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By Dr Tammy Wong Hulbert

*How can you engage different groups in your communities? Run an art project!
Dr Tammy Wong Hulbert ran an art project in 2019 to engage new immigrants
in Melbourne – using art as a tool to build inclusivity.*

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Far Flung: Connecting Intergenerational Families (2019) was an artistic collaboration between a 'Social-Artists-in-Residence' team with eleven local diverse families in Doncaster, Victoria. The project evolved out of a desire from the community and partners to recognise the voices of emerging diversity in the local Doncaster area, in particular, less established new immigrants from around the Asian Pacific region including China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam and Colombia. As a form of 'soft activism' this engagement formed the basis for a 3-month collaboration resulting in an art exhibition to promote the broader concept of the right to the city and was an action-based research project of my on-going broader research into 'curating inclusive cities'.

During this project, the development of building positive social relations between our group members was just as important as the outcomes of the project. The exhibition occurred at the Manningham Art Gallery in Doncaster from November 13 – December 17, 2019, presenting the families and their journey as both the subject and narrative of the exhibition.

It was significant to have the exhibition at the Manningham Art Gallery to recognise and represent emerging communities in the local area, showing how Doncaster's community is evolving and to place this conversation in a publicly accessible space for the entire community and for these new families to occupy to be able to occupy this space.

Working with Birralee Primary School, as a partner, eleven new immigrant families from the school community were invited to participate in the collaboration. The school identified students with an interest in the arts, who they felt would benefit from being involved in creative activities. Each of the students and their nominated guardians were asked to participate together, this was important for creating an environment where we would be able to work across the generations with both children and adults from the local area.



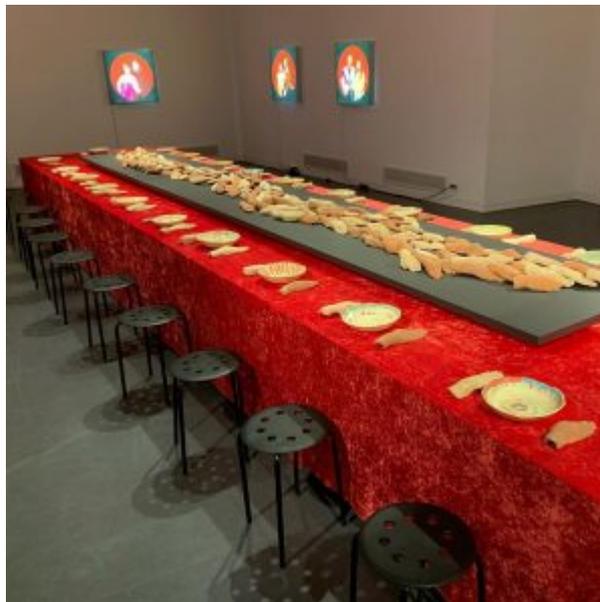
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Drawing from Manningham's art collection and studio focus on ceramic art, the families worked with artists on a range of social engagement and studio activities to connect with local place, rethink their own relationships with our globalising city and explore the way contemporary artists have expressed ideas in relation to the role of the individual in a collective society. By studying the work of various contemporary artists, this allowed the individuals of our group to reflect on their own positions in society.

We considered attributes we shared, the process of resettling and the desire to connect to our new homes as immigrants. Through our workshops, it became apparent that our families expressed how they exist as families between societies and that the dining room table became a significant site for connecting, sharing and building meaningful relationships within the family.

The resulting exhibition curated the group's perspective of having both a local and global sense of home, with participants expressing their sense of belonging through the comfort of dining and sharing. Together, we reimagined the gallery as a shared home, with the first room designed as a lounge to introduce and engage the audience through the voices and experiences of the participants through three carefully crafted videos of the participants in action, during the development phase and in interviews. The soundscape was drawn from the participants themselves during the process of building the artwork.

The main gallery became the shared dining room, each of the twenty-two participants created their own hands and places at the dining room table, representing the creation of their own place in a new society. Each participant made their own bowls, painting the foods they love, which gives them the feeling of comfort and a sense of home. The idea of creating a place for each of the participants drew attention to their absence in representation in society.



Drawing inspiration from the local landscape of the Yarra River, a river of connected hands were installed through the centre of the table, cast from the hands of each of the participants and represented a shared humanity through the act of reaching out and connecting to each other. The dining room walls were adorned with warm portraits of the family members, although they are not seated at the dining room, they are seen. An accompanying soundtrack of the families relaxed, eating and chatting over a banquet (recorded during dinner at our final workshop together) filled the space and emphasized their absence in representation, yet their presence in the community.

To conclude, although we started this project with 22 individual participants, we worked through the creative process and found that we shared a unique perspective of the complexities of the concept of the contemporary home, as local yet global citizens. Upon reflecting on these conditions, I drew inspiration from the words of curator, Hou Hanru, himself is an immigrant, as a point of reflection in launching the project:

“

(Home) is the most essential space for considering the question of identity, the established notion of home, both physically and intellectually, is being deconstructed and becoming more and more open towards new possibilities, of interpretation...every family or individual has to be involved in such negotiations, new social and cultural spaces, which are systematically transnational, multicultural and multi-disciplinary, are being created to become the most promising forms of social interaction across the planet...My home is your home, your home is mine. – Hou & Sans, 2002

”

It is through this process we came to understand that through migration we negotiate and renegotiate a sense of home bringing with us elements of the past, which combine with the new, to create re-imagined social spaces. Through this exhibition, by re-imagining a shared experience of home in a public gallery, we were able to express these renewed social conditions, which affect many people of our population and the idea that ‘our home is also your home’.

Note: *Far-Flung: Connecting Intergenerational Families* was supported by the City of Manningham, funded by Creative Victoria’s Creative Suburbs program in

partnership with Birralee Primary School, Chinese Community Social Services, The Chinese Museum and RMIT University Contemporary Art and Social Transformation (CAST).

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Source: Dr Tammy Wong Hulbert

Location: Australia

Release Date: 2019

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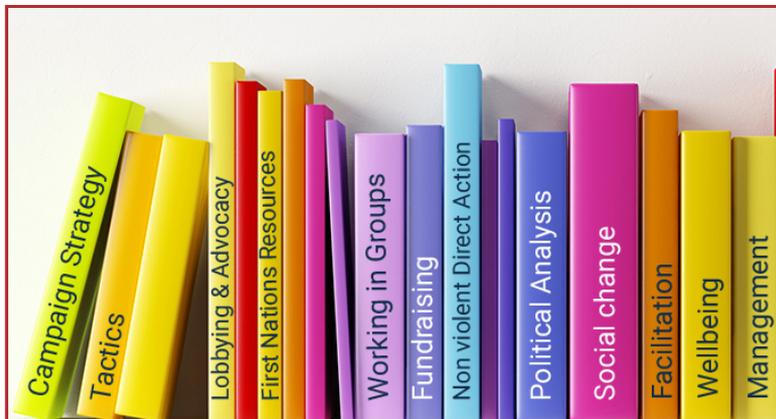
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