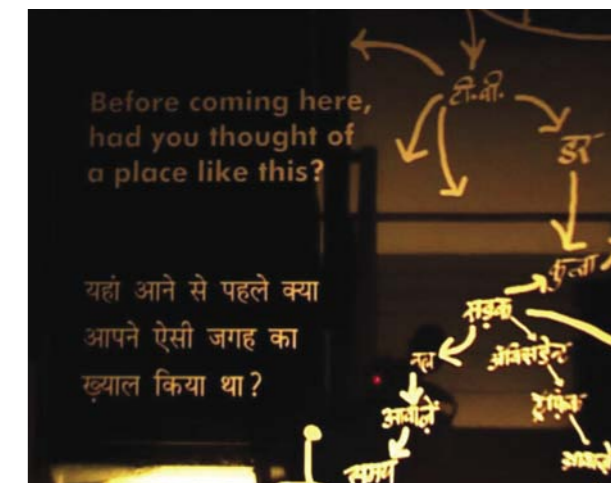
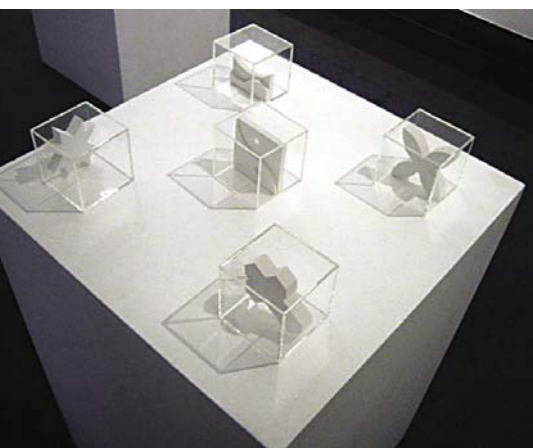




Ade Darmawan (Indonesia), Aqeela Sherazi (Pakistan), Daniel Boyd Ngarragoonda (Australia), Emily Mafile'o (Aotearoa/New Zealand), Ieuan Weinman (Australia), Karen Reys (Australia), Nathan Pohio (Aotearoa/New Zealand), Ngaruwanajirri artists – Jane M. Tipuamantumirri, Lorna Kantilla & Estelle Munkanome (Australia), Saiful Razman Mohd Kasim (Malaysia), SARAI (India), Taloi Havini (Australia), Terry Koloamatangi Klavenes (Aotearoa/New Zealand), Tony Albert (Australia) & Vili Lui (Australia)

from the edge



left to right:
 1) Terry Kolomatangi Klavenes *Hypothesis* 2005, installation (detail)
 2) Taloi Havini (left) *The Coconut Revolution* 2004/05, installation of silver gelatine photographs (detail)
 3) Ade Darmawan *are we happy...* 1999, 5 offset print posters
 4) Nathan Pohio *Horses: lowislightofhandmaneuveringofastillimageintosomethingmoving* 2005, single channel DVD
 5) SARAI Cybermohalla Project *Before coming here had you thought of a place like this?* 2004, installation (detail)

Front cover – exhibition installation image left to right:
 Nathan Pohio *Horses: lowislightofhandmaneuveringofastillimageintosomethingmoving* 2005, single channel DVD; Nathan Pohio *In Remembrance of The Tainuia Kid, BTJ* 2005, laser cut vinyl text; Vili Lui *Fabrication 1,2,3,4,5* 2004, installation mixed media; SARAI Cybermohalla Project *Before coming here had you thought of a place like this?* 2004, installation.

Back cover – exhibition installation image left to right:
 Taloi Havini *The Coconut Revolution* 2004/05, installation of silver gelatine photographs; Saiful Razman Mohammed Kasim *Bad Neighbours* 2004, *Helter Skelter* 2004, both acrylic on canvas, 122 x 122cm; Emily Mafile'o *Me'a'ofa* 2004, installation (detail); Ieuan Weinman *Yala. You are here/where am I* 2005, ink & colour on paper, installation (detail).

from the edge

Ivan Dougherty Gallery 2 March – 13 April 2006

This exhibition was organised by Museum & Galleries NSW, and was curated by Jonathan Jones and Haema Sivanesan. This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

This exhibition was first shown at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery 9 November 2005 – 29 January 2006 and presented by Museums & Galleries NSW in conjunction with *Leading from the Edge: 2005 Public Galleries Summit*

Exhibition Curators Jonathan Jones and Haema Sivanesan
 Visual Arts Project Coordinator, Museums & Galleries NSW
 Tracy Tucker

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conversations from the edge: a curatorial essay

from the edge is a dialogue: between two curators drawing on their culturally specific orientations; between fourteen artists, from Australia, Polynesia and Southern Asia, addressing issues of personal concern; and between these artists and - through their coming together in this exhibition - an equally diverse Australian audience. The purpose of this dialogue is to reflect on a range and variety of issues informing the idea of national and regional identity: indigeneity, nationalism, ethnicity, migration, gender, sexual identity, poverty, and by doing so attempt to open new ways of seeing ourselves in our local and regional context.

This exhibition showcases emerging artists working in a variety of media, and suggests new ideas and new approaches for the exploration of themes of personal, local, national and regional identity. It suggests that there is no neat or singular formula for addressing issues of social or collective identity, but that it is critical to engage in more open, complex and productive dialogues.

we are Australia

In a recent *Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend* magazine cover article, printed with the tagline “We are Australia”, Janet Hawley proclaims that “the dinkum Aussie is dead”¹. Migration has displaced Australia’s once Anglocentric homogeneity, so that the Australian population is now more complex and pluralistic than ever before. We could add that travel, the internet, globalisation, and even concerns over national and regional security, have brought about a cultural and political openness that displaces an historic insularity.

As Australia’s population demographic slowly shifts, so too our understanding of our place in the world. Yet these shifts - the increasing acknowledgement and awareness of our heterogeneity - unsettle our image of national unity, with the overarching nationalistic concern being for migrant and non-Anglo Australians to ‘fit in’.

In a video work titled *iam, youare, weare*, Tony Albert reflects on the politics of nationalisation. Drawing his inspiration from the Seekers’ song *I am, we are Australian*, the same song that inspired Hawley’s tagline, Albert juxtaposes what has become a jingoistic anthem with kitschy caricatured images of black dolls and corroborees. The familiar but empty lyrics of the song invite us to sing along, despite ourselves, suggesting the unquestioning means by which Aboriginal identity is constructed and accepted by the mainstream. Albert interrogates the stereotyped images that inform perceptions of Aboriginality by calling into question the marketing of indigenous cultures for the purpose of promoting tourism. But perhaps more significantly, Albert’s work signals the tensions surrounding this idea of a singular or unified national identity.

The Indonesian artist Ade Darmawan takes this concern for the foreclosure of cultural complexity into a wider, global context. In his 1999 poster project, *are we happy...*, Darmawan reflects on the influence of the media in shaping an increasingly homogenised world. Using images drawn from the television and superimposed with punchy slogans, Darmawan comments on how the media presents us with notions of how we should look, feel, think and behave. The media has the power to assume, but also promote imagined ideas of collective identity or unity. The artist states, that:



left to right:
 1) Daniel Boyd Ngarragoonda *Polly Don't Want No Cracker Neither* 2005, installation (detail)
 2) Tony Albert *iam youare weare* 2004, single channel DVD
 3) Saiful Razman Mohammed Kasim *Bad Neighbours* 2004, acrylic on canvas
 4) Karen Reys *Paper Stacks* 2005, clay slip and paper (detail)
 5) Vili Lui *Fabrication 1,2,3,4,5* 2004, installation (detail)

as consumers of [an] abundance of [mechanically, technologically, and digitally produced] images, 'we' run the risk of finding ourselves gradually belonging to a globalised scheme of constructed identities, leaving 'us' with the illusion of being together.²

Works such as Albert's and Darmawan's, along with the work of the Maori artist Nathan Pohio, critique easy or uniform notions of collective identity that assert an impression of cohesiveness or consensus, even while concealing or disavowing the violence underlying this myth. Like Albert and Darmawan, Pohio draws on images from cinema and the media, using found images and a variety of visual references to deconstruct stereotyped notions of Maori identity. Pohio's method of re-appropriating and re-activating found and pop-culture images is an effort to generate a new and positive language for speaking about contemporary indigenous culture and identity.

displacement, loss

In a series of paintings depicting a parrot juxtaposed alongside the inscribed names of Aboriginals taken to England by the British, Daniel Boyd Ngarragoonda reflects on the violence enacted upon Indigenous Australians through the process of colonisation. In these works the parrot is depicted as a beautiful, colourful, exotic creature, and a symbol of the pirate. It is a creature that has been stolen, tamed, and displayed as a prize. In these paintings the parrot serves as a metaphor for the colonising process of 'taming the natives'. Through this work, and the accompanying colouring book, Boyd attempts to expose this foundational violence, and thereby increase awareness of the injustices upon which ideas of nationhood are built.

The concern for the concealment of indigenous histories and voices is addressed by Karen Reys in *Paper Stacks*. In this series of works the notion of concealment is suggested conceptually, through the dipping of paper into a clay slip. The fact that the clay is unfired suggests the unfinished state of the project and that the construction of knowledge about Australian history and identity is still incomplete.

Taloi Havini also broaches the subject of violence, loss and displacement in her striking, but quietly haunting work, *Coconut Revolution*. Havini's photographic work depicts coconut palms, which for many of us, evoke the idyllic island life. But for Havini, and other members of her Solomon Islander community, the image of the coconut palm is associated with the violence of the Bougainville Freedom Struggle associated with the right for self-determination. Havini states that:

*the 'Coconut Revolution of Bougainville has brought contemporary meaning to the coconut palm tree, an icon of the Pacific that is often seen as providing comfort and rest. Such a bleak contrast was experienced by the people of Bougainville where our environment provided shelter for both the afflicted and the aggressor.'*³

Havini speaks as a refugee reflecting on memories of home, contesting the universality of visual forms and their meanings, and suggesting how our reading of the world is profoundly shaped and coloured by our experiences of it.

In a similar way, the Sri Lankan-born artist Ieuan Weinman explores the various, discontinuous, multiple, layered and culturally constructed meanings of home, place, and by extension, identity, through his drawings of Yala National Park

in Sri Lanka. While Havini's installation is reflexive and perhaps even nostalgic in the way that it invokes notions of home, Weinman's drawings are analytical and attempt to recover or re-connect with a displaced sense of personal identity.

Aqeela Sherazi's series of miniatures also explores notions of home and personal identity from the point of view of a relatively conservative Islamic context. Her work references a female-centred domestic space and the codifications of women's dress. This series of work documents a personal transformation, a coming of age. In Aqeela's case the sense of displacement is provoked by the migration of her family to Kuwait. This separation, and the attendant emotions of longing and loss are explored in a biographical way.

The negotiation of cultural violence and displacement is a recurring theme in *from the edge*. In his paintings, *Bad Neighbours* and *Helter Skelter*, the Malaysian artist Saiful Razman Mohammed Kasim expresses anger and frustration at the processes of nationalisation, which delineates exclusionary boundaries in an effort to regulate and control immigration. In Australia, the effort to protect our national borders from an influx of refugees and 'boat people' has led to the ostracisation of Tiwi Islanders from the mainland. The inclusion of Tiwi Islander work in this exhibition is an acknowledgement of this situation and an effort to expose the dilemma of drawing exclusive, rather than inclusive, boundaries.

diaspora

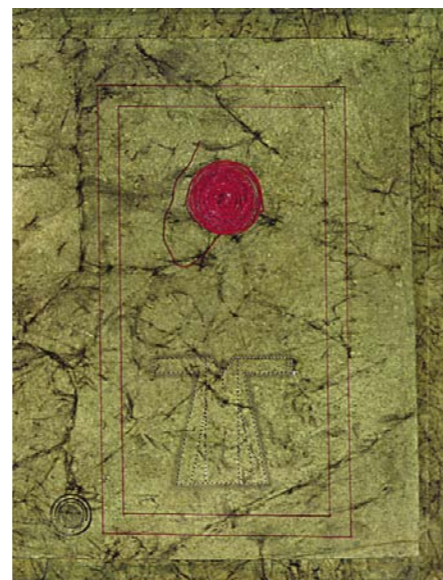
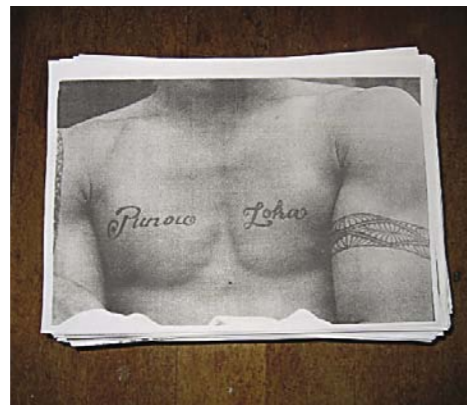
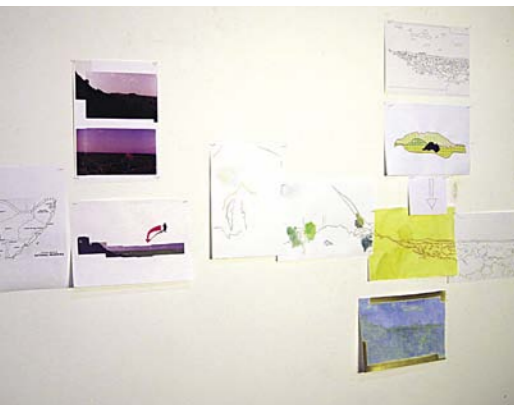
In a deceptively simple but effective installation work, Emily Mafile'o draws on her mixed or 'hafa kasi' Tongan and European ancestry to reflect on the complexity of the notion

of identity or belonging. Mafile'o produces sharply observed but cheaply reproduced photographic works depicting portraits of her community, both in Tonga and in working class South Auckland. Her images record the phenomena of diaspora - a displacement, but in this case also a flow of cultural information, influences and links, which inform a wider and more fluid sense of identity.

It is relevant to note that while Mafile'o was born in New Zealand, her sense of cultural identity is rooted in Tonga, and is expressed through her defiant portrayals of the various members of her diasporic community. Similarly Vili Lui, an ethnic Tongan born in Australia, draws on the images and aesthetics of his culture to explore notions of personal identity. Mafile'o and Lui along with Terry Koloamatangi Klavenes' all contend with their various and personal negotiations of Tongan identity in their work.

Klavenes' *Hypothesis* addresses displacement stimulated by the irrecoverable loss of culture, spirituality and tradition. This displaced tradition is remembered and memorialised in museums and archives. Yet although Klavenes' work references the symbols and objects of his tradition, his work also seems to pose the perplexing question of how we are to now understand these museumised objects and the culture that they represent. What are we to make of this loss? And how do we deal with this history? How are these types of losses acknowledged if not mourned within the broader frameworks of a collective identity?

before coming here, had you thought of a place like this? In Australia, processes of reconciliation attempt to heal rifts caused by the violence and loss incurred by indigenous



left to right:
 1) Ieuan Weinman *Yala. You are here/where am I* 2005, ink & colours on paper
 2) Emily Mafile'o *Me'a'ofa* 2004, installation (detail)
 3) Aqeela Sherazi *The Labyrinth Within II* 2001, watercolour and cotton thread on wasli paper

communities through the processes of colonisation. However, the very notion of reconciliation disavows complexity, being ultimately concerned with a totalising process geared towards unity, cohesion, consensus. But given the complex history of these issues and the ongoing resistance from various sectors of the community to accept homogenous notions of social identity, can there be a conceptualisation of community or collective identity that makes room for non-identity? For belonging by not-belonging? For difference?

The Cybermohalla project undertaken by the Sarai New Media Lab in Delhi, India points to ways of conceiving of a community, 'neighbourhood', or network that not only accommodates, but more importantly problematises, difference or diversity. Sarai suggests that:

*a network can be defined through the terms that are set up in it, so that nodes can keep reworking the accretion of densities within them by keeping them in circulation.*⁴

This network is an open and fluid conversation, a site of exchange and sharing but also a place for *listening*. The practitioners in this network acknowledge unique and different experiences, priorities and desires, but understand that a context for listening is therefore critical to the ongoing productivity of this neighbourhood. As one practitioner puts it, "fearless speech [or fearless exchange, sharing] requires that there be fearless listening"⁵, suggesting a radical openness and acceptance of difference. Such a model for a community, constructed through diversity, demands that we are not passive receptors of externally conceived models of collective identity, but that we are creative producers of an ongoing and dialogical process of identity-making.

Taking inspiration from this model, *from the edge* presents itself as a visual forum for the circulation of a range of concerns that constitute notions of identity. It sets up tensions and relations, but hopefully also invigorates conversations about how we see our collective selves, and our place in the world.

Haema Sivanesan
 2005

¹ Janet Hawley, "The New New Australians" in *Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend*, Special issue, 29 October, 2005.

² Ade Darmawan, artist statement for TRAMA workshop Buenos Aires, 2001. <http://www.proyectotrama.org/00/INGLES/2000-2002/buenos01/pagbue01/ade.html> Accessed 2 November, 2005.

³ Artist's Statement, 2005. Indeed the coconut tree could be seen as a prevailing reminder of colonial and capitalist oppression and exploitation. See "Bougainville- the Long Struggle for Freedom", by Moses and Rikha Havini, paper presented to the UN International Conference on Indigenous Peoples, Environment and Development, Zurich, 1995. Available at <http://www.eco-action.org/dt/bvstory.html> Accessed 2 November 2005.

⁴ Artists' statement, 2005.

⁵ Artists' statement, 2005.

list of works

Tony Albert (Australia)
iam youare weare 2004
 single channel DVD
 continuous loop

Ade Darmawan (Indonesia)
are we happy... 1999
 5 offset print poster
 58 x 41 cm each

Taloi Havini (Solomon Islands/
 Australia)
The Coconut Revolution 2004/2005
 Installation of silver gelatine
 photographs
 dimensions variable

Saiful Razman Mohammed Kasim
 (Malaysia)
Bad Neighbours 2004
 acrylic on canvas
 122 x 122cm

Helter Skelter 2004
 acrylic on canvas
 122 x 122cm
 Private collection

Terry Koloamatangi Klavenes
 (Norway/Tonga/Aotearoa/New
 Zealand)
Hypothesis 2005
 installation: 8 laser prints on paper;
 84 x 84cm each
 10 acrylic boxes
 9.5 x 9.5 x 9.5cm each

Emily Mafile'o (Tonga/Aotearoa/New
 Zealand)
Me'a'ofa 2004
 Installation of 215 black and white
 photographs photocopied on A4 office
 paper dimensions variable

Vili Lui (Tonga/Australia)
Fabrication 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 2004
 Installation of 2 paintings: acrylic and
 thread on canvas;
 3 textiles: coffee and tea dyed silk with
 screen print and silk thread;
 Courtesy the artist and Mori Gallery,
 Sydney

Daniel Boyd Ngarragoonda
 (Australia)
Polly Don't Want No Cracker Neither
 2005
 Installation of 6 paintings, oil on
 canvas board, 20x25cm each
 1 colouring book and shelf
 Courtesy Mori Gallery, Sydney

**Ngaruwanajirri artists – Jane M.
 Tipuamantumirri, Lorna Kantilla &
 Estelle Munkanome** (Australia)
Untitled 2004

Untitled 2004

Untitled 2004

Untitled 2004

natural pigments on paper
 77 x 57cm each
 Courtesy the artists, Ngaruwanajirri Inc
 and Aboriginal and Pacific Gallery

Nathan Pohio (Aotearoa/New
 Zealand)
*Horses: lowflislightofhandmaneuveri
 ngofastillimageintosomethingmoving*
 2005
 single channel DVD
 7 mins 14 secs

*In Remembrance of The Tainuia Kid,
 BTJ* 2005
 laser cut vinyl text
 2.5m wide

Karen Reys (Australia)
Paper Stacks 2005
 clay slip and paper
 dimensions variable

Aboriginal Encyclopaedia 2005
 Modified books and shelf
 dimensions variable

SARAI Cybermohalla Project (India)
*Before coming here had you thought
 of a place like this?* 2004
 Installation of single channel DVD,
 audio CD, vinyl on acrylic and text
 dimensions variable
 Courtesy Sarai New Media Collective,
 India

Aqeela Sherazi (Pakistan)
The Labyrinth Within II 2001
 37 x 27.5cm

The Labyrinth Within III 2001
 38 x 28cm

The Labyrinth Within IV 2001
 44.5 x 29cm

watercolour and cotton thread on wasli
 paper
 Courtesy Axes Art Space, Melbourne

Ieuan Weinman (Australia/Sri Lanka)
Yala. You are here/where am I 2005
 ink and colours on paper
 dimensions variable

All works courtesy the artist unless
 otherwise stated.



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