fetish as an object is a projection of a belief of the beholder. In his essay, “The Art of Fetishism: Notes on Dutch Still Life”, Foster says that in these paintings

a strange energy emanates from its objects [and as such] ...the inert appears animate, the insignificant seems humanly, even preternaturally, significant ...and the familiar becomes estranged.⁴⁸

He suggests that the strange energy comes from the manner in which everything is rendered with the same intense detail and attention to surface, where everything seems unspoiled – even half eaten fruit, wilting flowers or a spilt chalice for example (fig. 7).



fig. 7

Jan Davidsz. de Heem,

Vase of Flowers, c. 1660,

oil on canvas, 69.6 x 56.5cm.

These paintings do not simply capture perfection just before the point of its decay, they intensify and overdramatise it, making it surreal. The equal treatment of the surface of each object means that there is no differentiation in their material value - a gold jewel-encrusted chalice for instance is rendered just as precious and valuable as fruit or flowers. Foster argues that this shows an irrational relation of value to objects – irrational in the sense that it doesn't relate to their market value as commodities – and this is characteristic of the fetish.

In the same way that Foster argues the painters of Dutch Still Lives have imbued their subject with a significance beyond their rational, material worth, so are my works inflations of their original subjects. I do not illustrate these artefacts or the things they represent, but rather I enhance their surfaces and invert their scale to the point where they appear in a distorted form. This distortion gives rise to the experience of the 'uncanny' which, as Foster argues, is a feature of the practice of a number of the surrealist artists. In his book *Compulsive Beauty*, Foster defines the uncanny as:

A concern with events in which repressed material returns in ways that disrupt unitary identity, aesthetic norms, and social order.⁴⁹

As a movement that has been informed by such things as psychoanalysis and dream interpretation, it is often discussed as a practice that is drawn to, and intrigued by, the return of repressed psychic material. Foster's argument adds to this by suggesting that a number of the surrealist artists

⁴⁹

Foster, Hal, *Compulsive Beauty*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1993, p. xvii

were concerned with the recovery of repressed historical materials also. Foster argues that this is evident in the Surrealists' interest in the outmoded, that is, things such as ruins and the discarded materials found in flea markets and second-hand stores. Foster writes that at a time of intense modernisation the 'outmoded' was 'brought to consciousness as a category'.⁵⁰

Of particular relevance to this investigation is Foster's description of how the repressed historical material that is recovered through the surrealist art practice becomes distorted upon its return assuming a 'demonic guise' which can be seen as 'the sign of its repression'. Foster writes:

...once repressed, the past, however blessed, cannot return so benignly, so auratically – precisely because it is damaged by repression.⁵¹

He cites the collage novels of Max Ernst which he describes as 'overrun with monsters and grotesques', as an example in which repressed historical material returns under a new guise. Created from 19th century book and catalogue illustrations, Ernst creates a sense of unease and nightmare through the depiction of implausible scale and spaces (fig. 8, overleaf). In one analysis of Ernst's work, his collage novels are seen as a reaction against the bourgeois ideals of the 19th century – his parent's generation – whereby he reinvented the material that depicted the attitudes of that time 'revealing the psychological ramifications of the world they came from'.⁵²

⁵⁰ Foster (1993), p. 165

⁵¹ Foster (1993), p. 164

⁵² Scheede, Uwe M., *The Essential Max Ernst*, translated from the German by R. W. Last, London, Thames and Hudson, 1972, p. 39



fig. 8

Max Ernst, collage from *Une
Semaine de bonte*, 1934.

The 'demonic' aspect of the return of repressed material in the surrealist practice can be likened to the distortions of the artefacts that occur in the works submitted for examination. My works do not simply reference these artefacts, creating a new cross-cultural context for them in order to describe their position as culturally displaced objects. Rather they are significantly altered and distorted, often producing discomfiting and confronting outcomes. They symbolically depict, in their exaggerated, distorted, and at times confronting forms, the purgatorial and unbridgeable space between the past and homeland and the place of the present for the first-generation children of migrants. These artefacts haunt the spaces of this generation's imagination and the domestic space of their home – their haunting nature is where they exist as emblems of the dead rather than stand to immortalise the homeland and the family that were left behind.

The homeland only survives in memory and the imagination, and the central concern of this

project is the obsessive attempt by the children of migrants to somehow revive and breathe life into the artefacts before they slip into the more objective realm of purely historical objects.

The following chapter provides a detailed analysis of the works submitted for examination, and those that have been pivotal to the development of this project.

CHAPTER THREE

The Studio Investigation

This investigation has been undertaken through the medium of printmaking, and as the project progressed, the work developed further from the two-dimensional traditional print, resulting in three-dimensional works utilising the print and other techniques that were derived from my background in printmaking. The move to three-dimensions occurred in three of the four works that are based on my grandmother's skirt and this was an important development as it created a better relationship between the form of these works and concepts behind them. The significance I ascribe the photograph, and the inflated perception I hold of my grandmother, is made apparent in these works because the skirt is made real and therefore has a physical presence and tactility that is denied by the flatness of the two-dimensional photograph.

Within this investigation, I have used screen, lithographic, and etching processes, and in each case, the image has been constructed through meticulous detailed drawing. This was to impart an obsessive quality to the works that would reflect the obsessive nature of the project, that is, my obsession with, and embellishment of, the source material, and my relentless search for more detail and information from it (and from my father).

Collage has also been an important strategy within this project, especially during the early stages of the investigation. Collage involves manipulating,

writing over, and re-contextualising an existing image, and I saw this as a process that corresponded to the way in which I was ascribing new meanings to the artefacts that I was investigating. I employed this process both in the early stages of planning, such as a number of lithographic prints where I would transfer photocopied images onto stone and work into them, and in the final construction of many of the works. Initially I aimed to produce a more seamless image, and eventually sought to simulate the disjunction that occurs through collage, in order to reflect the fragmented nature of my inherited history that was driving the project. The process of collage has influenced the way in which the final works were constructed and resolved.

Several pieces produced during the first eighteen months of the program mark the development of the final works in both practical and conceptual terms. These include a series of lithographic prints dealing with the self-portrait and other literal responses to the source material. The following is a description of these pieces, along with details of their production and an analysis of their contribution to the direction of the project and final works.

Double Portrait



fig. 9

Karen Lurn

Double Portrait

1997

Lithograph

50 x 70cm

This image is a self-portrait, drawn in profile with my gaze fixed ahead of me away from the viewer. The portrait was drawn from memory and imagination - I did not rely on devices such as photographs or mirrors for accuracy in my self-representation. In the background to the right of the portrait are forms of vegetation, again drawn from my imagination, and to the left a darkened empty space. My right hand is raised as I move between the two spaces, as if drawn to something that lies ahead of me outside the frame of the image.

The final print shows two layers of the same image; during the printing process I moved the paper off register by approximately one inch which created a shift between the two layers. This produced a shadowy double of my portrait, resembling the effect produced in photographs

where the subject moves at the moment of exposure.

It was drawn in response to my father's description of his homeland as a plentiful and fertile land - a paradise that flourished in both my imagination and his - hence my reasons for drawing from my imagination. The doubling or shadowing effect of the portrait was intended to refer to both an imagined sense of self - that is, one that is separated from one's real or physical being - and the fragmented or double identity of the multicultural subject.

I found that the success of the image as a representation of the homeland, as an imaginary construction, was not in its illustrative or pictorial nature, but rather in the quality that the overprinting imparted to it. The shadowy and darker areas created alluded to an unknown and mysterious space through an eerie suspension created by the overlap of the double printing. This use of the print medium became important to subsequent works where I started to consider how to create imagery through the layering that the medium of print offered, rather than creating imagery through illustration. Whilst the double printing was intended to relate to the multicultural subject and the shift between two different realities, the outcome of this image was the realisation that the technique had the ability to represent this in such a way that the effect surpassed the illustration.

Dress Print



fig. 10
Karen Lunn
Dress Print
1997
Lithograph
75 x 55cm

This is an image of my grandmother's dress which was drawn from the photographic portrait of my grandmother and grandfather. The print was made in response to the volume and brightness of the dress and its dominance within the photographic image. A lithograph depicts the dress as it is worn by my grandmother - full and upright as if filled by her body - only she is absent in this image. The dress fills the picture plane and its volume and brightness have been emphasized through my illustration.

The image was printed using four layers of black to create a rich tonal range from velvety black through to the brightest white where the paper

was left unprinted. Several layers have been overlaid on the torso of the dress casting it in shadow which pushes it further to the background and serves to accentuate the luminosity of the skirt.

After completing the image I realised that I had not drawn the light as it fell on the skirt as a form, but rather, that I had drawn the skirt as if light emanated from it, that is, as if the light were an internal rather than external source. The result of this unplanned particular use of light transforms the image from a pictorial representation to a symbolic depiction.

Evaluating this work I had a greater understanding of why this particular image held such allure for me. Whilst I was drawn to the skirt for its formal qualities - its volume, form and decorative nature - I realised that I was simultaneously drawn to the photograph itself, as a referent of the real and as an artefact from the homeland. Furthermore, through my accentuation of some of the qualities of the skirt depicted by the photograph I became more aware that I was drawn to the photograph as a representation of something that existed beyond the ordinary and everyday.

Boy Father Holding a Ball



fig. 11

Karen Lunn

Boy Father Holding a Ball

1997

Lithograph

72 x 47cm

This image originated from another of my father's pre-Australia photographs: a group portrait of my father with his sister and his older brother (fig. 12).



fig. 12

left to right: Steven Mato Stivicic
(my father), Tomislav Stivicic
(my uncle), and Marica Stivicic
(my aunt), c. 1937.

My father and his brother are each holding a small ball and they are wearing identical outfits: a double-breasted shirt, dark shorts, long socks and lace-up shoes. His sister is wearing a check dress and is holding a doll, which has been blurred by its movement at the time of the photograph's exposure. Although, chronologically, this image predates the other portraits of my father with his siblings, the clothing is notably different - more modern. I asked my father about this photograph and he said that relatives who had migrated to America had sent the toys and clothing as gifts, and that the photograph marked their reception of these gifts and was sent as a thank-you.

I drew the image of my father to include his hands holding the ball. The background of the print depicts water, an unknown coastline, a compass rose and rhumb lines. This has been created

through the collage of photocopied images of early maps. One compass rose is situated behind my father's head like a crown, or a halo, with rays emanating from its centre. The second rose is placed under his hands that clasp the small ball.

Looking at this photograph I imagined my father receiving the gifts and wondering about the place far away from which they came, and I considered how visions of different worlds were conveyed through stories and objects and how, as children, we have a different relationship to the world through scale. I read into this photograph the curiosity and imagination that is characteristic of childhood and sought to portray this in the print. The image of my father as a child was not taken during the act of play, nor did he look playful. Indeed, there was no indication from this image that he had a childhood in the playful and innocent sense of the word, but rather that he was faced with harsher realities as a child than I had known.

Through my reading of this photograph, I became aware how my interpretation of the past was not shaped by my knowledge of it, but rather, by my understanding of the present and the way I have imagined the past. I then realized how much of the past is seen through the eyes of the present and this became important to my understanding of the image of the homeland with which I was working.

Small Red Dress



fig. 13

Karen Lunn

Small Red Dress

1997

colour lithograph

22.5 x 17cm

Drawn back to the image of my grandmother's skirt, I decided to rework the image of the dress on a smaller scale, one that related, in dimensions, to its photographic source. In this print the skirt becomes even more dominant than before. Its scale is exaggerated by the torso of the dress which is proportionately much smaller than the skirt as compared to the dress image produced in October of the same year. The skirt stands on its own, held up by its many layers. Using a crayon drawing on the stone and working into it with a brush and a nitric acid and water wash, I created stronger highlights by the removal of areas of tone. To the left of the dress is a smaller article of clothing which floats in the dark background; made visible

by the luminosity of the skirt. The radiance of the skirt also lights-up the textured ground beneath it to reveal coastlines and a small sailing vessel which were transferred from a photocopy collage and reworked with crayon. The image was originally printed in blue/black ink on white paper, and while this captured the strong sense of light in the image, it was a cold light which had little allure. Finally I printed this image over part of a previous image, a four-colour lithograph using a palette of warm reds. The use of colour gave the dress a warm, rich glow and gave greater depth to the image overall.

I found this image of the dress to be less nostalgic than the previous black and white image I had produced in October. The relationship between the figure (dress) and ground (world), and the smaller costume that hovers in the background, locates this image in a space that is more surreal and confined to the imagination.

Skirt Collage



fig. 14

Karen Lunn

Skirt Collage

1998

collage in journal

This collage is a skirt shape that has been created from magazine clippings of bridal gowns. My approach to this collage was unique in relation to other works in regard to both technique and concept.

My intention was to create, quickly, an image in response to the dress that did not involve much labour. Traditionally, I would spend a substantial amount of time drawing images.

Whilst this dress image was inspired by the image of my grandmother's dress, it was not intended to be a direct illustration of it. Instead, this was conceived of as a representation of the skirt as formed in idea or imagination. Created out of images of wedding dresses, which are charged with ideals of beauty and perfection, this representation is my own fetishistic projection onto the skirt of my grandmother.

Through this collage I considered how I could represent my grandmother's skirt in a less illustrative way, in order to expand its range of associations and responses for the viewer, beyond the descriptive. This led me to explore the dress through the detail.

Rose Motif

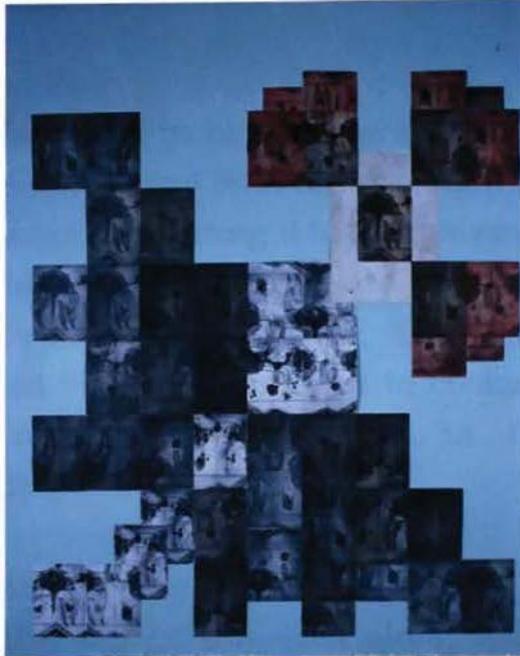


fig. 15

Karen Luna

Motif

1998

Black and white and colour

lithograph

Dimensions variable

In March 1999 I produced a coloured drawing 42x41cm (fig. 16).



fig. 16

This was a design for a key image that could be reproduced and multiplied to form a pattern. The drawing was based on the detail and contained three main elements:

1. The Red Rose

A red rose drawn in profile is at the centre of the image. Stems extend both left and right from this central image, connecting it to two halves of a rose in full bloom. The roses are drawn from a birdseye perspective. When this image was reproduced the two halves join to create one and smaller rose buds were drawn in the space surrounding the central image.

2. The Geometric Border

A geometric design was used along the top and bottom edge of this key image. It was drawn as two halves that would later join and complete the design when the pattern was repeated. The geometric design was chosen as a typical example of the patterns used in Croatian embroidery and textiles.

3. The Wattle Design (fig. 17).

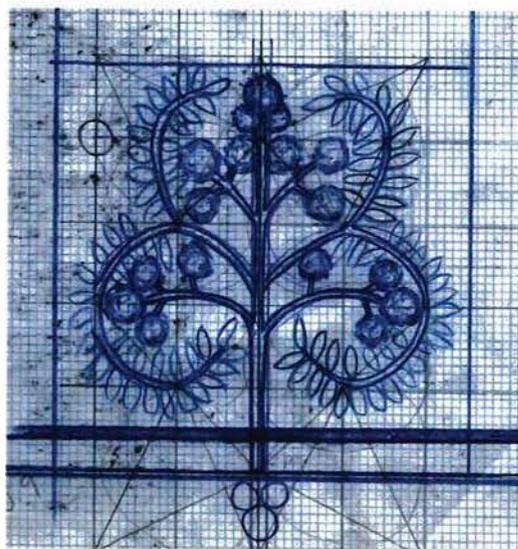


fig.17

This design was less dominant than the rose design; drawn in pale green pencil and was a

design based on native Australian flora. It became very stylized and was reduced to a simple line drawing, where its reference to the Australian Wattle became less obvious. The wattle design sits above and below the rose pattern, both in front of and behind the rose drawing.

The overall design of this key image was based on the 'Garland and Rosette', a design used in decorating Croatian textiles and clothing. The 'Garland and Rosette' was, typically, a series of two or more garlands that lay above one another in a wavy movement. The garlands sometimes intertwined with and were usually framed by a horizontal band above and below.

The rose is a common decorative device in many cultures and was chosen for its representation of beauty and the natural world. By juxtaposing Croatian and Australian elements in this design, I was aiming to juxtapose the different visual experiences of the two cultures.

This work utilized decoration for its seductive qualities and allure, and its ability to conjure up a vision in the mind of the viewer - a romantic vision that is based on ideals of beauty and the decorative.

Originally, I intended this work to be installed in an area with a function similar to that of wallpaper, the idea being to create an overwhelming interior domestic space. However, I realised that this had little to do with the power of the detail that was the original motivation for this work.

In reevaluating this work I decided to install it as a pattern on the wall. I selected a motif that was a Croatian embroidery pattern of a rose, in keeping

with the theme of the work. From a distance, this rose motif would dominate the work, whereas at close range the pattern within the prints would be the focus.

As a cross-stitch design, the individual stitches were represented by squares. I decided to reproduce this motif by segmenting the drawing design and printing it in smaller components. I photocopied the image onto A4 sized paper in five parts; these were transferred onto a lithographic stone and drawn into. They were printed as individual images in black, blue/black, magenta and transparent brown ink on grey, tan and white papers. The variation in colour was to be used compositionally in the motif design, by way of example, the magenta was used for the head of the rose, and the black was used to define its leaves. After printing this, transparent grey tones were overlaid in areas to add greater depth and contrast and more definition to the image for viewing at close range.

However, the work became too complex and overloaded on many levels. The individual components had the proportions of the portrait photograph that posed some problems when trying to reconstruct the motif design that was based on the square. This made it more difficult to reconstruct and it ended up being distorted.

This work was pivotal to the direction of the project; it marks my departure from earlier pictorial works and the time when I began to push the boundaries of the two-dimensional print. This was the first instance in which I used the medium of print for the purpose of repetition. I discovered a correlation between the repetition of the print and my relentless and obsessive act of looking and returning to the photographs, and

determined that repetition and obsession were necessary in conveying the perspective from which this investigation was undertaken.

My grandmother's skirt became the major focus of this investigation and is directly referenced by four of the six works submitted for examination. The subject of my grandmother's skirt saw me move from two-dimensional, illustrative printmaking, to three-dimensional, sculptural uses of the printed image. This was as much an exploration of the image of my grandmother's skirt, and through it my perception of the homeland, as it was an exploration of the photograph as a signifier of absence as well as presence. As the subject of my curiosity, the skirt also became the symbol of my desire – a desire to build a more complete picture from the fragments of the past.

Five Skirts



Fig. 18

Karen Lunn

Five Skirts

1998 - 1999

lithograph and drawing backed

with aluminium

174 x 160cm

Previous explorations of my grandmother's skirt had resulted in literal representations through illustrative drawing. *Skirt Collage* was the first move away from this way of working and led me to this work. *Five Skirts* was an exploration of ways of referring to the skirt that were less literal than previous explorations – ways that would hold the viewers' gaze and evoke a response from them in relation to the materiality of the skirt as a form, and ways that would more adequately represent my obsession with it. I was constantly drawn back to the photograph of my grandmother by the layering and folds of the skirt that make her appear so statuesque. I wanted to suggest the experience of the impenetrable layers of the skirt, and the allure for the viewer of the image's dark recesses. The repetition also alluded to my repeated act of looking at the photograph.

I worked from five key images, each a tonal drawing of gathered fabric, to make reference to the photographic image. Each image measured 30cm in height and 21cm in width, keeping it within the same proportions as its source - the photograph (fig. 19).



fig.19

Karen Lunn

Five Skirts (detail)

These images were printed as layers over each other in transparent blacks and greys that were in keeping with the black and white photograph. Their tonal range was enhanced further by the application of flat areas of very transparent tone.

While the photograph was the source for this work, my images exaggerated the folds of the skirt as they appeared in the photographic image and were exaggerated further by the overprinting of the transparent layers. Through the overprinting I saw that the prints had the capacity to take on a richness and subtlety of tone that would surpass

their photographic source, and I proceeded to draw into them with a range of polychrome pencils in greys and muted greens and browns to enhance this. Through the drawing I darkened areas of the print which made them appear more hidden amid the undulating skirt. In several images it became difficult to decipher which was background and which was foreground – in some sections the skirt appeared opaque, and in others it became more transparent revealing layers that were either underneath or over the top.

The areas of the print that had been drawn into had a sheen and smoothness that complimented the fluidity of the imagery and gave the prints more of a seductive quality. I rubbed the surface of each print with beeswax to achieve this overall. Through this the imagery had taken on an organic quality where the folds of fabric could be read as ribbons of kelp or grass by which you could be surrounded and become lost. While there is something inviting in the dark recesses of the imagery of *Five Skirts* as if they contain the possibility of penetrating beyond the density of the folds, this mass remains impenetrable. It was important that this work was removed from its source – the photograph – through exaggeration, and that its surface was made more seductive, because I was re-presenting the skirt - rather than illustrating it – as the subject of my obsession.

I pinned this work to the wall of my studio in a grid-like format using 48 prints – the overall composition being 6 rows high and 8 rows wide. Scale was determined by my own body size - the work was to be both taller and wider than myself so that it would fill my field of vision at a relatively close range, as if to imagine I could move through the layers. The arrangement of each individual print was determined according to

tone - the lighter images were used in the lower right of the overall construction surrounded by prints of a darker tone. Each image was pinned directly beside or above or below the others and no areas of wall could be seen, so the imagery could flow, uninterrupted from one print to the next. With this work I had departed from my traditional way of working through pictorial representation, and it remained pinned to my studio wall for some time while I considered its formal arrangement. During this time the sides of the prints began to curl inward as they were held in place by pins at the centre top and bottom of the image. This created an undulation in the surface of the work, mirroring the rhythm of the imagery which I decided to control by backing each print with a thin plate of aluminium that had been rolled, giving it a concave surface. The use of metal plates, which I associated with armor, seemed appropriate given the statuesque image of my grandmother from which this work was inspired. Up until this point I had been using multi-coloured map pins, but I decided that their multi-coloured heads were distracting to the work and eventually used less obtrusive Escutcheon pins that looked very similar to dress making pins and related to the subject matter of the work – the dress. The Escutcheon pins pierced through the print at the top and bottom centre of the image instead of holding it balanced against the wall as the map pins had done. I felt that piercing the print to hold it in place would compliment the curling inward of the sides of the image – as if the work was responding to the pressure imposed by the act of pinning it to the wall.

The final construction used 48 individual prints, eight panels from left to right and six panels from top to bottom. This gave the work the overall dimension of 160cm x 180cm.

Zslatona/ My Gold



fig. 20

Karen Lunn

Zslatona/ My Gold

1999 - 2002

Screenprint on hand-made

Cotton rag paper

Height: 290cm

Having returned to the image of my grandmother's skirt, I produced a lithographic print that was a drawing taken from a detail of the lace edges of her skirts (fig. 21).



fig. 21

Karen Lunn

Untitled

1999

Lithograph and pen and ink

70 x 54cm

I worked from a small area of the photograph, approximately 1.5cm square (fig. 22), and produced an image measuring 70x54cm.

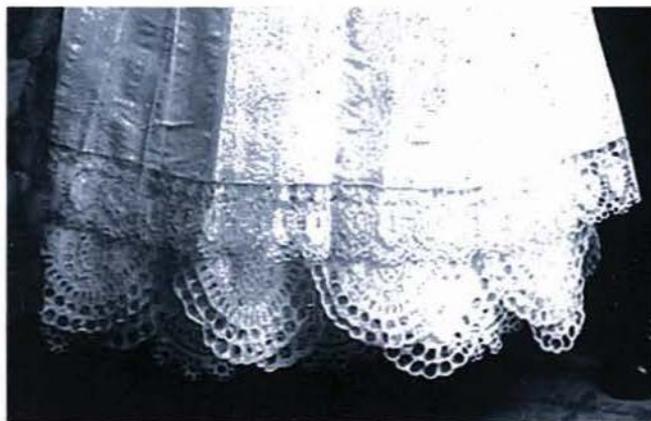


fig. 22

Having already worked from this photograph several times, each time I was compelled to return to it, I did so hoping to discover something new – something that I had overlooked previously. The flat, two-dimensionality of the photograph, and its

limited capacity to provide information about the past, made me want to enter the space of the image in order to explore it beyond its surface. Attempts of enlargement through photocopying or within the computer, only served to confirm the flatness of the photograph, and to dissolve the visual information that was already there. In response to this, the lithographic print I produced was an image of the lace that was created in the negative space.

The image was printed in black ink on white paper and was printed over itself a number of times in order to achieve a more intense and decorative surface, and to represent the layering of the lace edged skirts. With each printing, the paper was shifted downwards resulting in a downward ripple in the image. To achieve greater depth I overlaid areas of flat transparent tone, and worked into the prints with pen and black Indian ink (see fig. 21).

Studying an area of wall where I had pinned several prints one above the other, whereby each image followed from one to the next without interruption, I had the sense of being dwarfed by the skirt and of standing at its base. This was in keeping with my father's embellished description of his mother and the inflated perception I consequently held of her, where she existed in my imagination, 'larger than life'. I decided to refer to the skirt more directly and producing other panels that defined a hemline. When used in conjunction with the other prints, this work became a representation of a skirt with a hemline and no waistline so as to allude to a scale of the skirt that was greater than the dimensions of the printed image (fig. 23).

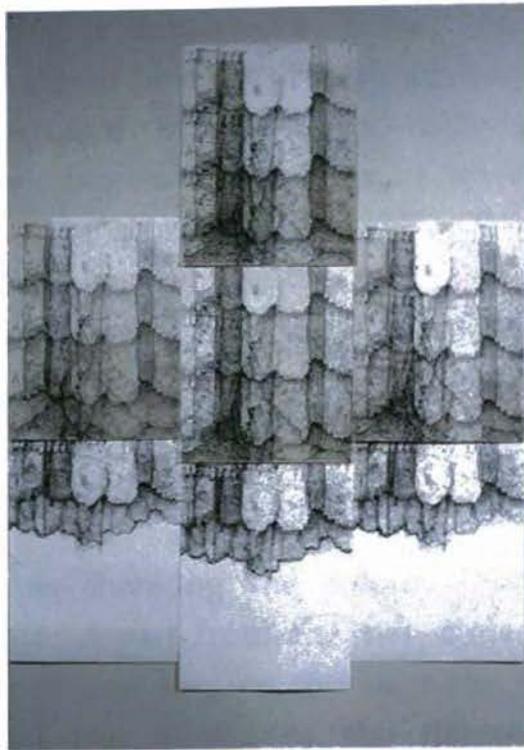


fig. 23

Karen Lurn

Untitled

1999

lithograph and pen and ink

199 x 270cm

I believed that this work was confined to the illustrative and that despite the scale to which it alluded it did not contain any of the sentiment that was behind my making of it. I felt that this could be rectified firstly by the use of an alternative colour. I considered the preciousness of the photograph as an image that was charged with my father's emotion, and as an image that I had injected with great significance as one of the only signifiers of the homeland, the past, and my grandmother. I had a conversation with my father regarding some of the Croatian words I had grown familiar with without knowing their translated meanings. I had assumed the translation of these words from the context in which they were used. My father refers to his daughters as 'Zslatona' which I had assumed translated to 'my daughter' or 'my girl', but

learned that it translated to something like 'my gold'. I realised how my father's sentiments were often disguised in this way, that he would sometimes express his feelings in ways that we would not be able to understand. From this I decided to work with the title of *Zslatona* for this piece and to reprint the image in gold ink. Gold would allude to something that was extraordinary, precious or ritualistic, in essence, something of significance.

As well as changing the colour, I believed it necessary to depart from the two-dimensionality of the print and to give the skirt the form and depth that was denied by the flatness of the photograph. In order to convey this more effectively I began to move into three dimensions where I used hand-made cotton rag paper in conjunction with the printed image, stacking layers of paper under the prints in order to give form to the work and to lift it away from the wall. The move from two to three dimensions was an important and challenging development within the project. I was no longer illustrating the skirt where it remained in an illusionary, pictorial space, but rather, I was giving the skirt a real material presence as a form that existed in real space. Conceptually, the move into three-dimensions was an important development as it served to deny the photograph's signified absence of the real, and was a way of imparting greater significance to the skirt by giving it a real presence as a form to be negotiated within a space by the viewer. But even then, the relationship between the printed image and the paper that was stacked underneath it was not adequate, and I thought that the work needed to become more animated and have a greater authority (fig. 24).



fig. 24

Karen Lunn

Untitled lithograph with hand-made

Cotton rag paper

1999

I screen-printed the lithographic image onto stacks of the hand-made paper in gold ink. The ink varied from transparent gold to solid opaque gold. The paper had been sewn together and the buildup of seams and folds produced irregularities in the thickness of the paper that affected the quality of the printing – sometimes it was faint and at other times the ink would flood the image. Where the paper overlapped, areas of white paper were left. I welcomed this approach as it gave the work a feeling of age and disintegration. This transformed the paper into something more precious and invited touch.

The use of paper to suggest fabric, rather than the use of fabric itself, was a key component of this work. I thought it necessary that, in its transformation from two to three dimensions, it had a material relationship to the skirt, but not a *literal* material relationship to it. As such, the

cotton rag paper had a material relationship to the cotton of the dress, but it also had different properties to its original fabric form that occurred in its transformation from fabric to paper. In this regard, it was paper that acted like material⁵³, or mimicked it – it was not the real thing, but a substitute for the real – a substitute but not a replacement for the real.

Gradually this work moved away from the wall entirely, and it started to take the form of the skirt as I had drawn it in *Small Red Dress* (fig. 13). While initially the dress-like form bulged out from the wall, I was never able to achieve the degree of volume that would give it the stately presence the work demanded. I made more paper/prints and a wooden frame that would be attached to the wall to provide support and enable the work to take on more form (fig. 25).

⁵³

This was particularly so where I had folded and scrunched the paper, softening it so it would gather and drape as fabric does.



fig. 25

Frame made of laminated pine ribs.

1999

I considered various methods of display such as laying it on its side rather than keeping it upright, however I thought that this would be too inactive in a space and that it would evoke a mournful reading of the work. I believed that such a reading would be inappropriate as this work was about *denying* loss and death through the use of a substitute; by bringing the image of my grandmother's skirt into a third dimension, and giving it the tactility that is suggested in the photograph.

The frame was successful in providing more volume to the skirt, although I decided that as long as it remained attached to the wall and incomplete as a form it would read as a fragment of the skirt – that is, something that was partial to it, rather than a reinvention of it (fig. 26).



Fig. 26

Karen Lunn

Zsletonal My Gold

In progress, 2000.

It became increasingly important to me that the skirt had a confronting presence through the 'new life' it had been given as a three-dimensional form, and that it appeared to have an independent 'life force' in the absence of a body. I felt it was therefore necessary that its structure and support should come from within rather than be dependent on the wall. To make it a complete form would not only suggest the possibility of it being occupied by a body but it would also give it more authority as a form. I therefore decided to make more paper/prints, a second half to the wooden frame, and a stand for it, in order to turn this piece into a freestanding work. I hung sheets of paper and prints from the stand in order to give the sense of the layering of the underskirts, as they appeared in the photograph.

The scale of this work, and emphasis on the bulk of the skirt, was important in order to achieve a feeling of monumentality and to overwhelm the viewer. There is something discomfoting in its

monumentality and the way in which it appears to defy gravity. There is weight and heaviness in the mass of the skirt, yet at the same time – through the layering of paper at its base – it is not weighed down to the floor, but rather, pushes up from it, as if floating.

The obsessive nature of this work was important to the project, as it was an ongoing concern with all the works. The feeling of obsession was not only achieved through the exaggerated scale and the materiality of the form of the skirt, but also because this work was not only an oversized skirt, but also hundreds of prints and hand-made paper.

The change of the colour of the image from black to gold, the quality of the handmade paper and the change from two to three dimensions, were starting to work in creating what could be described as a fetish object.

Light Dress

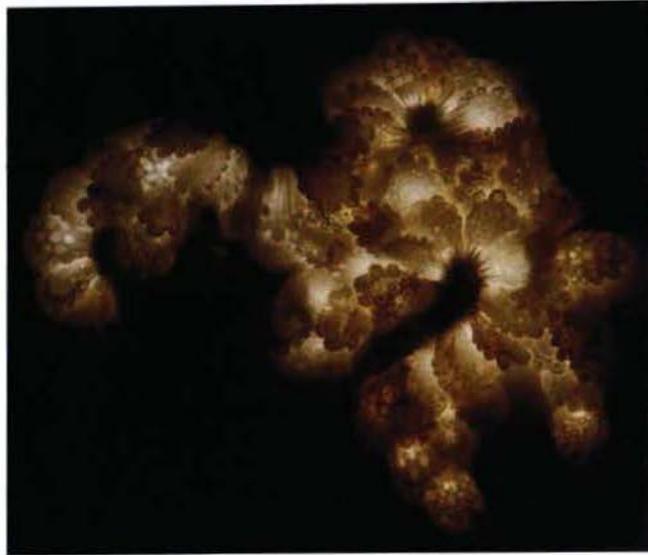


fig. 27

Karen Lunn

Light Dress

1999 - 2002

Hand-made paper and lights

Dimension and form variable



fig. 28

Karen Lunn

Light Dress (detail)

I started to produce another piece that related to the lace of my grandmother's skirt at the time I was working on *Zslatona*. This work was

motivated by the spectacle of the skirt as a decorative object, and the light that emanated from the skirt in my previous graphic depictions of it.

I created over 100 paper doilies from cotton rag and recycled pulp. These were formed in a shape that mimicked that of the lace at the base of the skirt. I created decorative patterns in each doily by using a set of hand-held leather hole punchers. The punchers varied in diameter and enabled me to produce a variety of patterns. Prior to this, I had tried to create patterns through watermarks, but these were only visible at relatively close range and when the paper was backed by light, and failed to take on the quality of the lace, which was achieved through the perforations. The patterns created within the doilies were at first loosely based on the photograph but became random after some time as I realised the effect this would create and the association it would have with the lace were more important than replicating it as it appeared in the photograph.

This work went through a series of changes before it reached its final form.

I wanted to allude to the pride that my grandmother exuded in the photograph, and felt that this could be achieved if I could fix the doilies to stand up-right, like the feathers of a peacock's tail, or fan (fig. 29).

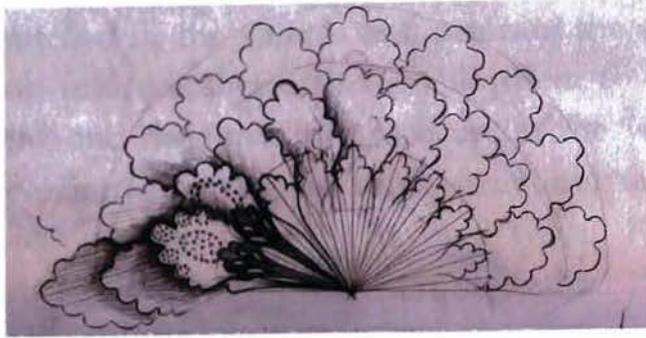


fig. 29

journal sketch

I was also interested in this form of display as I saw an association between the doilies I had made and the feathers of a rare and beautiful bird, which related to the allure of the exotic in the homeland.⁵⁴ Initially, I thought an open book form would have a similar effect. I tried to achieve this using a concertina spine that would expand when opened (fig. 30).



fig. 30

book form trial

54

This aspect of the work was, in part, shaped by Hans Gercke's article, "Exotic Worlds: *European Fantasy*", a commentary on *The Stuttgart Project Exotic Worlds – European Fantasies*, which comprised of a series of exhibitions staged in West Germany in 1987. As the title suggests, the central theme of the project was exoticism and covered architecture, visual art, theatre, souvenirs and collectibles, among other things. Gercke says that the 'exotic kitsch' that was featured in the main exhibition, 'all amounts to the search for lost paradise', and I saw that this related to what I was doing – that I was in search of something intangible, that existed in my own mind, be it an image of my grandmother's skirt, or of the homeland. See Gercke, Hans, "Exotic Worlds: *European Fantasy*", in *Art and Australia*, Autumn 1996, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 474-475.

This proved to be unsuccessful as the doilies, that I had stitched in the valleys and peaks of the spine, had no internal support to enable them to stand upright, and the form collapsed under the weight of the paper. In addition to its structural failure, the book was unsuccessful in other ways. Firstly, as a book I felt this form implied that it was something to be handled, where the 'pages' were turned and the book 'read'. It also implied that there was a purpose in turning the pages - that information would be gained or something revealed, however, the doilies had not been designed for this purpose and so there was nothing to be 'revealed'. Secondly, there was no pleasure in handling the doilies, and I felt this would work against this piece.

Deciding that this piece should be viewed rather than interacted with, I considered other ways in which to emulate the proud display of the peacock's tail. After several drawings and small-scale models that represented the form I wanted to create, I made a lattice-like wooden frame as a support for the work (fig. 31).



fig. 31
frame

However, I was unable to resolve this work using the frame - not only did it pose too many technical problems, I felt the success of this work would rely on a simple solution whereby the paper could take on a form that would be independent of a rigid structure. I wanted this

work to have more of an organic quality where it took on a life of its own, suggesting movement and growth that came from within its own materiality, which was independent of a supporting structure.

I had concerns regarding the quality of the doilies I had produced. Compared to their source – the appearance of the lace on the skirt in the photograph – they were awkward and clumsy, a satirical representation or imitation of the real. I believed this quality worked in opposition to the concept driving the work, and so I looked for a solution that would see the doilies transcend their materiality. I returned to my original reasons for undertaking the work and revisited my earlier prints depicting the dress that had led me to embark on this piece, and reconsidered how my particular use of light when illustrating the skirt had turned it from an illustration into a symbolic representation.

I decided that light should have a more prominent role in the work, and that a solution would be found through investigating the use of light with the paper doilies. I discovered that through backlighting the doilies were transformed from their ordinariness, and from their clumsy, weightiness, into something more ephemeral. The paper acted like a mask to the light, and its decorative image was created by light passing through the perforations, or negative spaces, producing something that was akin to an afterimage. The focus was thus directed away from the paper and toward the light and the glowing effect created. This was more in keeping with my fetishised projection of the skirt in my earlier drawings where the light emanated from within, rather than illuminated the skirt externally.

I finally resolved this work in the form of a wall piece where the doilies were arranged as a swirling, organic mass; an abstract reference to the skirt as if it were caught in motion. I had decided that it was unnecessary to construct a particular form from the doilies, but rather, that the associations with the skirt were strong enough in themselves and that the visual effect that would be created was integral to the work. The resolution of the work can be likened to Toulouse-Lautrec's studies of 'Marie-Louise Fuller, an American dancer who became infamous with her swirling skirt and veil dance at the Folies-Bergere in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. It is clear in the descriptive accounts of her performances, that her spiraling veils, which were said to metamorphose into things such as butterflies and orchids, would captivate her audience to the point where they would question whether or not what they were seeing was real.⁵⁵

In Toulouse-Lautrec's depiction of her, the veils are a swirling mass containing a life and energy that overwhelms Fuller's body (fig. 32).

⁵⁵

Jean Lorraine, in his book *Poussieres de Paris*, remarked: 'Was it a dance? Was it a projection of light or an invocation of some spirit?'. See Freches-Thory, Claire, "Stars", in, *Toulouse-Lautrec*, London, Paris: South Bank Centre, Reunion des musees nationaux, 1991, p. 304.

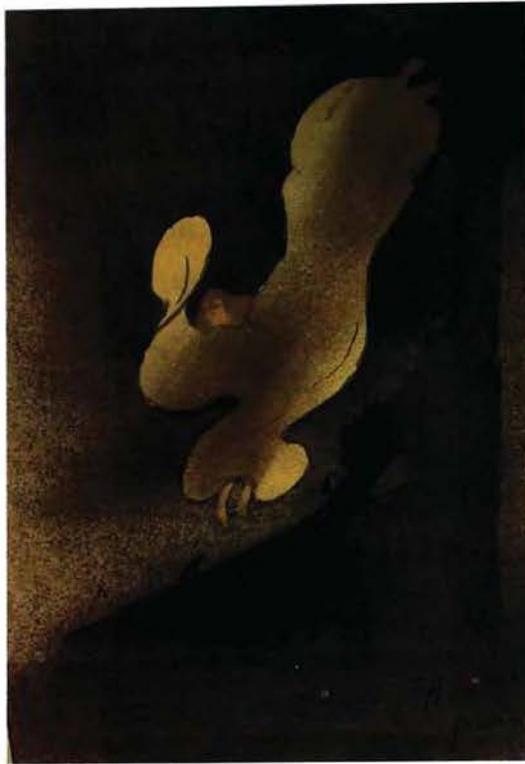


fig. 32

Henri Toulouse-Lautrec

Loie Fuller

1893

lithograph using brush and spatter

36.8 x 26.8cm

While one would assume from Toulouse-Lautrec's other works that he has depicted her performing on stage, the dark mass in the lower right-hand corner of his lithograph could equally be read as a landscape where she appears to be lifted into the night sky, consumed by her veils.

While I had arrived at the form of display for *Light Dress* independently of Toulouse-Lautrec's lithographs of Fuller, his depictions were nonetheless important to the work. His prints confirmed for me that such a display would not only be evocative of the spectacle of the dress, to which I wanted to allude, but also, of the sensation of being absorbed and fascinated by it.

As a writhing mass, the attention was focused on the skirt itself as an independent form – not its

implied wearer. The quality the backlighting gives to the paper, and the glow of the work within the darkened space, creates an enchanting and bedazzling effect. I believe that this is more representative of my fascination with the image of my grandmother's skirt, and my imagined encounters with it as a form, than previous attempts to resolve this work had conveyed.

Red Dress



fig. 33

Karen Lunn

Red Dress, 2001–2002,

Etching and watercolour, 222 x 55cm

This work is an etching that depicts a section of the image used in *Zslatona*. This image was printed in two layers, the first in a golden orange coloured ink, and the second, which was printed over the first and slightly off-register, in a rich red. Prior to printing, I tinted the paper with a water-colour wash in like colours.

The intense, hot red colour of this work was to represent the emotional and passionate aspects of the project. Up until this point, all of the works produced were deliberately monochromatic in response to their source – the black and white photograph. Having recognized how vital it was that the work contain the sentiment of this investigation, I decided to make use of intense colour for my purpose. With the skirt as the subject, I intended this work to relate to sentiment through bodily experience, that is, as though the image was an impression of the skirt on the surface of the skin, or something rising from within the body and appearing on it's surface. The etching process was important to this reading of the work as it entails the image leaving a physical trace in the metal of the copper plate – like scars and impressions left in the skin of one's body.

I created this work with a view to its relationship with *Zslatona*, and saw it as both a depiction of *Zslatona's* interior, and of my imagined contact with my grandmother's skirt. For this reason I produced this work in a portrait format, and restricted the length of the image area to approximately that of my own height.

Landscape/Fantasy



fig. 34

Karen Lunn

Landscape/ Fantasy

1999 - 2002

lithograph and drawing

266 x 327 cm



fig.35

Karen Lunn

Landscape/ Fantasy (detail)

I began to consider the studio setting of my father's photographs and saw it as instrumental in masking the reality of the homeland. One photograph in particular presented a romanticised view of the homeland which formed the basis of this work - the group portrait depicting my father's parents, grandmother, aunt and sister. I set out to re-present the atmospheric backdrop that had been used in the taking of the photograph.

Four separate images formed the basis of the work.

The first image was drawn with rubbing ink which produces soft, smudgy areas of tone. This was used predominantly as a layer of tone to the other images.

The second image was a detailed drawing of a mass of leaves that float unrealistically on a clouded background. The leaves dominate the lower half of the image and a smaller mass grows, in the opposite direction, in the upper left hand corner. This was drawn from my imagination and was not intended to allude to a real geographical terrain but rather suggest a fantastic landscape.

The third image was based on the clouded background of the second print and was drawn as a field of small open circles in order to produce a grainy effect, like the enlarged areas of a photograph. The circles varied in diameter and covered some areas of the stone more densely than others, producing the tonal variation within this image. The result was a very intense and claustrophobic space.

The fourth image was very atmospheric and depicted masses of cloud that were drawn using the side of a crayon. This was less dense and claustrophobic than the previous image.

These images measured 66.5 x 54.5cm and were printed onto BFK grey cotton paper using a silver-based ink which had been tinted with either blue, black or green. The silver-based ink had the appearance of graphite and a tone that was in keeping with that of the photograph. Some of the images were printed as layers for one print, at other times they were used as an image in their own right.

Twenty-four of these images are used in the final work. They are arranged in a grid measuring 6 images across and four images high. No wall is visible between each image in order to produce a seamless image overall. The overall dimensions of this work are 266 x 327cm.

This work moves between representation and decoration, just as I believe the photograph from which it was derived does. The landscape to which it makes reference is an imaginary landscape, situated somewhere in the homeland. It moves in and out of focus and the vegetation confuses the viewer by its swirling growth in all directions.

I drew into areas of this work with grey polychromo and graphite pencils. This served to distinguish between areas of foreground and background, and to introduce moments of clarity and to create a point of entry for the viewer. This was an important consideration as I did not want this work to be read as a backdrop as this would be too passive. Furthermore, the backdrop in the photograph had become the focus for this work, and so the work needed to be given more authority in order to portray this. I particularly focused on the prints that depicted foliage. I darkened the clouded background which pushed

the foliage to the foreground of the image. The drawn sections covered parts of the printed image producing areas that absorbed the light against those that reflected it. This is akin to the effect of solarisation and produces a surreal quality, thus locating the landscape in an unreal space. The metallic ink makes it difficult to view the image from all angles. This was to refer to the impenetrable surface of the photograph. The colour and the sense of light in this work is reminiscent of the enchantment of moonlight yet it neither alludes to the reality of nightlight nor of daylight.

While this work was predominantly based on the photograph, it was also influenced by the painting *The Swing*, by Jean Honore Fragonard (fig. 36).



fig. 36

Jean Honore Fragonard,
The Swing (detail).

As discussed in chapter two, I liken the fertile and Edenic garden, in which the scene of this painting is set, to my father's description of his homeland. Although Fragonard's landscape is not simply a romanticised version of the natural world, but a fantastic projection of it, the life and energy present in the atmosphere and the foliage is overwhelming and mysteriously inviting, but also powerful and volatile. I thought the fantasy

element of Fragonard's garden related to this work because of this hallucinatory quality. Furthermore, Fragonard's depiction of the dress worn by the lady on the swing, mirrors the form and movement of the atmosphere in the background, and contains the possibility of overwhelming the subjects in the work just as the background does.

Map



fig.37

Karen Lunn

Map

2001 - 2002

Waxed linen thread

Dimensions and form variable

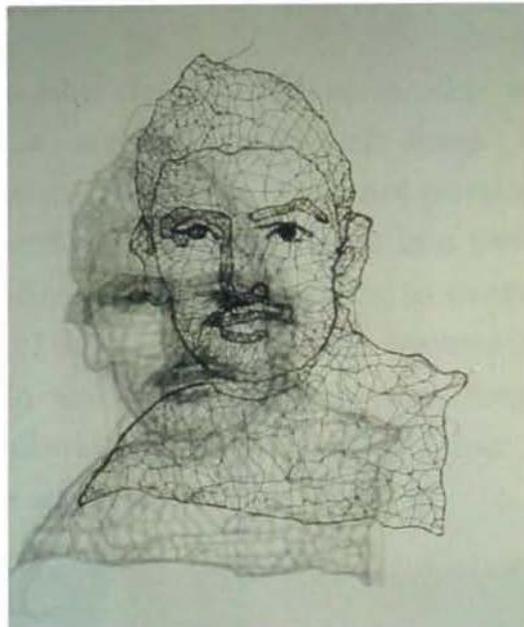


fig. 38

Karen Lunn

Map (detail)

The idea of mapping had long been of interest within this investigation. In the first year of the program, I had produced a lithographic print that was loosely based on the idea of creating a portrait of someone - and an image of the world - by reconnecting the fragmented remains of the past, be they material artefacts or immaterial such as memories and stories (fig. 39).



fig. 39

Karen Lunn

Map Print

1997

lithograph

60 x 49cm

This was not clearly evident in the work that depicted a web-like mass of lines within a decorative mirror frame. I did not pursue this any further, and I realise now that at that point in this investigation I was not yet ready to continue with that line of inquiry. This image became pinned to my studio wall, and over the years fragments of images, photocopies and things I had collected along the way, surrounded it (fig. 40).



fig. 40

My studio wall, August, 2001.

The print, and the wall that was created around it, prompted me to reconsider working with the idea of mapping and led me to question my father about his journey from Croatia to Australia. I asked my father to tell me details of his travel - when and how he left Croatia, which cities he went through and why, and why he decided to come to Australia instead of Canada. The contents of his suitcase had already provided some information as it contained papers that documented his journey of migration. Among these are his registration papers from a camp at Linz in Austria. These contain traces of his initial request, which was granted, to go to Canada. This was crossed out and Australia was scribbled in its place. There was also a card registering him under the Aliens Act (1947 - 1952), issued by the Australian Immigration Department.

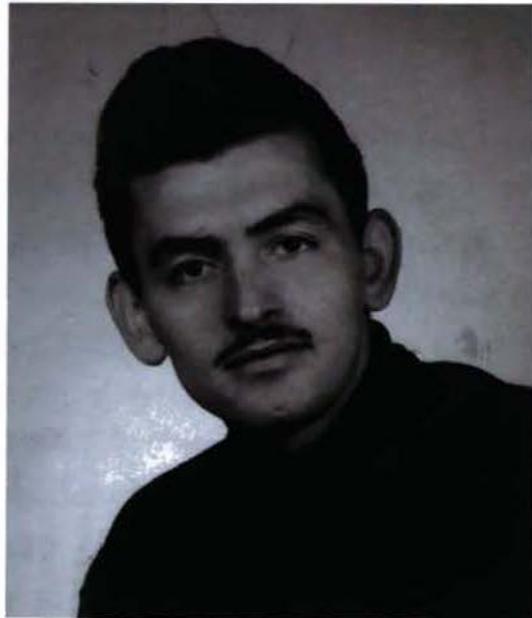


fig. 41
portrait of my father taken from
the document registering him under
the Aliens Act (1947 - 1952).

This contained a passport-size photograph (fig. 41), and information such as his date of arrival in Australia, the name of the vessel on which he came out, and his personal details, such as his name, date of birth, and physical description. All

of these things were a fragile, disintegrating trace of his journey. My father was able to fill in the gaps left by the documents in his suitcase, but what began to interest me equally was the way in which the order of his memories was not chronological, and also how some aspects of his journey were clearly inscribed in his memory - such as the date he arrived in Australia and the names of some of the places that mapped his journey of migration - and at other times his memory of places and events was very faint. I started to write things down, wanting to make them more permanent and was overwhelmed by the selectivity and fragility of memory.

I created a work that is in effect a map detailing my father's journey. The sources of this work are geographical maps of some of the places he recalled and the documents from his suitcase. I wanted to produce a map that was more like a web that held onto these fragile memories. I produced a series of pieces made of black waxed linen thread that were woven and stitched and knotted in order to create an image. These images were both freehand and traced from a photocopied source, such as my father's documents or map references for example. Areas of these pieces began to remind me of vessels and veins within the body and I considered this relationship to my father's internalised experience of migration as he had expressed to me. I decided to refer to this more directly and so I produced two pieces that were based on anatomy illustrations, one of a tree-like blood vessel, and the other a heart wrapped in muscle (fig. 42).⁵⁶

⁵⁶

These images were based on two reproductions from the *Diderot Encyclopedia: The Complete Illustrations 1762 - 1777*, Vol 1, New York, Harry N. Abrahams Inc, 1978, pp. 102 and 111.

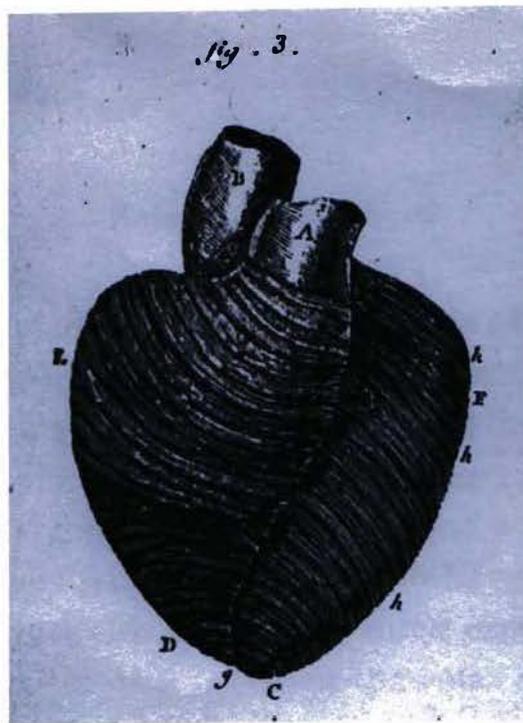


fig. 42

Image of heart from *Diderot
Encyclopædia*, Vol. 1, 1978,
(p. 111)

There is something ominous in their colour and fragility, as they take on the feel of charred remains. Furthermore they cast ghostly shadows which become metaphors for the fading of memory itself, and the removal of postmemory from real or first-hand experience. These shadows appear as distortions of the woven images, and are related to the ways in which I have distorted the source material of this investigation.

Having discussed my work, I now turn to artists whose works are related to mine. The following chapter acknowledges similarities and differences between this investigation and other art practices which serves to define the contribution this research makes to the field of visual arts.

CHAPTER FOUR

Related Art Practices

At the start of this investigation I worked predominantly with traditional two-dimensional printmaking. At this time I surveyed the work of other printmakers whose work shared similar conceptual concerns to mine. I found a history of printmakers within Australia who have explored in their work either their own direct experience of migration, or that of their parents, and how cultural difference has shaped their sense of identity.⁵⁷

The approaches to this subject within print are varied. Some artists have worked very literally and directly, such as Salvatore Zofrea for example who produced a series of twenty woodcuts titled *The Journeyman* where he records aspects of his family history and migration experience.⁵⁸ Although this series of prints specifically documents the experience of Zofrea and his family, it can be seen to represent an experience that is common to many migrants - the risks taken, the loneliness endured, and the hard work and struggle to rebuild a new life in a foreign place.

⁵⁷ These practices may be traced from the 1960's onwards. The late 1940's and into the 1950's saw Australia's biggest influx of migrants who had fled their war-torn and politically oppressed homes in Europe. From this array of non-English speaking backgrounds a number of artists working in print emerged and were instrumental in developing a strong printmaking presence within art institutions and art practice throughout Australia.

⁵⁸ The series begins with the moment his parents meet in Italy, and covers their story of migration to Australia and the life they established for themselves, and concludes with the death of his parents.

Other printmakers have dealt with this subject in less literal ways, preferring instead to represent the effects of migration. In the work of printmakers Udo Sellbach and Jan Senbergs, who migrated to Australia from Germany and Latvia in the 1950's respectively, there is a sense of isolation and alienation that can be seen to relate to their migration experience. Senbergs' prints focus on an unwelcoming landscape of a dark, desolate, and industrial nature. By contrast, Sellbach's focus is on the lone, contorted figure which is often depicted against a vast, isolated landscape – their contortion reading as the result of the torment of their isolation and loneliness. In both instances, the work of Senbergs and Sellbach can be seen to reflect their sense of cultural displacement as migrants.⁵⁹

Similarly, in the work of George Baldessin, who migrated to Australia from Italy with his father at the age of ten, the desire to reinvent one's self can be seen where he depicts figures of assumed identities such as performers, dancers, and acrobats. Like Sellbach's figures, Baldessin's characters are often in absurd and impossible poses to the point where they become disjointed and fragmented. Most often his figures appear isolated, even where they exist in groups, and he creates a great tension where he contorts their bodies so as to contain them tightly within his pictorial space. Baldessin's manipulation and fragmentation of his figures, both anatomically and in personage, can be seen to represent his own sense of fragmentation and the tension associated with his placement between two cultures.

⁵⁹

Their respective practices can be seen as a response to a time of greater racial intolerance where the Federal Government's immigration policy of assimilation advocated that migrants abandon their parent culture and adopt that of the dominant Anglo-Saxon group.

While the migrant and their experience is an important aspect of my work, it is the perspective of the first-generation children of migrants, and their perception of the homeland of their parents, with which my work is more directly concerned.

The experience of the first-generation children of migrants has been explored in the work of Vera Zulumovski. Born in Australia of Macedonian parents her relief prints literally bring together aspects of both cultures in their highly detailed and decorative surfaces. Her prints have a strong narrative and she characteristically depicts Macedonian rituals and customs or stories relating to her family history within an urban Australian setting. Zulumovski's work documents the continued practice of rituals and customs of a European culture within an Australian environment, and her experiences as a first-generation Australian growing-up between the two cultures. My works are a response to the complexity of such a situation and they do not bring together aspects of two different cultures in order to depict their coexistence within my family, but rather, they relate to the **effect** of this cross-cultural experience on my perception of the homeland as a first-generation Australian.

Another major component of my work is related to memory, most particularly my second-hand memory of my cultural heritage, that is, the stories and memories of my father that have been passed on to me by way of informing me of my family history. Where some of Zulumovski's prints are informed by stories of Macedonia that have been passed down to her, she illustrates them rather than comments upon their second-hand nature and the effect of this on her perception of the homeland and the past.

A more direct exploration of the complexities of the cross-cultural situation of the first-generation children of migrants is found in the work of Milan Milojevic. Milojevic is of Yugoslav and German descent and his upbringing within an environment that was intolerant of migrants saw him bury his European background under a more "Australian" exterior. His early prints that collage together references of his Yugoslav/ German heritage, and photographic images of his parents and their migrant experience, can be seen as his attempt to reclaim this heritage and reconstruct his cultural identity. While this work is revealing of his parent's experience, it has a strong autobiographical base as it is his response to the racially intolerant environment that he grew-up in and its effect on his identity as a first-generation Australian. My work is also autobiographical in the sense that it is an exploration of my perception of the homeland, and my projection of significance onto the photographs and objects that signify that it once existed. The use of family photographs and the tactile remains of our cultural heritage are important source material for both our works, however our use of them is very different. Milojevic's use of the photograph can be seen as more documentary in nature, that is, the images he uses are not far removed from their original state and are easily identifiable as being of photographic origin. By way of contrast, my works are **explorations** of my father's photographs where I have exaggerated and distorted their contents changing their meaning entirely.

Milan Milojevic's more recent works use manipulation to a greater extent where he constructs imaginary, hybrid creatures through the juxtaposition of incongruous features, such as the head of a deer on the body of a bird, or a double-

headed boar. These can be seen as metaphors for cultural displacement and his own hybrid identity. Furthermore this work is inventive in the construction of another world, one which can only exist in the imagination.

The imagination of the first-generation has been largely unexplored in the work of many artists. It is through the imagination that we are able to conjure-up the world from which our parents came and the far away distant lands with which we have a connection. The existence of this place, which comes to be described as the homeland, is confined to the realms of memory and imagination and has been a central concern of my investigation.

These artists are a small representation of printmakers whose work reflect their own cross-cultural experiences, be it their direct experience of isolation, alienation, displacement and fragmentation of the self through migration, or their experience as a first-generation Australian. These artists represent a starting point in terms of my thinking and of the art practices that were most relevant to me at the start of my research. These issues have been important to my practice, and continued to inform my work as I focused on the artefacts from my father's homeland more specifically - an investigation that was partially fuelled by the artefacts cultural displacement within my Australian environment. At this point these issues were no longer the **subject** of my investigations but rather were part of my **reasons** for undertaking this research. As my work progressed towards sculptural uses of the print I became interested in the cross-over between image and object and other artists became pertinent to my research.

There are particular artists whose practices stem from their own cross-cultural position who relate more specifically to aspects of this investigation than others, and for this reason they have been the first selected for discussion here. They include Elizabeth Gertsakis, Wilma Tobacco and Domenico de Clario. Following this is the discussion of another group of artists who have been important to this research project, and provide a further context for this investigation. These artists include Christian Boltanski, Joseph Cornell and Ann Hamilton. The materials they use in their works, and the spaces they allude to, are related to my use of the artefacts from my father's homeland and the significance I ascribe them within this investigation.

Australian artist and writer Elizabeth Gertsakis was born in Australia to migrant parents and has been concerned with issues associated with migration and multiculturalism throughout her career. Of particular relevance to this research is her early work titled, *The Shoebox Signifiers*, where she presents her parents' pre-Australia photographs alongside her own narrative which reads like an interpretation of each image. Through her descriptive child-like expression she relays her difficulty in translating the appearances, gestures and objects of the past into the present, as she tries to find meaning within the flat, two-dimensional image. An example of this can be seen in the text accompanying *Photograph No. 3* (fig. 43).



fig. 43

Elizabeth Gertsakis

Photograph No. 3

1985

black and white photograph

This is a portrait taken on her uncle's wedding day and depicts a young married couple standing behind Gertsakis' grandmother who is seated in front. Gertsakis' text reads as follows:

Again, as with the other photos, there is no background, nosense of place or context. Very worrying ... My uncle's hair looks strange ... what are all the dried up bits of grass doing on his suit? ... Why is he holding grass in his hand? ... It was a very long time ago. My grandmother's shirt is open. Her hands and scarf are special. Her hands are her character, her meaning, her life ... The most beautiful and important thing in the picture is the scarf. It is black and silky. It is very expensive and the tails are moving in the

breeze. Why aren't the grasses moving? The scarf is her vanity and sits strangely with her hands.⁶⁰

This is characteristic of all her texts which reveal her search for knowledge through the photograph and its inability to adequately provide it. In her article "Out of the Box", Gertsakis describes how, as a first-generation Australian, it was through these photographs and her parents' accompanying stories, and the memories they would recall, that she gained knowledge of her family history.⁶¹ Gertsakis says that this knowledge was acquired in a condition of absence, that is, the absence of any real or first-hand experience of the people or the place depicted in the photographs.⁶² This absence may be seen to account for her inability to fully understand the images. The only real experience Gertsakis has of her family, the homeland and the events of the past, is through the photograph, its accompanying narrative, and what she describes as the 'emotional aura' that was generated by her parents' discussion of it.⁶³

The Shoebox Signifiers is relevant to this investigation as it expresses the perspective of the first-generation children of migrants and their experience of learning of their heritage through the fragments of the past. It also serves as an example of the condition of post-memory, or second-hand remembrance, which has been central to this investigation. In both cases the photograph is a source of knowledge, which is also an absence of knowledge, and the memory connected to it is second-hand, that is, it does not come from our actual lived experience. Gertsakis'

⁶⁰ Gertsakis, Elizabeth, "Out of the Box ... Skepticism, Education and Italian Shoes for Men", in *Paper Burns*, No. 4, 1985, p. 12

⁶¹ Gertsakis (1985), p. 10

⁶² Gertsakis (1985), p. 10

⁶³ Gertsakis (1985), p. 10

quest for knowledge and meaning' in every detail of the photographs confirms that this form of remembrance is often obsessive and relentless. My work is also obsessive and relentless which may be seen in its detailed, hand-rendered surfaces and repetitive elements, and in the way in which a substantial part of this investigation has been focused on my grandmother's skirt. However, I have used the absence that is signified by the photograph in a way that can be distinguished from Gertsakis' use of it in *The Shoebox Signifiers*. Where the flat, two-dimensionality of the photograph becomes a point of frustration for Gertsakis as something that cuts her off from the past, the very absence of knowledge and the absence of the real have provided me with a point of entry to a world that exists more in idea than in reality. In this investigation, the photograph has become a site for an imaginative investment which is the direct result of the absence that it signifies. While, for Gertsakis, the lack signified by the photograph acts as a point of closure, within my investigation, this is overcome through the imagination, and by the transformation of the photograph into a three-dimensional form. In this regard, while there is a direct correlation between Gertsakis' position and my own, and the use of our parents' pre-Australia photographs to express it, the outcomes of our works are very different.

A relationship may be seen between the outcomes of my project and the work of Australian artist Wilma Tabacco. Wilma Tabacco was born in Italy and migrated to Australia at four years of age with her family. I attended an artist talk delivered by Tabacco at the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart in 1999. I recall her describing her experience as a 'New Australian', where her Italian background manifested itself in her appearance and the

furnishings around her home. She described this as an alienating experience where the visible aspects of her heritage became points of difference between herself and other Australians. On a separate occasion Tabacco noted how this experience can account for the intensely colourful, and at times decorative, nature of her works,

What I had to deny as a child, I now reclaim through my art ... Gaudy, brash colours, nasty sophistication, decorative patterns, exotic flavours, suffocating smells, the fastidiousness of the crafted surface, were once identified as particularly 'woggy'. I now use them as a strategy of cultural resistance and survival.⁶⁴

It is the visual and sensory manifestations of culture that are the source material for her works. These are often referenced in a minimal or abstract way, such as stripes of colour or organic forms that float on a background of contrasting colour. Her choice of colour is deliberately intense and consequently her works are optically very hard to look at. What was once the subject of her ridicule she uses as the weapon for her cultural fight-back.

While there are no visual similarities between the style of Tabacco's work and my own, there is a relationship between the refinement of her subject - where she alludes to her Italian heritage through the abstract and minimal depiction of vibrant colour - and an important development in my project (fig. 44).

⁶⁴

Gates, Merryn, "Can Too Much Beauty Make You Sick?", in *Re:Search*, exhibition catalogue, Hobart, Plimsoll Gallery, 1997, p. 19

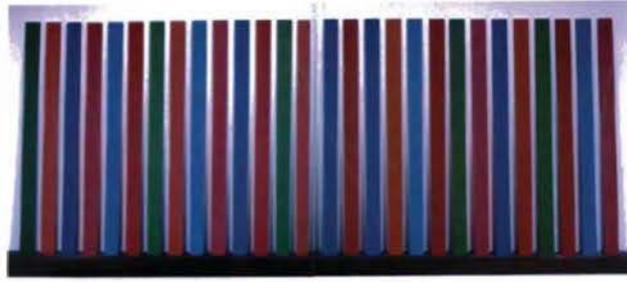


fig. 44

Wilma Tabacco

Confines

1997 – 1998

acrylic on wood

214 x 540cm

I had discovered, through having illustrated my grandmother's skirt a number of times, that there were ways of alluding to it that would more successfully express the allure it holds for me as an image. I am speaking with particular reference to *Five Skirts* and *Light Dress*. In these works the skirt becomes abstracted and through this I direct the viewer's response to the qualities of the skirt that I find seductive and intriguing. Whilst I came to this point independently of Tabacco's work⁶⁵, our practices are related in their approach to our respective subject matter.

There is an aspect of one of Tabacco's more sculptural works, *Caprice/ Cappriccio* that relates to the visual outcomes of this project (fig. 45).

⁶⁵

In the previous chapter, I outlined how I arrived at these points through early studio investigations.

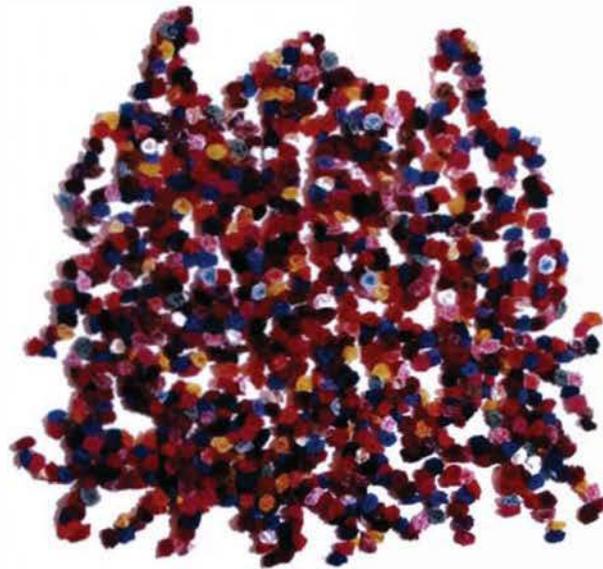


fig. 45

Wilma Tabacco

Caprice/ Cappriccio

1997 – 1998

1000 hand-made silk, satin and
cotton roses

dimension and form variable

This work is constructed of 1000 garishly coloured silk roses. These roses were made by hand using a traditional method that was imparted to Tabacco by her mother-in-law. Using wire they were joined, vine-like, and hung on a wall in forms evocative of floral constructions such as wreaths.

In his catalogue essay, "Saying it with Flowers", writer Edward Colless describes *Caprice/ Cappriccio* as something that 'threatens to grow into an ... obscenely uncontrolled budding and blossoming that could strangle'⁶⁶. He recalls that Tabacco said she wanted her flowers to be 'sexy and tawdry ... beautiful but unreal, impossible, and so ... nasty', and he says that they have a strange

⁶⁶

Colless, Edward, "Saying it with Flowers", in Colless, Edward and Sophia Errey, *Saying it with Flowers: works for a series of exhibitions by Irene Barberis and Wilma Tabacco*, Melbourne, RMIT Gallery, 1998, p. 9

and corrupt beauty because the work contains the labour, repetition and pain that made it.⁶⁷

I regard the overwhelming, suffocating nature of *Caprice/ Capriccio*, its saturation of colour and its kitsch quality, to be an extension of her other works that turn the decorative aspects of her Italian heritage into pieces that confront the viewer through their intensity. Its obsessive construction, and dynamic form which 'threatens to grow', corresponds to the nature of my works that are submitted for examination. The obsessiveness and the exaggerations of detail and scale of the works submitted can be seen to express a longing for that to which the fragmented remains of the artefacts alludes. Where my works express a sense of longing and a desire to build from and hang onto fragments of a lost heritage which characterises the first-generation children of migrants, Tabacco's works involve the reclaiming of a heritage that she denied herself because of her first-hand experience of cultural displacement.

The visual aspects of Tabacco's cultural heritage are transformed in her works through which she gives them new meaning and purpose. Similarly, the artefacts from the homeland that have been the source material for the works produced in my investigation, also undergo transformation where they take on a different appearance to their original form. While these artefacts became the subject of my curiosity, partly because they represent a culture that is different to the Australian culture of my birth, I do not use them in my works for their specific cultural references, but rather explore them as the only material connection I have to my heritage.

⁶⁷

Colless (1998), p. 9

Within my project, the artefacts from my father's homeland have been the subjects of my investigations not only because they have a connection to that which once existed in reality, but also because they signify that which is now stored in memory and (re)visited through the imagination.

The association between objects and internal concepts, such as memory and imagination, are central to the practice of Domenico de Clario, who has been an important influence within my investigation. De Clario works predominantly as an installation artist where he brings together a range of objects, most often ordinary and second-hand, sometimes including his own personal possessions, to create spaces that are akin to the storage areas of garages, basements and attics.

His migration from Italy to Australia has been noted as one of the major influences on his art practice, and as such, his practice relates to the first-hand experience of migration, rather than second-hand remembrance as my project does. While de Clario forms part of the context of artists whose practices have been informed by their own cross-cultural experience, his influence within this project is also due to the spaces he creates with materials that serve as repositories for things such as memory, experience and emotion.

De Clario has recalled his journey from Italy to Australia at the age of eleven, describing it as an experience that plunged him into a world of the

unknown, sending him on a 'journey within'.⁶⁸ This journey may be understood as his engagement with the internal concepts of memory and imagination; and may be seen as an attempt on his part to bridge the distance between the past and present; the cultural divide between the Italy he left behind, and his new home in Australia.

The influence of migration on de Clario's art practice and the way in which this is reflected through his use of discarded materials, is described in an exhibition catalogue essay titled, "The Horse in the Attic and the Empty Clothes", by curator and writer Edward Colless. It tells the story of de Clario's rejection of a wooden rocking horse that was given to him as a Christmas present before he and his family left Italy. The horse was said to be frightening to de Clario as a child, and was consequently locked away in the attic of the apartment building in which he and his family lived. Upon returning to Italy 35 years later, he hoped to salvage from the attic of his old home some of the objects of his childhood, particularly the rocking horse he had rejected. He found that the things he sought had disappeared and that all that remained was an old, rusty tricycle. De Clario's memory of the tricycle was unclear and so he contacted his parents in Australia to learn if it had any significance. Receiving confirmation that it had been his he took it with him and later incorporated it into an installation that was housed in an old basement.

⁶⁸

The moment of his arrival in Australia was later the subject of a performance by de Clario on Princes Pier, Port Melbourne. In this performance, he symbolically reenacts this moment using: a piano, seven coloured lights (representing the seven chakras in Tantric Hinduism, which are energy centres within the body), and twenty passages from a story by Italo Calvino, "A Return to the Opaque", which contrasts the visible with the invisible world. See Gunn, Grazia, "The Magnificent Seven: The imaginary Worlds of Domenico de Clario", in *Art and Australia*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1997, p. 365

As Colless' essay reveals, the significance of the tricycle was not that it facilitated de Clario's remembrance of his childhood, but rather that it was verified as an authentic part of his life prior to migration, a part of his home in Italy; a life that could never be returned to. The tricycle therefore became a substitute for all that had been lost and left behind, and its significance was ascribed based on its connection to the past rather than its ability to evoke any memory specific to it as an object.

Colless has likened de Clario's use of objects to a clairvoyant who,

... by handling someone's personal effects, communicates on their behalf with an invisible, unnatural realm - a realm of poetic associations, unconscious wishes or occult fantasy.⁶⁹

This is particularly evident in his installation *Memory Palace (Machine-for-Contacting-the-Dead)* which has been exhibited several times over a number of years at different venues. While aspects of this work vary according to the specifics of its location, the sense of ritual, and the attempt to bring the past into the present, or the attempt to 'travel' to places that are not part of our actual world, remain essential to the installation.

In one version of this work shown at Cable House, an old energy repository and transformer in Victoria, de Clario brought together a range of materials, including: doors, soil, toys, a mass of wires, a television monitor and other household electrical appliances. His intervention in the

⁶⁹ Colless, Edward, *The Diver's Clothes Lying Empty: Domenico de Clario: A survey 1966-1996*, Melbourne, Monash University, 1997, p. 4

space was not always obvious, some components of the installation were scratched or scribbled onto the surface of the walls or on existing fixtures at the site. The whole installation consisted of a series of related works that de Clario explains form the circuit of the 'Machine'⁷⁰ (fig. 46).

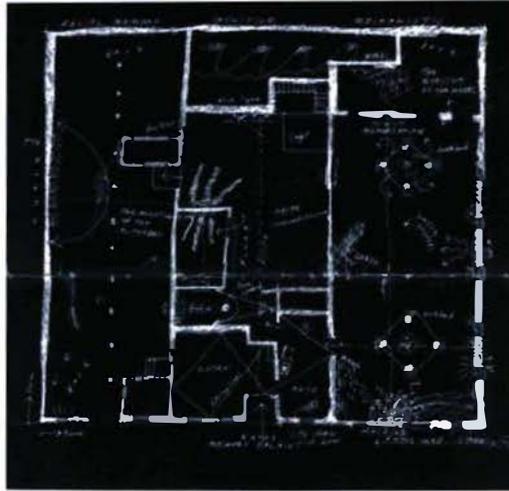


fig. 46
Domenico de Clario
Floor plan for *Memory Palace*,
Cable House, Melbourne.

The *Machine-for-Contacting-the-Dead* was the central component of this exhibition and housed a small painting belonging to de Clario which came out with him and his family from Italy (fig. 47).

⁷⁰

Stacey, Andrew, "Memory Palace Installation: machine-for-contacting-the-dead, Domenico de Clario", in *The Interior*, Vol. 1, No. 2, September-November 1991, p. 32

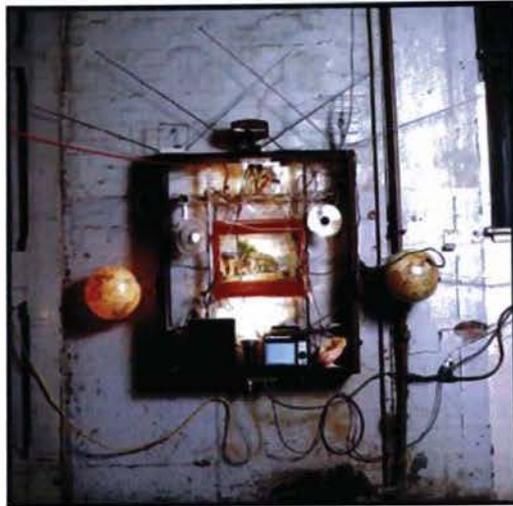


fig. 47

Domenico de Clario

Machine-for-contacting-the-dead

(detail), 1991, mixed media

The idea that internal states are engaged through material forms is central to my investigation. I have explored the artefacts from my father's homeland as a means of access to the past and this place that only survives in my father's memories and flourishes in my imagination. I have also been interested in the emotional weight of these things as signifiers of absence and loss, be it the loss of the homeland or of my father's family.

During my investigation, Christian Boltanski became a significant reference as an artist using the emotive capacity of the photographic portrait and second-hand clothing in works that appear to memorialise the individual. It is the atmosphere that he creates in his photographic installations through lighting and his altar-like constructions, and the overwhelming sense of loss and absence that is present in his clothing installations, that is especially relevant to this project. There is no direct visual correlation between his use of photographs and clothing, and how these have featured in my work. My work has not utilised the medium of photography or the use of actual clothing for its outcome, but rather such things

have been a source for, and a subject of, the research. Throughout my research the photograph has carried a particular significance because of its connection to reality and the irrecoverable past; and, paradoxically, because particular photographs present an image of a non-reality as contrived images. It is the sense of absence and loss that is conveyed by the photograph which is a potent reminder that it is a trace of what is no longer, and consequently the irretrievability of the past, that is the source of their power in this investigation.

Boltanski works from his own large archive of photographic portraits. These photographs are never taken directly from the subject, but are either re-photographed from an original portrait or a reproduction of one he finds in magazines and newspapers. The process of re-photographing images allows Boltanski to manipulate the portraits; he enlarges them, increases the contrast between black and white, diminishing individual characteristics which turns their subjects into ghoulish looking creatures. In one sense he uses the photographic portrait because it serves to identify the individual while, at the same time, he aims to obliterate the individual from their own image and present them as a representative of a collective humanity.⁷¹ Although he usually knows nothing of the subjects of these photographs, through his manipulation of the images and the contexts in which he places them, the implication is that they are portraits of the

⁷¹

The use of contradiction has been discussed in much of the literature published on his work. See interview between Christian Boltanski and Tamar Garb in, Semin, Didier, and Tamar Garb and Donald Kuspit, *Christian Boltanski*, Phaidon Press, London, 1997, p 6 - 44. Here he discusses how the images he uses, whilst 'resurrecting' them and giving them new life, are turned into generic portraits. See his exhibition titled "Menschlich"(Humanity) shown in Vienna, 1996. p 25 - 26

dead. Boltanski suggests that it is not just his particular manipulation and use of the photographic portrait, but the medium of photography itself that is responsible for this interpretation of his works, where he said:

...when we look at the photo we always believe that it is real; it's not real but it has a close connection with reality. If you paint a portrait that connection is not so close. With a photo you really feel that the people were 'there'... I use photos because I'm very interested in the subject-object relationship. A photo is an object, and its relationship with the subject is lost. It also has a relationship with death.⁷²

The combination of photography's relationship to reality *and* death contribute to the emotive power of his photographic installations. This may be seen in the many installations that he has produced over a number of years under the title *Monuments: The Children of Dijon*. While these installations vary according to the architecture of the exhibition site, they essentially involve the same elements. Boltanski presents black and white portraits of children in thin tin frames, and arranges some as groups that are suggestive of altar-pieces. The images are surrounded and illuminated by clusters of light bulbs, powered by black electrical cords that hang from each bulb. The spaces he creates are comparable to places of worship and the illuminated photographs of individuals may be likened to shrines commemorating the dead. Regardless of the fact

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Much of his early work aims at contradicting photography's 'connection to the real' and its accepted use as 'evidence'. Boltanski has used this myth of credibility to establish as 'true' situations that he invents, such as his elaborate record of a bicycle accident he never had, or the use of images of anonymous children which he presents as himself in a documentary of his own childhood. See Semin, Didier and Garb (1997), p 25

that Boltanski has used images of children that may well be alive, the way he installs these images and the atmosphere he creates suggests they are indeed portraits of the dead.

It is the transformation from portrait to shrine that occurs in Boltanski's photographic works, or that which has been described as the distinction he makes between 'images that are venerated and those that are looked at'⁷⁵, that is significant to this research. This is directly related to the status of the photographs that have been the subject of my investigation. While my father's photographs signify what once existed in front of the lens of the camera, they also signify what is no longer and consequently are signifiers of loss and death. As such, I have attributed to these photographs a significance that takes them beyond the family 'snapshot' or historical image.

The use of discarded clothing in Boltanski's installations such as *Lake of the Dead*, convey an overwhelming sense of loss and absence. In this installation Boltanski covered the entire floor space of the gallery with a heavy dumping of second-hand clothing. A wooden walkway was in place to enable the viewer to walk through the space without disturbing his installation. Light bulbs were mounted on the walls of the gallery with their exposed cords hanging down and underneath the clothing (fig. 48).



fig. 48

Christian Boltanski

Lake of the Dead, 1990,

Second-hand clothing and

Lights. Dimensions variable

As clothing contours the body so intimately, it takes on the form of the body. This makes recycled clothing a powerful symbol of the absent body because it has had a real connection to it. Because bodies once occupied the clothes their emotive power is made more intense by the anonymity and unknown fate of their previous owners.

Clothing or costume has been the subject of my works in a way that differs from Boltanski's clothing installations. My works do not present actual clothing but rather, have involved the construction of pieces in the likeness of clothing or costume, and from materials that would not normally be associated with clothing, such as paper for example. Through this representation, these works also carry associations with the body,

or an individual, as Boltanski's do. Where the clothing in Boltanski's installations represent the absence of the body and the loss of the life it once contained, my works that are based on my grandmother's skirt, take on a life that is independent of a body, a life that is made stronger by the body's absence. This life or animation transforms them from skirt, for example, to a fetish object where the object (the skirt) becomes a substitute for the subject (my grandmother and the homeland).

Given the scale of Boltanski's works created by the vast amounts of clothing and photographic portraits he uses, the subject of the Holocaust is often read into his works. At times he makes direct reference to the subject, such as the clothing installation *Reserve: Canada* from 1988, for example, where the title corresponded to the depot *Canada* where the effects of Holocaust victims were stored⁷⁶ (fig. 49).



fig. 49

Christian Boltanski

Reserve: Canada, 1988,

second-hand clothing and lights.

Dimensions variable.

In other works the subject of the holocaust is not so much referenced but implied by the vast numbers of 'victims', and the memorial nature of his installations. Boltanski was born the son of a

⁷⁶

Hirsch (1997), p.257

survivor, post-Holocaust, and says that he does not speak directly of the Holocaust in his work, because his work comes after the Holocaust.⁷⁷ Boltanski is separated from this event by a generation, and so his reference to the subject does not relate to first-hand experience, but rather, to the memory of it that he has inherited as part of his family history. It is not the specifics of the subject of the Holocaust that is related to my project, but rather, how Boltanski, as another artist operating within the generation of postmemory, deals with the second-hand nature of his 'memory' or 'experience' of the Holocaust. Marianne Hirsch argues that Boltanski's symbolic implication of the Holocaust in his works represent

...[his] search for a post-Holocaust aesthetic that would contain his generation's absent memory shaped by loss, mourning and ambivalence.⁷⁸

The Holocaust is not so far removed from his own history that it has become insignificant, but at the same time, it is not part of his immediate memory, his position is somewhere between forgetting and remembering. Hirsch says that whilst some may find Boltanski's desire to aim for universality problematic in relation to the Holocaust, it does highlight the fact that the gap between memory and postmemory is forever increasing.⁷⁹

The deliberate lack of specificity in his work can be understood as the effect of the generational distance between himself and the event that shaped his family and his own life. This

⁷⁷ Garb, Tamar, 'Interview with Christian Boltanski', in, Semin, Garb and Kuspit (1997), p. 19

⁷⁸ Hirsch (1997), pp. 258-259

⁷⁹ Hirsch (1997), p. 264

corresponds to the way in which I am not concerned with an accurate depiction of the past, nor have I intended to replicate what is depicted in my father's photographs, but rather, I have sought to allude to the effect of this distance on my perception of the homeland.

My perception of the homeland has been constructed in my imagination, and as such, it is not restrained by real knowledge and truth, but fuelled by the absence of it. I would liken this to the work of American artist Joseph Cornell and his interest in the creative and seemingly unrestrained vision of children which is evidenced in their play and interaction with objects. The works produced within this investigation have re-contextualised the images and objects from my father's homeland, and express an unrestrained vision akin to that of children as they project an inflated and exaggerated version of their subject. One example of this can be seen in *Zslatona* where the exaggerated scale of the skirt is in keeping with my father's description of his mother, and the image of her that this has established in my mind. Another aspect of Cornell's work that is related to my own concerns is the allure that all things elusive held for Cornell, be they moments, people – such as movie stars - or his own feelings. His desire to capture the fleeting, and preserve it so it could fulfil the desire to relive 'the moment' relates to my preoccupation with the material from my father's homeland as the only tangible connection between the present and the past.

Cornell worked almost exclusively in the area of collage and assemblage in which he would present

objects behind glass, framed within a box. His materials were gathered from his frequent visits to second-hand stores and bazaars. From here, he gathered a vast range of ephemera, including books, jewellery, toys, souvenirs, and photographs. His boxes and collages transformed the found materials he used beyond their ordinariness which was summarised by writer Kynaston McShine who remarked that Cornell 'treated the ephemeral object as if it were the rarest heirloom of a legendary prince or princess'.⁸⁰

Cornell was fascinated by the prospect of his materials being interchangeable between the ordinary and the extraordinary. The value he ascribed to the raw materials of his boxes corresponded to their capacity for this interchangeability. Writer John Ashbery expressed this when recounting his first viewing of Cornell's work and the impression it left upon him:

I was ... at the age when the shock of seeing that we have as very young children was beginning to go, and to be supplemented by adult knowledge which explains further but shields us from the dazzling, single knowledge we get from the first things we see in life ... These are, as it happens, toys or bits of junk, or cloth perhaps, maps, illustrations in encyclopedias that we pore over, realising they are "too old for us" but which nevertheless supply us with the vital information of a sort that their makers never had in mind. It was this visual magic that struck me immediately when I first saw Cornell's work ...⁸¹

The apparent absence of adult knowledge in Cornell's work gives the materials he employs the freedom to entice the viewer to a myriad of associations. In this regard, the infinity of space to

⁸⁰ McShine, Kynaston, *Joseph Cornell*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1980, p. 10

⁸¹ Ashbery, John, in his Foreword to *Caws, Marianne, Joseph Cornell's Theatre of the Mind*, New York, Thames and Hudson, 1993, pp. 9-10

which his boxes alluded may be seen as a direct contrast to their containment and actual size.

The photographs and objects that have been examined in this investigation offer a fragmented glimpse of Croatia, and hence very little knowledge of this place or the past, and this is part of their allure. The absence of knowledge that they represent has aroused my curiosity because they signify the exotic and the unattainable. This has given me the freedom to provide my own context for these representations of the homeland, one that encourages their metamorphosis.

At times, Cornell's box constructions had very specific references. These were usually female actresses or dancers, both living and dead. One of the most interesting accounts of this work was that he was not so much obsessed with their person, but rather with their 'star' quality, that 'the aura they possessed, possessed him'⁸². These works would either pay homage to their star status, such as his portraits of actress Lauren Bacall, or to the role for which they were remembered, such as his obsession with Italian ballerina Fanny Cerrito in her role as Ondine (a water-nymph who emerges from the sea to seduce a fisherman). One box construction in homage to Cerrito of 1947 represents her as a small ballerina figurine standing in front of a scallop shell behind a veil (fig. 50).



fig. 50

Joseph Cornell, *Untitled*

(*Cerrito in "Ondine"*), 1947,

mixed media, 29.8 x 38.3 x 10.1cm

Cornell selected green tinted glass for this homage to Cerrito as Ondine and this imparts a dreamlike quality to the work. The romanticism of the ballet was a common focus of these homages which is revealing of the particular qualities he sought. The light, mood and colouring is often seductive and enchanting which places its contents outside of reality.

Cornell endeavoured to capture the transient, to catch and preserve it so that it could be used to fulfill the desire to return to 'the moment'. This can be seen in his work titled *Taglioni's Jewel Casket* where Cornell presents an opened velvet lined jewel box as that belonging to Taglioni, a nineteenth-century ballerina (fig. 51).



fig. 51

Joseph Cornell

Taglioni's Jewel Casket, 1940,

mixed media, 12 x 30.2 x 21cm

A rhinestone necklace is hung inside its lid, and its contents include a layer of glass ice cubes that, once removed, reveal jewels and shards of coloured glass. The legend surrounding the ballerina is inscribed inside the lid of the box, which reads:

On a moonlit night in the winter of 1835 the carriage of Marie Taglioni / was halted by a Russian highwayman, and that ethereal creature commanded / to dance for this audience of one upon a panther's skin spread over the / snow beneath the stars. From this actuality arose the legend that, to keep / alive the memory of this adventure so precious to her, Taglioni formed the / habit of placing a piece of ice in her jewel casket or dressing table drawer / where melting among the sparkling stones, there was evoked a hint of / the starlit heavens over the ice-covered landscape.⁸³

The associations of the contents of the box are obvious: the dark velvet and the panther's skin; the ice cubes and the snow, and the necklace and

⁸³

Tashjian, Dickran, *Joseph Cornell: Gifts of Desire*, Miami Beach, Grassfield Press, 1992, p. 113

the stars. Taglioni's jewel box entertains her imagination by enabling her to relive her fantasy, and transports her back in time through the symbolic juxtaposition of jewels and ice.

Contained within the box, the contents have the capacity to transcend their plastic reality. Once removed, they would be no more than artificial ice and jewels, and would no longer be the precious link between Taglioni and the past, between reality and fantasy.

This relates to the artefacts that are at the centre of this research. These images and objects are removed from their original context - Croatia at a specific moment in time. Within their new context - Australia - they are more than family snapshots and old wares. Instead, they have become relics of a Croatia that can never be visited or returned to. Through the disruption and displacement of my father's migration experience, these photographs have come to represent the homeland and his family as he has described them in idealistic terms. My father's idealic description is supported by the photographs themselves because of the use of a studio backdrop, and the elaborate state of dress of those depicted, which set these depictions apart from the reality of the time. The photographs do not represent daily life as it existed in the Croatia from which my father first departed, and the backdrop gives no indication as to what the Croatian landscape was really like. My father's homeland is therefore not one that can be returned to in a physical sense, but rather, is (re)visited in memory and through the imagination, and this is reflected in the works produced during this investigation. These works

have been a reinvention of their original source – the artefacts from the homeland. This reinvention has entailed the exaggeration of detail and scale, and the creation of a tactility and materiality that was implied and therefore imagined. This aspect of the project was influenced by the work of artist Ann Hamilton whose installations are renowned for their spectacular visual impact and overwhelming material presence. This presence is achieved through the use of few elements which are present in huge quantities. Of equal intensity is Hamilton's meticulous construction of her works that is visible in the attention given to detail and surface.

Hamilton's practice is largely driven by her interest in human and animal systems, be they to do with classification, bodies of knowledge, or behavioural systems. While my project and Hamilton's work are not related through any conceptual similarity, there is a relationship between my work and her obsessive constructions and the manner in which the materials she uses are transformed through their repetition from individual elements into components of a unified whole. Influenced by her background in textile design, Hamilton has related the manner in which she works to cloth and its metaphors, where she said:

Cloth, like human skin, is a membrane that divides an interior from an exterior ... [In the making of cloth], individual threads of warp are crossed successively with individual threads of weft. Thus, cloth is an accumulation of many gestures of crossing which, like my gestures of accumulation, retain an individual character while [they grow together] to become something else.⁸⁴

⁸⁴

Nesbitt, Judith, and Neville Wakefield, *Ann Hamilton: Mneme*, Liverpool, Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1994, p. 16

Characteristically, Hamilton encloses the viewer in her work, literally, by covering every square centimetre of the installation space - be it walls smeared with algae or soot, or floors covered with hair or thousands of pennies. The experience of her works is a sensory one and so there is always an internal response to the environment or object she constructs. In this regard, her work may be seen as an exploration of the boundary between internal and external worlds.

The exploration of the boundary between self and the world, or interior and exterior, is related to my project because the materials that have been the source of my investigations have been explored, symbolically, *as* the boundary between internal/external, real and imagined. By way of example, the photographic image of my grandmother's skirt exists in reality as a material form (the photograph), and as a depiction of a reality (in that it captures my grandmother as she existed in front of the lens of the camera). Furthermore, it is also a means by which my father can engage with his memory, and I with my imagination, both of which are internal concepts. As such, these photographs, and the other artefacts that have been explored within my investigation, are on the threshold between the two.

In her installation *Parallel Lines* (1991), Hamilton constructed a work that was concerned with issues of memory and absence or loss (figs. 52 & 53).

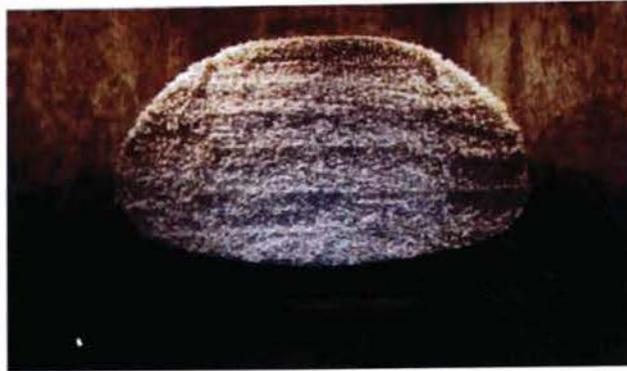


fig. 52

Ann Hamilton, *Parallel Lines*, 1991, first chamber installation with copper tokens, wax candles, and soot-lined walls



fig. 53

Ann Hamilton, *Parallel Lines*, 1991, second chamber: display cases, turkey carcasses, Dermestid beetles.

This was a two-roomed installation which consisted of very few elements which were present in enormous proportions. In the first room, the larger of the two, the walls were covered with a layer of soot from burning candles.

The long white candles, like those used in churches, were bundled and placed lengthwise along a raised, curved base measuring 40 feet long and 12 feet wide. This appears just ample to hold the tonnes of candles, the weight of which was accentuated by the curvature of the base.

The floor of the first room was covered with thousands of copper tags that had each been stamped with numbers, like those used to identify slaves and miners. In the second room, connected to the first by two entrances, the walls and floors were covered with more of the copper tags. Two glass and steel display cases were situated down the centre of the room displaying two turkey carcasses that were in the process of being devoured by dermestid beetles.⁸⁵

The elements she selected for this work: the metal identification tags, the candles, and the turkey carcasses which were in the process of being devoured, may all be associated with loss, the irrecoverable passing of time, and the memory that is embedded in objects. This work has strong associations with the memorial: the obsessive nature of the work suggests the desperate attempt to capture what is in danger of being eternally lost or forgotten.

Hamilton relies on our ability to recognize the elements with which she works. Recognition carries with it a range of given associations, such as the candles with mourning and remembrance, for example. However, the element of recognition is only one aspect of the work. The scale of many of her installations is similar to that of *Parallel Lines*, through which the collective elements

⁸⁵

My discussion of Hamilton's work, as with that of other artist's work, has relied upon the illustrations and descriptions of other writers.

metamorphose into something unique to their singular units. The material excess of Hamilton's installations imparts an organic quality to her works, and this was influential to the qualities I sought to impart to *Zslatona* and *Light Dress*. In each case, the quality of the final works is dependent upon the unity and quantity of its parts as it is through this that growth and an internal life force are suggested.

Whilst our works are driven by different concerns, there is a similarity in the obsessive nature of our works, and in our respective use of repetition and detail in order to achieve this.

Of particular influence to my investigation is the comment Hamilton made in relation to her own work where she states: 'the way things are said is what they mean'.⁸⁶ This idea became an important test for me with a number of the works produced during this investigation, particularly when I moved on from illustrative depictions, and began to work in three-dimensions with hand-made paper, light, shadow, and linen thread.

The following conclusion provides a summary of the central concerns of this research and its contribution to the field.

⁸⁶

Smallgood, Lyn, "Ann Hamilton: Natural Histories", in *Art News*, April 1992, p. 83

CONCLUSION

In this research project, I have investigated the artefacts from my father's homeland as forms of representation upon which my knowledge and perception of the homeland, my history and cultural heritage have come to be based. This investigation has also been shaped by the oral history I have inherited through my father's stories, memories and descriptions of his family and the Croatia from which he fled in 1957. This material evidence may be found in the homes and among the heirlooms of many Australians, connecting them to a great variety of cultural heritages. They may also be found in various collections, communities and museums where an attempt has been made to preserve and rebuild this history and the stories passed down through several generations. However so much of this cultural and family history is embellished through story telling, the instability of memory, and sentiment, and much of it remains forever untold. This heritage does not only exist in the concrete forms of the material remains of the past, but also in folktale and the imagination.

The principal concern of this investigation has been my projection of an inflated significance onto the artefacts through my interpretation of these images and objects as representations of the exotic and the unattainable, and as signifiers of memory, and presence as well as absence. I therefore ascribed a significance to these materials that was far in excess of their material worth. Through my

explorations of these artefacts, I found that their aura was not related to the place from which they were transported, but rather to the imaginary world that they inspired. It was also revealed that my obsession was fuelled by the futile pursuit of the homeland, and the unbridgeable distance between the past and the present.

My works do not simply reference or illustrate these artefacts, creating a new cross-cultural context for them in order to describe their position as culturally displaced objects. Nor do I use them as a means by which to reclaim a repressed heritage or a lost history. Rather, the significance of this research is where I have reinvented this source material, distorting and changing it, in order to represent the transformation that occurs both through my projection of significance onto these artefacts, and in the new life they have as articles of significance and meaning for the first-generation children of migrants.

In contrast with traditional printmaking, my works are unique, one-off pieces in that they are not part of an edition. Where the work has been constructed of multiple, repeated images, the focus is on the work as a unified whole and the collective presence of its many components rather than its singular units. At the same time however, the use of repetition and the multiple is integral to my work insofar as it was instrumental in imparting an obsessive nature to the project. For the first-generation children of migrants who have fragmented remains of their cultural heritage from which to derive knowledge and an understanding of their history, they often develop

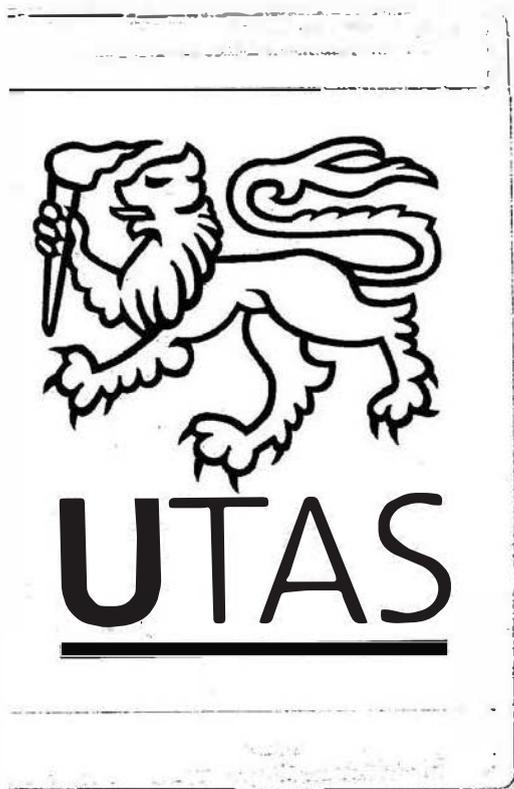
and intense, obsessive interest in the past and the homeland. Thus, I have used repetition, and intense detail, in order to convey my relentless curiosity with the photographs and objects that connect me to my cultural heritage.

A further development from traditional printmaking was where the work moved into three-dimensional, sculptural uses of the print. The print as object was a vital development in the project as it created a better relationship between the form of the work and the concept behind it. The work was an exploration of the flat, two-dimensional photograph and the absence and loss it signifies. While the ascribed significance of the photographs is due to their capacity to signify loss and absence, the reasons for this ascribed significance was not evident in the work until the point at which the work moved into a third dimension. The three-dimensional aspect of the work brought that which was denied by the photograph into an actual, physical, tactile existence which was emphasised further by the exaggeration of scale and form and the material excess of the works.

A further move toward a new conception of the print is seen in the works that did not use conventional printing techniques, but were constructed using processes that were derived from my knowledge of printmaking. This is evident in *Map* and *Light Dress*. In *Map* the images were traced from a preexisting source, be it a photocopy of my father's travel documents, maps, or my own free-hand drawing, and can therefore be seen as an impression taken from a

surface, just as the traditional print is. Furthermore, there is a relationship between the construction of an image through the black thread in this work and the image that is built-up through the etched line. Likewise, the 'image' in *Light Dress* is made by the impression left in the paper (as it is through the perforations that light passes, creating the 'image'), just as the traditional printed image is made by an impression, be it chemical or physical, that is left in the plate.

While this research project has reached a conclusion in that various issues and concerns were resolved in its undertaking, I do not see that I will ever be free of working with these concepts, but rather that they will continue to manifest themselves in my work in other ways.



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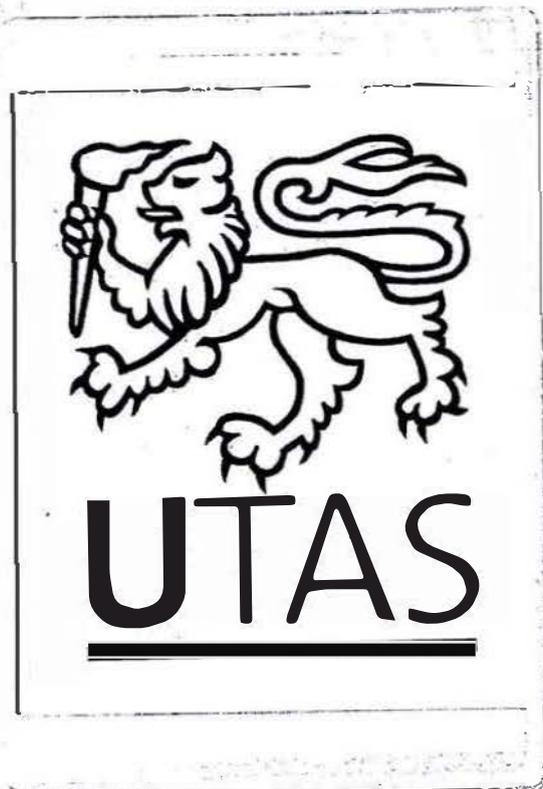
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