

DISPERSIA

Curated by JESSICA CLARK and ALICE DAWES

CAMERON JAMES COPE, ROLANDO GARAY-MATZIARIS,
DJURDJICA KESIC, LISA KRIVITSKY, HONGRUI LIU, HAYLEY
MILLAR, LESLEY WALSH and JUDE WORTERS

23rd – 30th JUNE 2016



Hayley Millar
Untitled, I'm the Captain Now 13, 2016,
Digital collage of medium format film
15.24 x 15.24 cm

“Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.”

— Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993

DISPERSIA is an exhibition about identity. Through notions of personal history, cultural memory and the trans-generational impact of migration and diaspora the artists in this exhibition chart tensions within their past and present personal histories. The lived experience becomes a powerful map of memory, as the works on show emphasise the importance of place building, weaving their own stories into a broader social and cultural narrative.

In this exhibition, artistic practice is used as a tool to visually communicate and reveal the importance of personal history in the development of identity. The artists delve deeper into the exhibition’s overarching themes of colonisation, immigration and inter-generational trauma. A visual exploration of place and space is initiated as the works create a dialogue through the intermingling of stories and aesthetics. The diverse collection of works, in their approach to and expression of identity, act as a map of meaning navigating the densities of cultural memory and experience.

Cameron James Cope’s work *Almost for the Asking* (2016), a personal intervention with, and musicological documentation of Frank Debenham’s, *A Global Atlas: A New View of the World from Space*, first published in 1958. The work is a part of an ongoing photographic series and project that intends to disrupt popularised notions of Australia’s national identity that are ingrained in the propaganda perpetuated as a result of pioneer and ANZAC mythologies. Through the analytical exploration of embedded narratives in objects, places and ancestries, Cope aims to generate conversation around the central omission of settler representations in Australian history: “that frontier wars were a ubiquitous

and fundamental part of Australia's invasion and colonisation by Europeans"¹. *Almost for the Asking* reverts the gaze from artwork to artist by questioning the place of an Anglo-Australian working artistically in the public discourse of frontier history.

The concept of colonisation is critiqued in the photographic works of **Hayley Millar**, whose use of personal imagery and digital technologies create alternative narratives of Australian history and blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy. Millar poses several questions surrounding Indigenous identity and post-colonisation in her photographic series, *I'm the Captain Now* (2016): "What if Aboriginal culture and tradition had been respected by the European settlers of Australia? What if Aboriginal culture was not suppressed and discarded? And, what would Indigenous culture look like if there had never been an invasion?"² Each image functions as a separate story in the construction of a broken identity, probing ideas—as Millar says—of the "fictitious, playful, and frank narratives that parade satiric references to the religious instruction forced upon Indigenous Australians by the Europeans"³. In Millar's work, the destruction of Indigenous peoples' connection to the land, spirit and dreaming, as well as all other aspects of cultural life, are brought to the fore through carefully constructed visual narratives. Millar re-authors her family history through the use of inherited film negatives from the 1960's, recontextualising and rearranging snippets of her displaced Indigenous identity and heritage. The resulting black-and-white digital collages recreate her family history, "providing an alternative view that encourages the reimagining of the experience of growing up Indigenous"⁴.

The conversation of personal histories is furthered as the impact of immigration and trans-generational trauma becomes a strong focus throughout the exhibition. **Lisa Krivitsky's** installation work's, *I Am Other* (2016) and *Memories of Another Land* (2016) focus on deciphering and tracking bloodlines through a deep-rooted collective and personal history of humanity and displacement. The two works together seek to conceptualise Krivitsky's personal view of her own

¹ C. J. Cope, personal communication, June 4, 2016.

² H. Millar, personal communication, May 30, 2016.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

identity as ‘other’ through the prism of her ancestry—“focussing on the Soviet Jewish experience of expulsion, marginalisation and migration”⁵. The works explore the concept of identity and displacement as well as the challenges of immigration and ideology by considering how one manoeuvres in new societies without language. This body of work delves deeper into the weight that family history, immigration and experience holds over one’s knowledge of self. Notions of ‘the other’ are uncovered through the interplay between individual and collective identity that is underpinned by genealogy, bringing into question what it truly means to feel like an outsider⁶. Krivitsky documents her lineage through language, photographs and stories, using her personal narrative as a gateway to consider the degree to which individual and collective history informs personal identity.

Djurdjica Kesic translates her own personal experience as a migrant, focussing on the theme of immigration and cultural memory as focal facets of identity-building in a new place. A clear exploration of notions of distance and proximity, orientation and disorientation, movement and transition and the *un-portability* of place⁷ are expressed through her contemporary appropriation of cartography. Using visual elements common to map-making and applying methods of segmentation and distortion, *Map Dress* (2016) reflects upon ideas of location and on Kesic’s personal migrant experience of place. The choice of a garment as a medium to map identity is a powerful and apt evocation; migrants leave home behind and enter an unfamiliar space, often with minimal possessions and only the clothes on their back. The delicately constructed fabric map is a metaphor for the road the migrant travels—a physical reminder of where they have come from and where they are going, encountering a new place to call home, and, a forced adaptability; the journey becomes a part of self, the weight of which will be carried indefinitely.

Rolando Garay-Matziaris’ two large-scale perspex works, *Footy/Pie* (2016) and *A Pub with no Beer* (2016) also reference the influence of

⁵ L. Krivitsky, personal communication, June 15, 2016.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ D. Kesic, personal communication, June 3, 2016.

immigration in shaping identity in a new country. According to Garay-Matziaris, these works incorporate collage and commercial printing techniques in order to explore cultural identities, hybridity and the inherited values found within the context of multicultural Australia⁸. The appropriation of sculptural imagery and icons from Ancient Greece are contrasted with colloquialisms of Australian language prevalent in music and communication, engendering a playful take on cross-cultural experience and identity. These satirical visual combinations within both works make a clear reference to the use of humour as a defence mechanism commonly adopted by many migrants in Australia. As Garay-Matziaris states, “the work intends to demonstrate a relational aspect of cultural belonging and identification processes through the use of collaged and shifting identities within a camouflaged picture plane”⁹.

Personal experience and the plurality of cultural influence that stems from multiculturalism is explored in the large and expressive work of **Hongrui Liu**. *1998’s Classroom* (2016) draws inspiration from a subjective exploration of the push and pull between East and West ideology¹⁰ and the old and the new. As a child of the post-Deng generation in China, Liu investigates his experience of corporeal punishment in a classroom of the past; a culturally charged symbol of Chinese tradition considered in contrast to that of Australia. *1998’s Classroom* sheds a new light on the concept of punishment, suggesting that the positive effects cannot be denied from a cultural perspective. The Tai Chi punishment depicted throughout the animated and expressionistic ink drawings are a kind of passive Zen, and in their scale juxtapose the meditative with the retributive and the repetitive. Liu’s intention here is to awaken lost memories and ignite nostalgia through the subjectivity of cultural memory and experience in an attempt to connect with those who may have shared a similar experience¹¹.

The trauma associated with the underpinnings of identity development and the universal need in understanding one’s own personal history are prevalent in the work of **Jude Worters**. *Untitled Objects (From the Protective Objects Series)*,

⁸ R. Garay-Matziaris, personal communication, June 14, 2016.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ H. Liu, personal communication, June 2, 2016.

¹¹ Ibid.

(2016) focusses on childhood trauma and loss. The body of work has been constructed using found objects and repurposed materials; material is manipulated, stitched and overlapped to evoke psychological states of femininity and the emotional strategies constructed as a mode of self-protection¹². Worters' artistic methodology of exploiting and altering the found object metaphorically exposes her interest in cultural memory and trans-generational trauma. The materiality and construction of *Untitled Objects (From the Protective Objects Series)* evokes an innately personal association with the past as psychological scars are suggested through the act of sewing and padding to insinuate healing and repair¹³. Primarily influenced by her own personal history—growing up in a large Catholic family—Worters concerns her work with the female psyche and how family dynamics and drama are an inescapable influence to our personal dispositions, identity and emotional state of being. The natural colour and staining of each 'protective object' suggests aging with trauma, alluding to the intrinsic scarring of a personal history and generating an idiosyncratic corporeal reference to the body and its traces.

Lesley Walsh's ceramic installation, *From One State to Another: From Disorder to Renewal* (2016) is delicately rich with colonial symbolism and nostalgia in process and materiality. The work consists of five books that have been carefully altered through a method of sea water immersion, slip application and kiln firing, creating a series of intricately fragile fossilised imprints of each books' original form. Walsh's use of hardcovers and paperbacks as the focal medium within her installation evokes cultural connotations of traditional Western methods of documenting history. The process each book undergoes is inherently metaphorical, as each element brings about the ephemeral nature of identity as a constant state of flux—our personal histories, memory and experience continually intermingle to affect our view of self. Walsh's concern with the sea and culture is also evident within this installation—an integral cultural choice that has consciously informed her artistic practice to reference her ancestors who

¹² J. Worters, personal communication, June 3, 2016.

¹³ Ibid.

arrived in Australia on the First and Second Fleets¹⁴. This personal connection to colonial Australia is a signifier of cultural history for Walsh as she employs a link to the earth and sea in her work, using these elements as an active metaphor for the connection of people and culture. The immersion of each book in slip, a derivative of clay, conjures a grounding of culture and experience, and together with the sea water, is reminiscent of the constant movement and ‘the unknown’ inherent to the concept of identity. Walsh’s exploration of the unknown within cultural history and the past create a relatable platform of experience for the audience as the ambiguity common to the formation of one’s own identity is highlighted. The central position of Walsh’s installation encourages a connection with the surrounding works in the space—alluding to the dispersion of culture prevalent as a result of fragmented histories and diaspora.

The artist’s in *DISPERSIA* collectively challenge the narrative of identity in Australia. As separate works, they tell a variety of stories and reflect the range of individual experiences and histories resulting from colonisation and immigration. Collectively, the works illustrate the changing nature of Australian society and reveal a narrative of values—in ourselves and in others. The exhibition strives to create a multi-layered topography, exemplifying the ways in which identity is an integral part of an artist’s practice. It does not strive for cohesiveness and, in fact, espouses variation even within attempts at categorisation. Instead, this exhibition aims to celebrate the difference in approach to a concept that is highly individualised and manipulated through form and concept. The many manifestations of identity shown here mirror the divergent approaches of artistic methodology—emanating from a fixed point. The end result travels wildly variable but eloquent paths.

Written by JESSICA CLARK and ALICE DAWES in collaboration with the artists of DISPERSIA.

¹⁴ L. Walsh, personal communication, June 10, 2016.



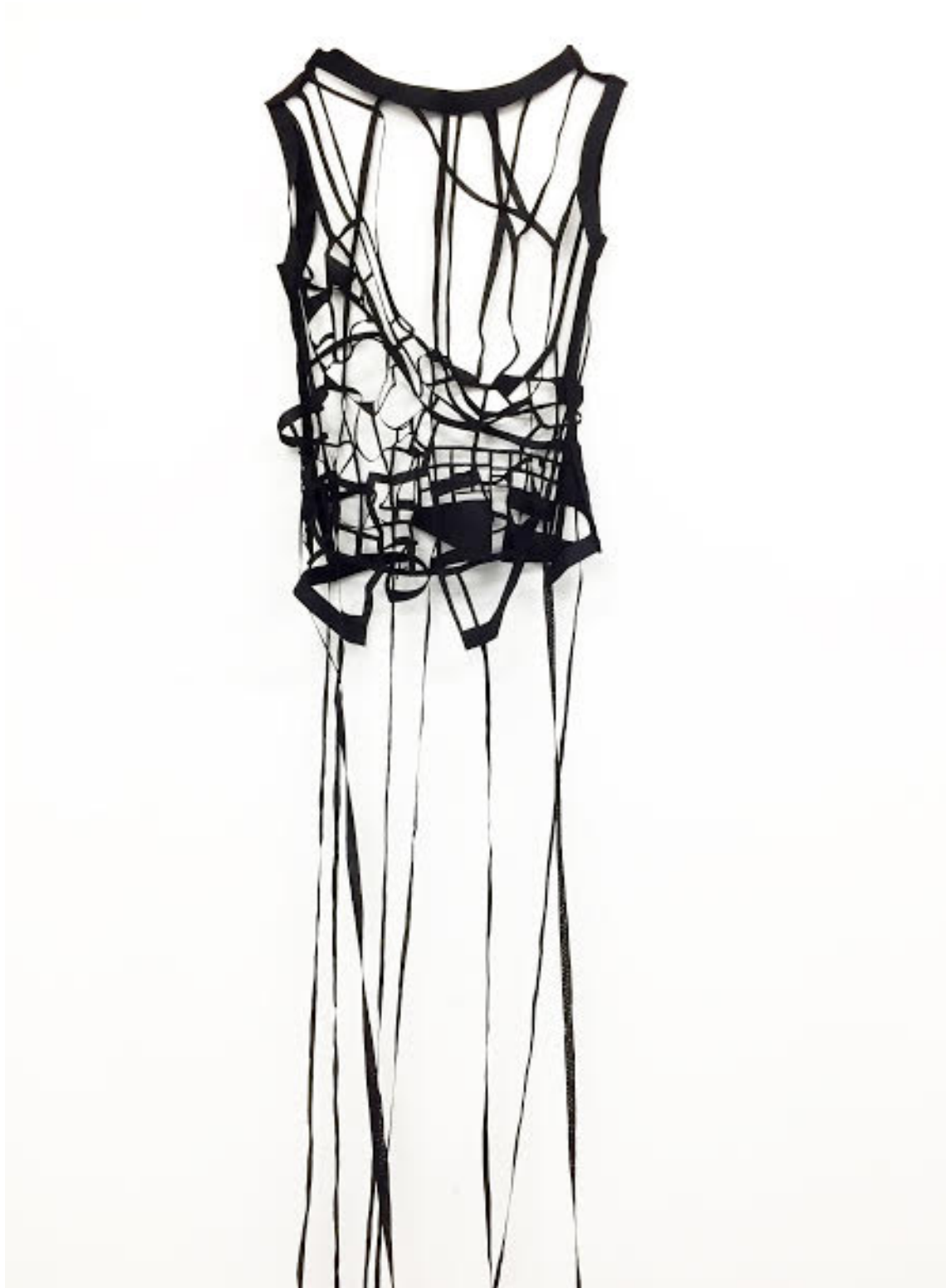
Cameron James Cope
Almost for the Asking, 2016
Printed poster, paper, table, pencils
59.4 x 84.1 cm / Variable dimensions



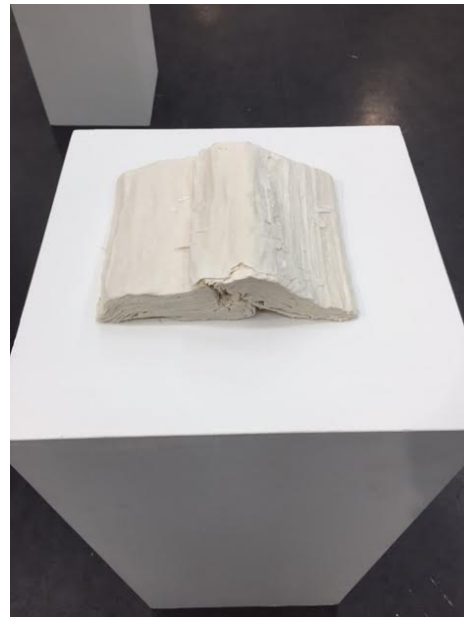
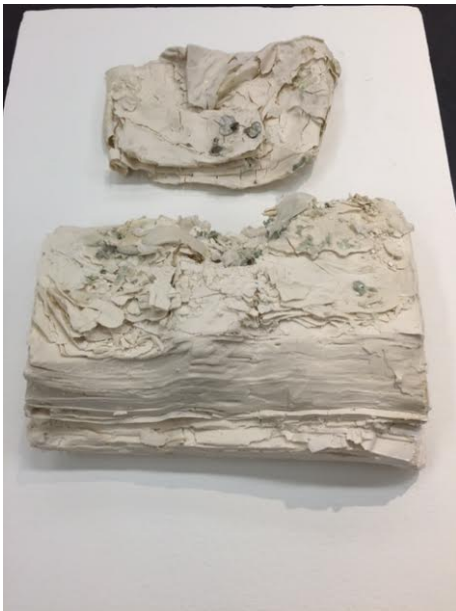
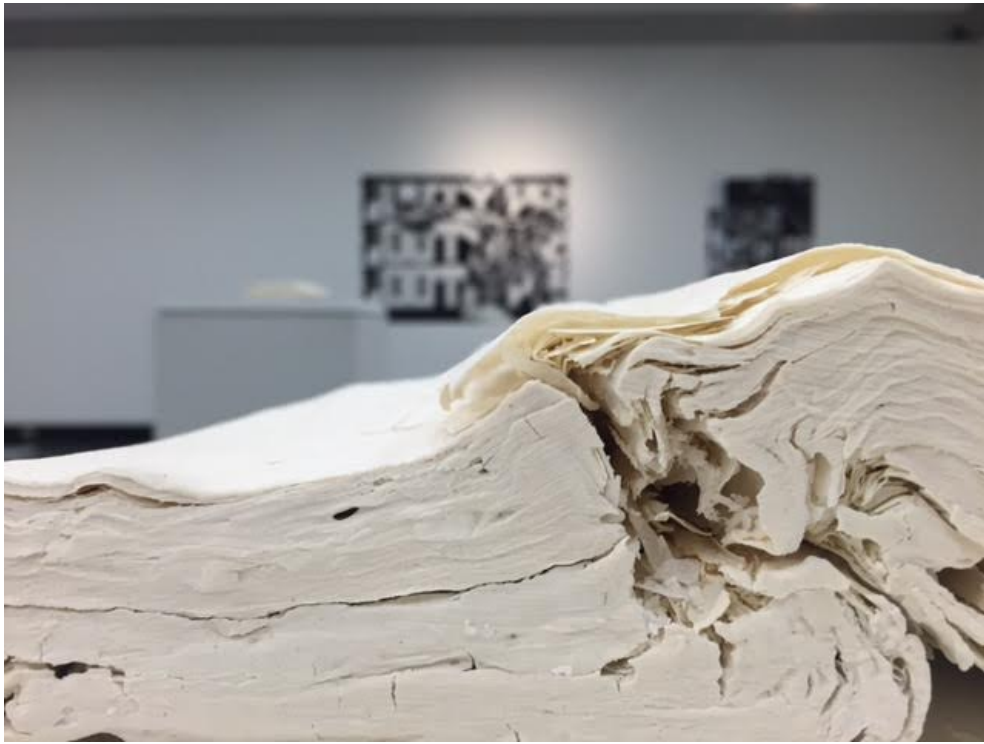
Hongrui Liu
1998's Classroom, 2016
Ink and paper
14 ink drawings 138 x 69cm



Jude Worters
Untitled Objects (From Protective Objects Series), 2016
Fabric, Tape, Haberdashery, watercolour
Variable dimensions



Djurdjica Kesic
Map Dress, 2016
Black Calico
50x 35 x 250 cm



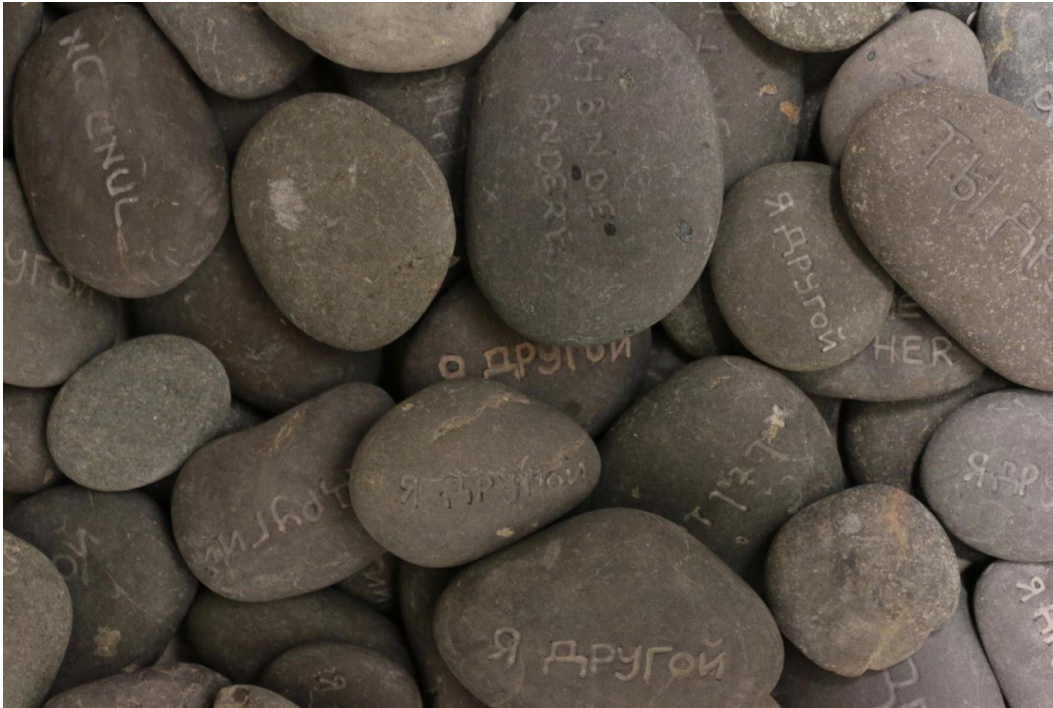
Lesley Walsh
From One State to Another: From Disorder to Renewal, 2016
Second hand books, slip, clay, sea water
Variable dimensions



Rolando Garay-Matziaris
Footy/Pie, 2016 (above)
 Printed Vinyl, Perspex
 84.1 x 118.9 cm



Rolando Garay-Matziaris
A Pub with no Beer, 2016 (below)
 Printed Vinyl, Perspex
 168.2 x 237.8 cm



Lisa Krivitsly
I Am Other, 2016 (above)
River stones
Variable dimensions

Lisa Krivitsly
Memories of Another Land, 2016 (below)
Glass bottles, transparencies
Variable dimensions