

GUS FISHER
GALLERY

FREE ENTRY



TUE – FRI: 10am – 5pm
SAT: 10am – 4pm

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FROM THE CURATOR

This exhibition takes its name from a place in the Golan Heights called the shouting valley, where the unique acoustics of the landscape enable people's voices to travel across a valley on the border of Syria and Israel. Known as a site of contested land, conflict and division, the shouting valley is conversely a route of connection, love and the voice as separated families meet on either side to hear each other's voices and wave to one another across the divide.

Bringing together individual perspectives and shared experiences, this exhibition encourages us to think beyond our own boundaries to the immediacies of others. For what we believe to be intrinsic to our own lives, may in fact be intrinsic to others whose privilege is different to our own.

As a country largely populated by migrants, *The Shouting Valley* resonates with Aotearoa's diverse history and asks us to think about our own whakapapa. At a time when the monstrous events of March 15th 2019 will be forever ingrained in Aotearoa's history, and controversial acts at off-shore detention centres magnify the disparities attributed to non-western migrants from the Australian government, the exhibition represents a resistance against these injustices.

As far right politicians urge countries to close their borders, enlist stricter migration policies and heed citizens to take back control, we answer back with voices that should, and will continue to be heard as we ask for everyone to take the time to listen.

WHAT'S ON

For more information and to view our full list of events, visit our website: gusfishergallery.auckland.ac.nz

Meng Foon in conversation with Damon Salesa
THURSDAY 10 OCTOBER,
6.30PM — 7.30PM

Lecture Theatre 039,
The Clock Tower,
22 Princes Street

Join new Race Relations Commissioner Meng Foon and Pro-Vice Chancellor (Pacific) Damon Salesa for an insightful kōrero on migration, identity and representation in Aotearoa today. A fantastic opportunity to hear these esteemed speakers.

Refreshments provided

Curator's tour of *The Shouting Valley*
FRIDAY 11 OCTOBER
12.30PM — 1.30PM

Join Curator Lisa Beauchamp as she elaborates on the exhibition's themes and exhibited artworks in this informative and relaxed talk and tour.

We were not born to be stuck
A participatory project by Vanessa Crofskey, as part of Artweek Auckland
TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER
6:00PM — 8:00PM,
THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER
12:00 — 2:00PM,
FRIDAY 18 OCTOBER
12:00 — 2:00PM

Join Vanessa Crofskey and helpers in a series of action-based performances devised in response to the artworks and topics explored in *The Shouting Valley* exhibition. Bring yourself and your memories as we explore our relationship to ourselves and others.

Film Screening:
Island of the Hungry Ghosts (2018)
FRIDAY 1 NOVEMBER,
6:00PM — 8:00PM

Ellen Melville Centre,
2 Freyberg place,
Auckland Central

This award-winning documentary by Gabrielle Brady follows the migration of millions of land crabs on Christmas Island from jungle to sea. That same jungle hides a high-security Australian detention centre where thousands of asylum seekers have been locked away indefinitely.

Huiyi – Hui: a kōrero and painting circle
SATURDAY 23 NOVEMBER
10:30AM — 12:00PM

Bookings required – see our website for details

Paint your own bespoke artist-made ceramic bok choy or kumara as you hear from artist Cindy Huang about her research on the history of Chinese and tangata whenua relations in Aotearoa.

Acoustic Leaks - a three part event series for *The Shouting Valley*

Schedule to be announced – please see Gus Fisher Gallery website for details

What kind of environment do we need to construct in order to hear each other better? *Acoustic Leaks* is a three-part event series featuring participatory workshops and panel discussions, providing a safe forum for discussion for everyone where no one voice is privileged over another.

Our sincerest thanks goes to the participating artists and their collaborators for sharing their incredible work with us: Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Hoda Afshar, Shahriar Asdollah-Zadeh, Cushla Donaldson, Manus Recording Project Collective, Jun Yang

Coffee thanks to: **kōkako**

THE SHOUTING VALLEY

INTERROGATING THE BORDERS BETWEEN US



FREE ENTRY

28 SEPTEMBER
— 14 DECEMBER
GUS FISHER GALLERY
74 SHORTLAND ST,
AUCKLAND CENTRAL

HODA AFSHAR, PORTRAIT OF SHAMINDAN & RAMSIYAR, FROM THE SERIES REMAIN, 2018. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MILANI GALLERY, BRISBANE.

The Shouting Valley is a timely and necessary interrogation of the global and local implications of migration and movement through the experiences of those who are restricted from exercising these freedoms.

This is certainly true of artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Language Gulf in the Shouting Valley* (2013); a beautiful and poignant depiction of how humans innovatively overcome and circumnavigate borders for the purpose of maintaining connections, even if these connections are as fleeting as the echoing of voices across a valley.

Prior to the Six Day War of 1967 which outlined new borders between Syria and Israel, ten years earlier the Israeli Government had already designated the Druze as a distinct ethnic community at the request of its communal leaders. They have since recognized the Druze as Arabic-speaking citizens of Israel, who serve in the Israel Defence Forces and have even attained top positions in Israeli politics and public service.

The four Druze villages in the Israeli-annexed portion of the Golan Heights, unlike the majority of the Druze community in Israel have been, until recently, historically resistant to accepting Israeli citizenship despite it being offered to them. Whatever their reasons for not accepting, Israel remains willing to provide the Druze (who were not recognized as a religious community before the establishment of the State of Israel) with the same rights that all Israelis have.

Despite the political tensions and complications that are rife in the Golan Heights, the right of the Druze communities there to choose whether or not they wish to partake of this, is one that should be respected - and is. Israel's provisions, regardless of how enthusiastically they are accepted or not, demonstrates their understanding of the basic human right to

exercise choice, and the human right of all peoples to celebrate and practice their unique cultural identity, irrespective of where they choose to reside.¹

What implications would such an understanding have in Aotearoa? Migration, whether we like it or not, is embedded in our history. Aotearoa's indigenous people or tāngata whenua still recall the ancient migration journeys of their earliest ancestors from East Polynesia, and far from speaking about them as distant or fleeting memories, Māori stand on the unassailable truth of these accounts, so that when stating their pepeha, always mention the specific waka hourua that their tūpuna arrived on.

If we ourselves can arrive at the conclusion that migration has in large part shaped our human history, it is imperative now more than ever, that we ask ourselves if we are demonstrating our understanding of the right of migrants to maintain and celebrate their culture, language and ethnicity here in Aotearoa. Running parallel to this is the simultaneous responsibility of migrants to have an understanding and appreciation of the unique rights of indigenous peoples and the distinctive relationship they have to the land within which they are living.

At its core *The Shouting Valley* explores the relationship between the state/government and the people, first asking who our people are, or more importantly whom we are excluding. In the context of Aotearoa, we must ask our government first to acknowledge our indigenous people, secondly to recognize all those who choose to reside in Aotearoa as our people, and finally to make sure that we are not precluding our people, including our migrants from the freedom of culturally being.

1. This statement is the author's account of the Israeli view of Israeli-Druze relations.

I remember the wallpaper most vividly. Reprints of bamboo branches painted like traditional Chinese watercolours patterned the kitchen of my childhood home. Their fluid green brushstrokes sprang forward, stretching leafy limbs across the walls.

How can wallpaper speak of identity?

Jun Yang, a Chinese-born Viennese artist, documents his own migration story through a composite of google searches in his video *Becoming European or How I Grew up with Wiener Schnitzel* (2015). A specially produced version of his wallpaper *Āokelān* (2019) weaves together the stories of Chinese history and migration to New Zealand alongside images of existing sites across Tamaki Makaurau, rendered in Chinese ink painting. Each ink mark is an affirmation of our existence as Asians in Aotearoa.

Yang uses wallpaper as "a metaphor for understanding a foreign culture." As we are perceived to be a foreign culture, many areas of Auckland are unearthed. These range from the chilli oil wafts of Dominion Road, to Maungawhau where the wind billows black wiry hair across faces in snapshots. Our diverse and sprawling city, which pockets so many inhabitants, is so often portrayed in a Western lens: colonised and civilised by Europeans. The stylistic choice to paint this city's landscapes in a traditional Chinese style affirms the many Asian people who call this place and country home. Our history stretches from the recent influx of international students to the yellowed skin gold miners who arrived on shore more than a hundred years ago. Historically excluded from the dominant narrative, Yang challenges the Sinophonic moral panic voiced by even the most well-intentioned Pākēha journalists and politicians. Who gives a settler the right to bar entry to others on stolen Māori land? We should be proud

to be Chinese and exist here.

To be proud in Chinese culture does not necessarily mean claiming yourself loudly. My family rarely wore cheongsams outside of Lunar New Year parades. We never spoke Hua Wen to one another outside of language school. Instead, culture surrounded us in a quiet embrace. My mother's Malaysian-born Chinese origins surfaced in household decorations. There was the bamboo wallpaper in the kitchen, a massive red hanging fan in the corridor, delicate embroidered tapestries of boatmen wearing rice hats. Bold red animals stuck up with blu tack fashioned zoos across doors and windows. I don't believe my mother was intentionally radicalising the house or trying to "invade" our small white Wellington suburb, but it was a gentle acknowledgment of where she had come from, and how far home had travelled to meet her.

I can't help but think of K. Emma Ng's book *Old Asian, New Asian*¹ when watching Jun Yang's video. Ng's book charts the New Zealand laws that were designed to exclude Oriental bodies from staying in the country long term, and the tension between those who grew up here fighting to belong against recent mainland migrants. *Becoming European...* narrates the artist's experience of migration to Austria as a young child, created during the European Migration Crisis. He has a distinctly Eastern European accent, which swiftly switches into the lilting clipped tones of Mandarin. A variety of google image searches outline what the terms 'refugee' 'threat' or 'restaurant' look like according to the memory of the internet.

"As a child I tried very hard not to be different," Yang muses. I think of the ever-shifting tides of geographic identity that we either embrace or hurl ourselves against. How I unconsciously survey public spaces to count how many Asian people are in my vicinity: on the bus, at university, in the library. I want to protect them. I want to proclaim my difference.

We shouldn't have to define ourselves so severely. We have always had a right to belong. Our wallflower history surrounds us like a painting.

1 Ng, K. E. *Old Asian, New Asian*. Auckland: Bridget William Books, 2017.

Across the world's Western liberal democracies, the contemporary debate on the refugee crisis has reached a tipping point. For the emboldened anti-migrant right, the current crisis of asylum seekers represents an existential threat to Western identity; a clash of civilizations that is often framed between the East and West, between Christianity and Islam. Under this logic, refugees are at best culturally incompatible with our way of life and wholly incapable of assimilating to Western norms; at worst, they are terrorist criminals who infiltrate our societies in order to cause havoc from within. The standard liberal response to this racist rhetoric is to push back against the cultural differences it emphasizes. If we simply took the time to listen to the Other, we would come to understand that 'they are us', that we both have the same concerns and the same desires. Our apparent differences are simply the result of mistranslated exchanges; once we overcome this barrier we would be more than willing to help our troubled neighbours. This circular debate ultimately imagines our crisis to be one defined by language, a culture war where the issue lies in the obstacle of understanding one another.¹

In *Language Gulf in the Shouting Valley*, Lawrence Abu Hamdan constructs a fragmentary film essay that embodies the precarity of the Arabic speaking Druze. Torn between the borders of Palestine/Israel and Syria, families resort to shouting across an acoustic valley in order to communicate with one another. A cacophony of voices emerges that are both penetrating and unintelligible. Abu Hamdan complicates this arrangement by highlighting the ambiguous role of the Druze in this geopolitical landscape. As heterodox Muslims, the Druze are seen as an acceptable minority by the state of Israel; eligible for military draft and employed as interpreters in the

occupation's military courts.² Although these concessions are unprecedented, they do not make the Druze immune to arbitrary land confiscation.³ In highlighting this compromising position, Abu Hamdan illustrates that the transgressor and collaborator are 'two sides of the same coin, two products of enslavement'.⁴

The audible muddying of emotional cries and intellectual speech between translators and protestors, academics and the state apparatus; ultimately undermine the symbolic efficacy of language, revealing its cracks and failures in a system designed to sow division and conflict.⁵ Under this treatment, language is presented in its incomplete form, as fragments that burst and bleed into abstracted feedback. Words and speech are made unfamiliar, flattened, and reduced to their limits; while the gulf is emptied to reveal a void rather than a barrier. In making these verbal cues incoherent, Abu Hamdan subjects us to experience the 'limits of its conditions' and the logic that sustains it.⁶ The portrayal of this antagonism therefore rejects the use of 'existing language',⁷ a tactic that estranges us from the typology of the valley, denaturalizing its contours, fences and barbed wires. Such alienation opens up a new space outside of our current understandings, one that has the potential to 'break through the circularity of suppressed imaginations'.⁸

1 Slavoj Žižek. 2016. *Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbors: Against the Double Blackmail*. Brooklyn ; London: Melville House. 64.

2 Laura Rascaroli. 2017. "The Politics of the Sonic Interstice and the Dissonance of the Neutral." *In How the Essay Film Thinks*. New York: Oxford University Press. 121.

3 Ibid 121.

4 Ibid 124.

5 Ibid 124.

6 Salomé Voegelin. 2019. *The Political Possibility of Sound: Fragments of Listening*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. 38.

7 Ibid 38.

8 Ibid 38.