

*Wave*, 2010  
2010 ANU Gallery Canberra,  
2011 TAP Gallery Sydney,  
Wangaratta Contemporary Textile  
Awards, 2013 Poland.  
Fuse wire, embroidery thread,  
fishing line, fish hooks, aluminium  
Overall size variable  
H: 225 x W: 192 x D: 115cm

# A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

*continued*

GABRIELLA  
HEGYES



*I also crossed the sea, not by boat but  
by swimming between Yugoslavia and  
Italy as an 'illegal'.*

Artist Gabriella Hegyes has a special talent for evoking with her art a strong sense of place, reflected vividly and poignantly in the installations and artworks she has been creating in Australia since her arrival here as a Hungarian immigrant in 1977. Her own experience is given expression in a strong sense of community, the shared experience of seeking refuge imbuing in Gabriella a deep feeling of compassion for other asylum seekers who have sought to reach our shores. 'Like they, I also crossed the sea, not by boat but by swimming between Yugoslavia and Italy as an 'illegal'. I was welcomed by the Italian community and spent almost two years in a refugee camp south of Rome.'

Gabriella's arrival in Australia coincided with the first wave of asylum seekers reaching Darwin from Indo China. She spent several months with 600 Vietnamese boat people in their hostel in Perth, witnessing their stress and the painfully familiar feelings of uncertainty. She is aware that still the political debate and unfavourable public opinion surrounding asylum seekers continues to be reflected in our media and human beings are reduced to nameless faces, recorded only as 'waves' of boat arrivals that 'threaten' the core of Australian society.

Gabriella's work 'Wave' 2010 was installed at the 14th International Triennial of Tapestry in Lodz, Poland in 2013. The installation focuses on the plight of asylum seekers, paying tribute to their bravery in undertaking the perilous journey to freedom and their tenacity in striving to survive. The crochet technique in this installation references the 'make do' nature of these vessels which are suspended precariously between the mercy of nature and human compassion.

It is within this context that Gabriella has been exploring Australia for over thirty years, observing along the way the rise and fall of populations which have attempted to tame our ancient arid land. Waves of different groups of Europeans and Asians have arrived with such hope and worked so hard and their legacy is often to be found only in rusting and broken objects lying buried in the dirt.

Gabriella's 'claim/reclaim' 2001 installation at Parliament House Sydney, celebrated the contribution to the arts of the Hungarian community over 50 years. It reflects how, in the course of cultivating the land in

the European way, more and more native plants were removed and replaced by crops. Australia's harsh dry conditions were less favourable for these plants and crop failure became frequent. Starvation drove many families from the land, abandoning their homes to find refuge in the cities. The interior is dotted with the skeletal remains of past lives and memories. Roofless buildings and remnant fences offer a glimpse into these lives through empty doorways; red dust and a sea of saltbush have reclaimed the land, creeping past gates into buildings and gardens, gradually obliterating all evidence of domestic life, leaving just fragments of furniture and rusting farm machinery.

In 2013 Gabriella was invited to be artist in residence for the Centenary Celebrations of Canberra at Strathnairn Arts Belconnen ACT. For this project she produced a solo exhibition and also worked with three community groups to create site specific artworks responding to the subject 'Terrain, Mapping Strathnairn'.

The journey to Strathnairn began for Gabriella in 2012 and was the first stage of her residency to create her solo exhibition 'Mapping' at Belconnen Art Centre. Her works were created from materials collected from five sites, following the route from her home at Sodwalls on the Western side of the Blue Mountains, thence to Black Springs/Shooters Hill, Abercrombie River, Goulburn and Lake George — gathering along the way native vegetation for dyeing, soil, found relics and images of graves.

'Trace/retrace' was a temporary exhibition which resulted from her residency at Strathnairn which reflected the site's natural and cultural history. Works were created using materials collected from the surrounding landscape and from the cottage garden, referencing the homestead and its history.

*In search of Gold*, 2012  
Belconnen Art Centre Canberra ACT  
Muslin, paint, various eucalyptus resins, brass  
rods and monofilament.  
Overall size variable: 5 panels each  
H; 144 x W; 43 x D: 35cm

Land prints on muslin created on site using  
found and collected natural materials





Working to create organic installations both as an individual artist and with community groups is a specialised creative activity requiring an awareness of complex social and historical interactions as well as a fascination for and detailed understanding of our natural environment. It also requires an array of skills from carpentry, draughtsmanship, welding, stone and wood carving, to dyeing, knitting, crocheting and then painting, drawing, encaustic ... Every installation created requires a multiplicity of these skills and artforms.

For the past two years Gabriella Hegyes has run workshops at Contextart, Textile Fibre Forum's annual event held in the Blue Mountains outside Sydney. She has also developed a workshop template based on her own extensive experience creating public art which she takes to interested individuals and community groups to help them design, seek the essential funding and instigate their own programs.

Gabriella is proud of the legacy she left to the Blue Mountains in 2000. The Wentworth Falls Lake Sculpture Project was completed by Gabriella working with 15 other artists, Council and contractors to create 16 sandstone carvings depicting native seedpods found in the Blue Mountains. Her aim was to draw attention to the importance of appreciating and preserving native vegetation in this World Heritage listed area.

The sculptures are permanently placed around the lake close to the plants they represent and the project is documented in a 60- page catalogue and education kit for students and teachers from K – tertiary levels about native plants, their uses by indigenous and non-indigenous people and how art can play a significant role in encouraging conservation.

*Earth Prints*, 2013  
Strathnairn Arts Homestead Gallery  
Holt Canberra ACT  
Xanthorrhoea (grass tree) and  
Eucalyptus resin on muslin





Gabriella Hegyes  
*Distant Lives*, 2012  
Belconnen Art Centre Canberra ACT  
Found objects and photographic  
transparencies  
Overall size variable: 10 panels each  
H: 45 x W: 17 x D: 4cm

Collected objects and photographic  
records of graves from various sites