

# TRANSIENCE



Hiromi Tango – Hiromi Hotel: Moon Jellies, Hazelhurst Regional Art Gallery and Sullivan + Strumpf, Sydney. Photography by Greg Piper

Transience has developed from the research project *Art/Hope/Culture: Empowering Women's Art and Culture* conducted by Dr Enza Gandolfo and Dr Anne Harris.

The project aimed to investigate, document and promote the art and the art-making process of ten women artists from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Nine of the ten women who participated in the project through interviews, provided work for this exhibition.

The researchers interviewed the artists on film, are developing a website and will publish articles both academic and educational as well as a book.

The women involved in the *Art/Hope/Culture* project are: Merlinda Bobis (writing and performance), Jigzie Campbell (performance), Lella Carridi (visual arts and writing), Ok-Hean Chang (visual art), Sivan Gabrielovitch (theatre), Mehwish Iqbal (visual art), Helen Kassa (film and spoken word), Hiromi Tango (visual art), My Le Thi (visual art), and Yumi Umiumare (dance).

Some of the artists have come to Australia as migrants, others as refugees (from Philippines, Jamaica, Italy, Korea, Israel, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Japan and Vietnam). Some have lived in Australia for many years and others have arrived more recently. What they have in common is a desire to express themselves and contribute to Australian culture through their art form.

Both the interviews as well as excerpts of film and performance works are included in this exhibition along with paintings, sculptural and installation works, displaying the diversity of practice among these ten women whose common experience is their journeys to Australia.

Artists are influenced to varying degrees by what surrounds them but more definitely by their life experiences. It is mostly impossible to distinguish specifically what shapes an artist's work unless they are able to articulate it. However often they are unaware of what drives their ideas and it is left for other people to theorise. In the same way that a signature is personal and a thumb print is unique, so an artist's life experience is unlike anyone else's. This comes through in the way they select one colour and not another, or one shape or object that resonates for them. As artists mature their work becomes more and more a reflection of themselves and less derivative of other artists' work.

This exhibition places artists in a specific context that elucidates one of the fundamental issues that shape people, where they come from and their sense of belonging.



My Le Thi - *Four Colours*, Acrylic on silk and canvas – 1050 x 750mm

My Le Thi's work is the most obviously connected to the theme of the exhibition. Empty shoes and hollow feet indicate movement and absence at the same time. The steps taken and the places left behind are imminent in the work. The shoes were given to My Le in workshops in Australia and overseas and they each tell a story of lives lived and journeys travelled.

All the appendages for the foot create an echo of the people who once filled those shoes. Shoes also carry the saying 'take a walk in my shoes' which ask us all to imagine what it is like to live the life of another human being. There are many people asking this of us right now about the experience of asylum seekers and this is where art becomes so powerful because it is almost impossible to understand from the safe space of a country where you are allowed to belong what it must be like to walk in their shoes. The women in this exhibition can come closer to understanding this than most and it is evident in their sensitive and powerful work.





My Le Thi – *Beautiful People* – Mixed media – Dimensions variable



YumiUmiumare - *Dis-Oriental* - Video 6:00



YumiUmiumare- *En-Trance* – Digital image by Garth Oriander

Yumi Umuimare is Australia's only Japanese Butoh dancer. She is also an accomplished comedy performer combining these two seemingly opposite disciplines into *Butoh Cabaret*. She speaks of being different and enjoying the exotic role that she plays outside her own country and of how she experienced culture shock when she went home after some time away, partly because she was no different to everybody else. She has worked extensively with Indigenous people in Australia and says she only really understood Australia through a connection with Indigenous stories and people. She classifies herself as a hybrid artist working outside traditional classifications, through performance, installation and multidisciplinary work.



Hiromi Tango - Hiromi Hotel and Magic installation – Photograph Megan Evans

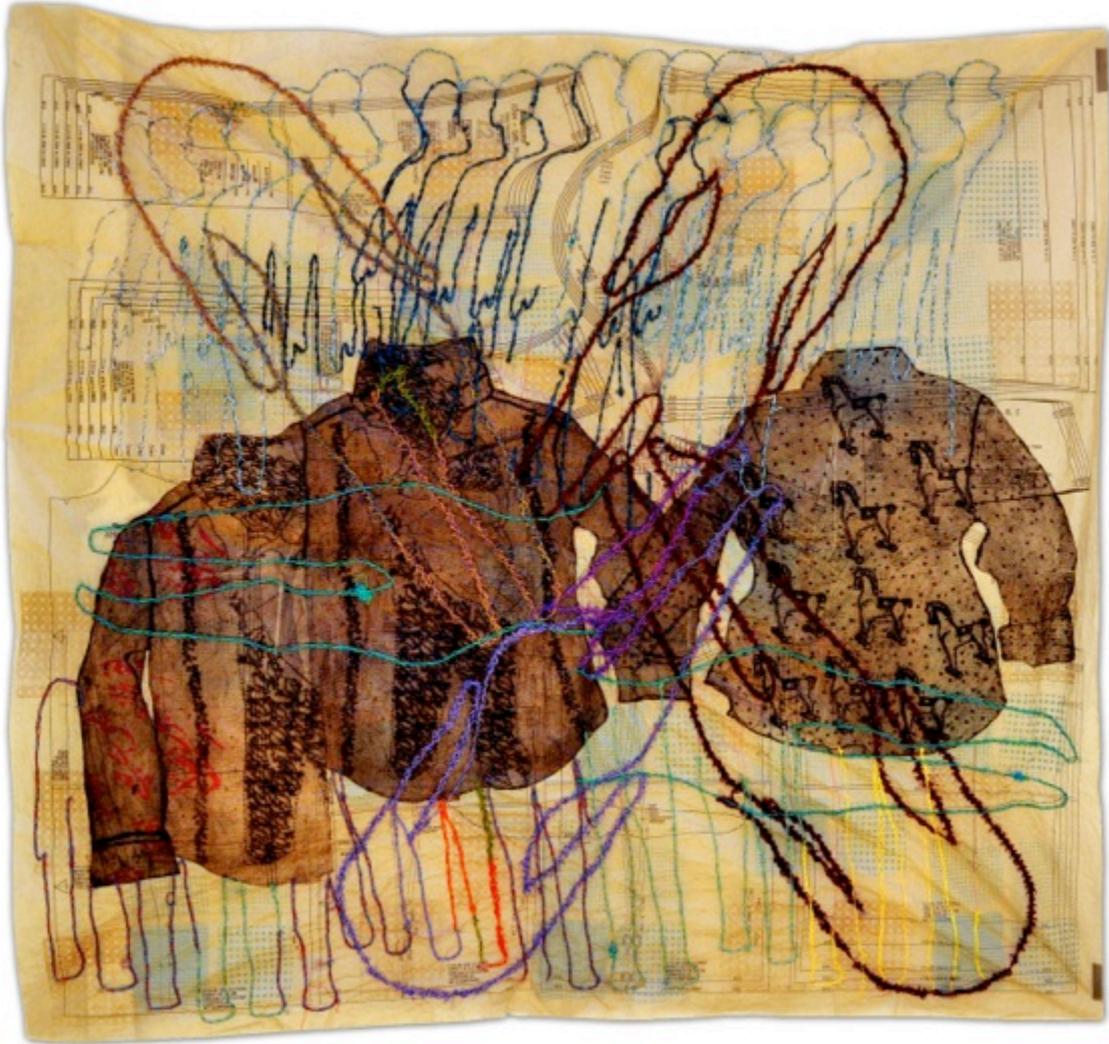
Hiromi Tango creates sculptural works from a multitude of objects and materials, building forms in an organic way. Her work often evolves collaboratively with other artists and by including her audience who contribute objects, weaving personal memories into the work. The playful sculptural forms tell stories, combining a wide variety of objects that hold varied meanings.

Performance is also central to her work where her body becomes part of the work itself, barely distinguished from the beautiful colorful objects that she moves through as she creates. Her objects seem to move even without her hand, though the inclusion of musical instruments, which are imagined by the viewer as being played despite the fact they are woven into a larger body of work.

Hiromi was unable to perform for this exhibition but is present in her absence by her gold hat, which alludes to her absent body.



Hiromi Tango - Hiromi Hotel and Magic installation – Photograph Megan Evans



Mehwish Iqbal – *Stigmata* – Collagraph, silk screen, embroidery on paper – 1135 x 1200mm

Mehwish Iqbal takes old dress patterns and embellishes them, turning them into artworks. The delicate nature of the markings are layered on the thin tissue, building up a textured surface. Coming from Pakistan she is interested in the personal experience of social, cultural and political landscapes. The soft golden background to her works on paper make one think of looking down on a dry landscape and seeing the human tracks woven beautifully across the land. She also refers to the body with shapes that could be micro as well as macro yet at the same time always fragile, reminding us of the temporary nature of our lives.

Mehwish's work has recently been shortlisted for the International Emerging Artist Award run from Dubai and her work will be shown in Ikono TV there.



Mehwish Iqbal - *Crossroads* - Etching and embroidery on paper - 1490 x 1150mm



Helen Kassa - filmmaker

Helen Kassa was influenced by the writers and poets of Ethiopia, her birth place. She began to write at seven years old and her love of storytelling learned as a child underpins her writing to this day. She also directs and produces films, documentaries and music videos. She exhibits her latest feature film in Transience called *Finding*. She aims to make work that is about what unites us rather than what separates us.



LellaCariddi- Green dress

Lella Cariddi came from Italy in 1955 and bought with her machine embroidered samplers that were part of her 'glory box'. She has worked collaboratively with Vincenza Fazzalori to combine them into hand bound artists books, which represents her love of writing. She also exhibits her green dress that she wore as a fifteen year old. Like My Lee's shoes it resonates with the echo of a lost time and place.

For Vincenza the collaboration enabled her to examine a biographical body of works created by her mother at age thirteen. The artists books are precious objects, gathering memories in the leaves of the pages.

*'It is 1955. The immigration medical officer in Rome declares all four of us (my mother, me, and my two much younger sisters) fit and healthy. The decision to leave Italy for ever is now irreversible. Preparations for our travel to Australia have been going on for several months. My father does not want us to travel on a migrant ship, but on the SS Oronsay, which is more like a tourist liner. It has taken my father five years to save the amount needed for the tickets, and we must get on with it. As time got closer for us to leave, my mother a woman of formidable intellect and equally strong aesthetic sense, hires a couturier to make a completely new wardrobe for us to take to Australia. I was fifteen and three-quarters, when I first wore the green dress made by the couturier.'*  
- LellaCariddi



Ok-HeanChang – *Breath* – Oil on canvas - 914 x 1218mm

Ok-Hean Chang's work is brooding and atmospheric. She is interested in the elemental forces of nature and the transformation of light in nature. Her large blue work is reminiscent of a coming storm bringing with it the electrical charges of lightening that momentarily flash bright and then descend into darkness once again. It is the emotions associated with her work that encourage the viewer to form their own narrative.



Ok-HeanChang- Opening (diptych) - Oil on canvas - 914 x 2436mm

Melinda Bobis is a writer/performer whose work *River River* is a performance based on a short story *Fish-Hair Woman*, which has since been developed into a novel. The character in her novel uses her twelve meter hair to trawl the river for corpses in a militarised village in the Philippines. Using a mix of traditional chanting and western composition Melinda combines storytelling with poetry and drama to tell her extraordinary story.



Melinda Bobis--still from *River River*

Jigzie Cambell, named Queen Jigzie, is a dancer who brings her Jamaican heritage to her performance. She has toured extensively throughout Australia as well as in Europe and Jamaica. Her show *Jamaica Irie* pays tribute to the songs, dances and stories of Jamaica.



JigzieCambell

These ten extraordinary women have all, in some way, drawn on their experience of migration whether it be as a refugee in extreme circumstances or leaving their country of origin by choice. They all affirm their love of Australia and the benefits it offers to migrants and refugees however there is also a lingering sadness or loss for many of them for the sense of being part of a bigger community with traditions that they are naturally at home in. Helen Kassa notes with poignancy that while the material circumstances are better there is a lot that she misses from the home she will always hold in her heart. Perhaps this tension is what makes for the power of their art. Creativity is a place where they can create a sense of belonging no matter where they reside.

Dr. Megan Evans  
*Visual Arts Curator*

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