

Using objects from the Australian Journeys Gallery to explore the concept of migration journeys

There is a case that deals with the story of Indonesian political prisoners who were displaced to Australia during the Second World War and further exhibits relating to displaced people.

In 1926 a Javanese court musician named Pontjopangrawit was imprisoned by the colonial government of the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia. He was held at the remote Tanah Merah camp, on the Digul River, in Irian Jaya, now West Papua.

Pontjopangrawit appropriated wood, nails and tins from camp supplies and used them to make a suite of instruments for a gamelan orchestra. It is known as the gamelan Digul, or the orchestra made on the river Digul. The *gendèr barung pélog* is one of the instruments from this orchestra.

When the Japanese invaded the East Indies in 1942, the Dutch government sent its Tanah Merah prisoners to a camp at Cowra, New South Wales.

Pontjopangrawit's gamelan Digul travelled with the prisoners to Australia. Two years later, the prisoners were released. Many moved to Melbourne and worked towards Indonesian independence. The gamelan's music became an integral part of their campaign.

Gamelan

Gender Barung Pelog - Gamelan Digul
Photo: Lannon Harley
National Museum of Australia,



This is a wall hanging made in a displaced persons camp just after the Second World War by a Ukrainian displaced person, Olga Basylewycz who made the wall hanging out of scraps of material that she could gather together by trading cigarettes. She was able to pull together scraps of fur, felt and wool to make the hanging and applied those to a woollen blanket from the camp. The quilt was eventually given to an Australian aid worker who was running the camp at that stage, Valerie Paling. She brought it back to Australia and donated it to the Forest Hill Kindergarten where it hung for about 40 years. This quilt is quite a remarkable testament to life in those displaced persons camps in Europe in that post-war period and how intimately Australia's histories are connected to those camps not only through the migrants who came to Australia, but also through the Australians who worked in them.



Little Red Riding Hood

Little Red Riding Hood Quilt
Created by Olga Basylewycz
Photo: George Serras
National Museum of Australia

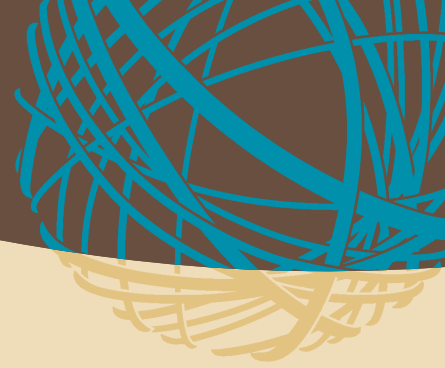
In the aftermath of the Second World War, Australian teacher Valerie Paling travelled to Germany to work for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

Her job was to resettle some of the thousands of people displaced during the war. Paling received the Little Red Riding Hood wall-hanging in thanks for her work at a displaced persons camp near the town of Ulm.

The hanging was created by Olga Basylevich, a Ukrainian refugee, using a United Nations issue blanket and scraps of fabric and fur.

Paling returned to Australia with the wall-hanging. She donated it to the Forest Hill Kindergarten in Melbourne, where it was displayed until 1990.

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This case explores the work of the Italian migrant Carmelo Mirabelli. Carmelo travelled to Australia from Sicily in the immediate post-war period and spent 8 years travelling around cutting cane, picking grapes and picking fruit through Victoria and Queensland. He took his camera with him everywhere and documented his life and the life of those people around him and then sent those photos back to his mother in Sicily along with remittance money to keep his family at home. It's a big collection and it's a very poignant story. It epitomises the kind of connections that we are trying to create in this gallery: the idea that a boy who learns to pick fruit in Sicily during the Second World War is then applying his special Sicilian fruit-picking technique in Shepparton in the 1950s and 1960s and teaching those Aussies a little bit about how you can become the fastest fruit picker in Shepparton by trying the Italian method of picking rather than the one that was already in Australia.

Sicilian-born Carmelo Mirabelli arrived in Sydney on the ship *Assimina* in 1951, and immediately headed north to cut sugar cane.

He followed seasonal harvests across the country for 5 years, then settled in Brisbane because its climate reminded him of Sicily. He later moved to Melbourne in search of work.

The cane knife was used by Mirabelli to cut sugarcane on farms around Ingham, Queensland, from 1951 to 1956. He worked in gangs of six to eight men, with each having to cut 15 tonnes of cane a day. The hook on the knife was used for stripping away leaves left on the cane shaft after it was cut, and slicing through creepers wound around the cane shaft. Canecutters also used the knife to clear away tangled leaves and grass as they moved along the rows of cane. The canecutting season ran from June to November.

Mirabelli photographed his experiences as an itinerant worker in Australia during the 1950s. He photographed himself, friends and workers on the sugarcane fields of Queensland and the orchards and vineyards of Victoria.

Migration did not end Mirabel's connection to Sicily — he sent money to his mother back home, as well as photographs that showed what his life was like in Australia.



Cane cutting tools

Photo: George Serras
National Museum of Australia

Efstratios Haritos emigrated to Australia from the Greek island of Lesbos in 1915 and 4 years later married Eleni Harmanis from the island of Kastellorizo.

The Haritos family went into business, beginning with a saltworks supplying the northern Australian meat industry. They then expanded into pearl shell harvesting, barramundi fishing, crocodile hunting and carting cargo to northern coastal communities.

In 1954 the Haritos family employed some of the first Kalyrnian sponge divers to migrate to Australia. Haritos divers used this brass helmet to fish for pearl off the coast of Darwin.



Brass helmet

Diving helmet used for pearl diving off the coast of Darwin by the Haritos family and their employees in the 1950s.

Photo: Lannon Harley
National Museum of Australia

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Then we get to a wonderful exhibit about Australians living abroad during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. We are very honoured that Rolf Harris has agreed to donate to us his second wobbleboard. The first one is still in his hands. He used the second wobbleboard throughout the 1960s right up to the period of his 'rediscovery' almost by the world when he covered Led Zeppelin's 'Stairway to Heaven'. This is the 'stairway to heaven' wobbleboard, as we call it.

Australian artist and musician Rolf Harris invented the wobble board in 1959. As a young portrait painter living in London, he tried to cool a piece of primed hard board he'd been drying over the heater by shaking it between his palms.

The 'whoop whoop' of the board fitted perfectly with a song he'd written for the crowd at the Down Under Club in Fulham: 'Tie me kangaroo down, sport'.

Three decades later, in 1993, Harris performed his version of 'Stairway to heaven' on the British television show *Top of the Pops*. Led Zeppelin's rock classic was transformed by the addition of Harris's trademark sound.

This was Harris's second wobbleboard. He used it from 1961 to 2004.



Wobbleboard

Wobble board musical instrument made by Rolf Harris; Rolf Harris: Stairway to Heaven wobbleboard front and back
Photo: Lannon Harley
National Museum of Australia

And then another exhibit about the development of the Kuta Lines surf brand, the way in which Australia's surf culture is part of the international surfing scene.

Tony Brown, founder of Australian surfwear company Kuta Lines, left the beaches around Newcastle in New South Wales for the surf breaks of Bali in 1973.

Inspired by the textiles and designs he saw on his first trip to Indonesia, Brown had shirts and board shorts made for friends and family. Today, with his wife Lynne and brother Mark, he runs a company that makes garments for beachgoers around the world.

From the 1980s, Kuta Lines made hooded 'Streaky' jumpers using a fabric developed in Indonesia. Traditional *ikat* weaving and dyeing techniques were adapted to create a fleecy, heavier-weight fabric that would keep surfers warm on the cold southern beaches.

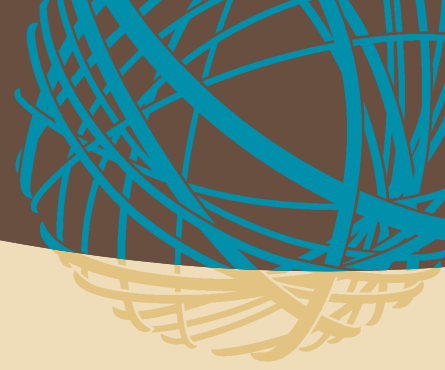
Streakies came in many colours and became something of a cult fashion item on the beach.



Hooded jumper

Kuta Lines 'Streaky' hooded jumper
Photo: Lannon Harley
National Museum of Australia

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Visitors will find exhibits that relate to the more recent history of Australia's interconnections with the rest of the world. There are exhibits relating to Irish dancing, and the musical practices of Vietnamese migrant Minh Tam Nguyen. The exhibit includes his story of the invention of a bamboo musical instrument in a Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camp during the Vietnam War, and then his arrival in Australia as a refugee. They are a group that really look at cultural connections.

From 1975 Minh Tam Nguyen spent 6 years as a prisoner of war in the 're-education' camps of the People's Liberation Armed Forces, or Vietcong, in central Vietnam.

During breaks from hard labour, Minh invented and played a musical instrument that combined features from the Vietnamese bamboo zithers and Western instruments like the guitar. He called it the *dàn tre*, which means "bamboo musical instrument".

Minh made this 23-stringed *dàn tre* in a Philippine refugee camp after fleeing Vietnam in 1981. He brought the instrument with him when he and his son came to Australia in 1982. Playing the *dàn tre* connected him to the family he had been forced to leave behind in Vietnam.



Bamboo musical instrument

Bamboo hybrid stringed musical instrument called a 'dan tre', an original creation by Minh Tam Nguyen
Photo: George Serras
National Museum of Australia

Australian Rachel Franzen took up Irish dancing as a young girl living in Canberra. Irish culture isn't in her blood — she started dancing simply because classes were offered as an after-school activity conveniently close to her home.

After a year Franzen was hooked. She went on to enjoy success in 10 consecutive Australian National Irish Dancing Championships.

Today, Franzen lives in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates where she works as an Irish dancing teacher and choreographer. She also runs a business designing and making Irish dancing costumes for students in Dubai and, via the internet, around the world.

Her designs blend traditional styles of Irish dancing dresses with modern fabrics and motifs drawn from Islamic architecture and decoration.

The design on this Franzen dress blends traditional Irish decorations with motifs derived from Arabic architecture.

The pattern in the centre of the bodice, for example, is a traditional Celtic form signifying the continuity of life; while the decorations on the skirt petals were inspired by a tile from the Luft Allah Mosque in Isfahan in Iran.

Irish dancing costume

Irish dancing costume designed and sewn by Rachel Franzen
Photo: Lannon Harley
National Museum of Australia



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Then we finally have a large showcase that looks at the Aurukun sculptures that were produced in Aurukun in the 1960s, entered the Museum's collection in the 1970s and were then displayed in New York as part of the first major exhibit of Indigenous art overseas, the Dreamings exhibition in 1988. That exhibit really looks at how Indigenous art was taken to the world in the late 1980s and has become such a significant factor in how Australia has been thought about internationally since then.

In 1962 men and women of the Wik people — the Aboriginal peoples of western Cape York Peninsula in northern Queensland — organised a series of important totemic ceremonies.

Lesley Walmbeng created this shark sculpture for dances held at the Arukun Mission station.

In 1988 curator Peter Sutton of the South Australian Museum selected the sculpture to appear in *Dreamings*, a large exhibition of Australian Aboriginal art that travelled to the United States. The sculptures first went on international display at the Asia Society Galleries on Park Avenue, New York.



Shark carving

Sculpture – wood – fish – freshwater shark
Photo: Matt Kelso
National Museum of Australia



Australian Journeys

Australian Journeys is a permanent gallery at the National Museum of Australia.

The National Museum of Australia education section can arrange educational activities for visiting schools. See www.nma.gov.au/education/ for contact details.

There are more objects and further information on objects in Australian Journeys on the National Museum of Australia website www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/australian_journeys/









