1001 NIGHTS IN FAIRFIELD

LITTLE BAGHDAD

بغداد الصغيرة

22 August — 16 November 2015

Exhibition Context: Little Baghdad

1001 Nights in Fairfield is the final installment of *Little Baghdad*, a project that worked at the nexus of contemporary art and community cultural development practice to present Iraqi stories and perspectives. *Little Baghdad* is comprised of:

The Long Tables: a series of Iraqi inspired dinner parties, engaging artists and audiences in critical and creative discussion.

Let's Party Like its 620BC: a weekend-long performance party, which included installations, performances and a food safari.

1001 Nights in Fairfield: an exhibition that presents multi-disciplinary works created in the context of this project and presented in partnership with Fairfield City Museum and Gallery.

Little Baghdad was developed over several years, with Iraqi communities by Powerhouse Youth Theatre and the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS). Fairfield City Museum and Gallery became a project partner of Little Baghdad, committed to staging the exhibition and exhibition programs. *More info: pyt.com.au/littlebaghdad*

Credits

© Fairfield City Museum and Gallery, Powerhouse Youth Theatre, STARTTS

We wish to thank our many partners and collaborators for their support. In particular, thank you to Arts NSW, Australia Council for the Arts, Australian Museum, Scanlon Foundation, Australian Government Department of Social Services and Information and Cultural Exchange.

1001 Nights in Fairfield credits

Curators: Lena Nahlous *(Fairfield City Museum and Gallery)*
Karen Therese *(Powerhouse Youth Theatre)*
Jiva Parthipan *(STARTTS)*

Exhibition Assistant: Timothy Talty

Design: Province Studio
Photographer: Helen Tran

Fairfield City Museum & Gallery is an initiative of Fairfield City Council and is known for its strong history of community involvement and is the largest exhibition space in Fairfield City. We are one of the City's greatest resources, at the forefront of creating and presenting events and exhibitions about our past, heritage, visual arts and of our culturally diverse communities.

Curators' Foreword

We are proud to present *1001 Nights in Fairfield*, an exhibition engaging and reflecting Iraqi histories, cultures and experiences. *1001 Nights in Fairfield* presents screen work, new media, poetry, projections, textiles, ceramics and visual art, which has been developed through a series of collaborations between artists and Fairfield's diverse Iraqi communities.

Like the ancient and much loved collection of tales known as *One Thousand and One Nights (ʾalf layla wa-layla)*, and its protagonist Scheherazade, this exhibition pays homage to Iraq's rich history of storytelling. The works tell stories of displacement, loss, resilience, resistance and reestablishment.

The city centre of Fairfield is fondly dubbed *'Little Baghdad'* by many, due to the high number of people from Iraq residing in the area. Despite the size of this population and their significant contribution to the social, economic and cultural life of Fairfield, there is a broader lack of knowledge and engagement with this community. The exhibition invites audiences to engage with Iraq and Iraqi cultures.

Works developed for the exhibition include: Zanny Begg's part-documentary part-fictional film made in collaboration with the Choir of Love; Nicole Barakat's textile works developed with Fairfield High's Parents' Cafe and Intensive English Centre; clay works made by young people from STARTTS with Hedar Abadi; visual art, mixed media and calligraphic works created by respected Australian Iraqi artists Abbas Makrab, Layla Naji, Aghar Niazi and Ali Hamadi; two films made by local artist Zahra Alsamawi, one set in Fairfield and the other in Iraq; Sean Bacon's screen work; Eiman AlUbudy and Cigdem Aydemir's poetry projections; Undrawing the Line's modular 3D drawing; Province's design work; and the digital stories from the Changing Lives project.

Our partnership with the Australian Museum provides local communities with access to a selection of their collection as part of this exhibition, some of which inspired the clay works by young people.

In the context of current realities in Iraq and the emerging community of Iraqi Australians, *1001 Nights in Fairfield* presents new possibilities on the nature of art, mythmaking, beauty, connections and concepts of displacement and home.

Lena Nahlous Social History & Exhibitions Curator, *Fairfield City Museum & Gallery*
Karen Therese Artistic Director, *Powerhouse Youth Theatre*
Jiva Parthipan Community Cultural Development, *NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)*

Contributing Artists (listed alphabetically)

Untitled (2015), Digital Film

Eiman AlUbudy and Cigdem Aydemir
On These Threads (2015) Video Installation with rug

Zahra Alsamawi is a Western Sydney-based screen and media artist who was born in Iraq, and migrated to Australia at age 12. She holds a Masters in Media Arts and Production from the University of Sydney and a Bachelor of Film Production Studies and a Diploma of Screen and Media.

Shatweh – Female headdress (Acquired 1903)
Embroidered broadcloth, linen and coins

Eiman AlUbudy is a Sydney based creative artist and poet who migrated to Australia from Iraq at the age of two. She holds a Bachelor of Creative Arts (Visual Arts) from the University of Wollongong. Eiman has exhibited work at the annual art exhibition at Club Marconi, The Bryan Brown Theatre, M2 Gallery, Bankstown Arts Centre and The Art Gallery of the University of Wollongong. Eiman has fallen in love with art and poetry, which she has used to express her opinions and experiences in politics, religion, identity and her family's migration. Following her artistic dream has not always been easy, however, it is one that she strives to excel in due to extensive passion and determination. Such optimism has helped her grow more towards pursuing her creative dreams as a creative artist and poet.

Australian Museum pieces from their Middle Eastern Collection
The Australian Museum has included several items from their collection this exhibition. The objects include a headdress, jewellery, pottery and a miniature candle holder.

Contributing Artists (listed alphabetically)

Eiman AlUbudy and Cigdem Aydemir
On These Threads (2015) Video Installation with rug

Little Baghdad, (2015) single channel video

Cigdem Aydemir is a Sydney-based artist strongly influenced by her identity as an Australian Muslim woman with Turkish heritage. Her socially and politically engaged art practice investigates possibilities for intersubjective and transcultural communication with an interest in post-colonial and feminist issues. Through the mediums of installation, performance and video art, Cigdem produces engaging and provocative work that is driven equally by research, play, criticism and humour. Cigdem was the 2013 recipient of the Redlands Konica Minolta Art Prize, in the Emerging Artist category, and the Edna Ryan Award for Creative Feminism in 2012. She has exhibited both nationally and internationally.

Sean Bacon is an award-wining Sydney-based artist. He studied video and visual arts, graduating with Honours in 1998. He worked with the French dance company Experience Harmaat, and their collaboration opened the performance section of the prestigious Venice Bienniale (2001). In 2005 he was awarded a 3-month residency at the Australia Council's Green Street Studios in New York. Sean has been a Company Artist for version 1.0 since 2005. His work with version 1.0 encompasses *Table of Knowledge*, the Helpmann Award winning *This Kind of Ruckus*, the Drover Award winning *Deeply offensive and utterly untrue*, and The Green Room Award winning *The Bougainville Photoplay Project*, *The Disappearances Project*, *The Major Minor Party* and *The Vehicle Failed To Stop*. Sean worked on Sydney Theatre's *Seven Kilometres North-East*, which toured to Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovinia and as video designer for Belvoir's Street Theatre's Measure for Measure, for which he won a Sydney Theatre Award for Stage Design.

Contributing Artists (listed alphabetically)

Language is the First Border (2015)
Stretch lame and velvet soft sculpture

1001 Nights in Fairfield (2015)
17min 33 sec film

Nicole Barakat is an award-winning artist, educator and curator who works to unpick the borders of art and life. She has a focus on traditional and contemporary textile practices, exploring transformation, imperfection and re-seeing mundane and discarded materials. Barakat holds a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Textiles with first class honours from the University of NSW Art & Design. She has exhibited and performed throughout Australia and internationally in San Francisco, Stockholm and London. She has worked as an art educator for over ten years, currently within the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. Nicole undertook an artist residency in Bethlehem, Palestine in 2010 and is currently working on a community-engaged project in Narrandera, NSW with the Cad Factory in partnership with Performance Space. She recently exhibited a body of work at the Kandos Museum for *Cementa15* and made her curatorial debut with the Lacebook exhibition at Peacock Gallery Auburn.

Zanny Begg is a Sydney based artist whose work focuses on political activism and community. Her work uses humour, understated drawings and found cultural artefacts to explore ways we can live and be in the world differently. Her work is often collaborative, inviting engagement with key themes such as resilience, financial disobedience and unthinking borders. Zanny has an experimental and research driven practice that works across film, performance, installation, activism and drawing. Zanny has a PhD in Art Theory. She was the director of Tin Sheds Gallery, University of Sydney (2010-2014) and has curated a number of exhibitions that probe social and political space. In 2014 she began teaching at UNSW Art and Design.

Fairfield High School Intensive English Class Students have worked with Nicole Barakat to produce textile works for this exhibition.

Contributing Artists (listed alphabetically)

Changing Lives was a digital storytelling initiative of Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) with Iraqi Australian high school students from Fairfield and Auburn. Hawraa Alsaidi, Israa Alsaidi, Abrar Al Saleh, Zahra Alhaieri and Asmaa Farzam all produced powerful digital stories about harrowing journeys from Iraq by boat to Australia, their time in detention, stories of longing for family left behind, and dreams of future lives in a new land. Coordinator/ Lead facilitator: Fadia Abboud, assisted by Fatima Mawas and Fadle Elharris

The Choir of Love was formed by Bashar Hanna in 2012. It is a vibrant, multi-generational community choir based in Fairfield, performing secular and faith-based music in Arabic. The choir receives funding and support from STARTTS and Fairfield City Council.

Contributing Artists (listed alphabetically)

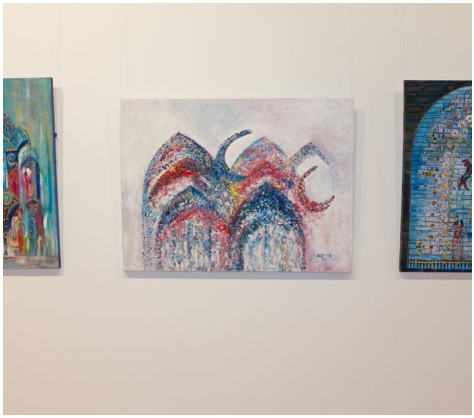
Untitled (2015)
Acrylic on canvas

Letters Against the Letters (2015) (Set of 2)
Mixed media on paper

Ali Abbas Hamadi is a Sydney-based visual artist who graduated with a Bachelor of Visual Arts from Baghdad University, Academy of Fine Arts in 1992. In 1999, Ali migrated from Iraq to Syria and Lebanon. He relocated to Australia in 2004. Ali has shown his abstract expressionist paintings in solo and group exhibitions throughout Australia and overseas, including his solo exhibition Baghdad. He recently received a Commendation for his work at Blacktown Arts Centre.

Abbas Makrab was born in Baghdad and is a Sydney-based artist whose vivid paintings, collage and print work draw on ancient Arabic stories and the role of myth in constructing culture and identity. Makrab has lived, worked and taught in Iraq, Jordan and Australia and has extensive experience working with migrant communities to produce major public art commissions, many of which can be seen in Western Sydney today. Abbas holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting) from the Baghdad Academy, a Master of Fine Arts (Painting) from the National Arts School Sydney and a Screen Printing Certificate 3, Ultimo College. His work has been exhibited in group and solo shows across Australia, Jordan, Iraq, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Damascus, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Germany.

Contributing Artists (listed alphabetically)

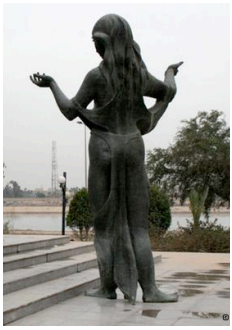


Echo of Baghdad (Set of Three)
Mixed media (2005, 2010, 2015)

Aghnar Niazi is a visual artist and a contemporary painter. She graduated with a Masters in Fine Arts (Textile Design), from the University of Baghdad in 1992. Through her work Aghnar explores memory, the human cost of war, displacement and destruction of home. Aghnar paints to vanquish the loneliness of place and time, searching for a connection between her old and new culture. Aghnar has exhibited at a number of galleries in Sydney, including Fairfield City Gallery and Museum.

I'm Scheherazade the story (2015)
Ink on canvas

Layla Naji has been fascinated by the stories of One Thousand and One Nights and by Arabic calligraphy since childhood. Layla has exhibited across NSW in a number of exhibitions and galleries, including Inside-Out, The Torture Memo with Michael Callaghan, Mori Gallery, Lismore Gallery, Peacock Gallery and North Ryde Art Gallery. She was a member of the Auburn Arabic Calligraphy group for five years and has worked on public art projects with Auburn Council, including murals and ceramics. She has acted as a cultural consultant for a number of theatrical plays including Belvoir Street Theatre's Baghdad Wedding and Scorched. Layla graduated as a mechanical engineer in Baghdad. Since arriving in Australia, she has worked in the community development and health education sectors and currently works in the disability employment sector.



Contributing Artists (listed alphabetically)

Untitled (2015) Clay

The Parents' Café began as a small social group at Fairfield High School aimed at involving refugee families, many of whom are newly arrived from Iraq, in their children's schooling. It has grown to include a community kitchen, garden, catering service and a hub for education and information. It has received widespread recognition and the UNHCR described it as a model for settlement best practice. The parents from The Parents Cafe have created new textile work with Nicole Barakat for this exhibition.

Province is part design studio and part creative collective and a collaboration between Laura Pike and Anne-Louise Dadak. Province navigates a niche that crosses spatial and site specific design, large scale public work and finely detailed visual identity and creative direction.

STARTTS Clay Making Workshops was conceived after a group of young Iraqis took a visit to the Australian Museum. Inspired by the museum's Mesopotamian collection, covering the regions of modern day Iraq, Iran and the Middle East. Iraqi Australian artist Hedar Abadi led clay-based art workshops at STARTTS with Iraqi youth. The project does recognise that acquisitions made by Western Museums from the British Colonial period are inherently problematic, however, it is also important to note that in the context of the ongoing destruction of cultural history and artefacts in conflict zones around the world, it is vital that people of the diaspora, especially young people, have a forum to engage with, and also contribute to, their own cultural history and practice.
Supported by: Lina Ishu.

Contributing Artists (listed alphabetically)

The Chant of Nudimmud (2015)
3 x 5.64 metres modular drawing with anaglyph 3D

Undrawing the Line is an artist collective formed in 2014 by four people from refugee and non-refugee backgrounds — Mona Moradveisi, Safdar Ahmed, Zanny Begg and Murtaza Ali Jafari — to challenge the binary between citizen and non-citizen that frames current thinking about borders.

Hedar Abadi was born in the ancient city of Babylon in Iraq, he graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts in Iraq in 1988. He has exhibited widely across the world, including Jordan, Austria, Iraq and Australia. In Australia, Hedar has exhibited at the Opera House, Paddington Contemporary Fine Art Gallery, Casula Powerhouse and Fairfield Museum and Gallery. He has won a number of awards including First Prize for his painting “Women in Prison” at Refugee Realities an exhibition held in Canberra by Oxfam International. He has also won the 1st Prize for the People Choice Award at Casula Powerhouse Annual Arts Exhibition two years in a row in 2013-14. His style is generally expressionist, as a painter under commission by the Iraqi government, he has mostly produced portraits, and explored a number of styles.

Fairfield City Museum and Gallery

Tue-Sat 10am-4pm
FREE ADMISSION

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