

*Homeland (Heimat)*



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*Homeland (Heimat)*  
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"*Heimat*", a German word that has no straightforward English translation, often expressed in terms such as "home" or "homeland", is a distinctively German concept that articulates a perception by which people are bound by their birth, childhood, language and earliest experiences. "*Heimat*" can be perceived as a reaction to the onset of modernity, a loss of individuality and intimate community, further alluding to the relationship between people and space, being (apart from house and home) village, city, State, nation, homeland, language or religion—effectively one's 'identity', the totality of the circumstances in which a person grows up. And removed by whatever force from home or homeland and this utopian sense of place, one would experience a sense of alienation and separation, displacement and dispossession.<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Ludewig argues that; "explorations of '*heimat*' aid the socio-historical investigation of any society as repositories of memory and history, escape and confrontation... [and] can be read as signifiers of continuity and disruption, reorientation and return, and as such... mirror values and social change".<sup>2</sup> The works of Basma Al Sharif, Brenda L Croft, Qiu Anxiong, Siamak Fallah and Hayati Mokhtar are connected by their experiences of displacement and social change.

\*

BASMA AL SHARIF, as one of growing phenomenon of globally based Palestinian artists, embodies the reality of the Palestinian diaspora, born in Kuwait in 1983; an early childhood in Brittany, France; then educated in the United States of America, earning a BFA & MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Art & Design. She then went on to teach at The University of Illinois at Chicago, The School of the Art Institute Chicago, and the American University in Cairo. As a USA citizen her art practice has seen her, in what the artist describes as "an endless state of travel", domiciled in Chicago, Cairo, Amman and currently Beirut.

In *The Gift* (2007), a photography and text installation inspired by Marcel Mauss' book *The Gift*, the work documents the artist's donation to and correspondence with a charitable organisation that aids Russian Jews to immigrate to Israel, and a return letter to the charity asking for a "return of the favor", supported by the production of 1,000 black postcards pre-addressed to the Gaza Strip. "Dear Rabbi Eckstein, My name is Basma Al Sharif. I am a Palestinian with USA citizenship, a Palestinian Authority passport and a Gaza ID card. I am glad you enjoyed my gift of \$US350. I humbly ask for a return of the favor. Thank you for welcoming me into your family, I welcome you into mine." Collectively *The Gift*, and her video works *Everywhere Was the Same* (also 2007) and *We Began By Measuring Distance* (2009) negotiate the conditions of diaspora, transience, displacement and nostalgia, incorporating the political turmoil in Palestine as it pertains to the artist's subjective experience. An earlier work still, *Semi-Nomadic-Debt-Ridden-Bedouins* (2005) sets the tenor for these artworks—proffered as a factual statement intertwined into a fictional narrative along a non-linear sequence, being essentially an experiment in story-telling and a study in visually communicating a political statement.

In *Everywhere Was the Same*, frame still pictures of houses long abandoned, cities that have grown and changed in the absence of their original inhabitants, with the sound of clicking slides, together with extracts from a speech by Palestinian leader Haidar Abdel-Shafi and a heart-wrenching song by the Lebanese diva Fairuz (Nouhad Haddad), structurally acts as a precursor to *We Began By Measuring Distance*. This latter work, commissioned by and presented at the 2009 *Sharjah Biennial*, presents an unfolding narrative of history, tragedy and the complication of Palestinian nationalism. Visually poetic, with long still and moving frames shifting between real news imagery and fictional images of landscapes, cityscapes or book illustrations, an

Arabic voice-over narrative (subtitled in English) and swirling music by the famous Egyptian singer Abdel-Halim Hafez's *Qariat el-Fingan (The Fortune Teller)*, *We Began By Measuring Distance* is neither bombastic nor didactic which its inherent historical subject matter might otherwise determine in some artists (and has); rather it is understated and restrained, but resonant nonetheless. The work begins with an anonymous group 'playing a game of measurements'. Information is offered innocently such that the viewer might perceive it to be fact, but then these measurements take on a political content, of distances between major international summits concerning Palestine and Israel. The measurements extrapolate ironically; the distance between the cities measured becomes smaller and smaller until we realise that Palestine contains two cities, Gaza and Jerusalem, which lie a mere 78 kilometres apart. Here distance has nothing to do with kilometres – the distance between Palestine and Israel is more significantly political. Thus both this anonymous group and the viewer are perhaps 'measured' themselves, as the work explores an ultimate disenchantment when the imagery fails to communicate the tragic – Al Sharif looks for answers in places where facts are useless, where measurements are interchangeable, "since history has failed us and the availability of facts has gotten us nowhere, the possibility for hope today is first admitting disillusion."<sup>3</sup>

The subsequent narrative shift into "the Virgin Forest" signals an alternative escapist perspective, another imagined space, and here Al Sharif further advances a sense of disillusionment, suggesting a "desire to escape boredom and/or tragedy through fantasy and to believe in something unbelievable, even while always being aware of its un-believability"; a lie even.<sup>4</sup> In a visually mesmeric and disjunctive sequence, accompanied by the music of Abdel-Halim Hafez's *The Fortune Teller*, the theatrical gyrations of jellyfish in an aquarium morph into white phosphorus shells exploding over Gaza City in December 2008. The viewer must somehow reconcile this correlation of phosphorous bombs with aquatic life, the political with the poetic. The artist is unequivocal. "I wanted to take images that I felt had ultimately betrayed me in their uselessness to change the course of events for Palestinians, to reveal their uselessness, make obvious their ineffectiveness and remind myself that a phosphorous bomb and children running away from attacks are nothing more than pixels or grains on plastic and that this material could be used to make pleasantly synchronised aesthetic footage."<sup>5</sup> The final scene of *We Began By Measuring Distance* reveals the artificiality of these images, offering no answers, resolving no problems, ultimately failing at representing tragedy, simply rendered two-dimensionally. The final subtitles read, "after some time, we began to have the distinct feeling that we had been lied to. That we, indeed, had not rested at all, and that our measurements had left us empty handed".

Alexandra Ludewig, in 'Home Meets Heimat' examined what this notion of "*heimat*" might reveal in a contemporary Australian or a wider context – "in addressing the dispossession of indigenous peoples and the removal and dislocation of Aboriginal children from their homes and families, the political nature of a home-grown [notion of *heimat*] debate cannot be ignored."<sup>6</sup> The onset of European colonisation and immigration to Australia since 1788 and its affects upon the indigenous peoples and their culture has long been discussed and analysed over time to the extent that it is now ubiquitous in the social consciousness of the nation. Historical analysis has been further challenged by the "History Wars" of recent years and its polemic debate over interpretations of the colonisation of Australia and its impact upon indigenous people, and subsequent deliberations over national identity and ideological extremities – further agitated by the 2007 federal government's policy of Intervention in Northern Territory and Prime Minister Ken Rudd's Apology to indigenous Australia in February 2008 – both recalling a national history of eugenic policies well into the twentieth-century.

BRENDA L. CROFT is from the Gurindji/Mudpurra peoples from Kalkaringi/Daguragu in the Northern Territory, Australia. Her photo series *west/ward/bound*, an "ongoing love letter" to her parents, is drawn from her father's collection of belongings left behind after his death, a "clutch of slides... tiny gems, special treasures" found in the bottom of a box; "acting as a telescope to yesteryear... bittersweet moments of my parents newly married lives". The Kodachrome originals, "little scratched and faded envelopes of light, these markers of before, sentinels of somewhere else... Because bits of me are imbedded in them, like DNA" unequivocally encapsulate the notion of a remove from "the innocence of times from before I was even considered".<sup>7</sup> In their contemporary presentations, reworked into large cinema-type banners, the words "departure", "caravan", "west/ward/bound" and "east/west" are 'ghosted' into the surface area, presenting a conjecture or contemplation into their meaning. (The words also act as the images' titles. In *Caravan*, Croft has additionally inserted into the image, acting like a veil or transparent curtain, her memory of, which also doubles as an artist statement, discovering the slides and family outings, in a red typewriter font, like a diary entry.)

Given a vernacular reading of 'west', 'ward' and 'bound' to suggest journeying into the 'great unknown', an act generally circumscribed with an optimistic, positive sense of purpose and outcome, that is 'progress', then conversely what can be imagined as left behind advances a perception of regret, a memory of a lesser place and time. But here Croft imbues the work with a resounding personal family narrative. The words "west, ward, bound" relate to her father being an example of a 'civilised/assimilated' Aboriginal man; 'west' as in westernised, and literally undertaking a journey heading west after his wedding; 'ward', her father being a ward of the State and Commonwealth during the first decades of his life; and 'bound' by the laws of his time that negated his rights and many other aboriginals. In the image *west/ward/bound*, the original taken in 1959, her father stands next to the latest model Holden, and in the background is a recent addition to Ansett Airlines, a Lockheed Electra passenger plane—both denoting modernity, national growth and success (of journeying). 1959 also happened to be the year that Albert Namatjira, perhaps Australia's "best known painter" died. Given his fame as an artist, Namatjira became the first Northern Territory Aborigine to be freed, in 1957, by the federal government from the restrictions of its discriminatory legislation that made him a ward of the State. But this didn't bring him freedom. Embroiled in controversy he soon died a 'broken man'.

*She'll be right, mate: Strangers in a Strange Land* extends the concerns/themes of *west/ward/bound*, not only of the dislocation of indigenous people (again utilising the photographs of the artist's father—who as Croft describes in her artists statement for this series—"was effectively a displaced person in his own country, taken away from his homeland in the desert country of the Northern Territory when only an infant"), but also in reference to the thousands of displaced post-Second World War Europeans who left their shattered homelands to work in Australia on the famous Snowy Mountain Hydro-Electric Scheme, one of the major global post-War projects of the 1950s. Much like *west/ward/bound*, these photos are of, "another age when everyone and everything seemed to be bathed in golden light... new beginning... new times". But additional to experiences of displacement and social change here, is a further resonating force, one of "sad irony" as these "New Australians" were working on a project, "that devastated the homelands of many indigenous nations, who had been driven from their country long before".<sup>8</sup>

For Croft the notions of 'home' and 'homeland' are questionable, the context of 'home' for displaced indigenous people always being fluid perhaps, even an "intangible concept". Croft professes "different elements of home in my head"—the home of her childhood when her family was "whole", in a political sense in inner-city Sydney in the mid-1980s/early 1990s, being her father's Gurindji country in the Northern Territory, and now where she lives, in Adelaide with her partner—a "halfway point between east and west", suggesting perhaps both a literal and metaphorical equilibrium or balance between 'repository of memory' and 'home'.<sup>9</sup>

Cultural-historical investigations of disruption and social change, or the loss of individuality from the onset of modernity, no less prevalent in contemporary Malaysia, China and Iran, are profoundly imbued in the works of Malaysian artist Hayati Mokhtar, Chinese artist Qiu Anxiong and Iranian artist Siamak Fallah. Malaysia gained its independence—“*merdeka*”, from Great Britain in 1957 in the midst of the communist insurgency of The Emergency. In the short period since it has experienced major upheavals, not unlike a number of its Southeast Asian neighbours. Political and racial ruptures in 1969 led to a New Economic Policy for “*bumiputra*” Malays (sons of the soil), a socio-economic distortion that now seems to be inflaming tensions yet again amongst the Indian and Chinese communities who consider themselves disadvantaged and dispossessed, and socio-cultural ruptures caused by the rapid onset of modernisation from Mahathir’s “*Wawasan 2020*” (Vision 2020) policy intending to propel the country from the Third World into the First, further accelerated by the onset of globalism, have resulted in seismic changes in rural and urban areas, the loss of indigenous and other minority cultural expressions and lifestyles, a loss of architectural heritage and a neutering homogenisation of regions into ‘cyber-cities’.

HAYATI MOKHTAR, as artist-interlocutor, unaffectedly records with a surgical nostalgia the loss of a past time and place, the assault of modernisation transforming a sense of utopia, like the irrepressible Malaysian jungle swallowing an abandoned house, under the prescript of ‘progress’. *Penawar* records the clearing-out and closing-up of a family home built in 1930 for a wealthy businessman, in Ayer Itam, Penang. Since that time successive children and grandchildren were born in the house and it was the setting for many family weddings, parties and social gatherings to which public figures of the time were often invited—Malaysia’s first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman and second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak were frequent house guests, as was the then Governor-General of Malaya, Sir Malcolm McDonald. Located away from the largest city Georgetown, ‘Penawar’ also provided a place of refuge for family and friends during the Japanese occupation of Malaya. The house thus stands as a memorial—the recording of its closing effectively generates a wider enquiry into the historical shifts and changes that Malaysia has seen as a whole, addressing both the country’s colonial past as well as the attendant implications of its recent economic growth. With Penang being gradually superseded by Kuala Lumpur as a commercial centre and after the death of the owner’s second wife, the estate needed to be redistributed and road-widening plans still threaten the house with demolition.

The closing-up events are played out across two screens, one showing the interior of the house in a series of slow tracking shots, the other in a single static wide-shot its exterior. This exterior view, by placing the house in its degraded context, provides a counterpoint to the interior view which witnesses the personal aspect of a life ending, the dissolution of a world, one characterised by a privileged, leisurely way of life set amidst gracious surrounds and conducted in a distinctly British style. The importance of the house’s historical context becomes evident from this exterior view—the continued existence of such buildings acts not only as a repository of an undeniable public legacy—albeit one underscored by a colonial past—but also they crystallise a realisation in the viewer of the sheer haste with which so many towns and cities have been transformed by development and its progeny, greed and dispossession, corruption and alienation.

Given this seemingly unstoppable process of erasure Hayati Mokhtar essentially poses the question, if these structures do indeed provide ‘us’ (contemporary Malaysians) with vital markers to help anchor pasts and navigate futures, then might not their disappearance mean that not only a clear sense of personal direction might be lost but ultimately a coherent sense of self? In extending Lucy Lippard’s quote—“our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography... the culture of any nation is unintentionally reflected in its ordinary vernacular landscape”, Mokhtar proposed that this “transformation could in fact engender a metaphorical form of exile: the impossibility of my returning to the places and landmarks that hold meaning for me and my estrangement from what has replaced them means that I have been effectively cast out—in not recognising where I am I not only lose my bearings but also my sense of completeness and rootedness, my sense of belonging.”<sup>10</sup>

In noting that the past colonial atmosphere evoked in *Penawar* is significant, Mokhtar continues, “given that Mahathir’s Malaysian-centric view of the nation encouraged not only rampant development but also a reclaiming of ground from the clutches of an imperial past. [And] ironically, in trying to regain an authentic sense of identity through the denial of the inherent complexity of what it means to be ‘Malaysian’, what in fact was created was a double lack. And to continue in the same vein, (to paraphrase Lippard) by similarly ignoring the way in which a ‘hybrid space can be seen as a shelter between cultures’, what emerges is a landscape of longing.”<sup>11</sup>

This tone is maintained in *No. 55 Main Road*, the address being the site of ‘Uncle’ Chang Ching’s shophouse in a rural Malaysian village in the abandoned mining area around Ipoh, confronted by the ubiquitous assault of modernity and ‘the motor car’. While there is a connection with *Penawar*, (being another home, though ‘*Penawar*’ is somewhat aristocratically named and positioned), the address implies the dominating presence of a main road. In *Penawar*, ‘the road’ (and therefore ‘the car’) is a threat to the house but unseen by the viewer. In *No. 55 Main Road*, though again one doesn’t see ‘the road’ its potential force of invasion and displacement is felt, if not marginally by the momentary light reflections of cars and trucks that are speeding by, then quite overtly by the omnipresent sound of traffic. A centre screen presents a single static shot of ‘Uncle’s’ living room and another screen to the side reveals details of that living room as well as spaces that are glimpsed in passing in the other two screens, such as the kitchen to the back of the shophouse, while the third screen presents an exterior milieu of derelict and decaying homes and businesses adjacent to ‘Uncle’s’ domain. By reading horizontally across the screens one image broadens and expands upon another such that there is a sense of simultaneity, as well as succession. Mokhtar finalises her rationale for *No. 55 Main Road*, “In another parallel with *Penawar*, [this work] focuses upon the process of transition whereby... we see both the persistence of the personal space, the daily ritual and its fragility in juxtaposition: hard up against the ungovernable forces of the outside world.”<sup>12</sup>

QIU ANXIONG was born in Chengdu, Sichuan province in China, in 1972. After studying painting at the Sichuan Art Academy, quite progressive for its time in embracing modernist painting and the Western avant-garde art, he undertook postgraduate study (for six years) at the University of Kassel, in Germany, in 1998. Though having a Western focus in his studies in China, this social and cultural remove left him with the feeling of being “culturally disconnected from the Western culture of his surrounds”<sup>13</sup> and isolated. Enveloped in his Western surrounds, Qiu experienced a strong realisation of his Chinese heritage and ethnicity, and turned to classical Chinese texts and philosophy – Buddhism and Confucianism, poetry and supernatural tales in response. His cultural stance further developed in this self-constructed environment, exhorting a desire for his contemporary Chinese artists to become responsible for preserving their cultural heritage and contemporaneity (then somewhat appropriated by the likes of Saatchi and Sigg, amongst others) and “spiritually vigilant”. It was during this time that Qiu developed his personalised articulation of modernist oil painting – while related to traditional Chinese ink and wash landscape painting, it eschewed that tradition’s caricature and distortions. From this background Qiu Anxiong conceived his major work – *The New Book of the Mountains and Seas*, which was presented at the 2006 *Shanghai Biennale*. An extraordinary ink-wash painting animated video, *The New Book of the Mountains and Seas* depicts “a world of fantasy and of curious places undergoing dramatic transformation”,<sup>14</sup> based on a classical Chinese text presenting a world view of geographical and scientific knowledge. Utilising the original as the basis for his meticulous constructed narrative (necessitating over 6000 brush and ink paintings), he presents a prophetic and visionary perception of our contemporary world, one that persists in his following animated and realtime video artworks.

*Nostalgia* (2008) is an unhurried meditative work comprising six videos of varying lengths, filmed in and around his hometown of Chengdu, ten years after he left for Germany in 1998. The total disparity between rural

Chengdu and cosmopolitan Shanghai – where he had been living for five years upon his return to China – was as profound as that experienced when he arrived in Kassel; “I left my hometown in 1998, and then lived in Shanghai after coming back from Germany. So I’m always a person away from home, and even when I come back ‘home’, I can’t find that hometown in my memory. And Shanghai is also a strange city for me. I filmed this work in Chengdu. It’s my hometown, and also not my hometown.”<sup>15</sup>

In his previous works Qiu Anxiong contemplated contemporary issues of “rampant modernisation, animal plague pandemics and messianic political ideologies”.<sup>16</sup> But in *Nostalgia*, Qiu sought to film a different time-and-motion contemplation – after so many years of absence he wanted to explore and ruminate upon the idea of ‘home’ and ‘homeland’, and discover “that hometown in my memory”. “‘Nostalgia’ is natural born for ‘homeland’, ‘homeland’ is a dream for all the people who have nostalgia. This work is deliberately different from my animation work. I have made a similar video work, *Jiang Nan Poem* (2005), it’s also still and meditative. *Nostalgia* explores the relationship with time and movement of vision, as did *Jiang Nan Poem*.”<sup>17</sup> The six video works each hold their static gaze upon commonplace rural landscape settings – farmers burning grass in a field, an abandoned and an operating factory, mountains, two people walking along a road, a pond, a river, a bamboo grove, a suburban street; sun, snow, overcast, smoke – eliciting a meditation upon classical Chinese landscape painting and a detached quiescence of an uninterrupted stillness upon his (or our) surrounding world. In *Nostalgia*, “Qiu doesn’t give us a sense of the world in transformation, as much of the discussion about contemporary China points out to us. If anything, *Nostalgia* acts as an antidote to the continual forward momentum of progress. He is more interested in considering the human impact of change, and asks us to consider the present not just in the context of the recent past, but within a much longer narrative, encompassing both the historical and the literary. He is interested in the possibility of a human history. His is a poetic and intellectual position, which understands history as being defined beyond the narrative of the contemporary situations in which we find ourselves.”<sup>18</sup> Qiu’s subscription to Buddhist/Confucian philosophy reinforces an implicit demand upon the viewer; “As modern human beings, we are always looking for something more and something new. We are not really sensitive to our surroundings. We want to see many things, and hear many sounds.”<sup>19</sup> After filming *Nostalgia*, a major earthquake ravaged Sichuan province in May 2008, killing more than 70,000 people, made homeless many millions more, and devastated a countryside of towns and villages.

SIAMAK FALLAH is a refugee from Persia (Iran) who lives in ‘exile’ as a consequence of his spiritual belief in the teachings of the Bāhā’ī faith. Bāhā’īs are still persecuted in many Islamic countries, as their religious leaders do not recognise Bāhā’ī as an independent religion; rather as apostasy from Islam – and the most severe persecutions have occurred in Iran, even before the Iranian Islamic Revolution via Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. Siamak Fallah was born in Firouzy, Pars, in 1966. He left Iran illegally, lived in Lahore, Pakistan during 1984-85, and arrived in Adelaide, Australia in April 1985 as a refugee. He began his artistic activity in 1987, undertaking a Bachelor of Visual Arts in Painting, South Australia School of Art, from 1994 to 1998. He wandered between Australian cities after that time – Alice Springs in central Australia in 2000 working with the Utopia indigenous community, he lived in Melbourne pursuing his writing between 2001-4; then returned to Alice Springs 2004-5, moved to the south coast of South Australia painting 2005-7, and returned to Melbourne writing and making video works in 2007. He is currently studying for his PhD in Visual Arts at the University of South Australia, Adelaide and a Bachelor of Media/Bachelor of Philosophy, University of Adelaide.

Siamak Fallah’s artistic practice, if not his daily life is driven by – “All that I do, all that I am, all that I love and all that I resist, are from my mother tongue.”<sup>20</sup> Displacement and exile are infused in his life and work. He sees these experiences countered with a hope arising from Persian mysticism and Bāhā’ī literature, to give a “voice of optimism and universal human values of resistance, equity, love, beauty and truth”.<sup>21</sup> He sees desire and

love in Persian mysticism as a narrative of 'self' which drives the individual towards a state of 'nothingness', such a state that alludes to personal identity as metaphor, and the context for a counter-discourse to attachment. He considers 'nothingness' an "authentic existence".

Siamak Fallah's ongoing *From my mother tongue* investigation hypothesises that the 'seeker' is on a path, and the path is a methodology which is paradoxical, experimental and in flux. From the mother tongue investigates the nature of the spiritual and explores implications for his practice and the viewer. It is a narrative of dislocation, fracturing and desired reunion, evoking aesthetic ideas and allowing the viewer to conduct a conversation with the works. These associations evoke a sense of familiarity and universality to counter loss, a sense of belonging through connections with memories, objects, places and people in order to maintain a sense of continuity and simultaneously interrupting how one feels about what is being witnessed as real, as an instantiation of the spiritual. This narrative of exile provides, extrapolates and constitutes a nomadology, with the necessary apparatus to move between things (which Fallah has always done in his wanderings as a refugee) in exile and in becoming. In this context of exile, nothingness and nomadology, Fallah thus explores the different spaces of 'being' throughout his work, experimenting with a variety of materials and forms, and always drawing from sacred texts in an attempt to convey a sense of (desire and attraction to) poverty and 'nothingness'.

Siamak Fallah contends in his artist statement that the video work "*I ran from Iran* aims to be truthful about a condition, a confrontation and an illness—[of] being human, degenerate and suffering from [a] "poverty of life".<sup>22</sup> At the time of making this work there was the media-inspired hysteria that enveloped Australia (currently being re-enacted under another government and a new international refugee catastrophe), giving the nation a visage of "menacing waves of refugees flooding the Australian shores" (a re-enactment of the "yellow peril" of the 1890s and its attendant White Australia Policy) and that the 'The War on Terrorism' had arrived on Australia's 'doorstep'. Fallah says that this work is "somewhat autistic, in the way that it interacts and depicts the problem—religion, history, war, prejudice, displacement, exile..." It is a *tour de force* performance, a repetitive, autistic and mesmeric ritual (if the latter two adjectives might be placed together) of insistent chanting, word-enuciation, money eating, beard stroking and face shaving, enacted in a domestic bathroom and within a 'domestic' technological framework—simple bathroom lighting accompanied by the irritating sound of an exhaust fan and a low-end video camera—even the razor (when shaving, twice) appeared blunt. The screen is filled with an out-of-focus mouth chanting, "I ran from Iran, I ran from Iran, they ran from Tehran, they ran from Tehran, I ran from Iran..." almost to the point of reaching a melodic torpor. The mouth articulates the word "freedom" (in English and Farsi)—"*azadi*", and "*azad boodan*" ("to be free"). Fallah has said (mockingly); "we [Iranians] went to war to free the people and defend our freedom". The mouth continues, counting in Farsi "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10" and then the reverse, and runs through the Persian alphabet, "*Alef Beh Peh The She Jim Cheh Heh Kheh Dal Zal Re Ze Zeh Sin Shin Saad Taa Zaa Ain Qain Feh Qaaf Kaaf Gaav Laam Mim Noon Vav Heh Yeh Hamzeh*." "The Persian alphabet is a contradiction in the way it is now made up of Arabic and Persian, and it indicates the space where both an Islamic and Arab value is resisted, by accepting it, but only on Persian terms. The result of this struggle and resistance is epitomised by the domination of the Islamic Republic and its 'revenge against Iran'. The Islamic Revolution was not an unexpected event, rather a necessity in the path of social transformation. Middle-Ages religiosity had demolished all opposition and as such the Islamic Republic had become an inevitable historicity waiting to unfold."<sup>23</sup> The mouth further enunciates in exaggerated Farsi, "*gorg-e bush*", a playful mispronunciation on the name of the recent American President (the Farsi literally meaning "be wolf") as George W. Bush continually referred to Iran as "I-Ran". Being Bahá'í Fallah explains; "Why I shaved is because the stereotype Middle-Eastern man is unshaven. Also in Iran at the time when I was there it was a sign of piety to have a hairy face. It was anti-Revolutionary if you didn't have a beard. Also in the not-so-distant past when they used to publicly execute Bahá'ís, they (people and the

government agents) would burn the person's beard first, then undress them and walk them around town to the beat of drums and so on, and then kill them. This was one method of course, there were many different ways of killing, but shaving off a man's beard was a form of humiliating them at the time."<sup>24</sup>

While the religious majority of Iran is Shiite, they are a minority in the greater Islamic world. During *Muharram*, Shia Islam's celebration of the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala when Imam Hussain ibn Ali, the grandson of the Islamic prophet Muhammad was killed, their grief is expressed by way of "*sine-zani*" (beating the chest), "*zangir-zani*" (beating oneself with chains), and "*tage-zani*" or "*qama-zani*" (hitting oneself with swords or knives). Fallah's torturous act of shaving his beard ironically determines some connection with his faith's oppressors' self-inflicted devotion of *Muharram*. "I wasn't thinking of *Muharram* but I had thought about throat cutting and vulnerability in that way. *Muharram* is a sacred time for Shia Muslims! I wasn't engaging that but I can see how it is connected. Iran was (and is) on a *Muharram* lock-down, 24/7. *Muharram* and is still like that ideologically."<sup>25</sup>

Longing, alienation, separation, displacement, dispossession and disruption, to varying degrees, unite the work of these artists, each inculcated with a deeply felt personal driving force. For Basma Al Sharif, "The political issues that are brought up obviously have to do with my heritage as a Palestinian, but I don't always feel like the focus of the work is solely [about that]... 'homeland' is not a place and being Palestinian is not an identity but a cause, and for me personally it is a cause that did not present itself as a choice, but a necessity... I am simply interested in human rights for individuals whose heritage is Palestinian... I am interested in the human condition."<sup>26</sup>

Nearly half a century after the photos were taken of her parents, Brenda Croft, *west/ward/bound* determines some degree of rapprochement—"Now I'm in Adelaide, living here, the 'halfway' point between east and west... *west/ward/bound* is my ongoing love letter to my parents, to this place, this city, and I thank the traditional custodians for watching over my parents as they travelled across the country, leaving one life behind and entering another, over a lifetime ago, an earlier age",<sup>27</sup> whereas with *She'll be right mate: Strangers in a Strange Land*, Croft's imagery reverberates with "echoes of injustice... within the long since ruptured landscape and empty structures, redolent with the aura of another time, other places, other histories".<sup>28</sup>

The catalytic moment for *Penawar*'s conception for Hayati Mokhtar, her experience of longing, or "*rindu*", was in positioning the work as a questioning of, in asking the viewer, "what can grow on this site of loss?" "Perhaps, rather than trying to pin down to a specific catalyst or one instigating moment it would be more accurate to consider the work in relation to my reaction to a series of experiences. The potential for this piece had already existed in me, because the dismantling of 'Penawar' was in many ways a re-enactment of the fate of certain places and houses from my past... And then, progressively, as a persistent sense of—a condition to which I could ascribe the word—'longing', the Malay word for it being "*rindu*", a desire infused with a gentle melancholy... The making of the work *Penawar* presented me with a subsequent means, a vehicle, with which to confront this past... It provided a method of encountering the moment again but this time armed with the capacity to sublimate the loss, to compensate or even go beyond it. And the name—how strangely apt. 'Penawar', 'Panacea'.<sup>29</sup>

With the changing of the address from "Main Street" to "Jalan Besar" ("Uncle's electricity bill is addressed to him at Main Street whereas the Council Notice refers to it as Jalan Besar) can be seen in the context of the erasure of Malaysia's colonial past. Mokhtar contextualises this in her statement for *Penawar*, establishing a

firm connection with the second work. “The re-naming of streets, for instance, was an understandable reaction to a chapter in the country’s history that was in itself profoundly destabilising—but, ironically, in trying to regain an authentic sense of identity through the denial of the inherent complexity of what it means to be ‘Malaysian’—what is in fact created is a double lack.”<sup>30</sup> Another factor (that one would only refer to only obliquely perhaps) in reference to Malaysia’s multi-racial complexity, is that the disregard for these shophouses might not be helped by the fact that they are predominantly Chinese owned.

For Qiu Anxiong, his artistic stance is one of simplicity, embodied in *Nostalgia*: “In some works, we try to bring a certain message or belief across. However, this time around, I feel that the pictures themselves need no explanation. The mere existence of this place captured on film is strong enough to tell a story.”<sup>31</sup> “There is no story in this work. It is just like when we are walking on the street, we see many people, you don’t know anything about them; they just come and go. But everyone has their own story, and in the landscape it also happens that there are many stories.”<sup>32</sup> “We can never return to the past, I filmed it and one year later everything thing has already changed.”<sup>33</sup>

Siamak Fallah’s motivations are deeply, personally felt: “The focus of *From the Mother tongue* (within which *I ran from Iran* falls) was to place my work within a broader frame of reference to demonstrate and reflect through this pragmatic placement the friction that constitutes art making in two worlds. Similarly it enabled me to establish that my Persian heritage is inherently a continuity by which I can make communicable my findings... In my early experiences in Persia, where my family were refugees in their own country as a result of their spiritual beliefs, taught me about a gap in society and history. Society by the way of this gap had constituted us as abject beings. So when our house was destroyed and with it my father’s writings, and people were put to death, it served to confirm this gap. These were my early lessons in what constituted the beginning of exile. These atrocities did not define us: my father continued writing and my parents persisted in our education that we are social beings and as such we are responsible in our relation with the world. These are the premises from which I construct my art practice.”<sup>34</sup>

#### Endnotes

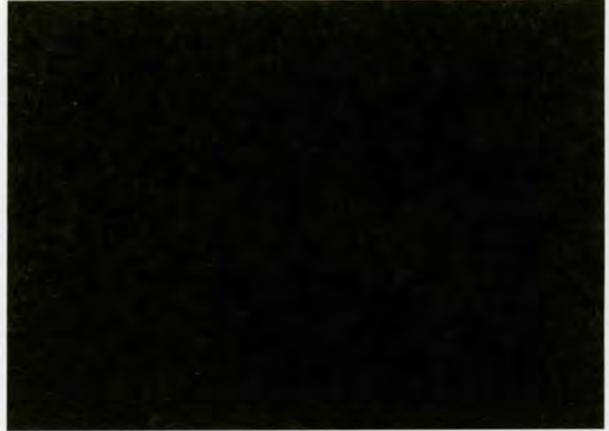
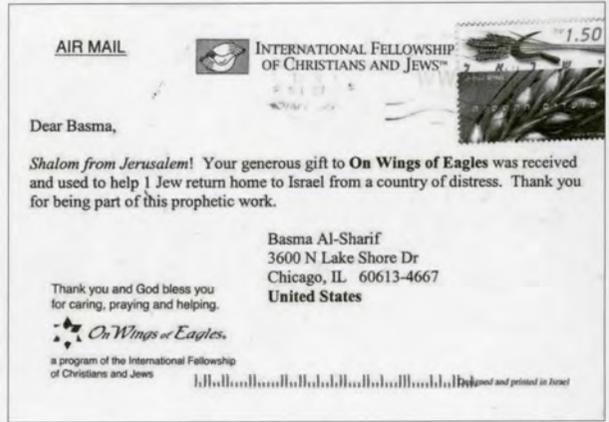
- <sup>1</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heimat>
- <sup>2</sup> Alexandra Ludewig, <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0708/12-ludewig.php>, 'Home Meets Heimat'
- <sup>3</sup> Basma Al Sharif email, 17 August 2009
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Alexandra Ludewig, *op cit.*
- <sup>7</sup> All quotes are from Croft's artist statement which also is the text overlaid on the work *Caravan*
- <sup>8</sup> Brenda Croft, artist statement, *She'll be right mate: Strangers in a Strange Land*
- <sup>9</sup> Brenda Croft, email 9 August 2009
- <sup>10</sup> Hayati Mokhtar email, 28 August
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Hayati Mokhtar, artist statement, *No. 55 Main Road*
- <sup>13</sup> Aaron Seeto, 'Nostalgia' (catalogue), 4A Gallery, Sydney 2010
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> Qiu Anxiong, email 15 June 2010
- <sup>16</sup> David Briers, 'Qiu AnXiong', *Art Monthly UK*, June, 2009
- <sup>17</sup> Qiu Anxiong, email, *op cit.*
- <sup>18</sup> Aaron Seeto, *op cit.*
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Siamak Fallah, artist statement, *Az Zaban-e Modari (From the Mother Tongue): I Ran from Iran*
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Siamak Fallah email 17 June 2010. It should be noted here that historically there has been much animosity between Persians and Arabs, and some Western confusion that Persians are Arabs, which, as they will tell anyone, they are not.
- <sup>24</sup> Siamak Fallah, *ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> Basma Al Sharif email, *op cit.*
- <sup>27</sup> Brenda Croft, artist statement, *west/ward/bound*
- <sup>28</sup> Brenda Croft, artist statement, *She'll be right mate: Strangers in a Strange Land*
- <sup>29</sup> Hayati Mokhtar, artist statement, *Penawar*
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> David Briers, *op cit.*
- <sup>32</sup> Qiu Anxiong, email, *op cit.*
- <sup>33</sup> Aaron Seeto, *op cit.*
- <sup>34</sup> Siamak Fallah, artist statement, *op cit.*

PLATES || STATEMENTS

*We Began by Measuring Distance:* long still frames, text, language and sound are weaved together to unfold the narrative of an anonymous group who fill their time by measuring distance. Innocent measurements transition into political ones, drawing to an examination of how image and sound communicate history, tragedy, and the complication of Palestinian nationalism. The work explores an ultimate disenchantment with facts when the visual fails to communicate the tragic.

*The Gift:* In 2007, I made a donation to a charity that aids Russian Jews immigrating to Israel. The work documents my donation and correspondence with the organisation, which included a postcard I received from Israel thanking me for my donation, proof of my donation, a letter I wrote to the organisation asking for a return of the favor, and the production of one thousand postcards pre-addressed to the Gaza Strip.

*Everywhere was the Same* is a slideshow of abandoned spaces that carries along the story of two girls who mysteriously turn up on the shores of a pre-apocalyptic paradise. Weaving in and out of fact and fiction, the story of a massacre unfolds only to be silenced by unresolved melancholic nostalgia.



*The Gift*

Top: postcard received from Israel, front and reverse

Bottom: postcard addressed to the Gaza Strip, front and reverse

Right: installation view, Contemporary Art Centre of SA, Adelaide 2009

photography & text installation, inkjet prints & postcards

2007

Photos courtesy the artist



*The Gift*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

16 || 17

plates



INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS™

Dear Basma,

It was such a joy to receive your recent gift of \$350.00 for our *On Wings of Eagles* project. Please accept my sincere appreciation – and my welcome to our *Fellowship* family.

With your gift, you are providing a very real blessing to the Jewish people. *On Wings of Eagles* has helped thousands of Jews emigrate to Israel from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia and other countries in distress. This is not only a wonderful opportunity and an answer to prayer, but the fulfillment of biblical prophecies such as Jeremiah 31:8: "Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth. . . ."

*The Fellowship's* other programs include *Isaiah 58*, bringing life-saving assistance to elderly Jews and orphans struggling to survive; and *Guardians of Israel*, a ministry of practical help and comfort to victims of terror and families living in poverty in Jerusalem and throughout the nation of Israel.

Again, thank you for entrusting your gift to *The Fellowship*. Our pledge to you is that we will use your gift to help return Jews to Israel. God promised Abraham in Genesis 12: 3, "I will bless those who bless you." I trust you are feeling His blessing even today!

With prayers for *shalom*, peace

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, President

Office: 30 North LaSalle St. • Suite 2600 • Chicago, IL 60602-3356 • 800-486-8844 • www.ifcj.org

397

**Receipt for your gift • Please save this receipt for tax preparation purposes.**



INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP  
OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS™  
Mailing center address:  
P.O. Box 96105  
Washington, DC 20090-6105

Basma Al-Sharif  
3600 N Lake Shore Dr  
Chicago, IL 60613-4667

**Thank You for your Gift!**

Date Received:	1/5/2007
<i>Project</i>	<i>Amount Received</i>
On Wings of Eagles	\$350.00
Total Deductible Gift:	\$350.00
Non-Deductible Portion:	\$0.00
Year-to-Date Deductible Gifts:	\$350.00

916238-9 X7A

*The Gift*

left: receipt letter, right: Basma Al Sharif letter

photography & text installation, inkjet prints & postcards

2007

Photos courtesy the artist

15 January 2007

Basma Al-Sharif  
3600 N Lake Shore  
Chicago, IL 60613

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein  
30 North La Salle Street  
Suite 2600  
Chicago, IL 60602

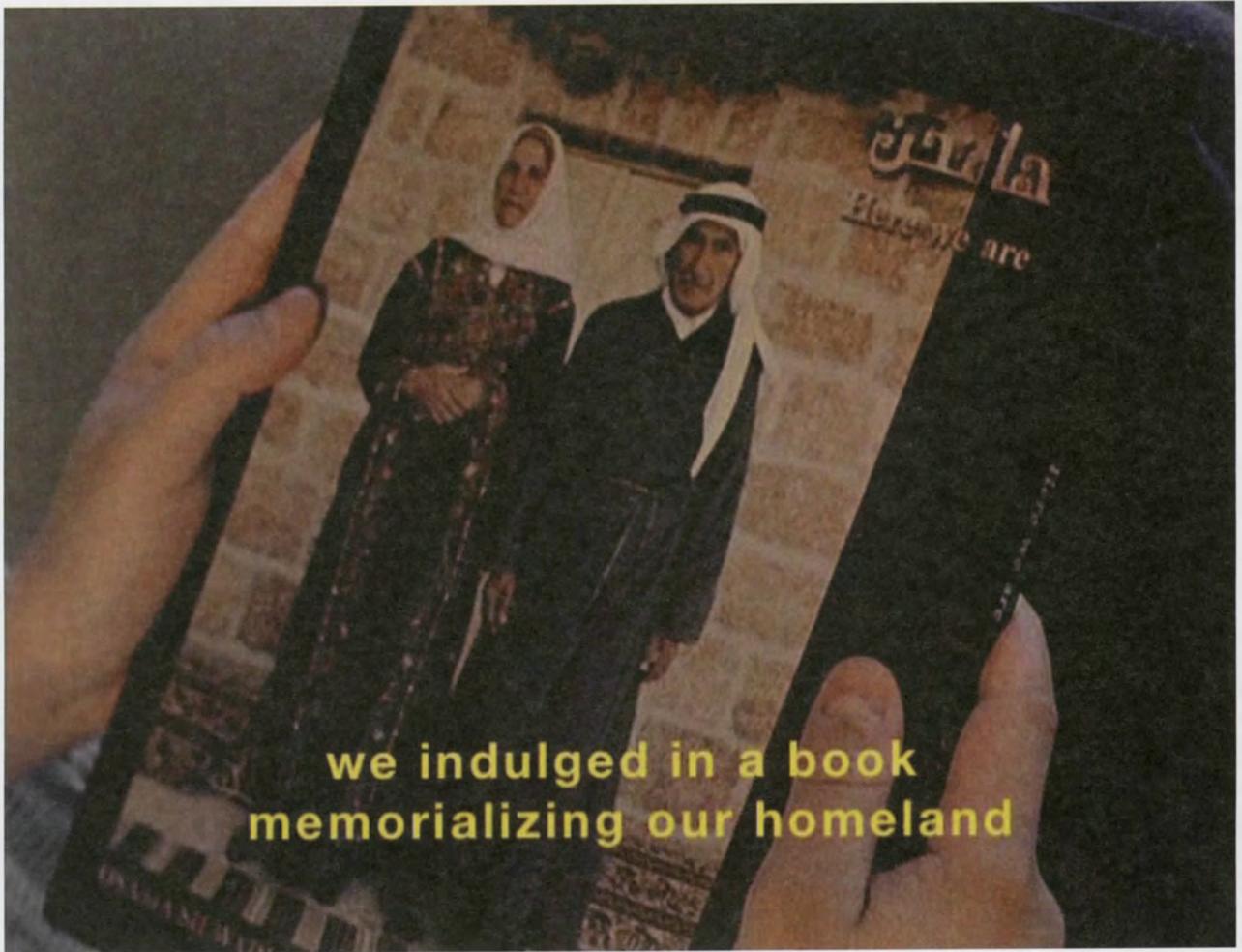
Dear Rabbi Eckstein,

My name is Basma Al-Sharif. I am a Palestinian with US citizenship, a Palestinian Authority passport and a Gaza ID card.

I am glad you enjoyed my gift of 350 US dollars. I humbly ask for a return of the favor. Thank you for welcoming me into your family, I welcome you into mine.

Sincerely,

Basma Al-Sharif



*We Began by Measuring Distance*  
video stills  
2009  
Photos courtesy the artist

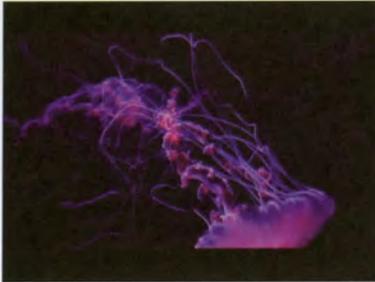


*We Began by Measuring Distance*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

20 || 21

plates



We Began by Measuring Distance  
video stills  
2009  
Photos courtesy the artist



Homeland (Heimat)

22 || 23

plates

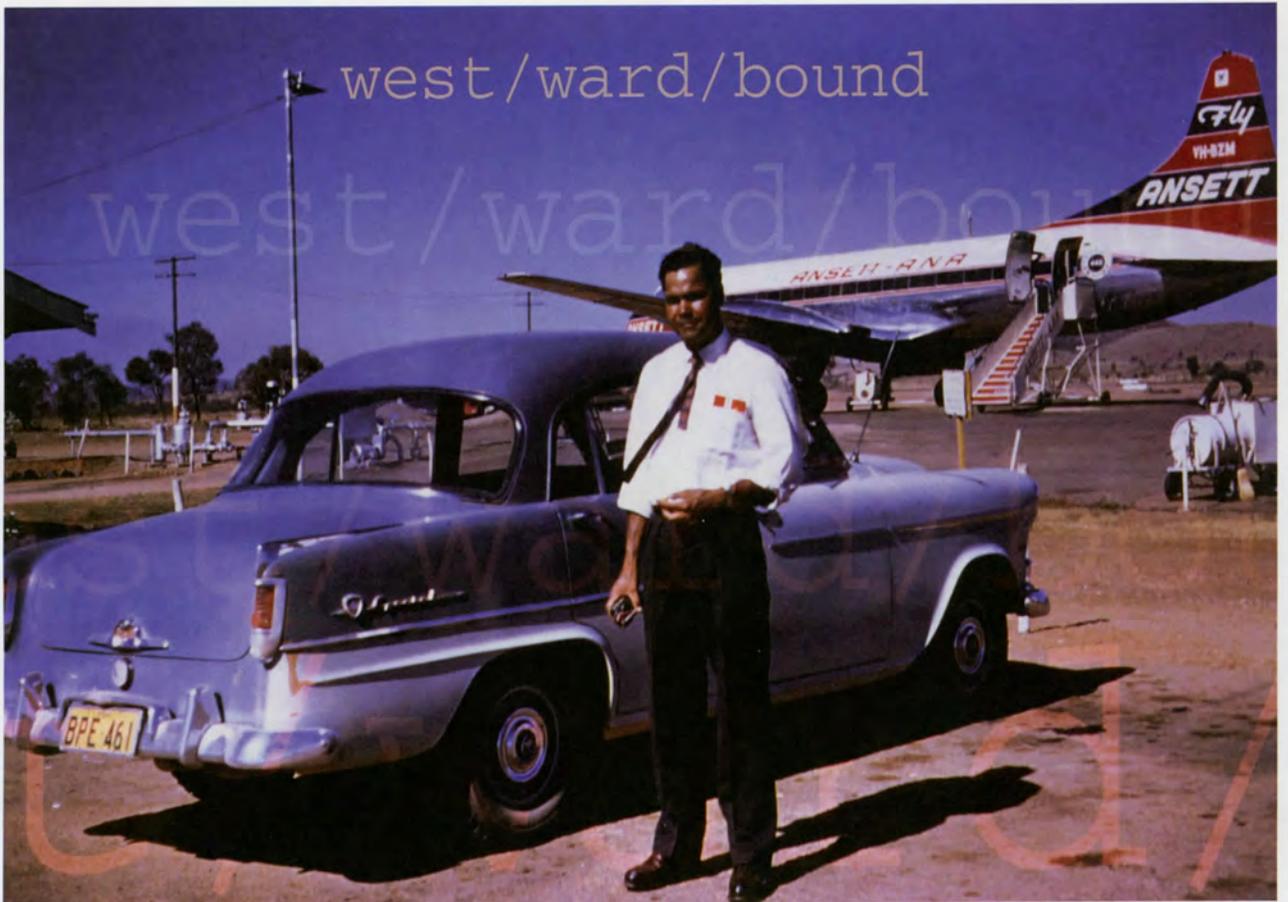
It lay in the bottom of a box, one of those old fashioned boxes that held things like silk stockings. The box had been my father's and I had never seen it before. I didn't see its contents until after he died. Everything he owned at the end of his seventy or so years fitted into one small room. When I opened that oblong box in it lay a pile of black and white photographs, all curled up at the edges, dozens of them, small enough to fit in the palm of my hand, mostly, images of my dad as a young man, long before he met my mother. A sweetly handsome man, still with a trace of the boy he'd been, which remained with him till well into his thirties. Skin and hair dark and shining, glowing almost, even in the shades of black, through tones of grey to white. In nearly every one of those long ago snapshots my father seemed to be in motion: playing baseball, cricket, football; standing proud in his army uniform alongside his mates, slouch hat tilted at a rakish angle, the gentleman ever present; cavorting on a beach somewhere as a make-believe femme fatale; gathered around a piano in a boisterous singalong; smoking a pipe, eyes a-sparkle, in his Uni days. He was always happy back then, it seemed. Nestled amongst these little secrets was a roughly wrapped bundle, which, upon being opened revealed a clutch of slides secured by a useless, perished, red rubber band, which snapped the moment I tried to remove it. I held them up to the weak lamplight, squinting as I tried to make out their contents, these tiny gems, special treasures. Having been so badly stored, it was not surprising to see the skein of spidery veins of dirt and dust etched into the emulsion, irreparably damaged. Still, I didn't mind because the moments that were captured in miniature made my heart ache. There, acting as a telescope to yesteryear, lay the freshly minted, yet bittersweet moments of my parents newly married lives. The moments just before they began the big journey to points unknown, of no return. My mother, deliriously happy, my father contented. Travellers going somewhere, anywhere, where? Big skies, empty brooding landscapes, anonymous bystanders, unknown observers. The colours, darkening or bleaching out, depending on the care taken with these wee bits of film. We always travelled when I was young. One of my mother's favourite weekend pastimes was to go for a drive, anywhere, it didn't really matter, it was just that we were going somewhere, in motion, on the road. We would usually sing, or play 'eye spy', with my middle brother making up impossible, nonsensical clues that only he could decipher. I don't remember when we stopped this familiar ritual, I mean, stopped doing it as a family. Maybe I just got too old and just didn't want to go out with my parents and little brothers, driving aimlessly, it seemed to my youthful arrogance. They used to drive through Queensland when they were courting and my father once told me how it was pretty dangerous back then, being a Black man driving around with a young White woman, particularly in some of those country areas. That's what I mean about brooding landscapes, under ominous skies, someone was always watching, waiting in the shadows. I like the bleached out colours, the innocence of times from before I was even considered. There is an effortlessness in their gaze, their appearance, which lifts me up, wraps my sad heart in warm light, gives me comfort. I've opened up most of my father's boxes, now, the safe distance of years offers respite, but there's still a catch in my throat, a punch in the guts whenever I've been brave enough to open his ugly old brown vinyl suitcase and the aroma of his last clothes, that cloying scent so familiar to the elderly and terminally ill. A potpourri of lavender and mouthwash, sweets, and sour sweat embraces me, squeezes me, squeezes the water out of my skin and down my face. That's why I love these little scratched and faded envelopes of light, these markers of before, sentinels of somewhere else. Because bits of me are imbedded in them, like DNA, my fingerprints are all over them, even before I held them. My father

once said that his only wish when he was young was to travel around Australia on his motorbike, remaining single, being free. Still, I knew how much he loved us. The first journey I remember was travelling across the Nullarbor Plain, when I was four, in our new Holden and caravan. I remember blue skies and dust; insects and splitting my head open, just over the border in South Australia, when a big rock fell on me from on top of a display cabinet at a roadhouse. Blood rushed fiercely down my face on onto my white tee shirt. I remember tasting it, mixed in with the tears streaming down my face. It seemed like everybody travelled in caravans and Holden's back then, that were always two-tone, just like my shoes which had been bought to match my two brothers' shoes. I didn't like them, I wanted girls' shoes, not boys' shoes, but I was told that I'd grow into them. I never did, and learned to fib that they were too small, managing to plead for a pair of Bata Ponytails before my mother caught me out, and I got in big trouble. We used to drive thirty miles to the next town for a special outing to a Chinese restaurant, where we'd all eat chicken and almonds, which is what I thought Chinese people only ever ate. I was shocked when my father ordered curry prawns one night. Often we'd go to the Drive-in, freshly bathed and smelling of talcum powder, dressed in our pyjamas, dressing gowns and slippers, my brothers and me. When we got there, much time would be spent searching for just the right position; not too close to the cafeteria, which always smelt of greasy, many-times-fried generic fowl. My parents selected a position that was near the bathroom but not too close to the projection building otherwise we couldn't see the screen properly. Before the feature we'd play on the swings with the other children, until that magic moment when the feature shuddered into life, lighting up the sky it seemed. Afterwards, Mum and Dad would lay the back seat down and we'd lie on cushions, and I watch the street lights whizz past on the drive home as I nodded off to sleep. I never felt as safe and happy as at that particular moment. Funny how cars and caravans and travelling, being on the road, always made me feel secure, cocooned, protected from the outside world. I felt happy, even when our old dog would lean over the back seat and dribble incessantly down our backs. Summer holidays took on the appearance of a military operation, with clothes and food and toys packed to last us for the duration. The car and caravan would be loaded up, lists ticked off and journeys begun. Departures. Arrivals. Destinations. Stopovers. Rest and recreation. Summer shadows and heat. Cicadas and the smell of wet dog and salty skin are indelibly carved into my memories of those times.

[1999]

Now I'm in Adelaide, living here, the 'halfway' point between east and west, ten years on from those words, nearly half a century on from that embrace atop Mt Lofty. I came here for love too, and want to wriggle myself into the middle of that embrace and feel and smell my father again, see the light of love in my much younger mother's eyes, squeezed tight in ecstasy, newlywed, my father's gaze somewhere on the horizon, who knows way. *West/ward/bound* is my ongoing love letter to my parents, to this place, this city, and I thank the traditional custodians for watching over my parents as they travelled across the country, leaving one life behind and entering another, over a lifetime ago, an earlier age.

[2009]



*west/ward/bound*

Left: *west/ward/bound*

Right: *departure*

digital print on vinyl banner, aluminium sail track

1959/1999/2009

Photos courtesy the artist, Stills Gallery, Sydney and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne

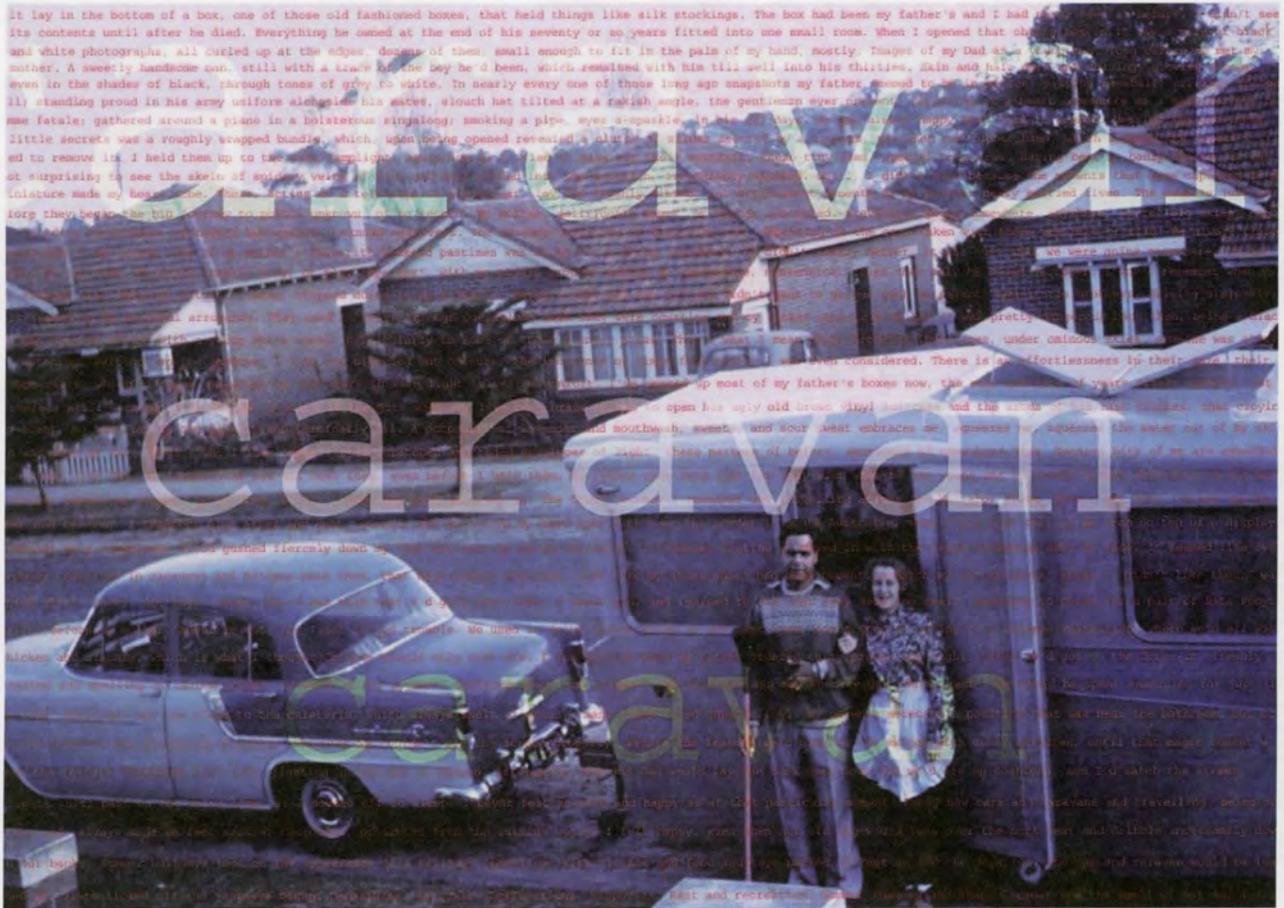


west/ward/bound

Homeland (Heimat)

26 || 27

plates



west/ward/bound

Left: caravan

Right: east/west

digital print on vinyl banner, aluminium sail track

1959/1999/2009

Photos courtesy the artist, Stills Gallery, Sydney and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne



west/ward/bound

Homeland (Heimat)

28 || 29

plates

*She'll be right, mate: Strangers in a Strange Land* relates to many things—dislocation of indigenous people within their own country, partially from the personal perspective of my father's travels across indigenous and government boundaries to the broader context of decimated nations, both here and overseas. His personal story is retold/reimagined through the filter of my eyes, re-presenting a viewpoint of a specific time in his life—leaving university in early 1940s Brisbane to join the army at the end of World War II; working as a cane cutter and railway engineer in Queensland in the late 1940s through to the 1950s; and finally, his gradual relocation southwards to commence work on the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme at the end of that decade and the beginning of the 1960s.

In the decade immediately after WWII thousands of migrants from Britain and many nations throughout Europe came to this country—at the invitation of the Australian Government—to build up the workforce. Labour was scarce and Australia was very much considered under-populated. Migrants came from Britain, Scotland, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain, Germany, Yugoslavia, Latvia and many other countries, whose names, borders and boundaries have been erased, replaced and shifted many times in the half century since, depending on the whim of the authorities of the time. One of the major projects of the 1950s was the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme and it was for this purpose that an enormous number of the “New Australians” emigrated. The diversity of nationalities in this single location represented one of the best examples in Australia at the time, of that over-used catchphrase, “global village”. This monumental scheme aimed to harness the might of the Snowy Mountains river system in a quest to create and generate electric power throughout a vast part of southeastern Australia. It was dangerous work and the saying was that for every mile built in the tunnels, a man's life was lost.

Carving into, blowing up, changing forever the face and shape of indigenous land; ironically it was a time of great harmony for all those involved. A period of innocence underscored their existence, especially for those who had escaped the horrors of war and its aftermath, accompanied expectations of the whole package: new life, new car, new home-sweet-home, set on the quarter-acre block.

This freedom of choice was inconceivable for many, as only a few years before they had fled their devastated homelands in the northern hemisphere. The sad irony was that they worked on a project that devastated the homelands of many indigenous nations, who had been driven from their country long before: the Ngunawal, Yuin, Kurnai, Brabiralung, Ngarigo, Jaimathang, Djilmatang, Krauatungalung, Walbanga: hunters of the Bogong moth, fishers of the river systems, now as devastated as the peoples who lived alongside them. A further irony was my father's involvement in this project, who had more in common with his ‘new’ friends than was realised at the time, as he was effectively a displaced person in his own country, taken away from his homeland in the desert country of the Northern Territory when only an infant. It would be a decade and a half from these original images before he found his family again, and then only being reunited with his mother for less than a month as she was terminally ill. My father's enforced migration mirrored that of his friends and colleagues, working as equals on this scheme, celebrating its sixtieth-anniversary (in 2009).

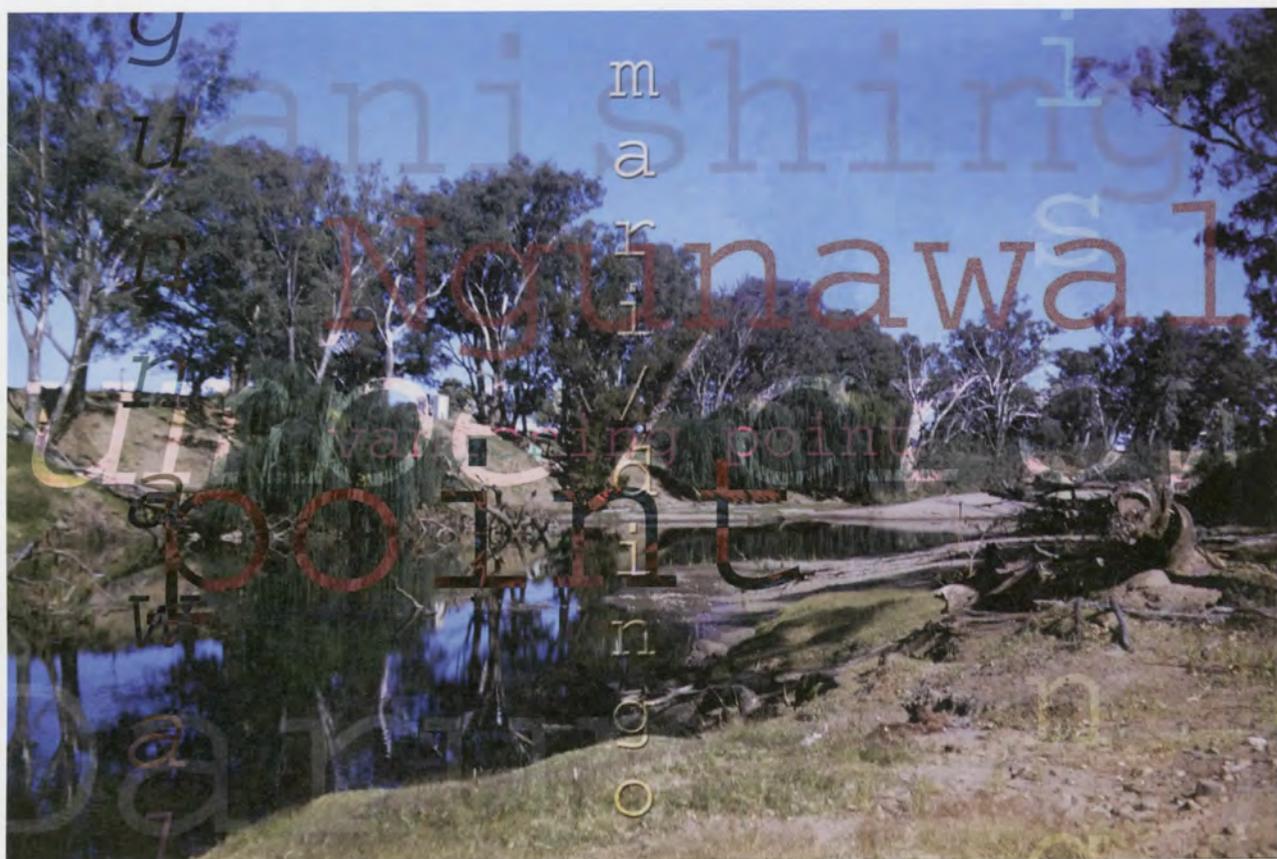
The Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme became (again) a meeting place, high in the alpine country of the Antipodes. The end of the century was so far off that it was impossible to imagine, and few would have wasted time reflecting on something so intangible. This happened years before I was born, but the connections of who I have become began there and then, sixty years ago, before my mother and father met while working on the SMHES a decade later. It was another age when everyone and everything seemed to be bathed in golden light, cast in a slightly Renaissance glow. New beginnings, new Australians, new times.

I imagine there would have been a collective horror if those sweetly naïve, inherently good people from all corners of the earth could have envisaged the less than warm welcome for migrants arriving in Australia in the past decade, or the rejection in many quarters of equal rights for indigenous people within their own land(s). Where once existed hopes and dreams, this has been countered by the rising, rancid tide of xenophobic paranoia, rimmed in redneck-ery, fed by fear, coupled with an embracing of ignorance, a rejection of humanity, a decrying of 'special treatment', a denial of (shared) histories. My mother's own recollections of this time are profound and we returned to the now vanished, or shrunken townships, that held echoes of expectant laughter and anticipation of their future. The connections are many for those involved in projects such as the SMHES. Dislocated from all parts of the country and the globe, torn from their families, they created new families, a brother and sisterhood.

I look at photos of that time and see my father's best friend, a sweet-faced Greek man named Gus, who became my godfather. My mother's best friend who became her bridesmaid, had fled Latvia with her family a short time before. Fresh, virile young men looking laidback and confident; wasp-waisted women wearing horn-rims and broad smiles of lush, red lipstick. Many of those who are represented in these images—whether meeting the camera full-face, or simply bystanders—are present only as images, as fragments of another time. Within the long since ruptured landscape and empty structures, redolent with the aura of another time, other places, other histories, echoes of injustice reverberate.

Ironically, as the continent experiences its worst drought in recorded, written history, the river systems are as shrunken, if not vanished as the towns that were built to reshape them. Ghosts line the dry, cracked riverbanks and the receding water gives up its dead—remnants of many lifetimes ago. These stories are ongoing: there is no beginning, middle or end. Wherever we travel in our future, our shadows cast our individual and collective past, and the shadows of those who came before us.

[1999-2009]



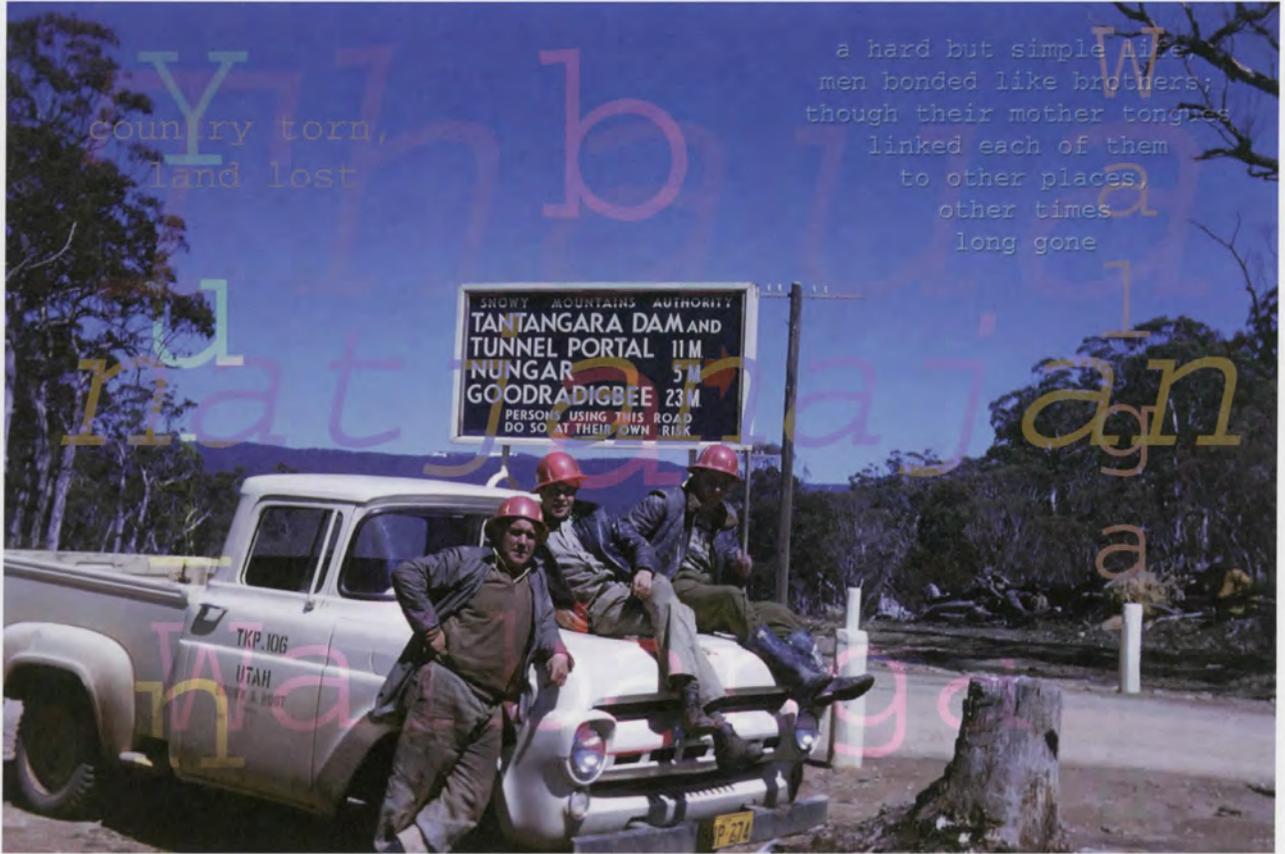
*She'll be right mate: Strangers in a Strange Land*

Left: *Vanishing Point/Ngunawal*

Right: *Yuin/Land Lost*  
archival inkjet prints

1999/2009

Photos courtesy the artist, Stills Gallery, Sydney and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne



country torn,  
land lost

a hard but simple life  
men bonded like brothers;  
though their mother tongues  
linked each of them  
to other places,  
other times  
long gone

*She'll be right mate: Strangers in a Strange Land*

*Homeland (Heimat)*



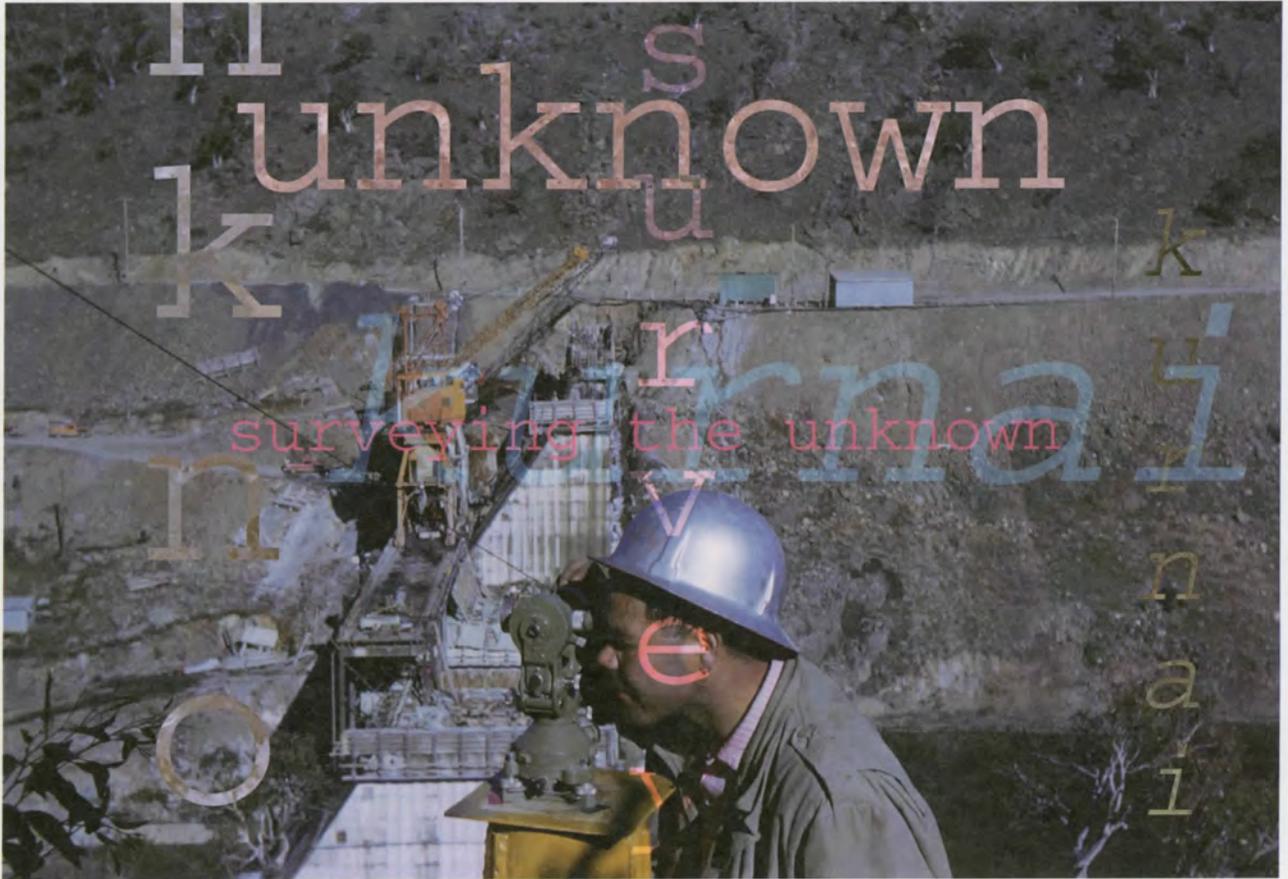
*She'll be right mate: Strangers in a Strange Land*

Left: *Ngarigo/Industry*

Right: *Surveying the unknown/Kurnai*  
archival inkjet prints

1999/2009

Photos courtesy the artist, Stills Gallery, Sydney and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne



*She'll be right mate: Strangers in a Strange Land*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

34 || 35

plates

'AZ ZABAN-E MODARI' (FROM THE MOTHER TONGUE):  
IRAN FROM IRAN

I am a religious refugee from Persia (Iran). I live in exile as a consequence of my spiritual belief in the teachings of the Bāhā'í Faith. Exile is a life affirming experience, when one takes life/existence on in the spirit of joy to overcome oneself. Exile is a life of experimentation. Living in exile is to live in-between spaces where the (visual/or otherwise) order of things known breaks down. Everything is evaluated to make whole these experiences, and this re-evaluation constitutes experimentation. I bring myself to account with my practice, knowing that I am in Australia because of all the Bāhā'ís in Persia who gave their blood for their beliefs and their love for humanity and peace. This is beautiful; this is intoxication; this is drunkenness and ecstasy.

Prints of Mishkín Qalam's calligraphy decorate every Bāhā'í household in Persia. Together with the ancient ruins of Persian city of Estakhr and Persepolis (only kilometres away from my birth place), they compose the first instances of my art education and eventually the mother tongue derived from these early art lessons. In addition, my early experiences in Persia where my family were refugees in their own country as a result of their spiritual beliefs taught me about a gap in society and history. Society by the way of this gap had constituted us as abject beings. So when our house was destroyed and with it my father's writings, and people were put to death, it served to confirm this gap. These were my early lessons in what constituted the beginning of exile. These atrocities did not define us: my father continued writing and my parents persisted in our education that we are social beings and as such we are responsible in our relation with the world. These are the premises from which I construct my art practice.

This work is a reference point: after the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1978-79, one did not have control of one's beard. One could not wear a short sleeve T-shirt for fear of punishment. This was a revolution that the majority of people wanted and supported. I was abject, even during the Shah's reign, because I am not Muslim. At the time I was making this video it was made to look (in the media) that there were menacing waves of refugees flooding the Australian shores and the 'War on Terrorism' was well underway. This work is somewhat autistic in the way that it interacts and depicts the problems of religion, history, war, prejudice, displacement, and exile.

There has been a tension between the need to have escaped Iran and not wanting to have left. Escape is a mindset, physically running away and emotionally never leaving. This conflict plays itself out in the real world and is not an imaginative construct. This video project has sought to deal with a history and explore issues pertaining to the human condition, to produce an artwork that is an aesthetic manifestation of these negotiations and experiences. As part of the installation, amongst other elements there is an Atlas of Encyclopedia Britannica and a compass that draws attention to political geography and volatile global history.

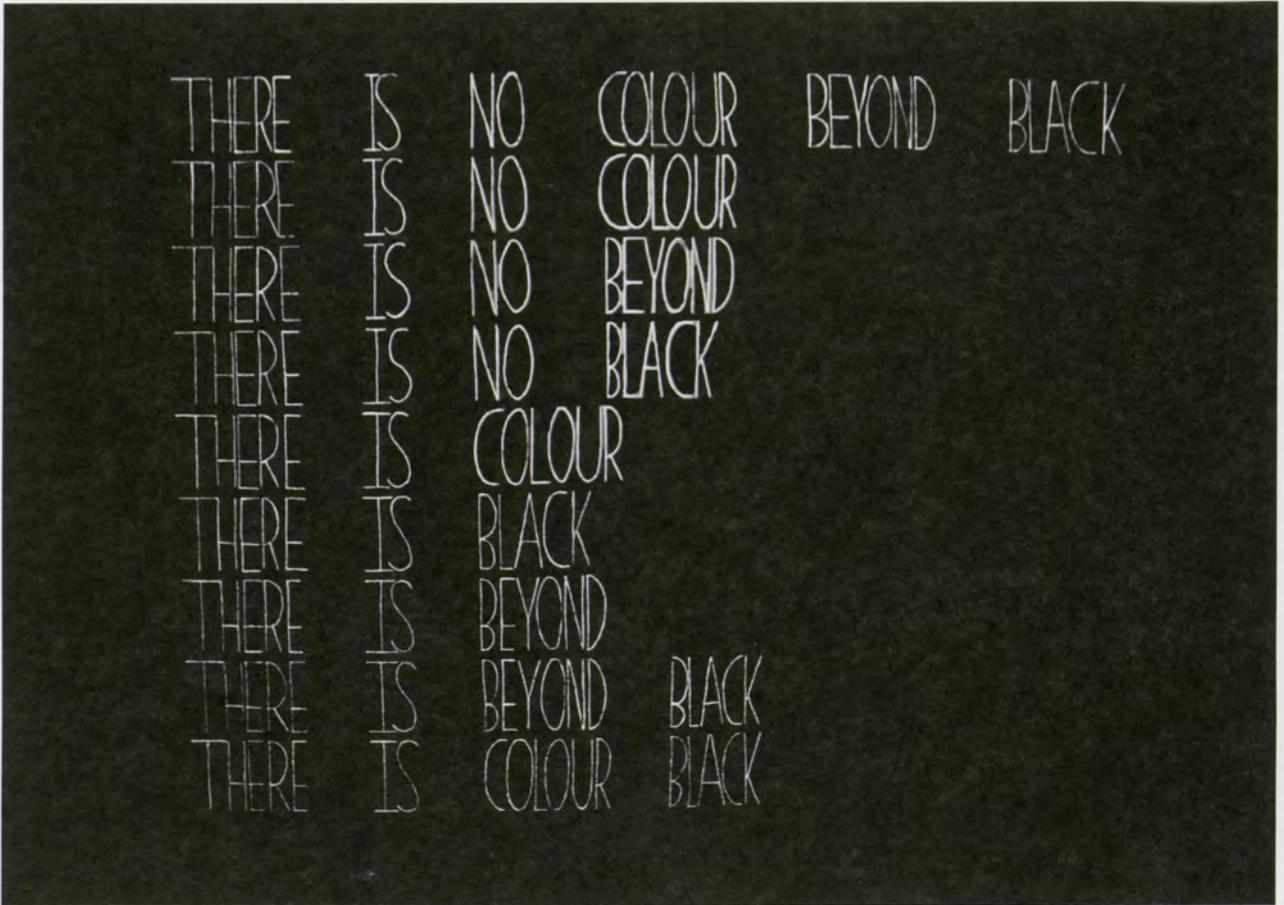
*Iran from Iran* aims to be truthful about a condition, a confrontation, and an illness – being human, degenerate and suffering from 'poverty of life'. The war pivoted on the premise "to preserve the way of our life".

All that I do, all that I am, all that I love and all that I resist are “from my mother tongue”. Displacement and exile infuse my life and work; I counter these experiences with hope, arising from Persian mysticism and Báhá’í literature, to give a voice of optimism and universal human values of resistance, equity, love, beauty and truth. Desire and love in Persian mysticism is the narrative of self, which drives the individual towards a state of ‘nothingness’. Nothingness alludes to personal identity as a metaphor and the context for counter-discourse to attachment. Nothingness is considered authentic existence.

I have been considering and exploring different spaces of being throughout my work; experimenting with a variety of materials and forms, and always drawing from sacred texts in an attempt to convey a sense of (desire and attraction to) poverty and nothingness. The state of bliss devoid of meaning or reason, Persian literature describes as “fana”, meaning annihilation. In this space meaning disappears, being vanishes and all that exists is universal will.

The narrative of exile provides, extrapolates and constitutes a nomadology with the necessary apparatus to move between things, as I always have, as a refugee in exile and in becoming. Exile is mystical, where one leaves oneself behind and enters the space of in-between. Exile enables one to perceive the world as it really is – a state of impermanence and transition, of composition and decomposition, yet the world in its essence is abstract. Exile has allowed me to feel my roots connected with the world and with the Divine.

The focus of *From my Mother tongue* is to place my work within a broader frame of reference to demonstrate and reflect through this pragmatic placement the friction that constitutes art making in two worlds. Similarly it enabled me to establish that my Persian heritage is inherently a continuity by which I can make communicable my findings; a paradox, an experimentation to make connections. This is ‘becoming’; a mystical experience, a “fana”, dying of self and living in the divine.



*From the Mother Tongue*

Left: *There is No Colour Beyond Black* (installation detail), University of Adelaide Bar Smith Library

Right: *Siamak Fallah*, University of Adelaide Bar Smith Library

pencil shavings, white chalk, graphite, black paint

2008

Photos courtesy the artist

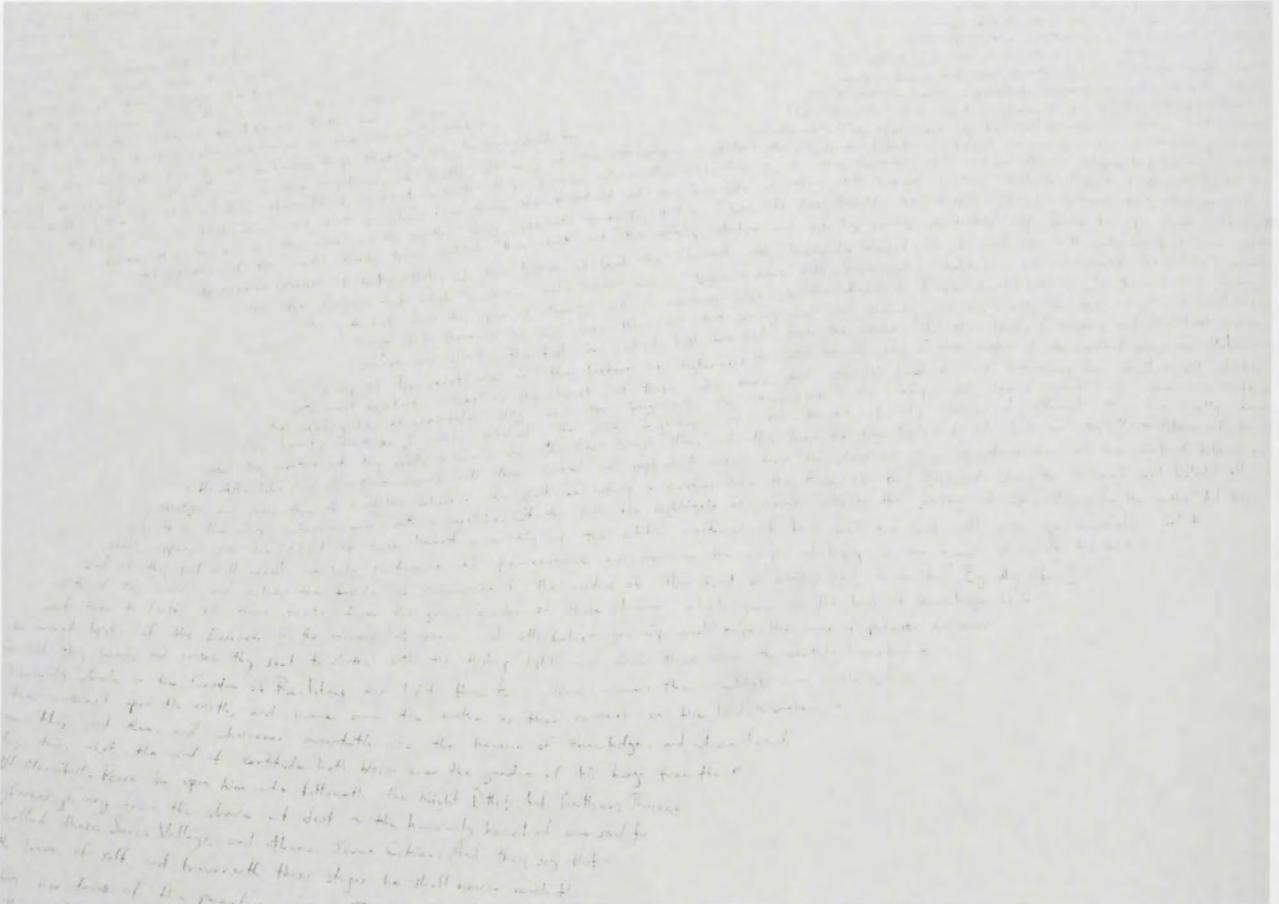


*From the Mother Tongue*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

38 || 39

plates



From the Mother Tongue

Left: Az Zabane modari lābaik lābaik: From the Mother Tongue Here I am here I am (installation detail),

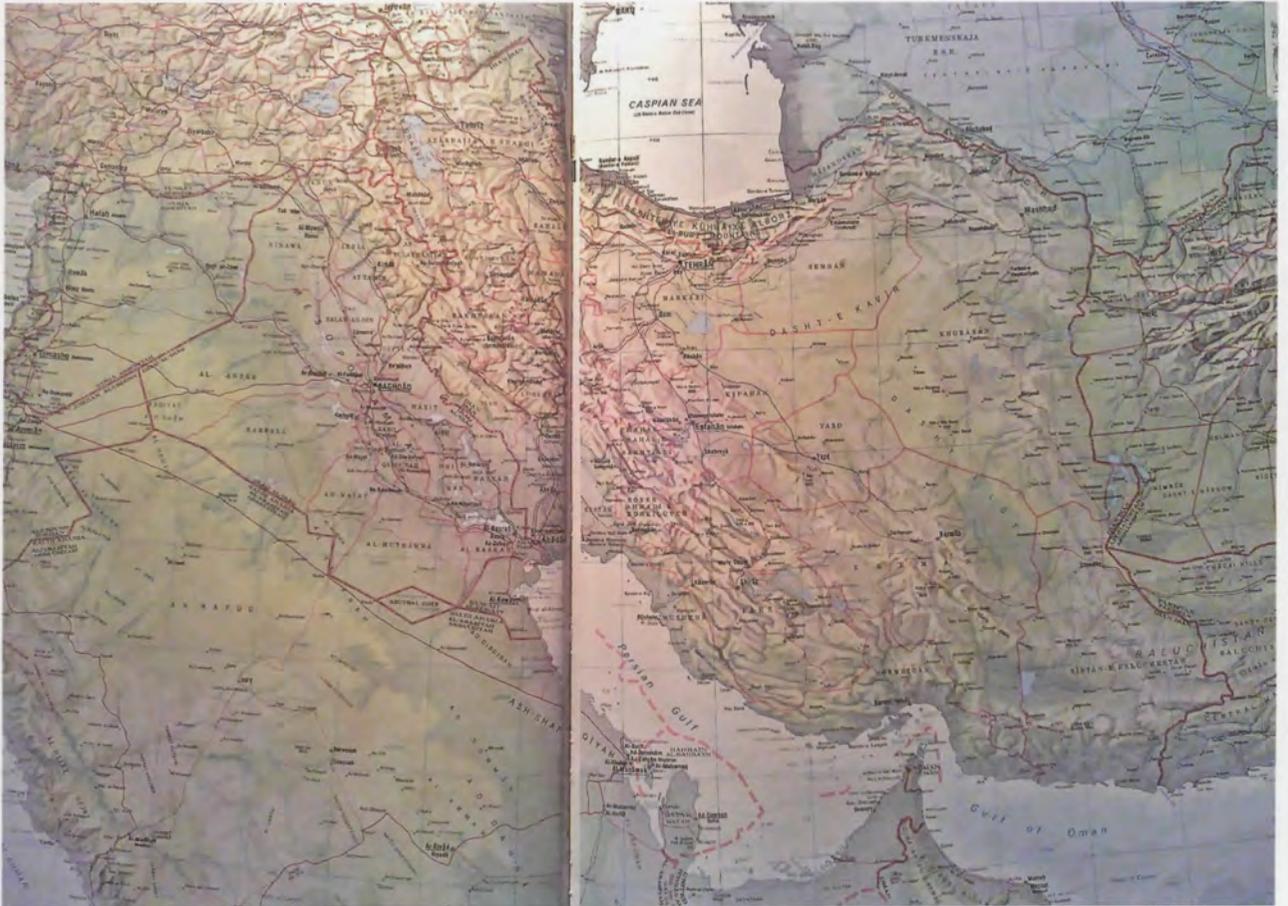
Contemporary Art Centre of SA, Adelaide

Graphite pencil

Right: Encyclopedia Britannica Atlas of Persia

2009

Photos courtesy the artist

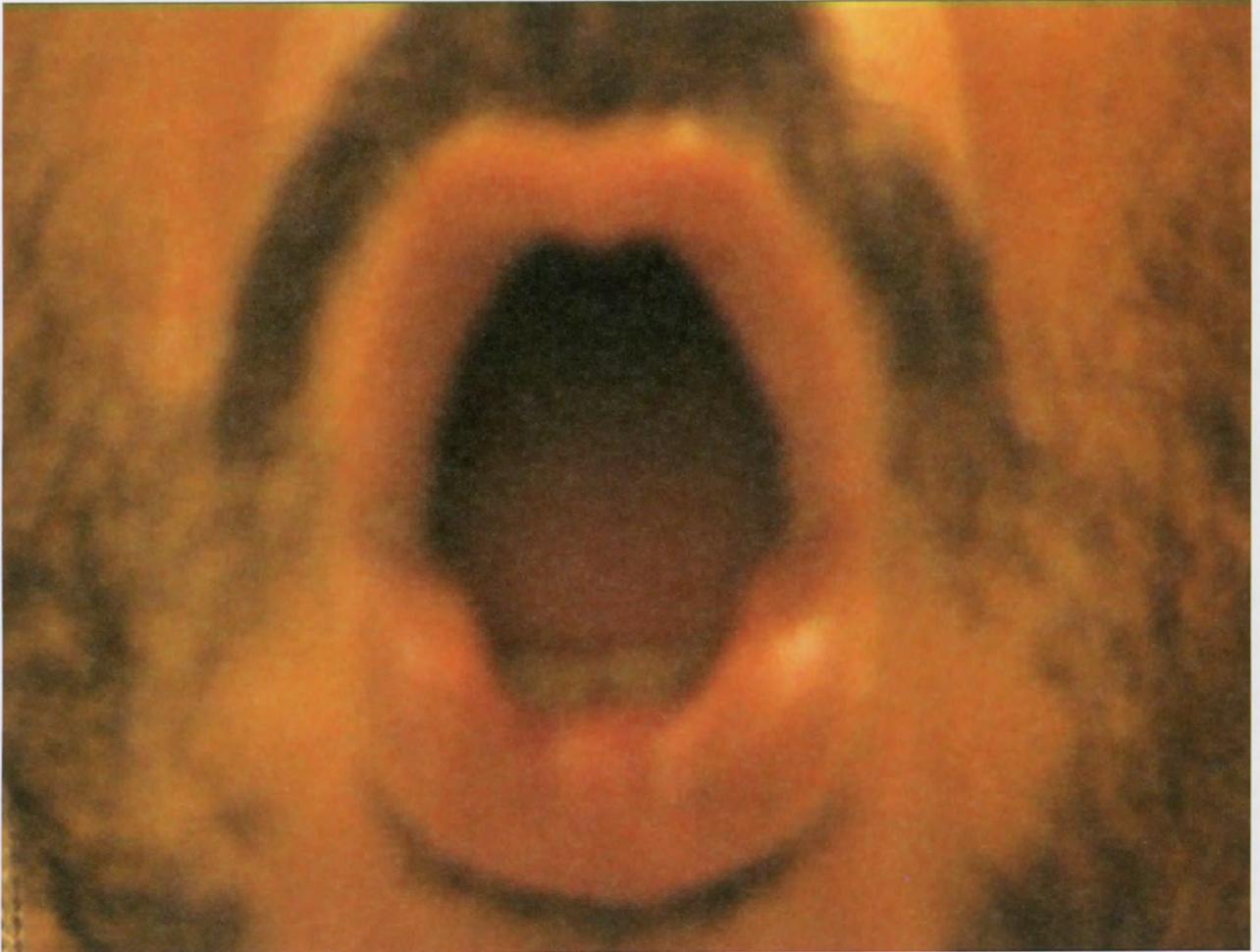


From the Mother Tongue

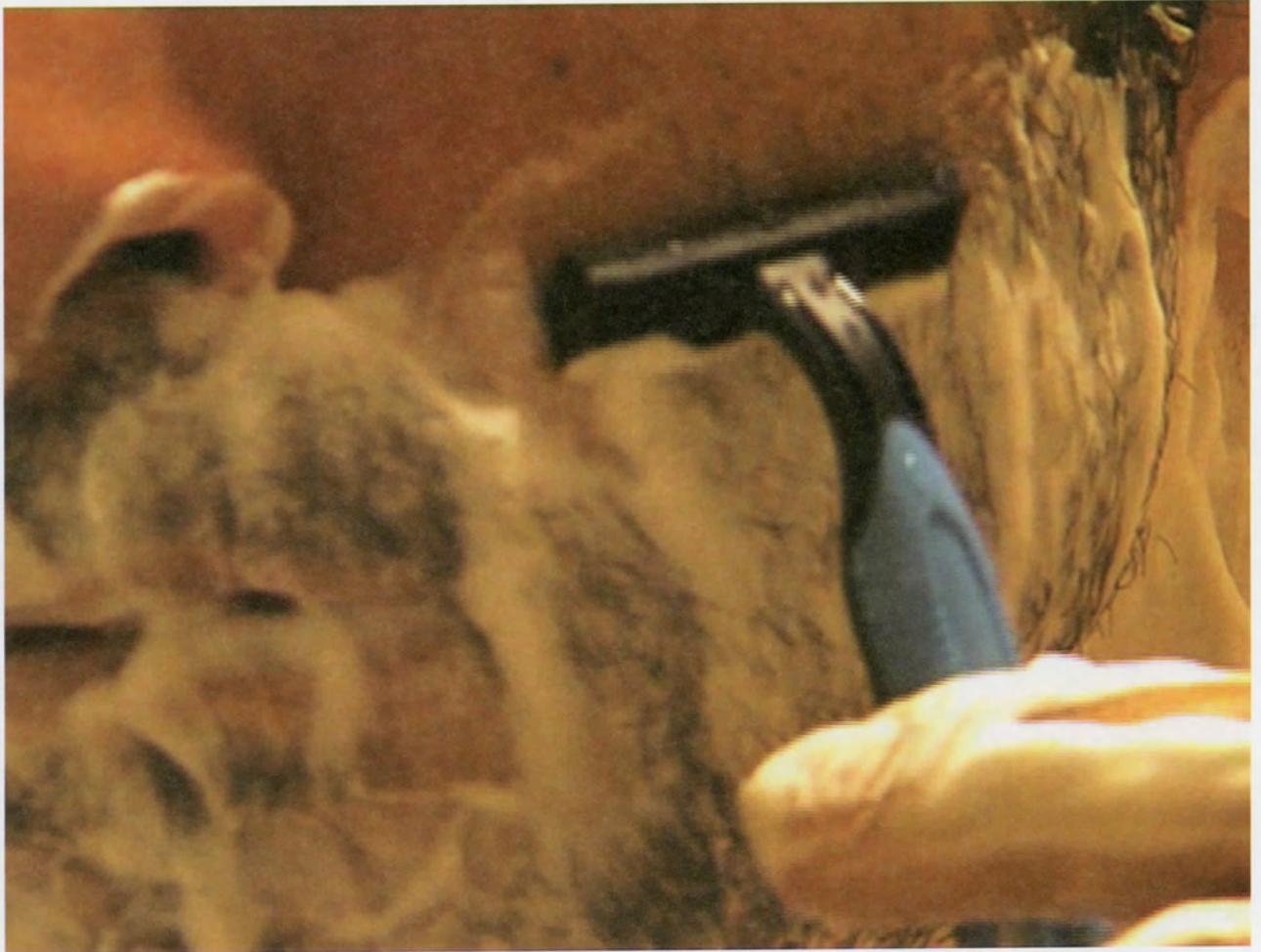
Homeland (Heimat)

40 || 41

plates



*From the Mother Tongue: I ran from Iran*  
video stills  
2002-04  
Photos courtesy the artist

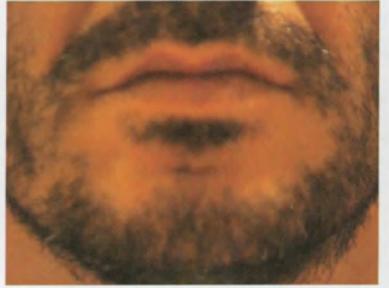


*From the Mother Tongue: I ran from Iran*

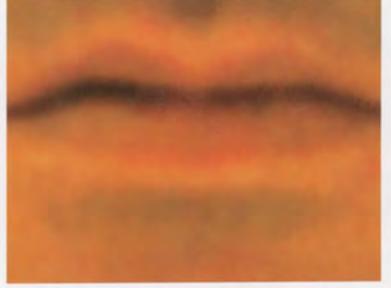
*Homeland (Heimat)*

42 || 43

plates



*From the Mother Tongue: I ran from Iran*  
video stills  
2002-04  
Photos courtesy the artist



*From the Mother Tongue: I ran from Iran*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

44 || 45

plates

## PENAWAR

This video work records the clearing-out and closing-up of a house in Ayer Itam, Penang. The house, Penawar, built in 1930, for a wealthy businessman and auctioneer C.M Hashim, served as a family home and remained occupied until the death of his second wife, Puan Sri Fatimah in 2006. During that long span of time, successive children and grandchildren were born in the house and it was the setting for many family weddings, parties and social gatherings to which various public figures of the time were often invited—Prime Ministers Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak were frequent house guests and (Governor-general of Malaya) Malcolm MacDonald would sometimes drop by for afternoon tea. Aside from this, being located away from Georgetown, Penawar provided a place of refuge for both extended family and friends during the Japanese invasion and subsequent occupation of Malaya. Thus the house has a rich past and one that reflects the twists and turns of history and the changes that the country has seen as a whole. Malaysia's strong economic progress and population growth is evident, for instance, in the way that the rambutan orchards surrounding the house have made way for modern housing and how Ayer Itam road, which the house fronts, has become a busy thoroughfare. To give another example, the fact that Penang was gradually superseded by Kuala Lumpur as a commercial centre is mirrored in the way that many Hashim family members have now chosen to move to the capital city. Despite these shifts, the house, its contents and the grounds were maintained and Puan Sri Fatimah by this time very old and ailing—continued to live there with her maid and private nurse. It was only after her death that the need to amicably redistribute the estate, as well as fears that road-widening plans could lead to a compulsory purchase order, pressed the family to decide to sell the house. Some photographs and various object d'art were removed in recent months but the process of packing the main contents of the house and furniture was left until just before Chinese New Year in 2007. The house awaiting its clearance and the actual emptying of the house is documented here.

The events are played out across two screens one showing the interior of the house in a series of slow tracking shots, the other its exterior in a single static wide-shot. The exterior static wide-shot provides a counterpoint by placing the house in its degraded context. At first there is minimal activity, in what appears to be a relatively intact but strangely lifeless house. However, as the piece unfolds and we enter more rooms, voices are heard, figures enter the frame and pieces of furniture and photographs come into view, we gather more and more evidence of its past. But just as we do, we sense the imminent dismantling of that very history. It is not just the personal aspect of a life ending that is witnessed here but also the dissolution of a world—one characterised by a privileged, leisurely way of life set amidst gracious surrounds and conducted in a distinctly British style. Judged unsympathetically, it could be argued that the sale and possible demolition of this house is of no real significance—its relevance and nostalgic pull limited to the people who knew the place and to those who come from similarly elite backgrounds. However, by viewing the the house within a wider historical context its importance becomes more evident: such buildings not only act a repository of an undeniable public legacy be it an unpalatable one i.e., our colonial past. But, also, they crystallise the sheer haste with which so many of our towns and cities have been transformed by development. Cinemas, shop houses, government quarters—and not just grand houses—all gone. And, if these structures do indeed provide us with vital markers to help us anchor our pasts and navigate our futures, then might not their disappearance mean that we will lose, not only a clear sense of direction, but also, ultimately, a coherent sense of who we are?

A curtain flutters, we hear birdcall, after that, a car horn. As we continue to move through the house we then hear the sound of geese, followed by someone speaking Hokkien, then Malay and we hear the word "*datuk*" uttered, also, later, flooding into a room, the call to prayer: these languages and sounds are immediately recognisable and when woven together evoke a distinctly familiar atmosphere. We are reminded of the

experience of being indoors in a bungalow, perhaps, or a shop house as a child until a mobile phone rings and disrupts that memory. Sound is indeed an important component of the piece and is used a device by which to not only create an atmosphere, as already described, but also to emphasise various important subtexts within the piece. For instance, the endless drone of traffic references the fact that what we see might have to make way for a highway as well as reminds the viewer of what lies beyond the walls of the house and, more abstractly, what lies outside the borders of the projected image. Glimpses seen from the interior of passing cars, a neighbouring petrol station and bank (the only clue as to what the framing of the image has cropped out)—and traffic heard on the soundtrack reinforce this encroachment of the present. Sound is also used to push forward the action. This action is, in fact, minimal and the narrative that eventually emerges never quite gives the viewer the whole story. However, given that the piece is carefully punctuated by specific visual and aural details, certain deductions and conclusions can be clearly drawn.

My aim was to operate within a restricted visual vocabulary and physical setting, to create a record of the closing up of a house, in order effectively to generate a wider enquiry into the historical shifts and the changes that Malaysia has seen as a whole. In other words, to keep the action as pared down and absolutely centered around this event and yet move beyond the family history element, to address the country's colonial past as well as the attendant implications of its recent economic growth. This seemingly unstoppable process of erasure poses the question: And, if these structures do indeed provide us with vital markers to help us anchor our pasts and navigate our futures, then might not their disappearance mean that we will lose, not only a clear sense of direction, but also, ultimately, a coherent sense of who we are? As Lippard writes: "Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography... the culture of any nation is unintentionally reflected in its ordinary vernacular landscape". Taking this observation further, it might be argued that its transformation could in fact engender a metaphorical form of exile: the impossibility of my returning to the places and landmarks that hold meaning for me and my estrangement from what has replaced them means that I have been effectively cast out: in not recognising where I am I not only lose my bearings but also my sense of completeness and rootedness—my sense of belonging. It is both the banality and poignancy of that crucial moment of banishment that I meant to depict in the work, as I observe with a degree of detachment and neutrality, that exact point of transition where a place becomes a space. My plan was to set out and document an actual scene, one which, while functioning within its limited scope, touches upon what could be described as a 'modern homelessness': to ask the viewer, as Berger has asked, following his statement (in relation to the notion of 'home', "The choices open to men and women today—even amongst the underprivileged—may be more numerous than in the past, but what has irretrievably been lost is the choice of saying: this is the centre of the world". I wanted *Penawar*, in its mute observance, to present such questions to the viewer and as an artist ask, these questions bother me, do they bother you? This last question is not as flippant as it may seem given the complacent "what to do?" attitude that is generally prevalent in Malaysia. Also, it is important to mention that the distinctly colonial atmosphere evoked in *Penawar* is significant, given that Mahathir's Malaysian-centric view of the nation encouraged not only rampant development but also an 'out with the old, in with the new' stance, a position which was aligned with the wish to—quite literally—reclaim ground from the clutches of an imperial past. The renaming of streets, for instance, was an understandable reaction to a chapter in the country's history that was in itself profoundly destabilising but, ironically, in trying to regain an authentic sense of identity through the denial of the inherent complexity of what it means to be 'Malaysian'—what is in fact created is a double lack. And to continue in the same vein, (to paraphrase Lippard) by similarly ignoring the way in which a "hybrid space can be seen as a shelter between cultures" what emerges is "a landscape of longing".



*Penawar*  
video still  
2007  
Photo courtesy the artist



*Penawar*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

48 || 49

plates



*Penawar*  
video still  
2007  
Photo courtesy the artist



*Penawar*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

50 || 51

plates

## NO. 55 MAIN ROAD

No. 55 Main Road is the home of eighty-seven year-old 'Uncle' Chang Ching. It is one of the few inhabited buildings in the two rows of pre-war shophouses that make up the defining centre of Kampung Kepayang, south of Ipoh. "Main Road" named in colonial times, has now been changed to its Malay equivalent, "*Jalan Besar*". The word "*besar*" translates literally as "big" and "*jalan*" as "road" and given the volume of the traffic and that these shophouses are pressed right up to its edge, his address aptly reflects the dominating presence of this trunk road. The traffic is relentless and the speed at which the cars and lorries go by has meant that the front rooms of these shophouses seem besieged. Together with other factors—such as newer shop lots and housing developments that now exist nearby—the road has contributed to the near desertion of this small town. What were once dwellings and businesses, such as medicine and coffee-shops, are now mostly abandoned ruins. Seen at a glance, from a passing car, for instance, it would appear that Kampung Kepayang, with its shopfronts shuttered or else exposed to the elements, is a ghost town.

The truth is even more bleak. Soon the town may not exist at all. The two rows of shophouses have been marked for demolition by the District Council under Section 83 of the Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974. The Council considers these buildings to be structurally unstable and therefore unsafe both for their inhabitants and for passers-by. Another reason, and most probably the overriding motivation behind this move, is the fact that the trunk road needs to be widened again.

There is a chance that one row will be saved—the side opposite Uncle's shophouse—given the presence of a mosque at the end of the row. The Malay village and orchards back towards the river will also be spared, but the coherence of Kampung Kepayang, as built up over more than a century, will be gone. Some of the townsfolk are resigned to the loss of this place, others don't really care, but having lived there for fifty years, Chang Ching is determined to stay put, to live out his remaining days here.

*No. 55 Main Road* is spread across three screens: one shows a long tracking-shot across the front of the shophouses; the centre screen is static, of 'Uncle's' living room open to the road; the third screen reveals details of this living room, and of spaces to the rear of it, glimpsed down a passage. By reading horizontally across the screens, one image can broaden the understanding of another, and there is a sense of concurrency as well as sequence, forming a diffuse narrative. For instance: the sight of notices (telling the occupants to quit), pasted on the fronts of the shophouses in one screen, points up the air of long-standing permanence in the ordered clutter of Chang Ching's possessions and photographs in another. We see the objects collected over many years, both treasured souvenirs and the leftover stock of valves and resistors from his days running a radio and TV repair business. At another point, in what hints at a story progression, the man who has been sitting in his living room reading and listening to Chinese songs from his youth, closes his book, gets up from his chair and leaves, down the passage to the back of his house.

The place is viewed primarily from the inside, from within the intimacy of a home. The outside world impinges, but only through indirect, peripheral intrusions. The sound traffic is there, always. Less pervasively, less overbearingly, there are the reflections of the traffic, flickers of light that the passing cars and lorries make as they hurtle along the road that cuts through this one-street town.

Uncle's stubborn attachment to his shophouse, and to the town that is familiar to him, is an act of resistance to the dictates of a short-sighted bureaucracy that is acting to facilitate supposed progress. In No. 55, the joss-sticks are lit, a kettle boils, the key is in its usual place by the back door, and yet the adjoining shophouse along is only a facade. Further down the street there are more abandoned buildings: strangely beautiful and melancholy structures that are littered with remnants of belongings, photographs and altars, and with staircases that persist simply as a pattern running up a wall. Each invites us to construct for it an imagined past or pasts; with some offering more clues than others.

As with *Penawar*, this work emerges from my preoccupation with the hold that places—be it a hometown or a homeplace, or even their ideated versions, can have over us—perhaps because they epitomise our desire for a sense of belonging and continuity as we are forced to become reconciled to a modernity that appears not to accommodate such needs. In another parallel to *Penawar*, No. 55, *Main Road* focuses upon the process of transition whereby “a place becomes a space” but here we see both the persistence of the personal space, the daily ritual and its fragility in juxtaposition: hard up against the ungovernable forces of the outside world, and indeed against neighbouring shop-lots that have already succumbed to dereliction.



No. 55 Main Road

video stills

2010

Photos courtesy the artist



No. 55 Main Road

Homeland (Heimat)

54 || 55

plates



No. 55 Main Road

video stills

2010

Photos courtesy the artist



No. 55 Main Road

Homeland (Heimat)

56 || 57

plates

## NOSTALGIA

*Nostalgia* unfolds at a slow meditative pace. Over forty minutes of simple vistas of fields, abandoned factories and forests are shown across six channels of near-monochromatic video. Built up with moody tones of grey snow, wind and rain, this large-scale video installation evokes both grand Chinese landscape painting and pictorial traditions of the black and white photographed landscape. The wide-angled format captures things unfolding in the camera's vision such as animals on a hill, mosquitos buzzing or smoke billowing from a small fire in a field. These videos seem endless and ongoing. Accompanied by a metered soundtrack which samples the natural world, the tempo reinforces the video's sense of infiniteness.

In this work, the artist plays on our expectations that something should happen, that some narrative or drama should unfold. When asked about the six channel construction of *Nostalgia*, Qiu is adamant that the films slowness, or its wide-angled, "spectator-on-a hill" view is not about capturing a cinematic realism. Instead, he asks us to watch and take time to consider the unique ordinariness of the world. He remarks: "as modern human beings, we are always looking for something more and something new. We are not really sensitive to our surroundings. We want to see many things, and hear many sounds" Like much of his work, there are Buddhist precepts which inform it? that we do not encounter the world with just our eyes, or only our ears, but with all five of our senses.

Most of Qiu's work refers back to Chinese classical texts and philosophy, which may be influenced by the artist's five years spent at university in Germany. During this time he describes being culturally disconnected from the Western culture of his surrounds. This experience of isolation and disconnection allowed Qiu to delve into these texts, which up to that point he had never read. It was through the cultural distance between Germany and China, that Qiu realised how Chinese he really was. It is from here that his major work *The New Book of the Mountains and Seas (Part I)* was initially conceived. This three screen digital video animation was constructed from over 6000 original brush and ink paintings, depicting a world of fantasy and of curious places undergoing dramatic transformation. Qiu's work was based on the classic text *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, a book of mythology and geography. Using the mythology of the original text, which depicts a fantastic world of strange, almost alien creatures, Qiu was able to develop a narrative, which drew parallels to the transforming world in which we live. This overlap of literary history and alien universes, read in the context of the contemporary world, unfolds through the slow-moving format of hand-constructed brush painting. *Nostalgia* was filmed in and around the artist's hometown in Chengdu, Sichuan province at the beginning of 2008. Returning to Chengdu after five years of living in Shanghai, Qiu was struck by the great differences between the two cities—Shanghai is international and always moving, while Chengdu is rural and relaxed. Filming *Nostalgia* allowed him the opportunity to stop and think of how the world has changed, he wanted to evoke the feeling of remembering what it might have felt like as a child, playing with natural things like sand, water, earth and the trees. He admits that, "I am not interested in presenting a wistful, melancholic state, I do not live in the past. This work is really about stopping and looking back, taking the opportunity to consider the things that might be overlooked, not necessarily to relive it or to venerate it. It is also interesting that after I filmed this work, the earthquakes of 2008 occurred, so this place no longer exists like this. We can never return to the past, I filmed it and one year later everything has already changed."

In certain sections of the work, Qiu's conception of the past is amplified by the introduction of images of abandonment, for example factories from the 1980s, or paths lined with detritus of domestic situations. He is suggesting to us, that while we can't return to a single moment in time, history continues to reverberate — it appears as ruins on the landscape. Remnants of the past which exist within the present haunt this work, for example the juxtaposition of old factories and new cities; farmland and new development. *Nostalgia* doesn't give us a sense of the world in transformation, as much of the discussion about contemporary China points out to us. If anything, it acts as an antidote to the continual forward momentum of progress. The artist is more interested in considering the human impact of change, and asks us to consider the present not just in the context of the recent past, but within a much longer narrative, encompassing both the historical and the literary. He is interested in the possibility of a human history. His is a poetic and intellectual position, which understands history as being defined beyond the narrative of the contemporary situations in which we find ourselves.

[Aaron Seeto, Director, 4A Gallery, Sydney, 2009]



*Nostalgia*

Left: *Burn Grass*

Right: *Nostalgia*

video stills

2008

Photos courtesy the artist, Hanart TZ, Hong Kong and Boers-Li Gallery, Beijing



*Nostalgia*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

60 || 61

plates



*Nostalgia*

Left: *Factory*

Right: *New Place City*

video stills

2008

Photos courtesy the artist, Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong and Boers-Li Gallery, Beijing



*Nostalgia*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

62 || 63

plates



*Nostalgia*

Left: *Water*

Right: *New Place City*

video stills

2008

Photos courtesy the artist, Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong and Boers-Li Gallery, Beijing



*Nostalgia*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

64 || 65

plates



*Nostalgia*

Left: *Snow*

Right: *Factory*

video stills

2008

Photos courtesy the artist, Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong and Boers-Li Gallery, Beijing



*Nostalgia*

*Homeland (Heimat)*

66 || 67

plates

## || LIST OF WORKS

### Basma AL SHARIF

*We Began by Measuring Distance*  
Single channel video  
Audio

*Everywhere Was The Same*  
Single channel video  
Headphones

*The Gift*  
Variable dimensions  
Framed photographs & text installation, inkjet prints & postcards

Courtesy the artist

### Brenda L CROFT

*west/ward/bound.*  
each 310 cm x 200 cm  
Digital prints on vinyl banners, aluminium sail tracking

*She'll be right mate: Strangers in a Strange Land.*  
each 112 cm x 162 cm  
Archival digital print, screws, magnets, acid free tape

Courtesy the artist, Stills Gallery, Sydney and Niagara Galleries,  
Melbourne

### Siamak FALLAH

*Az Zaban-e Modari (From the Mother Tongue): I Ran from Iran*  
Single channel video installation  
Audio  
Silk cloth, rod, pins, black paint, vinyl lettering, plinth, compass,  
lamp, Encyclopedia Britannica

*Az Zaban-e Modari: 'Vahdat' (Unity)*  
Graphite pencil

Courtesy the artist

### Hayati MOKHTAR

*Penawar*  
Single channel video  
Audio

*No. 55 Main Road*  
Triple channel video  
Audio

Courtesy the artist

### QU Anxiong

*Nostalgia.* 2008  
Six channel video  
Audio

Courtesy the artist, Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong and  
Boers-Li Gallery, Beijing

**Basma AL SHARIF**

Born Kuwait City, Kuwait 1983

Lives and works in Beirut

EDUCATION

- 2007 Master Of Fine Arts  
Dept Art and Architecture, School of Art and Design  
University of Illinois at Chicago, USA
- 2005 Bachelor Of Fine Arts  
Dept Art and Architecture, School of Art and Design  
University of Illinois at Chicago, USA
- 2004 Master Fine Arts Visual Arts program  
Malmö Art Academy, Lund University, Malmö,  
Sweden

EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 *Manifesta 8: European Biennial of Contemporary Art*,  
Region of Murcia, Spain  
*Spacemakers*, Defina Foundation, Tent Gallery,  
Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh  
*London Palestine Film Festival*, Barbican Cinema,  
London  
*Independent film in Palestine*, no.w.here, London  
FACT (foundation for Art & Creative Technology)  
*MyWar*, (online) London  
*Rencontres Internationales*, Paris/Berlin/Madrid
- 2009 *Docudays: Beirut International Documentary Festival*,  
Lebanon  
*ArabShorts*, (online) Goethe Institute, Cairo  
*Homeland*, Contemporary Art Centre of SA, Adelaide  
*31st Festival International Cinéma Méditerranéen*,  
Montpelier, France  
*Chicago Underground Film Festival*, Gene Siskel Film  
Centre, Chicago  
*Sharjah Biennial*, Sharjah, UAE  
*Art Park: Arteast, Art Dubai*, UAE  
*Ann Arbor Palestine Film Festival*, Ann Arbor, USA  
*Palestine Film Week*, Al-Balad Theatre, Amman, Jordan
- 2008 *The Jerusalem Show*, Al Ma'mal Foundation for  
Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, Palestine  
*7th Annual Chicago Palestine Film Festival*,  
Gene Siskel Film Centre, Chicago  
*Dokufest, International Documentary & Short Film  
Festival*, Cultural House, Prizen, Kosovo  
*Images Du MoyentOrient*, Musée Jeu Du Paumes,  
Paris
- 2007 *ARTEAST: Cinema East Film Festival*, IFC Theatre,  
New York
- 2006 *Formfit*, The Great Space Gallery, Chicago

AWARDS

- 2010 Marcelino Botin Grant for Visual Arts
- 2009 Fondazione Antonio Ratti: Advanced Course in Visual  
Arts XV, Como, Italy  
Artist in Residence, Makan, Amman, Jordan  
2nd Jury Prize *Sharjah Biennial*, UAE
- 2007 Shatana International Artist Workshop, Shatana, Jordan

*Homeland (Heimat)*

**BRENDA L CROFT**

Born Perth, Australia 1964

Lives and works in Adelaide

EDUCATION

- 2009 Honorary Doctorate in Visual Arts, Sydney College of  
the Arts, University of Sydney, Sydney
- 2001 Alumni Award, College of Fine Arts, University of New  
South Wales, Sydney
- 1995 Master of Art Administration College of Fine Arts,  
University of New South Wales, Sydney

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide
- 2006 Niagara Galleries, Melbourne
- 2005 Artplace, Perth
- 2004 Niagara Galleries, Melbourne
- 2003 Stills Gallery, Sydney
- 2002 Stills Gallery, Dank Street Waterloo, (satellite exhibition  
*Biennale of Sydney*), Sydney
- 1999-2000 John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University of Technology,  
Perth
- 1998 Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
- 1994 Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
- 1993 The Performance Space, Sydney
- 1993 Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 *Homeland*, Contemporary Art Centre of South  
Australia, Adelaide  
*Visual Sovereignty: International Indigenous  
Photography*, CN Gorman Museum, University of  
California, Davis, California  
*There goes the neighbourhood*, Performance Space,  
Sydney
- 2008 *Half light: Portraits from Black Australia*, Art Gallery of  
New South Wales, Sydney
- 2007 *Brilliance*, Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht
- 2006-7 *Light sensitive: Contemporary Australian Photography  
from the Loti Smorgon Fund*, National Gallery of  
Victoria, Melbourne
- 2005-6 *Points of View: Australian photography 1985-1995*,  
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- 2004 *In Focus: 5 Contemporary Women Photo-Artists*,  
Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery/Stills  
Gallery, Sydney  
*Images: Contemporary Photos by Aboriginal Artists*,  
Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht  
*Witness*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
- 2002 *Photographica Australis*, ARCO Spanish International  
Contemporary Art Fair, Madrid
- 2001 *hybrid<life>forms: Australian New Media Art*,  
Netherlands Media Art Institute, Amsterdam
- 2000 *Das Lied Von Der Erde (The Song of the Earth)*,  
Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany
- 1999 *Beyond Myth/Oltre il Mito*, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi,

- 1999 48th Venice Biennale, Venice  
*Signs of Life: Melbourne International Biennial*, Melbourne
- 1998-2000 *Retake: Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Photography*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
- 1997 *First Person Plural: Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Art*, Betty Rymor Gallery, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago
- 1997-6 *Abstracts: New Aboriginalities*, Watershed, Bristol  
*Native Titled Now*, Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide
- 1995-6 *True Colours: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag*, Boomalli & The Performance Space, Sydney
- 1995 *Mistaken Identities: Africus Johannesburg Biennale*, Johannesburg
- 1994 *Sydney Photographed*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney  
*Urban Focus: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art from the Urban Areas of Australia*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
*True Colours*: Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool; Leicester Gallery, Leicester, South London Gallery; London Conference Call (with Adrian Piper), Camerawork Gallery, London
- 1992-3 *Conference Call* (with Adrian Piper), *The Boundary Rider: 9th Biennale of Sydney*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

#### COLLECTIONS

Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht, Netherlands; Artbank, Sydney; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Edith Cowan University, Perth; Flinders University Collection, Adelaide; John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University of Technology, Perth; Monash Gallery of Art, Melbourne; Murdoch University Art Collection, Perth; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; National Library of Australia, Canberra; Powerhouse Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney; Power Institute, University of Sydney, Sydney; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; State Library of New South Wales, Sydney; University of Canberra

#### GRANTS

- 2009 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia Council curatorial travel
- 2004 Visual Arts/Crafts Board, Australia Council
- 1998 Visual Arts/Crafts Fund, Australia Council
- 1996 New York Visual Arts/Craft Fund Australia Council  
Greene Street Studio, New York residency
- 1993 Visual Arts/Crafts Fund, Australia Council
- 1991 Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Research grant

#### SIAMAK FALLAH

Born Firouzy, Pars, Persia, 1965  
Lives and works in Adelaide

#### EDUCATION

- 2010 PhD candidate, University of South Australia, Adelaide  
Bachelor of Media/Bachelor of Philosophy candidate, University of Adelaide, Adelaide
- 2009 Visual Arts Honours, University of South Australia, Adelaide
- 1998 Bachelor of Visual arts, University of South Australia, Adelaide

#### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 FELSpace, Adelaide
- 2009 Contemporary Art Centre of SA, Adelaide  
*Road Movies*, Adelaide Film Festival, Contemporary Art Centre of SA, Adelaide
- 2008 *Line of Beauty*, Nexus Gallery, Adelaide
- 2008 *There is No Colour Beyond Black*, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, Adelaide
- 2004 *I Ran from Iran*, Nexus Gallery, Adelaide
- 2000 *Nine*, Watch This Space, Alice Springs
- 1999 *Nightingale*, Nexus Gallery, Adelaide  
*Beh (B)*, Artspace, Sydney
- 1998 Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide  
*Dog*, Nexus Gallery, Adelaide
- 1997 *Rubicon*, Nexus Gallery, Adelaide
- 1996 Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide
- 1994 Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide
- 1993 *Prayer in a Temple*, Union Gallery, Flinders University, Adelaide

#### GRANTS

- 2010 Australian Postgraduate Award (APA)
- 2009 Arts SA Project Grant

#### HAYATI MOKHTAR

Born Kuantan, Malaysia 1969  
Lives and works in Kuala Lumpur

#### EDUCATION

- 1999 MA Fine Art, Goldsmiths College, University of London, London
- 1997 BA (Hons) Fine Art, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London

#### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 *Border Zones: New Art Across Cultures*, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver
- 2009 *Homeland*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide
- 2007-08 *Out of the Mould: The Age of Reason*, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur; Maimo Art Museum, Maimo
- 2007 *Antara Merdeka*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

- 2006 *Biennale of Sydney: Zones of Contact*, Sydney  
*Me! An Exploration of Appetites*, Rimbun Dahar, Kuala Lumpur
- 2004 *Luxe de Luxe, Polyptyque Ingeniere,Culturelle* (Paris) for Avenue K, Kuala Lumpur  
*Semangat: Artists for Theatre*, Five Arts Centre; Valentine Willie Fine Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
- 2003 *15 Tracks: Contemporary Southeast Asian Art*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; Tama Art University Museum, Tokyo; Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka
- 2002 *36 Ideas from Asia: Contemporary Southeast Asian Art*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; Museum Küppersmühle Sammlung Grothe, Duisburg, Germany; Helikon Kastélymúzeum KHT, Hungary; Rupertinum Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Austria; National Museum of Abruzzo, L'Aquila, Italy
- 2000 *Becoming: When the Time is Right*, Islington Arts Factory, London
- 1998 Valentine Willie Fine Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
*Art and Nationalism*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
- 1997 *Shamiana: The Mughal Tent*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

## QIU ANXIONG

Born, Sichuan, China, 1972  
Lives and works in Shanghai

## EDUCATION

- 1994 Sichuan Art Academy, China  
2003 Kunsthochschule, University Kassel, Germany

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS, USA  
2009 Arken Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, Denmark  
4A Gallery, Sydney, Australia  
Boers-Li Gallery, Beijing  
Barbara Gros Gallery, Munich, Germany  
2008 Build 18 Creative Centre, Shanghai  
2007 Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide  
Universal Studio, Beijing  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo  
Grace Li Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland  
2006 Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong  
2005 Bizart Art Center, Shanghai  
2002 Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 *11th Cairo Biennale*, Cairo  
*Zeichen im Wandel Der Zeit, Chinese Contemporary Ink Painting*, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin  
*Moving Horizon, UBS Art Collection*, The National Art Museum of China, Beijing  
*5th Media Biennale Seoul*, Seoul, Korea

- Mediations Biennale*, Poznan, Poland  
*3rd Triennial of Guangzhou*, Guangzhou  
*16th Biennale of Sydney*, Sydney  
*Staring into Amnesia, Art Unlimited, Art Basel*, Basel  
*Still & Motion*, National Museum of Modern Art, Osaka  
*China Power Station Part 3*, Museum d'art modern Grand-duc Jean, Luxembourg  
2007 *3rd Lianzhou International Photo Festival*, Lianzhou  
*Video Lounge*, Kunsthau Zurich, Zurich  
*China Power Station Part 2*, Arstrup Fearnleys Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway  
*Animation Painting*, San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego  
*Animated Histories*, Noga Gallery, Tel Aviv  
*Chinese Ink Painting*, Guan Shanyue Museum, Shenzhen  
2006 *China Independence Film Festival*, Paris  
*China Power Station*, Serpentine Gallery, London  
*Restless*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai  
*6th Shanghai Biennial*, Shanghai  
*Entry Gate: Chinese Aesthetics of Heterogeneity*, Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai  
*Twelve CCAA Contemporary Art Awards*, Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai  
2004 *Four Corners*, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore  
*Celebrating 20 Years of Hanart TZ Gallery*, Hongkong Arts Centre  
*24 Artist from Germany and China*, Alexander Ochs Gallery, Beijing  
*Mensa*, Alexander Ochs Gallery, Beijing  
2003 *New Landscapes, New Portraits*, Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong  
*From China with Art, Contemporary Chinese Painting*, Galeri National Indonesia, Jakarta  
2001 *Chengdu Biennial*, Chengdu

## COLLECTIONS

Oxford University Museum, Oxford; Kunst Haus, Zurich; Arstrup Fearnley Musum of Modern Art, Oslo; Uli Sigg Collection

## ALAN CRUICKSHANK

Born Adelaide, Australia 1953

- 2000- Executive Director, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide; Editor, *Contemporary Visual Art+Culture Broadsheet* magazine  
2008 Southeast Asian Editor, *Art+Australia*, Sydney  
2007-8 Consultant, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
1998 Pier 2/3 Manager, *11th Biennale of Sydney*  
1988 Assistant Curator, Graham Nash Collection/Curatorial Assistance Inc., Los Angeles  
1985-2000 Independent curator  
1983-2000 Australian correspondent, *European Photography* magazine, Germany  
1980-2003 As artist: exhibitions and museum collections, Australia and internationally  
1980- Independent publisher

## || ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Dr Charles Merewether, Director  
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Saifudin Mead, Exhibition officer

Milenko Prvacki, Dean Faculty of Fine Arts,  
LASALLE College of the Arts

Basma Al Sharif  
Brenda L Croft  
Simak Fallah  
Hayati Mokhtar  
Qiu Anxiong  
Aaron Seeto  
Peter McKay

Brenda L Croft is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne  
Qiu Anxiong is represented by Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong and Boers-Li Gallery, Beijing

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Government of South Australia  
Arts SA



全球華人慶大年  
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