



Photo: Dragi Markovic

IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

Jakarta bombing

Perhaps one of the major misconceptions about history museums is that they specifically collect and display objects from the distant past. This may be the case when you consider the National Museum's *Springfield* collection, the Australian Institute of Anatomy collection of wet specimens, and the rich and varied collection of Aboriginal breastplates, just to name a few. But as museums face the problems of trying to retrace the recent past, it becomes clear that their role is not only to preserve and interpret remains of yesteryear, but to collect the material culture of the present for the benefit of future generations.

This was certainly the case when the Museum acquired material from the Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in December 2005. After featuring in a small exhibition in the foyer of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's building to mark the first anniversary of the bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta in September 2005, the material was acquired by the National Museum of Australia. Consisting of the Australian Ambassador's shattered blast-resistant office window, three pieces of green metal fence posts which became flying debris, a shrapnel-torn Australian flag, the Embassy's broken Australian Coat of Arms, and a clock frozen at the time of the explosion, the collection's arrival at the Museum

coincided with its latest exhibition, *Captivating and Curious*, and was immediately put to use in the temporary gallery space.

At 10:25 on the morning of 9 September 2004 a car bomb exploded outside the Australian Embassy in the Kuningan District of South Jakarta. The bomb detonated four metres from the front gates of the Australian Embassy, propelling shrapnel and debris into its glass façade, the surrounding buildings, and into the street. The Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, David Ritchie, was seated at his desk when the bomb went off: a piece of strong paling from a security fence at the entrance of the Embassy was propelled high into the air and lodged itself in his fourth floor office window. So powerful was the blast that the large metal Coat of Arms suspended at the entrance of the Embassy was ripped from the building, and broke as it was flung to the ground. Whilst the Embassy's structure withstood the impact of the blast, the windows to the front offices were completely blown in. In the chaos following the blast, Embassy staff and those at the scene rushed to assist the injured.

Owing to the massive level of destruction, it is not known whether or not a suicide bomber set off the explosion. However investigators believe that TNT was used to detonate over 200 kilograms of potassium chloride, similar to explosives used by terrorists in the 2002 Bali bombing and the 2003 Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta. Ten Indonesians lost their lives in the blast, but no Australians were seriously injured.

9 SEPTEMBER 2004

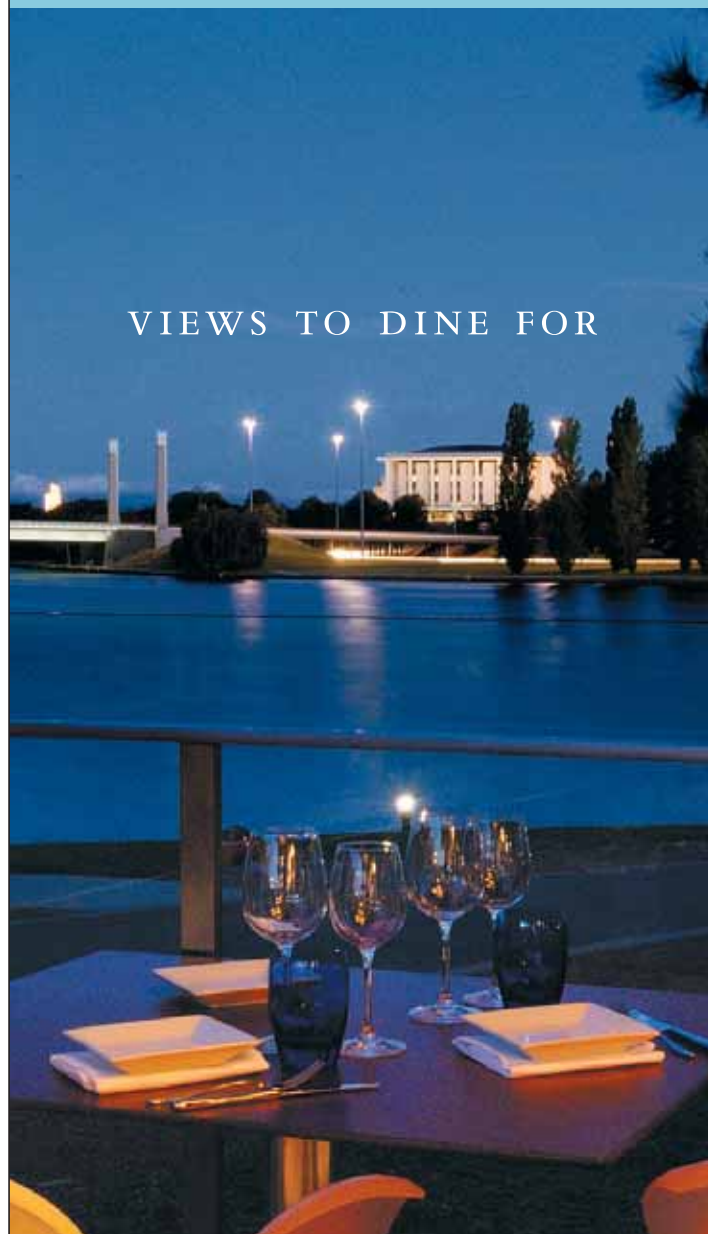
The bombing was later revealed to be the work of Jamaah Islamiya, a south-east Asian terrorist group linked to al-Qaeda, which had been held accountable for the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings and the 2003 Marriott Hotel bombing. Investigators are unclear why the terrorist group had targeted the Australian Embassy; however it is possible that the bombing was intended to influence the upcoming regional elections in Indonesia. It was also argued extensively in the months following the bombing that the attack was in retribution for Australia's role in the Iraq war, but these claims have been dismissed by the Australian Government.

The material is a welcome addition to the Museum's growing collection of objects illustrating the threat of terrorism in contemporary Australian society. Marking the beginning of the 'war on terror', the Museum holds a soiled and dishevelled Australian flag which was pulled from the debris of the World Trade Center after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The flag was also on display for the first time in *Captivating and Curious*. In 2003 the Coogee Beach Dolphins Rugby League Club donated a football jersey signed by the families of Dolphins team members killed in the 2002 Bali attacks.

Similarly, the Museum preserves the bloodied T-shirt worn by former Kingsley Cats football coach Simon Quayle at the Sari nightclub on the night of the first Bali bombings. The T-shirt is currently on display in the *Eternity* gallery. A poignant reminder of the personal bereavement and private tragedy connected to the first Bali bombings is the collection of forty-seven messages left at the Parliament of Victoria building mourning the loss of the eighty-eight Australians killed in the blasts.

While the Museum develops its collection of terrorist-related material, the Australian Embassy bombing material is a visually confronting and chilling reminder of the current threat of terrorism in Australia, illustrated by the broken and scarred debris of a premeditated terrorist attack on the Australian Mission. The acquisition of the material at a time when the public memory of the Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta is still fresh underlines the importance of collecting contemporary material culture for the benefit of future generations.

Aaron Pegram is a Curatorial Assistant at the National Museum of Australia



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