

BELONGING, IDENTITY AND FAMILY

Sky Cave - Amy Perejuan-Capone
Coming Home - Alex Martinis Roe

22 October 2021
– 9 January 2022

CREATIVE LEARNING AT PICA

This education kit focuses on two themes: belonging, identity and family; and personal, political and spiritual stories. It has been created to assist students' engagement with the exhibitions at PICA in October 2021- January 2022:

Sky Cave by Amy Perejuan-Capone.
Coming Home by Alex Martinis Roe.

Housed in a heritage building in the heart of Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia, PICA is the city's focal point for the best Australian and international contemporary art and performance.

PICA is situated on the lands of the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation and pays respect to the traditional and custodians of this Country. We pay respect to First Nations people, their cultures and connection to land, waters, community and the arts.

This education kit focuses on ways to experience, understand and make contemporary art for teachers and students in years 7 to 12. Hands-on activities can be adapted by teachers to the needs of their classes.

Links to the Western Australian Curriculum are noted for teachers. The exhibitions illustrate **personally significant contemporary themes. Spiritual identity, ceremony and ritual and gender and feminism** is explored using installation, found objects, textiles, ceramics and digital media.

INTERPRETATION:

Contemporary Art

What do your senses tell you?

- Describe what you see, hear, smell or touch (if the work can be interacted with).

What clues can you find about the meaning?

- Describe the use of materials, colour, texture, form, scale, repetition, variation, odour, light, volume, tone and speed.
- Investigate symbols or text.
- Think about the position of the artwork in the space.

How has the artist been influenced by their surroundings or context?

- Think about when and where the artwork was made, and world events at the time.
- Investigate the artist's identity and life experiences.
- Consider the role of culture, history, politics, social movements, or environmental conditions.

How do your personal experiences influence your response to the artwork?

- What does the artwork remind you of?
- Explain how the artwork makes you feel.
- Think about who the ideal audience is.
- Consider how your identity, knowledge and interests affect your interpretation.

What is the artist trying to say?

- Consider if there are any important themes or messages.
- Think about whether the artwork acts as a metaphor.

KEY THEMES

BELONGING, IDENTITY AND FAMILY

People's identity and sense of belonging is shaped by their family and previous generations. They teach us about who we are, and the world around us.

Archives can be an important way of passing down culture and knowledge from older to younger generations. Archives are collections of historical records or artefacts which provide information about a place, institution, or group of people.

Many families have an archive of documents, photographs, recordings, heirlooms, scrapbooks, recipes, prized possessions, and sentimental memorabilia. ¹ This reveals the traditions and rituals passed down by previous generations which shape our identity and values.

Historical records are criticised for being far removed from 'truth'. Notions of the past often overlook women, migrants and people of colour. Feminist and post-colonial perspectives challenge historical records that are incomplete or inaccurate.²

Intergenerational learning describes how culture and knowledge is shared between the eldest and youngest members of families and communities. ³ In a changing complex society, intergenerational learning is increasingly important and happens outside of the family more often. Young people and elders can teach each other a lot. Two-way learning happens between different generations. Sharing of ideas and values has social, emotional and health benefits for both age groups. ⁴

The way families and community members interact with each other has changed overtime and contributed to a loss of connection between the young and old. ⁵ This is due to societal changes such as increased working hours until later in life, and families relocating to different communities in a globalised economy.

Kinship describes bonds of family that are not necessarily biological. ⁶ It's the close ties people have with each other through shared blood, ancestors or land. These ties can also be through shared connections between people who are not relatives. ⁷ Kinship is a sense of belonging together and being defined by each other.

Genealogy is the study of family histories and lineages. A 'family tree' can be constructed using historical records, interviews and genetic analysis. Genealogy explores identity and how individuals came into existence.⁸

1 Anna Woodham, et al., 'We Are What We Keep: The Family Archive: Identity and Public/Private Heritage,' *Heritage & Society* 10, no.3 (2017): 203-220.

2 Giovanna Zapperi, 'Woman's reappearance: rethinking the archive in contemporary art—feminist perspectives,' *Feminist Review* 105, no. 1 (2013): 21-47.

3 Sally Newman and Alan Hatton-Yeo, 'Intergenerational learning and the contributions of older people,' *Ageing horizons* 8, no. 10 (2008): 31-39.

4 Sandra Kerka, 'Intergenerational learning and social capital,' ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education (2003).

5 Newman and Hatton-Yeo.

6 Marshall Sahlins, 'What kinship is (part one),' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 1 (2011): 2-19.

7 Sahlins.

8 Nikolas Rose, 'Identity, genealogy, history,' *Questions of cultural identity* (1996): 128-150.

KEY THEMES

PERSONAL, SPIRITUAL AND POLITICAL STORIES

Contemporary artists are turning to traditional crafts to express themselves spiritually and politically.⁹ Craft objects and artefacts are used in ceremonies or rituals connected to: *Family/Utility* – based on domestic and functional use; *Shelter* – architecture and physical protection; *Adornment* – beauty and embellishment; and *Votive* – expressing devotion as part of belief systems.¹⁰

Spiritual Identity is connected to rituals -regular actions in a routine or ceremony. The process of making things can be a type of ritual.¹¹ The term 'spirituality' can mean many things and describes a sense of joy, growth, or unity. It is now used to describe any experience that touches the individual and restores a sense of wonder.¹²

Spirituality is no longer applied to only religious experiences. The New Age movement offers plenty of non-religious or secular experiences.¹³ Spirituality can lead to a strong sense of personal identity and resilience which leads to positive mental health outcomes.¹⁴

Slow making of arts and craft practices also has a positive effect on wellbeing and mental health.¹⁵ This involves slowing down and making time to build connections – to ourselves, and to family, food, the places we live, and life. The emotional value of the hand-made continues to grow in a society rapidly transformed by technology and facing multiple crises.

There has been a dramatic rise in the number of people getting involved in crafts over the past 18 months during the pandemic, fuelled by hashtags on social media such as #quarantinecrafts #covidcrafts #covidcrafting #coronaviruscraftproject #coronaviruscraftchallenge.¹⁶

Gender Identity or gender role is often connected to craft techniques associated with the everyday life of women, such as knitting, sewing and textiles. Feminist perspectives explore the history of craft as work to create emotional experiences.

Craftivism is activism using craft to challenge inequality.¹⁷ These do-it-yourself activities are inspired by sustainability and civil rights. E.g. the Women's March on Washington and pink crocheted "Pussyhats" protesting sexism.¹⁸ Or the Knitting Nannas protesting environmental destruction.¹⁹

9 Indian Ocean Craft Triennale, 'About IOTA,' <https://indianoceancrafttriennial.com/about-iota/>

10 Indian Ocean Craft Triennale.

11 Anna Fisk, 'To make, and make again: Feminism, Craft and Spirituality,' *Feminist Theology*, 20, no.2 (2012): 160-174.

12 Cornel Du Toit, 'Secular spirituality versus secular dualism: Towards postsecular holism as model for a natural theology,' *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 62, no.4 (2006): 1251-1268.

13 Du Toit.

14 Justin Poll and Timothy Smith, 'The spiritual self: Toward a conceptualization of spiritual identity development,' *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 31, no.2 (2003): 129-142.

15 Indian Ocean Craft Triennale.

16 Gina Fairly, 'Crafts sector seek national policy: The uptake in craft and design is not reflected in revised policy' (2021): <https://www.artshub.com.au/2021/10/15/crafts-sector-seek-national-policy/> (accessed Nov 2021).

17 Elizabeth Garber, 'Craft as activism,' *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, 33, no.1 (2013): 53-66.

18 Ben Davis, 'Those Pink Hats at the Women's March Can Teach Us Something About Political Art,' *Artnet News*.

19 The Knitting Nannas, 'Saving land, air and water for the kiddies,' <https://knitting-nannas.com/>

Sky Cave

Amy Perejuan-Capone

Sky Cave by Fremantle-based artist Amy Perejuan-Capone explores the process of reconnecting with her father by working together and sharing skills across generations. *Sky Cave* is part of an ongoing collaboration between Amy and her father Greg, who is a pioneer of the sport of hang-gliding.²⁰ The exhibition connects personal and social histories. It explores the miracle of flight as a metaphor of the search for spirituality and freedom from fear.²¹

Presented as part of the Indian Ocean Craft Triennale, the artist has restored six historical hang gliders with hand-made safety harnesses woven using an inkle loom and threaded through buckles crafted from porcelain. The installation of ceramics, textiles, video and found objects draws on family archives.

Perejuan-Capone was inspired to start this process after observing the effects of climate change on traditional practices.²² Having lived and worked in extreme Arctic environments (such as Upernavik, Greenland, and Longyearbyen, Svalbard), she witnessed the human impact of a rapidly transforming environment.

Livelihoods of Arctic communities are increasingly vulnerable and at risk because of climatic changes which reduce their access to natural resources resulting in cultural loss of traditional and local knowledge.^{23 24} Amy's experiences in these communities made her reflect upon a lack of connection with her own family and sense of anxiety and loss.²⁵

20 Emma Kelly, 'Flights of Passage,' *Sky Cave Catalogue* (Perth: Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2021)

21 Interview with Amy Perejuan-Capone, date 20 October 2021

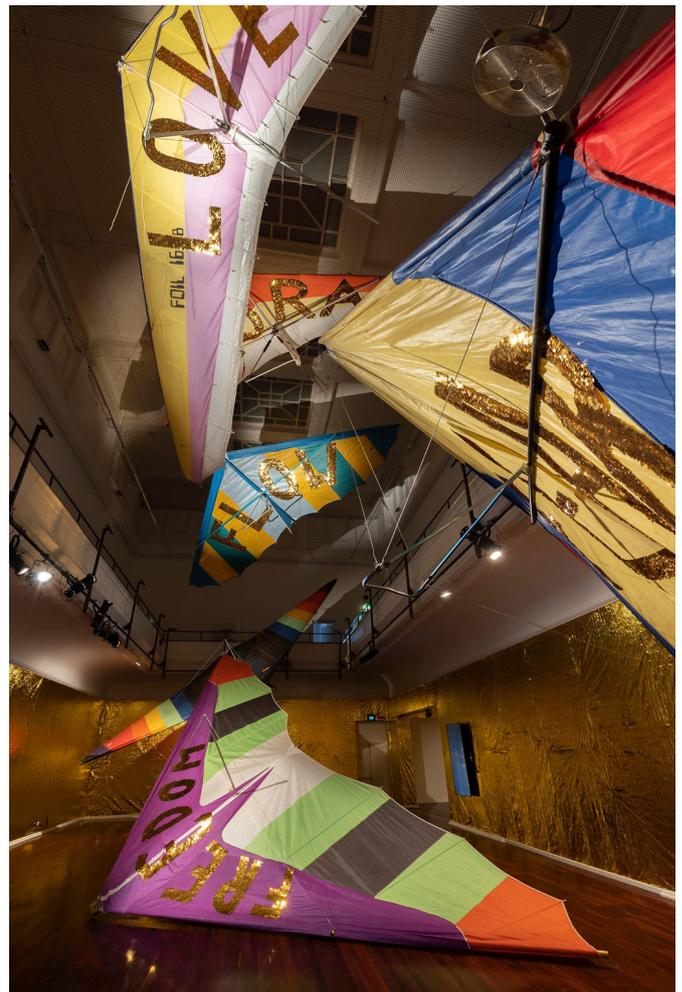
22 Interview with Amy Perejuan-Capone.

23 Donna Hauser, et al., 'Co-production of knowledge reveals loss of Indigenous hunting opportunities in the face of accelerating Arctic climate change,' *Environmental Research Letters*, 16, no.9 (2021): 1-15.

24 James Ford and Barry Smit, 'A framework for assessing the vulnerability of communities in the Canadian Arctic to risks associated with climate change,' *Arctic* (2004): 389-400.

25 Interview with Amy Perejuan-Capone.

26 *Don't stare at the sun too long*, PS Art Space, Fremantle, November 2019.



Returning home Perejuan-Capone started a journey in search of optimism and strength in an uncertain future. *Sky Cave* builds on an earlier project where Amy teamed up with her father, a master craftsman, to create a 1:1 scale replica of his ultralight aircraft.²⁶ Working together for *Sky Cave* strengthened family knowledge and bonds.

Stories and skills passed on from Amy Perejuan-Capone's father form the basis of *Sky Cave*. She is recreating through art the out-of-body experiences – or vivid dreams – he experienced in his childhood. *Sky Cave* creates the same sensation of separating from and floating above the ground.

Image: Amy Perejuan-Capone, *Sky Cave*, installation view, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), 2021. Photographer: Bo Wong.

In the 1970s Greg was the first to jump off Mount Nameless/Jarndunmunha, 4km from Tom Price, 1,128m above sea level.²⁷ By the time Amy was born in the late 1980s Greg had explored 200 caves from the sky with a team of palaeontologists in expeditions to the Nullarbor which contributed to scientific discoveries.²⁸

Sky Cave takes its title from myths and family legends and about flying within one of these large caves. Amy describes this as the opposite of Icarus – a character from ancient Greek mythology who dared to fly too close to the sun using wings made by his father from feathers and wax.²⁹ Ignoring his father's advice, Icarus fell to his death after the wax melted. *Sky Cave* explores flying to the depths of the earth instead. It contrasts the sky as a symbol of freedom and outward expression with the subterranean as a symbol of personal inward states.³⁰



²⁷ Kelly.

²⁸ Greg Perejuan, 'Nullarbor Challenge: The Search for Lindsay Hall', *Skysailor* (April, 1993): 12. Online: https://www.safa.asn.au/images/skysailor_archive/pdfs/1993/1993-04-APRIL.pdf (accessed May 2021).

²⁹ Sarah Wall, 'Sky Cave,' *Sky Cave Catalogue*, (Perth: Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2021).

³⁰ Interview with Amy Perejuan-Capone, date 20 October 2021.

³¹ Australian Curriculum: Sustainability, <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/cross-curriculum-priorities/sustainability/>

³² Interview with Amy Perejuan-Capone.

Curriculum links: Sustainability³¹

Contemporary art reveals insights into the ways social, economic and environmental systems interact to support human life.

The works of Amy Perejuan-Capone draw attention to how a changing environment can lead to anxiety, and loss of intergenerational knowledge. The artist shows how family bonds and traditional craft can lead to resilience and optimism.

Exhibitions like *Sky Cave* creatively examine more balanced approaches to the way we interact with each other and the environment.

Curriculum links: Visual Arts

Sky Cave explores concepts, materials, styles, messages, and purposes relevant to the Visual Arts ATAR course.

Differences – tradition and innovations, inter-media investigations.

Identities – human emotion, heroes and rebels.

Commentaries - Ceremony and ritual, found objects.

Points of View - spirituality, installation, personally significant contemporary themes.

Image: Amy Perejuan-Capone, *Sky Cave*, installation view, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), 2021. Photographer: Bo Wong.

Sky Cave Ballroom (PICA 2021), 2020- ongoing

Six historical hang gliders rise upward towards the ceiling in the central PICA gallery, adorned with gold sequined text. No longer airworthy, each glider represents an important stage in the development of hang-glider design. The words written across their wings represent the spiritual journey experienced in flight and in life.

From the oldest glider to the newest, read the words FEAR, FREEDOM, FLOW, DEATH, AURA and LOVE. The artist describes this as a journey which starts with fear or anxiety, going on to reach freedom and a state of flow – being energised and focused. Death is described as a constant and is contrasted against Aura – emotional and spiritual transcendence. The journey ends with love as a motivating force: *“you keep things alive by loving them – it’s custodianship.”*³²

The walls of the gallery are glowing and covered with reflective gold foil made from space-blanket Mylar. This material was initially developed for space travel and is used as emergency blankets in the snow. The artist became familiar with these blankets while in Arctic communities.



³² Interview with Amy Perejuan-Capone.
³³ Wall.
³⁴ Wall.

Image: Amy Perejuan-Capone, *Sky Cave*, installation view, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), 2021. Photographer: Bo Wong.

Six safety harnesses for each hang glider have been made to the artist’s body size and proportions. Their colourful hand-woven straps are also covered with gold text inspired by her family history and experiences. Hand-crafted porcelain buckles are threaded through the straps.



These harnesses are no longer functional as a safety device. Brittle ceramic buckles that would break on impact reference the fragility of the human body.³³ Laid out on glass-topped frames and made from luxurious satins the harnesses appear like funeral clothing and are reminiscent of a body bag or sarcophagus.



Hang-gliding pioneers bonded with each other in their life-or-death quest, and designed safety harnesses together to make their sport less dangerous. Amy has adopted this practical approach to managing anxiety through cooperation. Her art examines the anxieties of 21st century life in a hands-on collaboration.³⁴

Historically a male-dominated sport, the heroic stories of hang gliding overlook the women who supported men or were pilots themselves. Gertrude Rogallo (wife of NASA engineer Francis) is the under-recognised co-inventor of the 'Rogallo Wing', the basis of modern hang gliding.³⁵

Gender bias in design

When designing products, the male body is standard. In the 1930s, influential architect Le Corbusier developed 'the human scale' for architecture based on the 'modular man' - a six-foot man with his arm raised.³⁶

When car crash test dummies were introduced in the 1950s they were based on the 50th-percentile male. Female crash test dummies have been introduced in the last few years, but only in the passenger seat in less than a quarter of safety tests.³⁷

NASA faced outrage on Twitter when the all-female spacewalk was cancelled because the spacesuit prepared for astronaut Anne McClain was too large.³⁸

Amy recognises the contribution of women, including her mother, by feminising the history of hang-gliding. Handwoven textile harnesses made to her body size and shape challenge the sexism underpinning the design of many products. This results in safety products being designed for the average male body, rather than the average human body.³⁹

INQUIRY: Living Memory Box

Talk to someone important to you from a previous generation about any special skills, interests or hobbies they have.

This could be a craft they have refined over a number of years, or their expertise and knowledge about a particular topic.

Ask them if they can share any stories and techniques with you. Document or record what you have learnt. This could be through diagrams, notes, photos, illustrations, or recordings.

How could you use this knowledge to make an artwork?

How does this story or technique say something about the world more broadly?

Is it an example of a 'lost art' that reveals changes in society?

³⁵ Wall.

³⁶ Caroline Criado Perez, 'Invisible women: Exposing data bias in a world designed for men,' (Random House, 2019).

³⁷ Criado Perez.

³⁸ Ritu Prasad, 'Eight ways the world is not designed for women', BBC News (2019) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47725946>

³⁹ Criado Perez.

Parenthesis (Four Movements at the Hard Border 2021), 2021

A digital video titled *Parenthesis (Four Movements at the Hard Border 2021)*, shows Amy Perejuan-Capone's journey to retrace her father's Nullarbor expeditions from the shore of the Indian Ocean. It was filmed on Jirgala-Mirning land on a road running along the border between Western Australia and South Australia, during a time when the border was 'hard' or closed to limit the spread of COVID-19 during the pandemic.

Filmed in bird's-eye view, four grounded hang gliders are seen making a series of coordinated movements performed by two sets of parent/child collaborators: Amy Perejuan-Capone and Greg Perejuan; Holly O'Meehan and Jill O'Meehan Paynter. Gold emergency blanket is pinned to the ground with rocks spelling Fear, Freedom, Death, and Love.

The delicate balance between these things can be upset, affecting human connections. The pandemic has led us reconsider what these words mean, and what our responsibilities are as members of society. Border restrictions have forced distance between family members, highlighting the loss of liberties.

The soundtrack – inspired by NASA's recordings of the vibrations of Pluto, the most distant planet in the solar system – creates an eerie backdrop to the red desert moonscape of the Nullarbor Plain.



The Trike (Dreamer 2), 2021

A replica trike glider has been made by the artist from memory and archival photographs. The original was built c.1987 by the artist's father in his shed with fellow pilot and close friend 'Stubby', while the artist watched on in a baby bouncer. The wings of the trike once belonged to Stubby and sat broken and abandoned for 30 years following his early death. *The Trike (Dreamer 2)* represents cycles of birth (the artist as an infant), growth (experimentation), and death (the loss of senior kin).



Image Left: Amy Perejuan-Capone, *Parenthesis (Four Movements at the Hard Border 2021)* (still), 2021. Image courtesy the artist.

Image Right: Amy Perejuan-Capone, *Sky Cave*, installation view, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), 2021. Photographer: Bo Wong.

COMING HOME **by Alex Martinis Roe**

Alex Martinis Roe's exhibition, *Coming Home*, reveals connections between personal, political and spiritual histories. The artist explores how Judaism has been linked with feminism through the history of a group known as the Jewish Adelaide Feminist Lesbians (or JAFL, for short). Film, installation and archival material shows how the group have adapted traditional Jewish rituals to their shared values and political activism. Together they have found ways to connect their different identities and to foster a sense of belonging.

Martinis Roe's artwork involves research with political communities. The artist has a personal connection to the JAFL group as two members are her aunts. Her interviews with JAFL's ten members have been converted into a 'family tree' spanning 48 metres. Stretching back to the 1660s and organised right-to-left like the Hebrew script, this timeline features personal items and archival photographs connecting family narratives to world events.



What is Feminism?

First Wave – suffragette movement focused on political change at the turn of the 20th century. Emphasis was upon injustice of being denied property ownership and voting rights (suffrage).⁴⁰

Second Wave – attention turned to inequality in wider society during the 1960s and 1970s. Focused on women's liberation, and job/economic equality.⁴¹ The phrase 'the personal is political' highlighted the impact of sexism on women's private lives.⁴² Emphasis was on breaking gender stereotypes.

Third Wave – in the 1980s and 90s attention shifted to the role of identity. Race, class, sexuality and disability 'intersect' to affect women's lives. It was acknowledged that women of colour had been overlooked in the second wave.⁴³ Influenced by queer theory, gender and sexuality were discussed as fluid categories that do not fit the 'male' and 'female' binary.

Fourth Wave - in the 21st century the global feminist community uses the internet. Social media activism has contributed a culture in which sexism can be 'called out'.⁴⁴ This continues a focus on everyday interactions. Feminists have been challenged to be inclusive of trans women.⁴⁵ Psychology and spiritual concerns about the planet are emphasised.⁴⁶

40 Ealasaid Munro, 'Feminism: A fourth wave?' *Political Insight*, 4, no.2 (2013): 22-25.
41 Harriet Wrye, 'The fourth wave of feminism: Psychoanalytic perspectives introductory remarks', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 10, no.4 (2009): 185-189.
42 Wrye.
43 Munro.
44 Munro.
45 Munro.
46 Wrye.

Image: Alex Martinis Roe, *Coming Home*, installation view, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), 2021. Photographer: Bo Wong.

The timeline reveals kinship within a family of choice. It tells of how creating shared practices was like ‘coming home’. Martinis Roe looks at a history that goes beyond shared genetics: “*I’m concerned with using stock-standard tropes to describe non-biological relationships, or non-biological relations.*”⁴⁷

Coming Home is a project of learning from elders about feminist and LGBTQIA+ inclusive politics alongside the Jewish history. Visitors are invited to sit on floor cushions hand-crafted by JAFL members and watch four videos explaining personal stories of political and spiritual practices: 1. *Coming Home* introduces the group and its beginnings. 2. *Rituals* shows how Jewish rituals have been adapted to their shared beliefs and values to create a family culture and sense of connection. 3. *Kinship Structures* focuses on bonds of closeness and relatedness that extend beyond the family; 4. *Activism* reflects upon feminist and queer activism and issues such as marginalisation, reproductive rights, and women’s health.



⁴⁷ Victoria Perin, ‘Alex Martinis Roe: Coming Home’, Art Guide Australia, Nov.-Dec (2012): <https://artguide.com.au/alex-martinis-roe-coming-home/>

INQUIRY: Exploring the Archives

Explore your family and local history archives! Look for documents, photographs, videos, recordings, heirlooms, scrapbooks, recipes or other prized possessions which reveal something about your identity and values.

STEP 1. Investigate your family archives.

Often a specific family member ends up becoming the keeper of the ‘stuff’ passed down by previous generations and takes on the role of family curator. Is that the case in your family?

Think about what the things we keep say about us. Take photographs or make copies of significant things in your family archive to present in your visual diary and use in an artwork.

STEP 2. Investigate local history archives.

Think about how the private history of your family may be different to the official or publicly recognised history. Investigate the historical archives for information about where you live now, or where your family once lived.

National and State archives can be accessed for free online to research family and local history, and feature a range of documents, images, maps, and audio.

The State Library of WA has a range of e-resources. slwa.wa.gov.au/eresources
Trove provides access to the National Library of Australia’s archives.
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that these resources contain content that may be culturally sensitive.

Image: Alex Martinis Roe, *Coming Home*, installation view, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), 2021. Photographer: Bo Wong.

MAKING: Rethinking the Archives

Contemporary art highlights the political importance of creatively reworking the past to give voice to groups of marginalised people who have been silenced in historical records.

Think about your family or local history archives:

What is missing from the things that previous generations chose to keep?

Whose voices have been silenced?

What cultures or lived experience does the archive reflect?

Try to capture the authentic experience of your family, or local area using a variety of artistic techniques. For example, you could:

Cut out parts of the photographs from an archive to use in a collage. Combine these cut-outs with other materials such as coloured paper, fabrics, images from magazines and newspapers.

Draw or paint a picture inspired by the archive. Consider whether you want the drawing to be realistic, expressive or abstract.

Digitally edit copies of videos, recordings, and images. Try changing elements, adding layers, combining new material, or removing features to rethink the archive.

Use a traditional craft technique, such as sewing, knitting, or weaving to represent an important practice or ritual.



48 Denise Levenick, 'How to Organize Inherited Items: A Step-by-Step Guide for Dealing with Boxes of Your Parents' Stuff', (Penguin, 2012).

Image: Alex Martinis Roe, *Coming Home*, installation view, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), 2021. Photographer: Bo Wong.

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