CROSS-MENDING

24.11.18 - 15.12.18

The term 'cross-mending' refers to the archaeological process of piecing together fragments of objects that have been dispersed across a site. Through cross-mending, archaeologists can uncover information not only about the fragmented object, but also about the history of a specific site. The exhibition takes 'cross-mending' as its title to describe how we make meaning from the past; what we inherit and learn from those who have gone before us; how we honour and celebrate them; and how we go forward.

Cross-mending presents a multiplicity of voices that speak to the past, present and future, exploring ideas surrounding denied or forgotten family histories, the nature of identity, the role of women, maternal relationships, colonial history, queer history and migratory experiences. Featuring recent works by seven early career artists working or trained in Meanjin/Brisbane, *Cross-mending* prioritises a diversity of perspectives and seeks to foreground marginalised voices.

Callum McGrath's *1897-1991* serves as memorial plaques commemorating a series of unsolved murders of gay men in Sydney in the 1980s and 1990s, in some cases originally recorded as suicides; and a series of suicides by queer men who were patients, lovers and associates of German Jewish physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfield, an early queer rights advocate. Considering the significance of inherited queer trauma, these works honour the lives and deaths of the fallen and question our understanding of progress as a linear trajectory.

The lasting impact of intergenerational trauma also forms the basis of Sancintya Mohini Simpson's contemporary Indian miniature paintings series, *Natal Landscapes*. *Sugar Cane* and *Plantation* tell the stories of the Indian women who were indentured as labourers in Natal, South Africa from the 1860s through to the early 1900s; a fate members of the artist's own family endured. Simpson's emotional processing of this harrowing aspect of her matrilineal heritage is to use Indian Miniature painting techniques, a practice traditionally associated with the wealthy, to preserve these disappearing stories. She explains that her work, "is about an experience with my mother; a healing, a grieving, a release, an understanding."

Christopher Bassi likens his painting practice to the way a writer constructs fiction using lived experience; his works are not autobiographical, but draw on history and heritage to form a personal cosmology that blurs fact and fiction. Deliberately engaging with archetypal modes of painting and the Western art history canon in order to offer a new perspective on it, Bassi's works speak to his reflections on contemporary life and those living between cultures. Using props and staging, his *Black Palm* works employ the iconography of a black palm frond to suggest a sense of place, constructing a layered narrative that plays with time, reality and meaning.

Reflecting on her relationship to her mother, Jessica Enkera's works recreate images lifted from her parents' wedding album, as well as found photos of Princess Diana, all rendered naively in either embroidered textile or in paint on

handmade papier-maché 'frames'. Toying with notions of idealised womanhood, idolisation and the space that the British Royal family occupies within the public imagination for citizens of the colonial commonwealth, Enkera's works usurp aura in favour of humility while connecting her individual narrative with broader histories.

In Robert Andrew's video *Indivisible*, the audience takes on the artist's gaze, looking through a window towards a crowded view of buildings within Naarm/Melbourne's inner-city. As the wind picks up, an Aboriginal Flag becomes visible in the distance. The flag is humble but joyful, defiantly active in the face of built-up, stagnated colonial architecture. A moment of Indigeneity triumphant in a smothering colonial scene, the work is a nod to the fact that the world's oldest living culture is one of survival and strength. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

Hannah Brontë's work utilises powerful language derived from hip-hop culture and vernacular slang. Her large scale banner *Evie* relies on the potential of a phrase to hold multiple meanings, making a statement that poses a question—what does it mean to be the snake or the ladder? Both are loaded symbolically, and Brontë's tongue-in-cheek reference to the childhood board game reels with the sharp wit of a whip-smart comeback.

Deep Water Dream Girl is a cinematic love-letter by Athena Thebus, following the artist and her cousin Ricardo in their mothers' hometown in the Philippines. Together, they explore each of their mythologies, both of which are informed by their Filipina heritage. As Thebus explains, "the drive to make this work really came from trying to imagine what our mestiza language looked like, sounded like, felt like". Earth, water, fire and hot, humid air come together within this diasporic Filipina dreamscape celebrating people, their bodies and the places they come from.

The exhibition is accompanied by two commissioned texts by Leah King-Smith and Hilary Thurlow, which each reflect on the exhibition's themes and provide another dimension to the conversation. Leah King-Smith raises questions about reality and archival 'evidence' through a reflection on her participation in a recent exhibition, while Hilary Thurlow's text challenges singularity and argues for a pluralistic reading of history.

Cross-mending brings together works that see each artist interrogating the histories they have inherited, through blood or culture. At its heart, *Cross-mending* is about finding yourself in your past, wherever that past comes from.

Text by Lisa Bryan-Brown, Katherine Dionysius and Amy-Clare McCarthy, co-curators of *Cross-mending*.

A THOUSAND UNSEEN HELPING HANDS

In a recent exhibition of contemporary women artists (*So Fine*, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, 2018) I was invited to draw from my family background, particularly the influence my Aboriginal mother had in my life, and create a series of photo works that applied the layering techniques I had used to create my break-out series *Patterns of Connection* (1992). Given I had spent the previous year researching 3D animation technologies to create hundreds of "spirit being" manifestations of my mother which in part eventuated in an innovative installation work (*Mill Binna,* PhotoAccess Gallery, Canberra, 2017) I was somewhat dismayed by the provocation to rekindle a technique that was appropriate for the context at the time and which involved painstaking experimentations with mirrors and re-photography. Despite these misgivings, a small series of photo-layered work was born and exhibited along with reproductions of the source photos of Pearl King as a young woman (taken by my father Tom King). Each portrait of Mum was accompanied by a brief hand-written anecdote by my eldest sister, Philippa King.

During early discussions for the *So Fine* exhibition I had proposed my avatar images, since I consider them to be contemporary 'portraits' of my mother, but was met with refusal by the curator who insisted that the avatars were "not real". This implies that the photo documents are real and by this logic are valued even more highly by being categorised and historicised in a national portrait museum context. Ironically, the *Patterns of Connection* work was intended to counter the ownership tactics inherent in Imperialist collecting methods.

I support photo elicitation methodologies in Indigenous research fields because historical documents can lead to cultural empowerment and education. However, if the *Patterns of Connection* work was deeply understood there would be an awareness that the active principle is outside the domain of documentary analysis. Spiritual evocation can certainly be elicited from unedited source material although it is more difficult to make the shift, particularly if the materials are stored within controlled archival filing systems.
The poetic juxtapositions in my layering work are meant to draw attention away from documentary evidence toward contemplative reverence for spirit matter that is multidimensional and thus crosses space and time.

Returning to the avatar debate, the spirit beings I create are metaphors for *aliveness in the present* and constitute a resource akin to Joseph Campbell's "thousand unseen helping hands". Archival "evidence" is a moot point when the measuring instruments limit what is calculable. It's the artist's role and in my case, the Indigenous artist's role, to interrogate deeply entrenched paradigms of judgement by speculating propositions that may be questionable in conventional terms, but are nevertheless methodologically decolonising.

Text by Leah King-Smith

POLYPHONY

Repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time. The singularity of any first time makes of it also a last time.

Polyphony refers to different voices contributing to the same narrative. It was initially theorised in relation to literature, but it can also be seen in other texts like art, film and history. Each voice generates an alternate and often conflicting view to the dominant narrative. The text appears as an interaction of distinct perspectives or ideologies, borne by the different characters. Voices are woven into one strand of time, forming a tapestry of narratives. For each voice there is another which reverberates in harmony, and one which polarises. Moving away from dominant narratives presents gaps, spaces and holes that are filled through redressing existing narratives and opening up new ones.

Why do some histories come to the fore and others stay hidden? Multiple voices play into one larger narrative of conflicting and alternate pathways.

There are moments in time and history that lay forgotten until unearthed by the present. Once found, they revive voices from the past: first time, last time, first time again, last time again. To repeat over and over again in order to assert sublimated voices from the past is to perform polyphonically, however repetition can also leads to the establishment of orthodoxy and dogma. Where can we see the repetitions of dominant historical narratives being played with counter-harmonically? How can repetition be re-used to undo as much as it is used to stagnate?

When telling a story, the narrative is built from one perspective, yet when digging through history, a polyphonic multiplicity is found: a cacophony of voices, some loud, some silent, but all speaking.

Fragments of time are brought forward to bring new narratives into the present from the past. When brought forward they alter present histories that personify issues of the past and renew their positions in the present.

Within this shift in time and narrative, new perspectives are found. Polyphony consists of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody, as opposed to a musical texture with just one voice (monophony) or a texture with one dominant melodic voice accompanied by chords(homophony). We all live within the same linear, calendrical time but within this linearity we live within our own individual times; polyphony is the sound of relativity.

Memories of the past act as ghosts that haunt the present, waiting to return. Here, they come to the fore through the polyphonic mode of redressing history's narratives. This mode amplifies the multiple voices and narratives within a moment in time, making a moment thick and loud.

Demarcations of the past are brought forward in the present. First time and last time, each time a new time, new times from old times, time and time again.

Text by Hilary Thurlow