

# Between House and Home: Artist Statements

*As we explore the meaning of home, we acknowledge that the land on which we are living and exhibiting is stolen land, the home of the Kaurua people. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.*

## **Grasshopper Houses | Felicity Townsend**

Weaving is a big part of life in Papua New Guinea. I remember watching my aunties painstakingly manipulate great swathes of pandanus strips to make *ikaka* mats, the sweet smell filling the cookhouse as the long leaves dried. I remember learning how to fold coconut palm fronds to make little 6-sided balls, over-under, over-under, over-under. And I remember sitting with my friends in the grass on next to the airstrip and in front of our house, plucking long forked stalks for the game of grasshopper houses.

They're funny little objects; perhaps more a cage than house- I don't think any of the grasshoppers we caught wanted to stay in them. A triangular prism of strands with a loop at the beginning (I thought it was meant to be a door; my sister remembers it as the steps leading up). A small fragile thing, easily made, easily discarded. The grasshopper escapes, the grass goes back to the earth- but sometimes, far later than you would expect, you could find one lying forgotten on the ground, dried out but still keeping its shape.

I have moved a lot, back and forth. I've always wavered between treating home as a sacred thing, an appellation only given to a location that has really earned it- or else using it to label any place where I happen to be sleeping that night. I have homes where my roots have dug deep into country and community, and I have homes that are simply the sense of familiarity that accumulates over years of short stays in the same guesthouses. Each one of these grasshopper houses represents a period of time in a specific place, the repeated patterns of transition between countries. Homes can be as common as the grass, and just as ephemeral- but sometimes they still hold their shape, even years later. Sometimes they still hold your heart, and there's a beauty in their impermanence.

## **Constructions of Home | Felicity Townsend**

When you live a static life, home can be easily taken for granted. It's a constant; handed to you on a silver platter and comfortably inhabited without question- or at least I assume so. I never experienced that. When you grow up in a life of mobility, home is never constant. Rather than being something to simply inhabit, it is something that you must continually construct. What can I take with me? What gets left behind? Who gets left behind? Who am I when I can't be understood in the language of a place? Where do I belong when my roots are somewhere else but I

have been transplanted? Is home inside me or an external location? Is home a family or a community rather than a place? We are always building, knocking down, renovating, reconstructing.

The process of revisiting the childhood game from our home in Papua New Guinea with my sisters at my home in Adelaide is an acknowledgement of the role of family in creating a sense of belonging and of the cumulative nature of this ongoing construction. It's easy to build a house for a grasshopper; it's harder to build one for yourself by yourself.

### ***And Then I was Lost* | Felicity Townsend**

What do you do when the old definitions of home don't fit anymore? What do you do when you can't return to the person you were in a specific place in a point in time? What do you do when you move countries and you can't recognise yourself and there are no landmarks to find your way? What do you do when you outgrow a place or a community or an ideology? What do you do when you are stripped naked and your previous identities can't cover you?

What do you do?

### ***Of Stillness and Motion* | Mira Sulistiyanto**

*"...it's only by stopping movement that you can see where to go. And it's only by stepping out of your life and the world that you can see what you most deeply care about and find a home."* - Pico Iyer

Train carriages and similar transport vessels are by nature not spaces to form a home in. However for those that travel regularly between significant places, a familiarity grows in these spaces and the rituals that surround the acts of travel and they become a comfortable, home-like constant. This installation encourages audience interaction within the shared space of such a transport vessel. Views outside the window speak to my relationship with Indonesia: a home which I love but cannot find stillness in.

As we move from place to place, picking up old threads or still grasping ones we tried to stretch with us around across oceans, we go through acts of reinventing ourselves. At each arrival we inhabit a new self. At each departure we leave parts of ourselves behind that we might never see again. People come to know us in different ways because our communication is compromised in a second language, we adhere to different norms, and our goals, routines and interests rarely remain the same across borders. Ours is a world filled with selves. Do we know our authentic one?

## ***Evolution by a Young Child* | Mira Sulistiyanto**

Inhabiting this frame are just some of the many hundreds of toy animals that my brother and I mediated our entire worlds through, for the better part of a decade, across three nations. I remember meticulously laying them out, whichever country I was in, facing each other in certain ways as they interacted in our minds and our voices became a channel for them to speak to one another. When I pick one up today I recall the different scripts the animals had when we played with them. There were wise dogs and skittish horses, guinea pig communities that found safety in numbers with Australian marsupials, and snarly bears that often got themselves into spots of trouble with territorial big cats.

The animals were bought in Australia during trips 'home' as gifts from grandparents at Christmas. Then they joined our ritualistic return process from their *place-of-origin home* in Adelaide, to *everyday-life home* in Singapore where they spent most of their days laid out on our tiled living room floor. One day Mum brought home great sheets of thick, sturdy cardboard and the three of us painted, papier mached and painted again until we'd created deep blues oceans, dry saharan plains, humming rainforests; homes for our animals to inhabit. They lived and lived and lived for years until the day came to truly pack them away - this time into a shipping container - and be sent 'home'.

This work utilises the techniques of shadow puppetry, another allusion to childhood, but also an important homage to the old Javanese techniques of *wayang kulit*, in which *dalang* tell tales from the ancient Hindu *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* epics using intricately carved and painted buffalo-skin puppets against framed white cloth. These performances cause me a deep conflict: I want to understand but I can't and in that way I feel disappointment in myself in the wake of my heritage. It is difficult to fit in a box you were only half made to fit, so like me, the piece has Javanese roots despite the initial appearance. With the animals suspended in the air, layered on floors, the frame mimics their old apartment home in Singapore. Once again I'm housing my animals, this time as shrine to a childhood home I farewelled before realising what the word meant.

## ***Emotional Baggage* | Felicity Townsend**

It's a familiar ritual. We'll be moving countries within the week; Mum has been making lists and spreadsheets for months, carefully categorising and organising what needs to be shipped ahead and what will be taken with us. Suitcases and duffle bags are being pulled down from the tops of wardrobes; after dinner that night Dad disappears into his study and then emerges with an armful for clear packaging that he's been hoarding for who-knows-how-long.

"Right! It's time to make luggage tags."

Carefully slicing through the stiff plastic to make small rectangles, corners rounded off for safety, holes punched at the end for ties. Picking colours from our ever-growing collection of wool (full of potential and never-finished crochet and *bilum*-making projects). Twist, twist, twist, hold, let it spring into shape, tie a knot, slip it through- strong and bright, easily identifiable. You won't lose that on an airport conveyor belt or a big flat bag trolley on a small grass airstrip. Slap on the address label for our first stop- journeys are always done in stages, a few days here, a week there, sitting in air-conditioned boredom while the parents rush around to do a million jobs (Mt Hagen, Port Moresby) or else snatching a few days in the liminality of reef and rainforest (Cairns) before plunging into the reality of life in Adelaide or Mapodo. There will be at least four layers of addresses on the tag before we're there. Wherever 'there' is this time.

What is an address label? Its text refers to fixed point in space but the label itself indicates the presence of a mobile object with a future destination. It speaks to a journey with purpose between locations and a projection of presence from one place to another. The layered tags of my childhood travels reveal histories of movement, of exchanges, of accumulated memories through the transfer of the physical between destinations. Tags get attached to the things that travel with us; they are markers of keeping and continuity through transition. In this work I have separated the layers to show the chronology of travel and to track the accompanying reshuffling and redefinition of 'home' over a multiplicity of locations.

### ***Mapping Home | Mira Sulistiyanto***

Somebody once told me about a project from school in which they had to think of ways to psychologically map your home city. *Which one?* I thought. The definitions of home are blurred and fragmented but how fortunate I am that that is the case. How fortunate to have so many spaces that house me. Sometimes zooming out to take in the bigger picture is a challenge.

### ***Lifelines | Mira Sulistiyanto and Felicity Townsend***

The painted line at first glance appears to be a portion of the southern coastline of Australia, but upon closer examination that explanation doesn't quite fit. It's an invented coastline; a fantasy space drawn from the shape of three real and disconnected ones, to create, at last, one singular home.

The coloured wool winds its way along the wall, mapping the flow of the Aramia River. It's a line that flows through my veins; it's a collection of threads spun together, wool from Papua New Guinea, shipped to Australia as padding for our belongings in drums and trunks. It's the skeins which travelled with me through Spain, Ireland, Wales and England as I rolled the strands on my thigh and remembered my aunties, sitting on the grass, sitting in the cookhouses, guiding my hands as I learned how to make *bilums*. It's the connecting thread between cultures and homes, and it's not yet complete. There will be more to be added, wherever I go.