

Tell Me a Story



EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

A GOOD PLACE TO START

ESSAY BY

Town Hall Gallery Curator
Rachel Keir-Smith

‘When I weave it’s actually a meditative process for me. I tend to take myself into this really beautiful space where I am imagining all of the women, you know, sitting on the riverbank weaving, telling stories, talking about family and talking about a way of life. So I actually transport myself to that place and it is a really healing thing for me to be able to weave and also to be able to share my work with other people.’

– Aunty Kim Wandin¹



Humans have always drawn on the social and cultural practice of sharing narratives to help us navigate the world and to better understand who we are. Techniques and customs including oral traditions, monuments, folklore, and dance have been developed to translate memory, commemorate experiences, and record

knowledge that is passed on to others. ‘Tell Me a Story’ is a major exhibition at Town Hall Gallery exploring the rich and intricate art of storytelling, featuring artworks and historical items that illustrate the many ways meaning is created and embedded in cultural materials.

The texts and pictorial traditions of diverse cultures offer narrative elements and artistic styles for artists to draw on and create poetic imagery with contemporary insight. Kate Beynon’s paintings and suspended soft sculptures are informed by her mixed ancestry and the diverse cultural backgrounds of her family. She depicts spirited portraits layered with symbols including Buddhist, Taoist and Celtic designs and beliefs. Deeply interested in talismanic imagery, Kate transforms mythic characters into contemporary guardian figures, drawing influence from storytelling, film, animation, fashion, textiles, anatomical and botanical imagery. Female surrealist painters including Remedios Varo Uranga and Frida Kahlo, and Qing Dynasty artist Yun Bing, renowned for her 17th Century paintings of flowering plants, provide inspiration for her practice. Kate blends self and family portraits (including her son Rali) amidst vibrant, hybrid mythological and supernatural characters representing multicultural identities that are in between, fluid, or in flux. Proposed as allies for social change, they aim to promote kindred spirits for a precarious world.²



Similarly applying ancestral influences in semi-autobiographical works, the large-scale paintings on cloth by Jumaadi blend personal motifs with the crafts and iconography of Balinese temple paintings, traditional shadow-puppetry, ancient epics, and stories of contemporary Indonesia.³ Jumaadi explains, 'If you put two or more shapes near each other, they will create some kind of narrative or suggest some kind of meaning. Like a tree and a shoe, like a man and a snake, like a durian and an ant, like earth and sky and clouds.'⁴ His evocative vignettes distil the human experience as it relates to marriage, travel, birth, death, and longing through enchanting, two-dimensional characters, animals and landscapes arranged in flat compositions.

The human body is a potent site of memory, where narratives can be shared through song, gesture, language, rhythm, and tone. Oral histories and performances are often ephemeral and both site and time sensitive; these stories are vulnerable to becoming lost, overlooked, or left out of the archives. The voices of dozens of Hawthorn locals were collected in 1985 as part of a research project titled 'Mayblooms and Cherry Bobs:

Recollections of Hawthorn'. Extracts from these tapes have been digitised and made available by the Boroondara Library Service, including accounts of leisure, family life, the Spanish Flu, community festivities and visits to the Town Hall, offering insight into aspects of community life in 20th century Hawthorn. Creating new archives about culture and loss, Sancintya Mohini Simpson's multisensory artworks centre the perspectives of members of her mother's family; indentured workers from India who were sent to work on sugar plantations in South Africa during the late 1800s and throughout the early 1900s. Through intimate verbal accounts and the songs of Indians indentured in South Africa, the artist conveys how language has shifted, been lost and rewritten, to remedy some of the gaps and silences within the colonial archive.⁵ Like song, dance is a medium that creates a direct access to human patterns of living; personal and emotional experiences that are shared through a physical vocabulary, transcending the boundaries of vocal or written language.⁶ Kathleen Gonzalez Villamizar references the wisdom of diverse ancestral rituals, prayer, and ceremony in her interactive

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– Jumaadi

and emotional dance performances. Kathleen’s new site-specific installation and multimedia performance channels labyrinth dance practices from around the world, including concepts about spiritual and corporeal language of transcendence and embodiment.⁷

Hand crafted objects have many layers of storytelling embedded in their materials, the skills and practices used to construct them, the functions they serve in everyday life, and the meaning and histories bound within them. Freya Carmichael describes the way fibre artworks entwine the past with the present as a metaphor for Aboriginal identity. ‘All fibre forms embody in-depth knowledge of land and seasons, and material collection,’ she says. ‘Their preparation celebrates continuous relationship with land and waters, and intimate wisdom shared across time and generations.’⁸ Countless years of technological and aesthetic knowledge is embedded in the intricate woven forms of Aunty Kim Wandin. Building upon the embodied knowledge of her ancestors, Aunty Kim harvests, prepares, sculpts and weaves natural materials sourced on Wurundjeri Country into baskets, pots, trays and eel traps used for gathering food and carrying babies.⁹ Traditional ways of finding food and the tools that were used in this pursuit also informs the practice of Lewis Wandin-Bursill, a proud Wurundjeri man continuing the carving and etching style of his four-time great uncle William Barak, who etched and carved symmetrical line designs referencing nature onto bark and cloaks.¹⁰

Storytelling engages our intuition and imagination through many different formal and creative arrangements. Detailing accounts of love, conflict and the everyday through oral histories, painting, weaving and more, ‘Tell Me a Story’ celebrates the transformative and healing potential of documenting and sharing stories with others.

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- 1 Aunty Kim Wandin, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, email correspondence, August 2022
 - 2 Kate Beynon, email correspondence, September 2022
 - 3 Krisztina Hunya, “Jumaadi”, 13th Gwangju Biennale - Minds Rising Spirits Turning, accessed 5 September 2022, <https://13thgwangjubienale.org/artists/jumaadi/>
 - 4 Tiffany Tsao, “Jumaadi: Art as a Vehicle to Connect”, Asymptote, accessed 5 September 2022, <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/visual/tiffany-tsao-jumaadi-art-as-vehicle-to-connect/>
 - 5 “Sancintya Mohini Simpson”, Milani Gallery, accessed 10 September 2022, <https://milanigallery.com.au/artists/sancintya-mohini-simpson/>
 - 6 Kathleen Gonzalez Villamizar, ‘Univer-Cursal “The Ancient Revival Pattern”’, Artist Statement, August 2022.
 - 7 Kathleen Gonzalez Villamizar, ‘Univer-Cursal “The Ancient Revival Pattern”’, Field Research Document, August 2022.
 - 8 Freya Carmichael, Ngugi, as cited by Christine Joy and Aunty Kim Wandin in “Djirra Binak (Reed Basket)”, Artist Statement: Christine Joy and Aunty Kim Wandin.
 - 9 Christine Joy and Aunty Kim Wandin in “Djirra Binak (Reed Basket)”, Artist Statement: Christine Joy and Aunty Kim Wandin.
 - 10 Lewis Wandin-Bursill, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, in conversation with Aunty Kim Wandin and Christine Joy, August 2022.



EXHIBITION TOURS

Wed 26 Oct, 12–1pm

Sat 10 Dec, 3–4pm

Free, book online

DANCE PERFORMANCE BY KATHLEEN GONZALEZ VILLAMIZAR

Sat 12 Nov, 2–3pm

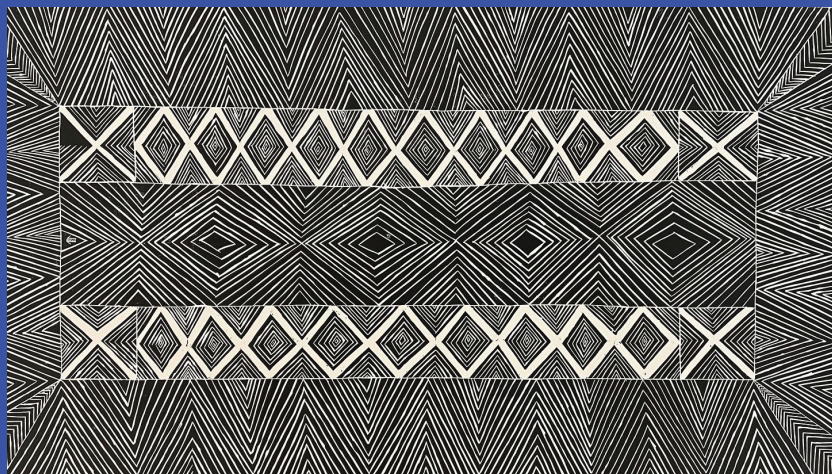
Free, book online

CINEMA SESSION

Wed 23 Nov, 6–8.30pm

'Monsieur Mayonnaise'

\$10, book online



IMAGES

ABOVE

Lewis Wandin-Bursill, 'Tharangalk Biik', 2022, lino print on museum quality cotton rag paper, 180 x 150cm, private collection, image courtesy of the artist.

COVER

Jumaadi, 'Love will find its way', 2019, acrylic on cloth, 150 x 285cm, image courtesy of the artist and King St Gallery on William. Photography by Agung S.

PAGE 2

Aunty Kim Wandin, 'Djirra Binak (reed basket)', 2019, *Lomandra longifolia*, 45 x 20cm. Photography by Christian Capurro.

PAGE 3

Sancintya Mohini Simpson, still from 'The Language of Indenture', 2019, single-channel video, sound, 6.19 mins, image courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

PAGE 5

Kate Beynon, 'Lucky Charms: Self-portrait with son Rali', 2018, acrylic on wood, 40 x 35cm, image courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery.

OPENING HOURS

Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm

Sat, 12–4pm

Closed public holidays

HAWTHORN ARTS CENTRE

360 Burwood Road,

Hawthorn, Victoria

03 9278 4770

Town Hall Gallery is a member of the Public Galleries Association of Victoria.

Town Hall Gallery participates in the Cultural Gifts Program.

