

2 0 1 9

A D E L

A I D E / /

I N T E R N

A T I O N A L



2019 Adelaide//International ERICA GREEN

While the *Adelaide//International* can rightly be seen as a ‘reprise’ of the earlier iterations in 2010, 2012 and 2014, it is significantly different in concept, context and strategy. The earlier Adelaide Internationals looked outwards and sought to offer audiences a succinct introduction to new international art and trends—a boutique alternative, if you like, to the sprawling surveys of the *Biennale of Sydney* and the wonderful *Asia Pacific Triennial*. We now have a surfeit, among which the inaugural *NGV Triennial* (2017/18) was hugely popular and featured some special works, not least *The Enclave*, a gripping video installation by Irish artist Richard Mosse about war and displacement. However, the *Triennial* suffered from curatorial arbitrariness and crowded excess.

In this first of three consecutive *Adelaide//International* exhibitions—for the 2019, 2020 and 2021 Adelaide Festivals, respectively—the Samstag Museum of Art has instead created a focussed conversation between four internationally experienced artists (two from Australia and one each from Aotearoa New Zealand and Singapore). Though their work—at the surface—is entirely different, these artists share certain common links and conceptual underpinnings that relate to (or derive from) the profound sweep of 18th and 19th century English colonisation into ‘our’ geographical world (which is to say the artists’ worlds), and also from the associated migrations, disruptions and exchanges that followed.

Very thoughtfully—and in quite marvellous ways visually—the immaculately crafted work of each artist reveals positions, meditations and imaginative original thinking on the postcolonial world of their own experience. In its various parts, the 2019 *Adelaide//International* is about the love and recovery of Indigenous culture, and challenges questionable assumptions and the uncritically received histories of Empire. It is also about difference, marginality and displacement, and the search for personal identity amidst the suffocating flow of dominant culture.

In *Room B*, his new work at Samstag for the *Adelaide//International*, **Brook Andrew** makes good use of his abiding hybridity principle, reassembling a cohort of elements from his considerable archival oeuvre to form an evergreen statement about Indigenous life and recovered memory. It is a work that pushes back against the viewer.

Andrew’s artistic journey—encompassing not only his inward reflective process but also his compulsive garnering of found things of interest, and his regular travels abroad to engage with ethnographic museums that typically hold precious Australian Indigenous artefacts—has provided him with a growing armoury of eclectic materials. He uses these to launch highly energised subversions against established orders. There is the appearance of chaos in much of it, but it is deliberate and considered. A Dadaist at heart, Andrew understands anarchy.

Room B comprises an installation of video and three-dimensional constructions set within a gallery space utterly transformed by a vibrant mural of Wiradjuri patterns. This is *his* heritage, one that speaks eloquently to his other (Celtic) self. A standing screen is splattered with painted words and displays a jumble of found things from the extensive Andrew archive. An empty vitrine sits on the gallery floor and is similarly overlaid with painted messaging. Like a graffitied ruin, the vitrine seems to signify the colonising anthropological practice of rendering Aboriginality through ‘primitivist’ displays of curiosities, objects and bones. As the writer Georges Petitjean has suggested, it is an exorcism.¹

These are recurring devices and themes for Andrew, in which he cobbles things together in unlikely juxtapositions but with coherent intent: to confront and challenge the viewer with all the contradictions of contemporary white and black Australian cultures. They both are cultures that he loves.



Finally, *SMASH IT*, Andrew's new video for *Room B*, forms a statement about societal intolerance of difference and also about Aboriginal resistance and the destructiveness of forced assimilation. The looped video blends a mix of the artist's archived moving-image treasures—interviews, documentaries and film clips.² One of these captures a moment from Charles Chauvel's legendary 1955 film *Jedda*, a story of tragic love in which two fated Aboriginal characters are caught between seemingly irreconcilable worlds.

Brook Andrew has considerable regard for his Aotearoa artist colleague **Lisa Reihana**—a fellow traveller in the re-examination of history—whose masterpiece *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* Andrew describes as 'a big idea' and 'seminal'.³ Though true enough, it understates Reihana's achievement in creating what is an astonishing work of art that has an auteur's inspired originality and whose creation demanded a warrior's resolve for its complex production. A decade in the making, it proved a sensation when presented as part of *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries*, the official Aotearoa New Zealand offering at the 2017 *Venice Biennale*, where it was popularly judged the Biennale's standout work.

A multi-channel video of awesome physical scale and great technical innovation, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* immediately commands the viewer's interest. As its panoramic visual narrative unfolds like an extended tracking shot, travelling (with one small exception) to the left of screen over two almost identical 32-minute cycles, we are taken on an absorbing journey of simulated pictorial history, set in the late 18th century at peak Pacific Ocean exploration.

Reihana has conceived *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* as a 'transgressive' reinterpretation of key events surrounding Captain James Cook's three voyages of exploration, culminating in his death on the beach of Hawaii's Kealakekua Bay in 1779. Famously, Cook undertook the first of his journeys—as Lieutenant Cook—on HMS Endeavour, with Joseph Banks of the Royal Society leading an unprecedented expedition of scientists, among them Banks's notable colleague naturalist Daniel Solander. (The expedition also included the industrious and talented natural history illustrator Sydney Parkinson and astronomer Charles Green, both destined to die—like many ill-fated members of the science team and crew—before the Endeavour returned home just on three years later.) Their prime scientific objective was to record the Transit of Venus in Tahiti in 1769, but they also aimed to make ethnographic observations and collect fauna and flora. It was only upon completing their astronomical task that Cook was to open the Admiralty's 'secret' papers, instructing him to proceed south in search of Terra Australis Incognita, 'the unknown land of the South'.

Over the course of Cook's three voyages, other artists contributed to what became an unequalled trove of pictorial representations, not least John Webber, who was aboard HMS Resolution at Cook's death. Cook's unparalleled exploratory success and brilliance as a navigator, along with his reputation for humane and intelligent leadership, have led to his popular apotheosis, in which history has become myth.

It is a myth that Lisa Reihana, as Māori, is concerned to resist. She has questions to ask of the accepted history surrounding these events, and she has alternative versions to propose. Of special interest to her, for example, is the likely perspective of indigenous peoples encountered by Cook and whose views of the explorers would have been experienced, literally, from the beach and so reversed. She is also determined to elevate the otherwise historically understated roles of Tupaia and Omai, two men from Ra'iātea in the Society Islands who travelled with Cook on different voyages, making exceptional contributions to his expeditionary success. Tupaia especially, an *Arioi* high priest taken aboard the Endeavour by Banks, provided vital help with navigation and in the encounters with Māori, who respectfully recognised his status. Along with others, he died of dysentery in Batavia before reaching England.

For Reihana, Tupaia and Omai are distinguished emissaries from the south; she shows them discoursing with Cook and Banks and they make repeated appearances in her narrative. Also prominent is the person known as the Chief Mourner, in this case an emissary between life and death whose spectacular costume—fearful to Tahitians—is



based on a famous drawing made by Tupaia whilst travelling on the Endeavour.⁴ Along with Cook and Banks, these five characters provide the central motifs in *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, for whose creation Reihana found a marvellous device.

A 19th century decorative wallpaper, *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* is an extraordinary technical wonder of 10 metres and 20 drops, produced in 1804-5 by Joseph Dufour & Cie and the artist Jean-Gabriel Charvet. *Les Sauvages* drew on representations from the voyages of Cook, La Pérouse, de Bougainville and Jean-François de Galaup to create a fanciful depiction of the South Seas, and, for a time, became much favoured by wealthy Europeans and North Americans as domestic furnishing. As Rhana Devenport, the curator of *Emissaries*, suggests in her very informative and compelling account of *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, the wallpaper was intended to ‘cast the wealthy as worldly participants and purveyors of faraway places, and their guests as amused and titillated momentary adventurers’.⁵

To create *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, Reihana has taken elements of the background landscapes in *Les Sauvages* for herself, but rendered them afresh as a revolving sky, land and sea in an extraordinary work of reinterpretation. In her painstaking way, she has disposed of the twenty ‘chapters’ of the wallpaper’s representations—which she calls ‘a concoction, a fabulation invented in someone else’s elsewhere’⁶—and instead, with the technical miracle of the green screen, produced her own depictions of encounters and exchanges, ‘reimagining history and its representations from a 21st-century Māori and Pacific perspective’.⁷

There are eighty episodic vignettes of fascinating storytelling to *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, supported by the inventive soundtrack of James Pinker and a large cast of costumed actors and dancers. Two different Captain Cooks are performed by male and female actors, reflecting Pacific peoples’ confusion as to his sexual orientation. Australian Aboriginals, relegated to the near-invisible distance in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* (as was the death of Cook), are now foregrounded. It is a marvel: you will not tear yourself away.

In a holiday colour snapshot taken in 1972, **Ming Wong**—then about one year old—is sitting in a small pram, foreground and centre to the picture but looking away from the

camera, distracted. His mother stands behind, one hand on the pram. She is looking directly at the viewer with an expression that suggests the unseen photographer is not yet ready. A confident, modern tourist, she is smartly dressed, wearing a yellow-ochre blazer, a colourful scarf, a red hat that matches her dress, and a white handbag draped casually across her left forearm. Elegant.



They are in the Piazza San Marco, Venice, on a clear day, with St Mark’s basilica and the towering Campanale immediately behind. It’s a good, memorable shot and seemingly straightforward, other than for the fact that she is Asian—Chinese, in fact; a Singaporean. Not exactly out of place, but for the era and the European context—to some eyes at least—different!



Thirty-seven years later, Wong will return to Venice, where his exhibition *Life of Imitation*—commissioned for the Singapore Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009—will elevate him to international attention.

Ming Wong makes films; *In Love for the Mood* (2009) is one of three that comprised his Venice exhibition. Each of his projects have a constant: they are reworkings of particular scenes taken from celebrated world cinema classics, moments—typically rich in emotion—he has chosen specifically for what they offer as material for his own purpose. And where the original film tells a complete story (in this case, Wong Kar Wai's 2000 film of unconsummated desire, *In the Mood for Love*, set in 1960s Hong Kong), Wong's objective is different.

Having chosen his cinematic moment to appropriate, Wong sets about representing it in his own unique way, examining it repetitively and forensically from alternative viewpoints, crafting it in a manner that amplifies the viewer's awareness of specific details such as speech and gesture. Yet the result confounds certainty as to what is actually happening as a narrative, or what is exactly intended. Typically, Wong will use the same actor to play duplicate roles and different genders in the same scene, or he may repeat the scene using different actors each time, of differing ethnicities. Often it is himself performing. He takes great care to achieve a professional filmic effect with his use of costume, colour, lighting, music and dialogue.

In the case of *In Love for the Mood*, Wong's chosen moment is a scene where Mrs So (Maggie Cheung in the original) is rehearsing with Mr Chow (Tony Leung) to accuse her husband of adultery. Here, Wong's Mrs So and Mr Chow are both performed over three vignettes by a Caucasian actress from New Zealand. Portrayed in the first scene as struggling to effectively deliver her lines in Cantonese, the actress is clearly miscast. An off-camera Wong is prompting her. In two subsequent scenes, subtitled respectively in English and then Italian, she becomes more confident and her acted Cantonese more accomplished. In all of this, Wong effectively conjures questions of meaning that have additional complexity (and interest) through his emphasis on portraying the cumbersome process of rehearsal, in contrast to the actual performed rehearsal of the appropriated scene.

Growing up in Singapore, Wong's preoccupations as an artist have been much influenced by that country's rich history of multiculturalism and its progressive moves to independence from colonial beginnings. Wong is particularly enamoured of the period following World War Two that ushered in a golden age of cinema and a buoyant multi-ethnic and multilingual culture. However, with the establishment of the Republic of Singapore as an independent and sovereign state in 1965—following the drama of racial disruption that came with Singapore's brief merger with Malaysia and the military confrontation (*Konfrontasi*) with Indonesia—a culture of homogeneity gradually evolved, displacing the diversity of the past.

Wong's films, then, can be understood as being opposed to the levelling effects of government-driven culture and the loss of differentiation—especially of language—that results. He thus deliberately selects actors to perform roles for which—because of their race and gender, for example—they would not conventionally be chosen.

He is about social relations, language, identity, and celebrating difference.

Eugenia Lim thinks deeply about modern Australian society and the forces of history that have shaped and welded our national form and identity. Having grown up in Australia the daughter of Singaporean Chinese immigrants, she is also keenly aware of the cultural and social nuance—and the experience of difference—which impacts distinctly on personal development.



Lim's art provides a means of unwrapping these complexities, no doubt for her own satisfaction of understanding, but also, importantly, to forge a personal statement of values and to make socially critical observations. Her artistic journey is an evolving one in which, project by project, she intimately examines a subject of interest and uses a highly managed blend of mediums such as performance, video and installation to create imaginatively sharp commentaries. They are at once explicit and yet oblique.

In the 2019 *Adelaide//International*, three of Lim's recent projects have been brought together under the unifying rubric of the Ambassador—her abiding character—to create an enhanced perspective on the artist's concerns and versatility. Inspired by the work of Hong Kong-born artist Tseng Kwong Chi and his *East Meets West* series, Lim's Ambassador—Tati-like in manner and mostly mute—is a somewhat distanced and aloof Asian personage, dressed in a gilded Mao suit. The character provides continuity and linkage between each of Lim's works, facilitating audience focus and engagement. In the three iterations in which we encounter her, the Ambassador appears conspicuously out of place or out of time; notwithstanding her implicit diplomatic prerogatives, she is anomalous, a dislocated stranger in a strange Australian land.

Lim's earliest work in the Ambassador series, *Yellow Peril*, begins autobiographically as a meditation on migration and origins, with two enlarged black and white photographs screen-printed on gold mylar. One photograph shows her parents, who migrated to Australia in 1973, standing before Ron Robertson-Swann's iconic public sculpture *Vault* in its original 1980 Melbourne City Square location, six months before it was 'driven out of town' by a reactionary media campaign that derided it as 'the yellow peril'.⁸ It is of course a marvellous metaphor for the active racial discrimination against people of non-European origin—especially Chinese—which began with the mid-19th century Victorian gold rush and was formalised by Australia's newly federated parliament under the White Australia Policy in 1901 (though finally made unlawful under the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act).

A second photo shows the Ambassador holding a papier-mâché replica of the Welcome Stranger—the world's largest alluvial nugget, found in Victoria in 1869—a fiction that nonetheless serves to assert the long Chinese presence in Australia. The Welcome Stranger replica is presented, in situ, on a plinth in front of the photographs. The last part of *Yellow Peril* is a video set in Ballarat's simulated gold rush theme park, Sovereign Hill, where the Ambassador wanders the streets and tries her hand at panning for gold.

The People's Currency, Lim's second work, creates a lively interactive play set in an imagined 'Chinese workshop of the world', symbolically illustrating the procedures and transactions of global economics and the underpinning mechanisms of industrial production—with their uncertain worker rewards and remunerations—upon which we have come to rely. Here (in a performance that Lim will reprise at Samstag for the *Adelaide//International*) the Ambassador supervises a process in which voluntary participants 'manufacture' digital devices, for which they might—or might not—be paid a commensurate wage (in fact, a counterfeit currency that Lim has created).

The Ambassador leads the workers in factory calisthenics. We, the observers, are implicated in the systems and labour practices—usually conducted out of sight—that deliver us our treasured products.

In *The Australian Ugliness*, her third and most recent work, Lim reveals an appreciation for (and knowledge of) Australian architecture, which she sees as a vital expression of the national identity. In fact, her interest stems largely from time spent as an artist-in-residence at the South Yarra family home of the late Robin Boyd, legendary architect and influential social critic. Famously, Boyd—who designed the Walsh Street house in 1957—wrote critically of Australian architecture as an allegory of the Australian society of his day, with its mediocrity, superficiality and kitsch suggestive of an 'aesthetic and ethical gap in the national psyche'.⁹



Lim's *The Australian Ugliness* is in many ways an homage to Boyd, and her Ambassador takes up his example of critical provocation by visiting more than thirty architectural sites across the country. Shape-shifting into a tourist, property investor, client or resident—and taking selfies— Lim inspects and witnesses both grandly iconic public and more modest residential buildings that embody identity, place, design and class.

For Lim, much of this contemporary architecture maintains the qualities critiqued by Boyd, and continues to represent “a culture that still privileges the white, the male, and the monumental”. She says she wants “to bring to these my own experiences as a woman, non-architect and Asian-Australian—an identity largely invisible or under-represented in architecture and architectural discourse”.¹⁰ Lim's critical project could be seen as aspirationally channelling her own Asian heritage towards a future integrated Australia.

A triptych of videos comprising *The Australian Ugliness* chart the Ambassador's journey of architectural inspections, and are displayed in a gold pavilion—a gesture to one of Boyd's last works, Neptune's Fishbowl (1970) in South Yarra. Ten photographs, documenting several of the Ambassador's activities, are presented nearby.

Erica Green February 2019

- 1 Georges Petitjean, 'The constructive iconoclast: the art of Brook Andrew', an unpublished essay written in response to Brook Andrew's installation *Room A*, as presented in, *The Boomerang Effect – The Aboriginal Arts in Australia*, Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, Switzerland, 2017/2018.
- 2 *SMASH IT* was created through a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship undertaken by Andrew in 2017 at the Smithsonian Institute, USA, and while in residence at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, from July 2017 - June 2018.
- 3 See 'Brook Andrew and Lisa Reihana In Conversation' in *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries*, exhibition catalogue for the 57th International Art Exhibition – *La Biennale di Venezia*, 2017. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, p76.
- 4 Among the illustrations brought back to England by Joseph Banks from the Endeavour expedition, were eight watercolour drawings (now in the British Library) attributed to an unknown artist, 'Artist of the Chief Mourner', but long speculated to have been made by Banks. It was only in 1997, following a review of Banks's correspondence, that these were reattributed to Tupaia.
- 5 Rhana Devenport, 'Emissaries: A New Pacific of the Past for Tomorrow' in *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries* exhibition catalogue for the 57th International Art Exhibition – *La Biennale di Venezia*, 2017, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2017, p19. Curator, director and commissioning editor Rhana Devenport. An initiative of New Zealand at Venice. Presenting partner Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
- 6 Ibid, p19.
- 7 Ibid, p20.
- 8 Commissioned by Melbourne City Council in May 1978 and without a name when installed at Melbourne's City Square in May 1980, Ron Robertson-Swann named the work *Vault* in September that year. *Vault* (built of prefabricated steel, painted yellow and popularly known as *The Yellow Peril*) was removed in December 1980 and since 2002 has been located alongside the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Southbank, Melbourne. In 2017 *Vault* was recommended for heritage protection status.
- 9 See Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1960
- 10 Eugenia Lim, 'Ugly-beautiful Australia: Eugenia Lim', in *Assemble Papers: The Culture of Living Closer Together*, 2018. <https://assemblepapers.com.au/2019/01/24/ugly-beautiful-australia-eugenia-lim/>



2019 Adelaide//International

28 February — 5 April 2019

Samstag Museum of Art Galleries 1, 2, 3 & SASA Gallery

2019 Adelaide//International Curator: Erica Green

Published by the Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art University of South Australia

GPO Box 2471, Adelaide SA 5001 T 08 8302 0870 E samstagmuseum@unisa.edu.au

W unisa.edu.au/samstagmuseum

Copyright © the artists, authors and University of South Australia

All rights reserved. This publication is copyright. Except as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced by any process, electronic or otherwise, without permission in writing from the publisher. Neither may information be stored electronically in any form whatsoever without such permission.

ISBN-13: 978-0-6485117-0-0

Author: Erica Green

Samstag Museum of Art Director: Erica Green

Curator: Gillian Brown

Associate Curator: Joanna Kitto

Administrator: Karen Devenport

Curatorial Assistants: Sophia Nuske, Jemimah Dodd

Gallery Attendants: Emily Clinton, Callum Docherty, Sam Gold, Sophie Green

Installation: John Axe, Peter Carroll, Daniel Tucker

Graphic Design: Xtra Shiny

The Samstag Museum of Art is delighted to present this new series of exhibitions for the 2019, 2020 and 2021 Adelaide Festivals, each comprising works by artists from Australia and overseas, along with associated forum programs.

In 2019, two Australian artists — Brook Andrew and Eugenia Lim — and two international — Lisa Reihana (New Zealand) and Ming Wong (Singapore) — are featured in four distinct exhibitions exploring histories of migration, the impact of cultural exchange on communities and individuals, and questions of who holds the power of narration.

The Samstag Museum of Art wishes to express our special gratitude to the four artists of the 2019 Adelaide//International, whose thoughtful and immaculately crafted works give this exhibition its power.

Adelaide//International is a Samstag Museum of Art exhibition series for the Adelaide Festival.

Eugenia Lim: The Ambassador is a 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art and Museums & Galleries of NSW touring exhibition. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program.

Ming Wong: In Love for the Mood is presented courtesy of the Singapore Art Museum.



SAMSTAG
MUSEUM

ADELAIDE
FESTIVAL
1-17 March 2019
AF

SASA
GALLERY



Art, Architecture
and Design



Centre for
Contemporary
Asian Art

Museums
& Galleries
of NSW



Australia
Council
for the Arts



Australian Government
Visions of Australia

sam
singaporeartmuseum
CONTEMPORARY ART IN SOUTHEAST ASIA