



Ginseng Cowboy. Mixed media on paper, 100x120 cm

Each three metre tall banner contains a single figure holding an object. They hang and swivel in space like a crowd walking down the street.

At the end of the day, despite all the political changes, we, the people, are left to negotiate the political diatribe and live through these cultural shifts. So even though this work provides no direct answers to my questions, it does hint at the complexity of the world I belong to and highlights different ways individuals

honour their experiences of belonging in relation to the other. As an artist I hope to trace the fluidity of this process of belonging here in this time and place.

HERE – at this juncture, in this world, in your life. Imagine an island. Imagine an island prison. Our borders shut.



Coburg Opera. Digital Image, 100 x 60cm

'Untold stories can emerge from below the surface. These are stories of movement and migration, culture and race, difference, perception and imagination. This is the terrain we enter in Penelope Richardson's...trans-cultural vision.'

Bridget Crone 2000



Tom Yum, Dick & Harry II. Digital image, 100x60 cm

HERE

Penelope Richardson

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Cover image: *Oriental Eve*. Ink on silk. 300 x 100cm

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Penelope Richardson

HERE

Imagine an island. Its sweet scent drifts on the deep blue sea after weeks of salty brine covering the decks and penetrating the clothes of everyone on board. Imagine a vast barren island filled with the perfume of honey.

What are we doing here? To whom does this place belong? Is this your home or can anyone belong here? How does a sense of belonging begin, with affinity or birthright? Why is it that even some of those who were born here make no claims? These are some of the questions that have become central to my practice.

HERE developed as my way of analysing notions of belonging and otherness using text and image. The work developed over a period of five years and responds to the shift in Australian relations with Asia. I focussed on this relationship because I believe that the way we see the other tells us something about how we see ourselves.

As an artist I am interested in changes in politics that create clear shifts in culture – marking the difference between one time and another. The challenge for me is to trace them and engage artistically with these shifts without falling into didactic expressions. I see my role as an artist as engaging with my own context and creating images that reflect its complexities and anomalies. My work is an acknowledgement of my time and place. It attempts to explore a sense of

the times in which I am living through playful images that parody, mock and highlight the diversity of values and conflicting interpretations of my context, wherever that may be.

As a starting point to this project I interviewed fourteen people between the ages of 18 and 30 about their perceptions and understandings of Australia and of Asia. The interviewees came from Australia, India, Indonesia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Taiwan. Each person was asked to bring two objects with them to the interview – one representing Australia and the other Asia. I asked each person the same questions and photographed them holding their chosen objects that ranged from a wok, a car and a carton of milk to hats, clothes and mementos. These images and interviews became the basis of many of these works.

During our talks notions of identity and stereotype were explored uncovering both political and historical prejudice on both sides. For



Party had just won its first seats in parliament. The work *Lingua Franca* is a coalescence of our conversation with historical image of Robert Menzies a promoter of the White Australia Policy.

The historical notion of the fear the Asian invasion or 'yellow peril', etched



instance in the interview with Yoko from Taiwan she talked about her mother's fear of her coming to Australia due to the White Australia Policy that she believed still to be in force in 1997. At the time of our interview the One Nation

deeply on the Australian psyche, was discussed regularly and is mocked in the work *Armour Yourself* in which a person stands poised to defend the nation with a wok in hand and lid on head, resembling an ancient Mongol warrior – don't fight them join them. The *Ginseng Cowboy* suggests the extent to which Eastern philosophy and medicine has become an accepted part of our culture, while *Euro Geisha* admired the inventive tenacity of the Japanese who have managed to maintain a balance between traditional culture and the new. The work *Timor Crossing* makes a satirical reference to various artists who found inspiration in Asian culture.

No longer strictly a painter, I see myself as an artist who choreographs my ideas to the medium which most suits them. In this project, advertising and marketing



imagery became a strong point of reference. My research highlighted that prejudice broke down at some level when people spoke of food and shopping. This lead me to make a series of works using commercial souvenir type objects such as tea towels, plates, mugs and t-shirts. In this case the resulting images show the

complexity of the ideas being explored but without proposing solutions.

In a sense this project is a visual exploration of cross-cultural dialogue centring on Australia, looking at how exchange is manifested and expressed through our perceptions of the other. To emphasise this I have used images such like Borobodur in Tom yum, Dick and Harry, the Mongol hoards and Chinese script which are relevant to specific Asian cultures, creating a cross-cultural double entendre as well as giving the possibility of the tongue-in-cheek humour having a trans-cultural interpretation.

One commonality that became very clear from all the interviews I conducted was the notion of dual identity hinting towards the



multicultural realities of both Australia and Asia. Four or five generations since migrating, some of the Asian interviewees identified as Chinese-Indonesian in the same way as Australians continue to identify, for example, as Greek-Australian. If we intend to

locate ourselves within our geographical context, I considered that this complex sense of identity and belonging could be read as a regional commonality. To emphasise this idea I wanted to make a work that blurred the boundary between here and there and suggesting that the faces on the street could be either Singapore or Sydney. This lead me to make twelve large silk painting works.

