



SAMSTAG MUSEUM OF ART WIRLTUTI SEASON
2024 AFF/SAMSTAG MOVING IMAGE COMMISSION
FRIDAY 11 OCTOBER — FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER

Moore

ARCHIE MOORE

DWELLING (ADELAIDE ISSUE)

ARCHIE MOORE

Migulugbi—a bed, a room, a memory...

(migulugbi—to dwell)

Essay by Dr Debra Dank (Gudanji/Wakaja)

It was too bright. They told me to go to sleep, but the glow made it like daylight. I held up my hand and slowly turned it this way and that. The veins popped out like the earth worms after rain, fidgeting in the slippery mix of water and earth to escape back into their underground home. My veins wriggled under the brown skin covering my hand, but not to find an escape back into the earth; the earth and my veins already belonged and lived within each other. I moved my hand and watched as the light played with my fingers to make valleys and mountains. And there, on the top of a mountain rendered by my finger, I saw a little clump of earth, tucked into the corner of a fingernail. Mum had missed that when she had scrubbed us clean before bed. Seeing that made me happy and I celebrated it ... but only in my head where the sounds and noises made by my thinking could not be heard because my parents wanted me to sleep.

I tucked my hand under the blanket, otherwise Mum would be sure to see and wipe that little clay fragment away. She had a thing about being cleaned of dirt before we got into bed. And as my clay fragment rested safe on the mountain, I made a tight fist to hold that little piece of precious earth, a reminder of what I had done that day, a companion that made it possible for that treasured day to continue and not be lost to the passing of the night and the harsh light of day. I knew the rising sun would happen soon enough. The clay imprinted itself into my hand as I squeezed my fist tight. Soon, I felt it no more, and when I pulled my fist out from the covers, in the kindly moon's glow, I saw that it had been turned to a dust smudge. I rubbed it, and slowly, it became a soft stain on my skin, there to remind me and become a memory that would be added to the stories that were already hoarded here.

I could not see the earth on my finger as dirt. Earth held the memories of this place. It is where our bodies go after they do their job of offering us such vital hospitality. So, the mountain that my finger had now become housed reminders and fragments of memories of all who had sat and lay and lived upon it—for that tiny moment but possibly, too, forever.

The warmth left after the sun's work of heating this place travelled up through the layers of the swag that cradled my body. I lay beneath the stars and the brightly glowing moon that people said made it possible to see forever. They said that a lot here, and about other places like this big open plains country where Dad was currently working. You could see forever—they said that of nights such as this and most days. I always peered out there into the direction that they were looking at. They saw some far-off place that my eyes could not find—neither daylight nor the full moon's glow helped me see what they did. I would torture my eyes into hard squints, soft squints and whatever type of squint there was in between, too, trying to find forever. They saw it but I never did. I still don't know what forever looks like.

In our swag in that moment, I could see the stars playing across the sky above me, but I didn't know if they were forever either, in the way people said. I think I need a lot of living before I get there, and I don't know if forever is where I should be but that little bit of earth under my fingernail made me feel that perhaps forever could exist somewhere.

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I had been told in my science class that the stars stayed there all the time. We couldn't see them during the day because the sun was too bright, but the stars remained. I liked knowing they stayed there because they reminded me of those memories. Always there, invisible to us in that moment but still there. I preferred the moon and the stars with their soft, even light, like the memories that were shared between me and my grandmother. Soft, ephemeral things that were so strong I imagined I could remember living them, and when I sat with the quiet at my shoulder, I imagined that I had felt that earth before. I remembered that it contained so many memories that I was literally covered with the words and lives and stories of others when that dust—red like my blood—rose and covered me, as it often did out here. In some part of my head, and in my heart too, I know I didn't make my grandmother memories, because while they are like the warmth that rises from our night fire, staying just out of physical reach, close enough to feel in my bones, I had not lived them. I know, too, that the biggest thing, the truth of my living, was that while I knew my grandmother and I had never met in this life, I know we live together in that earth.

All the night sounds rose to chase away those sun-bright noises of the birds and the cattle, and now I lay in our swag being warmed by the bodies of my sisters. My eyes closed to let my thoughts come out. As I lay there, with closed eyes to try to make the world dark enough to sleep, I felt the cushioned softness under me. The earth, the memories, the arms of my grandmother were all there waiting to welcome me into sleep and dreams—to migulugbi.

Tomorrow, we would travel back into town. It was exciting because when we returned to town we would be moving into our own house. Camooweal had had some new houses built, and Mum and Dad had been able to get a house for us. We would have a house, and we could keep our own things there. I would have somewhere to keep my books and to keep my collection of matchbox covers. It would be strange to have our own place and not be looking at camping with family or looking for other houses that were vacant.

I had my own room in our new house. It had been exciting for a few weeks and then I got lonely. I missed the swag and my sisters and their warmth. It was hard to get comfortable on the new bed that I now slept on because the space was strange and had a different shape and a different softness—there was no warmth from the earth under the swag, no ancestors close, and I really missed my grandmother. I tossed and turned in that bed, but I struggled to sleep, to truly dwell.

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Mum and Dad both insisted that we keep the house clean. That was code for: all the dirt had to stay outside. The house was lovely for Mum and I as we covered the new books for the school library. It was also lovely when we sewed our shorts on the treadle sewing machine after carefully cutting pieces from the fabric that Mum's granny had given us, but it felt strange. My toes didn't feel like my toes anymore because I walked on the piece of torn towelling that dad insisted we walk on while in the house. There were no footprints, no dust smudges and no memories in that new house. At night, as I tried to sleep, my body was cold without my sisters close by, the moon's glow was kept outside by the curtains that hung across the window, and I could feel a strange coolness coming from under the mattress—no warmth from the sunshine tonight.

I lay and wondered if my grandmother had known the embrace of a mattress like I was now feeling. I didn't think she ever had. I was glad because I didn't want her to feel this strange, uneven coolness. I wanted her to always be warm, to always know the sun's heat in the gentle embracing glow of the moon – forever. I felt sad, too, that we lived in this place now where the dust was not welcome, where the earth was kept out. I willed my memories to seep through the walls of this new house. I hoped for the breeze to lift the curtains and bring the smells of the gidgee. I hoped for the night sounds of insects and animals to rise through the floor, so I didn't need to sleep in solitude, where nostalgia was my companion and not my grandmother who sat with me in the earth.

Dr Debra Dank

Debra Dank is a Gudanji/Wakaja woman, married to Rick, with three adult children and two grandchildren. An educator, she has worked in teaching and learning for many years. She continues to experience the privilege of living with country and with family. Debra completed her PhD in Narrative Theory and Semiotics at Deakin University in 2021. She is the author of *We Come with This Place* (2022). The book was shortlisted for 2023 NSW Premier's Literary Award, Douglas Stewart Prize for Non-Fiction, Indigenous Writers' Prize, UTS Glenda Adams Award for New Writing, shortlisted for three Queensland Literary Awards 2023, and longlisted for the 2023 Mark and Evette Moran Nib Literary Award and Stella Prize the same year.

Archie Moore's Memory-Work Essay by Dr Helen Hughes

Implanted Memories

Architecture and memory have always been closely associated in the western imaginary. Classical models of mnemonics—the orator's tool for remembering large amounts of information and recalling them in order—were called 'Roman room' or 'memory palace' techniques, and were modelled on multi-room buildings. In this type of mnemonic (or 'mnemotechnique', from the Greek *mneme*, meaning remembrance or memory), the memoriser would first mentally impress information onto certain objects, like a vase or a piece of furniture, and then 'place' those objects in the various rooms of a building with whose layout they were familiar. When it came time to recall the information, all the orator had to do was to mentally walk through the building, one room at a time, stopping at each object to retrieve the information it contained.

Circa 95 AD, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian explained why buildings that are already familiar to us are useful to the art of memory. He reflected: 'when we return to a place after a considerable absence, we not merely recognise the place itself, but remember things that we did there, and recall the persons whom we met and even the unuttered thoughts which passed through our minds when we were there before.' Rooms and houses that we know intimately are always already pregnant with memory—haunted by people, experiences, feelings. In such spaces, time is prone to collapse a little, with the past leaking into the present in unexpected ways. To put it another way, rooms and houses that are familiar to us are teeming with both voluntary memories (information that we purposely retrieve) and involuntary memories (associations that arise spontaneously).

However useful it may be as a mnemotechnique, this model of memory as an architectural storehouse is a misleading one. As is now well understood, a memory is not a static object that can be retrieved perfectly intact from the past—like a vase from a shelf—but rather is continuously remade in the act of its retrieval. This is something that the Kamilaroi and Bigambul artist Archie Moore knows well, observing: 'I know it's reconstructed [...] Every time you remember something, something gets added to it.'ⁱⁱ Indeed, his *Dwelling* series pivots around these twinned gestures of remembrance and reconstruction.

Begun in 2012 and now in its fifth iteration for *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)* at the Samstag Museum of Art, *Dwelling* sees the artist build immersive total installations that recreate various rooms from his childhood. These include the kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms and living room from the fibro house on the outskirts of the town of Tara in west Queensland that he grew up in, as well as his school classroom and the corrugated-iron hut in which his grandmother lived.

i Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 22–23.

ii Archie Moore, 'Archie Moore: Biographical Interview,' filmed 2015, published March 1, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqQITSpN1bo>, accessed October 10, 2024.

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Like memory, film is an important interpretive framework for Moore's work. For the 2018 iteration of *Dwelling* at Griffith University Art Museum, Moore titled each room after a different camera, including *Camera Familiaris* (family room) and *Camera Schola* (schoolroom). He was playing on the double meaning of 'camera' as both a chamber or round building and an instrument for capturing and storing images.ⁱⁱⁱ

Similarly, the title of the series refers both to the noun 'dwelling' (a home) and the verb 'to dwell' (to live somewhere or in a particular way, often used metaphorically to describe time spent worrying—i.e., *to dwell on the past*). Moore has said that when we find ourselves in one of his *Dwellings*, '[w]e are inside the memories of my childhood home.' The memories, he notes, are simultaneously 'accurate, authentic, false, vague, and absent.'^{iv} Accordingly, his reconstructed rooms are not perfect remakes of their originals, but rather expand and contract according to the dimensions of the gallery in which they are built.

Strongly reminiscent of mnemonic techniques like memory palace, and related to the camera as both a room and an instrument for capturing and storing images, *Dwelling* is a powerfully inscriptive work. It has the capacity to imprint itself in viewers' memories through a variety of senses, including sight, touch and smell. A temporary site-specific installation that is deconstructed at the end of each exhibition period, rather than a discreet art object that is collected, preserved and presented in perpetuity by a museum or gallery, *Dwelling* endures as a memory, implanted in the minds of its viewers in the same way the memory of the childhood home in Tara endures in the mind of the artist, the home having long-since been demolished. Indeed, memory could be said to be both *Dwelling's* content and, ultimately, its medium.^v

Intergenerational Memory-Work

Dwelling transforms a home into a gallery, a personal memory into a collective experience, the past into the present, and memory into history. By reconstructing the rooms of his childhood for public encounter in a museum, Moore is very deliberately playing with the politics of memory and its relationship to history-making. He is, in other words, undertaking a form of memory-work: that is, working with the material remnants of history, along with more intangible emotions and sensations, and making them public. Memory-work is crucial to determining what is socially remembered, and what is socially forgotten. In a settler-colonial context like Australia, then, memory-work is a hotly contested terrain.

iii In *Dwelling (Victorian Issue)*, Moore created a camera obscura in one of the rooms by turning a hole in the door into a lens that threw upside-down scenes from the street outside onto the back wall. This, too, was built on a childhood memory, Tara Heffernan notes, when 'a hole in the front door cast an inverted projection across his living room wall.' Moore was captivated, and 'sat and watched this free movie for a while, fascinated by how it came to be there.' Tara Heffernan, 'The Impoverished Aesthetic: Class, Race, and Depression in the Work of Archie Moore,' *Memo 1* (2023–24), 99.

iv Archie Moore, 'Archie Moore Discusses *Dwelling (Victorian Issue)* with Paris Lettau,' interview by Paris Lettau, Gertrude Contemporary, 2022, <https://gertrude.org.au/article/archie-moore-in-discussion-with-paris-lettau>.

v This is an idea I have also explored in relation to Mike Nelson's total installations. See Helen Hughes, *Mike Nelson's Hybrid Scripts*, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2015.

In their book *Memory in Place: Locating Colonial Histories and Commemoration*, editors Cameo Dalley and Ashley Barnwell have noted that ‘[i]n Australian memory studies, much of the research on settler-colonialism, Indigenous–settler relations and colonial forgetting focuses on the national level.’^{vi} This can be seen in the way national memory is both inscribed and produced by institutions like the Australian War Memorial, for example. By contrast, Dalley and Barnwell see value in attending to memory as it operates at a local level, ‘on places and landscapes where the potency of history and memory come together in lived relations that resonate across generations.’^{vii}

As Chris Healy (writing in the same volume) rightly notes, for decades Indigenous artists have taken on the mantle of non-institutional memory-work in this country, thereby countering the dominant mentality of colonial forgetting and inventing new modes of remembrance. Examples like Djon Mundine’s *Aboriginal Memorial* (1987), which is permanently installed at the National Gallery of Australia, and Fiona Foley’s *Witnessing to Silence* (2004), a public artwork located outside the Brisbane Magistrates Court, are both iconic counter-monuments that bear witness to and seek justice for colonial atrocities committed against Indigenous populations at the hands of settlers.

Unlike these forms of commemoration, however, Moore’s *Dwelling* is somewhat unmonumental, perhaps even a little ambivalent. It cuts across the grand scale of the state and the nation in its commitment to the domestic. And instead of commemorating something as tangible and specific as an historical massacre, as with, say, the incredibly significant community artwork *Myall Creek Massacre Possum Skin Cloak* (2000), *Dwelling* remembers violent racism as it registers on the psyche and the body—handed down *through* psyches and bodies, perhaps epigenetically, in subtle and indirect ways. In other words, as a form of intergenerational memory.

When prompted to broach the topic of intergenerational trauma in an interview with Paris Lettau for a previous iteration of *Dwelling* (*Victorian Issue*) in 2022, Moore spoke about his mother’s inherited fear of having her children removed from her by the state, and thus her insistence on giving Moore Dettol baths.^{viii} (The scent of disinfectant can sometimes be detected in his reconstructed bathrooms.) He also spoke about the way his uncle would ‘do a lot of things violently,’ forever redirecting his aggression—even onto sandwiches:

He would smack the lid off the butter container while saying something like, “Get off there you cunt!” Then he would stab the butter with the knife yelling, “Argghh!”, and slam the thickly buttered knife onto the white bread. “Fuck ya!”, he would say, flicking some of the remainder onto the ceiling.^{ix}

vi Cameo Dalley and Ashley Barnwell, ‘Memory at Scale: Interdisciplinary Engagements with Australian Histories,’ in *Memory in Place: Locating Colonial Histories and Commemoration* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2023), 1.

vii Ibid.

viii Moore, ‘Archie Moore Discusses *Dwelling* (*Victorian Issue*) with Paris Lettau.’

ix Ibid.

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Moore's house in Tara was both a refuge from racist abuse experienced on the streets or in school and a site for its processing and internalisation. In *Dwelling*, we do not see these memories reenacted or narrated (which could be traumatising for viewers, and retraumatising for the artist); instead, the reconstructed house is haunted by them. By creating atmospheres over monuments, Moore's memory-work troubles the idea that the full extent of colonial violence can be registered through positivist formats like archives and books, in facts and figures, black ink on white pages. Attending to the ongoingness of intergenerational trauma rather than to an originary event, his memory-work also troubles the idea that colonial violence is historical as such. Instead, *Dwelling* shows how it endures in the present—and is thus all the more urgent to redress.^x

Colonial Forgetting

Settler amnesia is not delimited to forgetting acts of violence against Indigenous peoples. It extends to the deliberate severing of the chain-links of intergenerational memory within Indigenous communities through a range of mechanisms, including the removal of children, the banning of ceremony, assimilation policies, and a generalised disregard and delegitimisation of oral history and other forms of intangible heritage through which cultural knowledge is passed down and preserved through generations. The question for many practitioners of memory-work in the settler-colonial context of Australia thus becomes one of 'how to remember what has been forgotten?'^{xi}

Moore—who has, in recent years, become an accomplished family historian in an effort to address gaps in his own family's intergenerational knowledge—reflects on precisely this problem in his interview with Lettau. He commented:

I have emotional feelings sometimes when I am in the bush and look at a pile of rocks, a path, or a group of trees etc, it feels like the landscape is trying to communicate with me. But the disruptive impact of Settler Colonialism has meant I don't have the tools to decipher it. I didn't have any traditional upbringing, which severed me from any connection.^{xii}

Moore likens his experience to the protagonists of the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1979), based on the Strugatsky brothers' book *Roadside Picnic* (1971), in which a professor, a writer and a stalker—a term given to those who trespass in forbidden areas—enter an area known as the Zone that has been affected by extraterrestrial activity. The three men each grasp to comprehend the mysterious events that took place there, as does the government. In *Stalker*, as with Moore's experience on Country, the environment itself holds memory. Tarkovsky's famously long, atmospheric shots of wind passing through trees or water flowing down a stream hint at the land's quiet and irrepressible knowledge.

x Barnwell and Dalley, 'Memory at Scale,' 18.

xi Ibid., 1–2.

xii Moore, 'Archie Moore Discusses *Dwelling* (Victorian Issue) with Paris Lettau.' The following year, in an interview with Rex Butler, he elaborated on this sensation, saying that at times he has felt that 'the physical characteristics of the place' were trying to communicate with him, only he could not decipher their meaning. Archie Moore in Rex Butler, 'Archie Moore: The Stalker,' *Memo* 1 (2023–24), 79.

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Moore attributes this feeling that the land is trying to communicate with him to something that he calls ‘archaic residue.’ This is a form of ‘spiritual inheritance’, he says, ‘some customary information passed down to you, genetically, from your ancestors’, but which colonial violence has short-circuited and scrambled in the present.^{xiii} In *Dwelling*, we are invited to move through the rooms of his remembered childhood home as if we ourselves are stalkers, searching for clues as to what each domestic landscape harbours.

Depopulated and mute, the house clearly holds psychic residue of the past whilst withholding specific details of the events that have occurred within its walls. It is all *mise-en-scène* and no narrative, which distinguishes Moore’s approach from that of the Russian artist Ilya Kabakov, whose total installations were often accompanied by detailed scripts describing the lives of their unseen occupants. Curiosity and frustration thus become important affective dimensions of Moore’s work—markers of the attempt to access imaginative sites of meaning that, it seems, have been all but sealed off.

Dr Helen Hughes

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xiii Butler, ‘Archie Moore,’ 79.

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Archie MOORE, *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*, 2024. Mixed media installation with moving image, commissioned by Samstag and the Adelaide Film Festival. Installation view at Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, 2024. Photography by Sia Duff.

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Dwelling (Adelaide Issue) is the newest installment in a series of works that consider the nature of transgenerational memory by one of Australia's most significant artists, Archie Moore.

Here at Samstag, Moore (Kamilaroi/Bigambul) recreated his childhood home, immersing visitors in the mise-en-scène of his past. Drawing upon visual, auditory, haptic and olfactory elements, these remembered interiors are detailed interrogations of memory, experience, and their effects on identity. Inside, we move through and discover disquieting markers of the impermanence of 'home' and the duality of safety and danger in domestic spaces. And in amongst this, a chance to reflect upon how an individual can find or build refuge from the ugliness of an exterior world.

Co-commissioned with the Adelaide Film Festival, with production by Molly Reynolds, *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)* is the latest iteration of Moore's large-scale architectural works, distinguished by its considered and imaginative deployment of original moving image elements. This is Moore's first institutional exhibition since receiving the Golden Lion at this year's Venice Biennale—the first Australian, and First Nations, artist to achieve the highest recognition at the world's most prestigious showcase of contemporary visual art. Living and working on Ngudooroo (Lamb Island, Queensland), he is a 2001 Samstag Scholar with a multifaceted art practice that mines personal and institutional histories.

Gillian Brown, Head Curatorial (Acting), Samstag Museum of Art, October, 2024

ARCHIE MOORE

Dwelling (Adelaide Issue), 2024

Mixed media installation with found furniture and objects, olfactory experience, single channel videos with and without sound.

A Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, and Adelaide Film Festival Moving Image Commission. This project has been supported through the UniSA Jeffery Smart Commission fund.

Samstag Museum of Art expresses grateful appreciation to our partners the Adelaide Film Festival, who have enabled the commissioning of Archie Moore's *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*.

The unique collaboration between Samstag and the AFF over many years to commission and present moving image works has been innovative and creatively generative. For over two decades, this partnership has not only provided support for artists, filmmakers, and other creatives to create and present ambitious moving image works, cumulatively, these commissions are celebrated and internationally recognised.

Most importantly, our special appreciation and thanks go to the artist, Archie Moore, whose compelling vision and ambitious approach has resulted in this complex and powerful work. We extend that appreciation to all the people who have enabled the development and presentation of this immense undertaking: thank you to producer Molly Reynolds who has guided the commission with Archie as he commuted from Venice and back, several times; Mosaic AV, and the particular technical expertise of Sebastian Mitton and Taia Doyle; Klaus Frolich and the installation team; production assistant Dahlia Opala; Mark Eland, Gemma Soloman, Maxx Corkindale and Sam Matthews; Amanda Rowell; and Jaquie Hagan.

Thank you also to the University of South Australia, which has additionally supported Archie as a Pirku murititya Visiting Research Fellow and through the UniSA Jeffrey Smart Commission fund.

Archie Moore is represented by The Commercial Sydney.

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Cover image: Archie MOORE, *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*, 2024. Mixed media installation with moving image, commissioned by Samstag and the Adelaide Film Festival. Installation view at Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, 2024. Photography by Sia Duff.

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SAMSTAG WIRLTUTI SEASON

Archie Moore: Dwelling (Adelaide Issue) is a Samstag Museum of Art and Adelaide Film Festival commission for the 2024 Adelaide Film Festival. 11 October — 29 November 2024

Commissioners: Erica Green, Director, Samstag Museum of Art and Mathew Kesting, CEO/Creative Director, Adelaide Film Festival

Producer: Molly Reynolds

Production Designer: Dahlia Opala

Exhibition Curator: Gillian Brown

Catalogue Authors: Dr Debra Dank and Dr Helen Hughes

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