

MY ADOPTION EXPERIENCE

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

4th Anniversary of the National Apology
for Forced Adoption

Brisbane, 21st March 2017



**Forced Adoption
Support Services**

Funded by the Australian Government
Department of Social Services

My Adoption Experience

Artists / contributors

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Nancy and Andrew Kent

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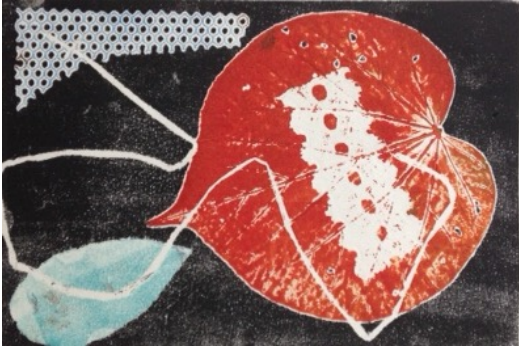
Exhibition co-ordinator: Patricia Zuber

This activity is funded by the Small Grants program
Forced Adoption Support Services



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ELEA FAITHSHIELD, BARBARA WENCK, FAY HANSON

Secrets in our Hearts 2016
Collagraph Monoprint

Produced in the printmaking workshop held during the Mothers Healing Retreat on North Stradbroke Island in March 2016.

A symbolic print expressing aspects of our shared experience of loss.

The main leaf was chosen for its heart and womb like shape - where it all began for us and our children.

The lace print was chosen to express our naivety and our babies' innocence and vulnerability. The net - a piece of 'fishnet stocking' represents how we were perceived - often as women of ill repute and thus shunned.

The large Aqua teardrop - one of many we shed and still shed.

The line weaving through the print - the umbilical cord - still unbroken - forever searching, forever yearning for our little ones.



BARBARA WENCK
Driftwood Heart 2016
Driftwood on canvas

The driftwood heart was collected at North Stradbroke Island during the Mothers Healing Retreat in March 2016.

Unfinished.
Incomplete.
Fragmented
My heart has its own memory of the experience

BARBARA WENCK

These are copies of crayon drawings that Barbara Wenck completed as part of an art journal to express her experience of losing her first baby to adoption.



“When I was pregnant the one thing I didn’t get to express was my “yes” to what I wanted. So I gave myself permission to draw it.”



“That was me pregnant at 17 with the flared pants and “no” was what I had to say to that baby... when I looked at it and realised what it was, it was a wow moment”.



“I think when you’re pregnant with life for the first time and at such a young age, it does draw you more into yourself and question life... From conception onwards I felt like I was carrying the weight of my parents. I’ve drawn Africa as my father and Australia as my mother.

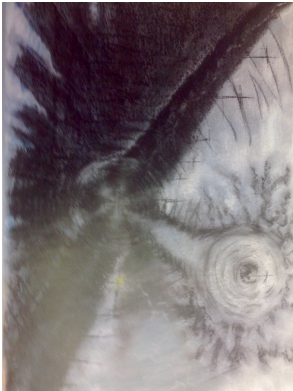


“I had toxemia/ preeclampsia during the final weeks of pregnancy and was hospitalised. I was also very depressed. The entire experience had become very toxic for me and I wanted to die just to escape it all.

BARBARA WENCK art journal
continued

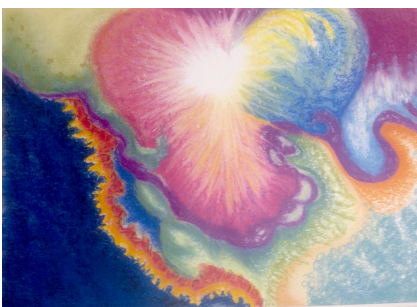


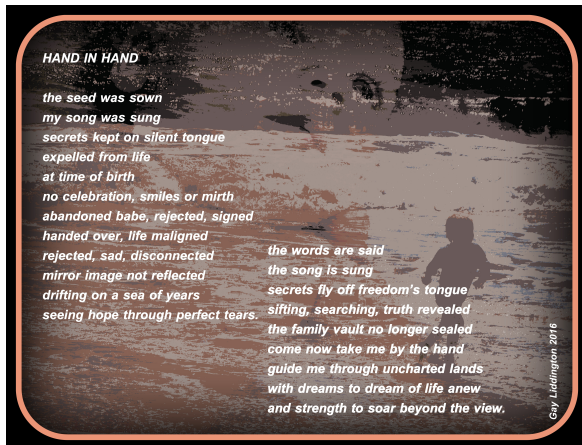
“In this picture I draw a dissected baby/body. My child was born with the use of forceps and I was unconscious for the birth so I felt disconnected /dissected from everything too.



“This drawing is of death. It certainly was a multiple laying of deaths for us both (myself and my child). To feel and express the trauma and the death and the destruction, it’s very fitting. It’s just as important and just as meaningful as the days when you feel the exact opposite.”

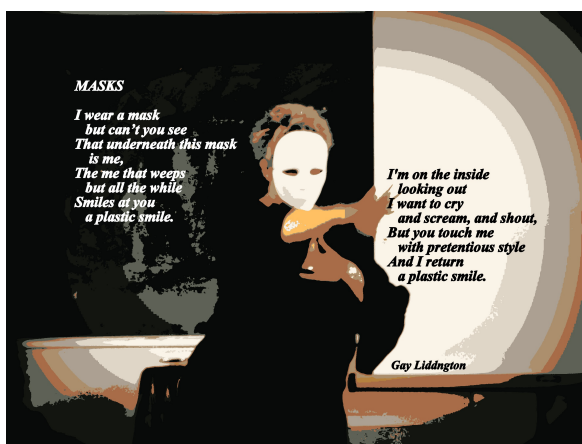
I think for me going through the whole process and feeling like that, about the trauma and the worst thing that can possibly happen to you, is a breakthrough in understanding what life is about and not being frightened of it. What you learn, the compassion and empathy for yourself in those moments, isn’t wasted because you get to share that. If you’re lucky you get to help somebody else and that’s what makes life really worth living, isn’t it?





GAY LIDDINGTON
Hand in Hand 2016
Digital print on canvas

This artwork was inspired by the stories of adoptees including my own. The longing and heartache, joys and struggles. My aim was to encapsulate those journeys in poetry and enhance it with photography.



GAY LIDDINGTON
Masks 2017
Digital print on canvas

'Masks' is an expression of reaching out from behind the mask of perceived judgement and truth. It is a cry for recognition, one that is commonplace for many adoptees. This piece was written in 1991 from my own hiding place.



PETER YOUNG
Tenacity and Triumph 2016
Photograph

This image speaks to me about the capacity we all have to have a good life despite, or in some cases because of, a hard starting point. My mum, Grace, was young and unmarried when she gave birth to my sister Denise. This was at a time when there was no option to keep and raise a child 'out of

wedlock'. Grace went on to later marry and have three boys, but she never stopped loving her daughter. Her great affection for her niece and later for her daughter-in-laws and granddaughters provided a window into her love for the daughter she lost. Despite this grief Grace had a good life - she was tenacious. She died in January 2013. A few months later Denise came into our lives. She is a lovely, living reminder of my mum.

This photo was taken at Kununurra, in the north west of Western Australia



JAN KASHIN

Trish Warrior Princess 2003

Acrylic on canvas

Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Brisbane, October 1968

Trish recounted her experiences in the hospital when she gave birth. As I painted her with both arms tied to the bed by 'bandages', and with a nurse either side of her, pushing down her shoulders and elbows so she couldn't see her baby, and the bed linen tied tightly, squashing her while she tried to give birth, I realised the enormity of the crimes of hospital staff in every state.

Trish was threatened with deportation if she didn't submit, go quietly and surrender her baby. She was 20 years old and not an Australian citizen - still British!

The nurses' hands encase her arms and shoulders like gigantic spiders. Her shoulders were pressed down so that she would not be able to see her newborn being delivered.

'If you don't let them see their babies they can't bond', was the hospital workers/social workers' mantra.

That the babies had spent 9 months with their young mothers before they were born, seemed to have been forgotten by the ethos formulated.

Now all hospitals must have a Mission Statement clearly visible to all patients, visitors and staff.

TRISH LARGE, ALAS - Adoption Loss Adult Support Australia Inc



St Mary's Home, Toowong (1919-1991)
Reproduction

The Church of England presented this print to Trish Large along with other mothers who had been resident in the home.



JAN KASHIN
Mummification (Mummyfication) 1997
Hornsey Hospital, Hornsey, NSW 1963
Pastel on paper

'Mummification' is the middle picture of a trilogy -
1. 'Mutilation' 2. 'Mumification' 3. 'Dumbification.'

All 3 are pastel on paper and were painted in the weeks before the sixth Australian Conference on Adoption in Brisbane 1997. I was Convenor of that conference under the name of Janice Benson.

Three weeks before the conference I lost the power of speech - I couldn't talk. There were good reasons for my dilemma. I took a week off and began drawing from the depth of my soul. The year and a half preparation for the conference had stirred some primal realisations for me.

The first picture describes the beginning of the torture. It is called 'Mutilation' or 'Pin her Down'. The second picture, 'Mumification', advances the first image to the point of being patched up and ready to be sent home.

The bandages of the binding of the breasts are used to create an almost 'better than new' image - a warrior woman, even.

Forbidden to go to the nursery to see her baby, they might as well have covered her face, as her right to breathe in the smell of her newborn was denied her.

Unable to hold her baby, they might as well have cut off her arms. They bound her breasts to make sure she couldn't feed her baby.

Forbidden to walk to the nursery to see her baby, they might as well have cut off her legs.

Her abdomen was well and truly bound to protect any future procreation. Many young women were farewelled by staff with 'see you next year'.

They had been effectively type-cast into providers for the infertile. They had been channeled into a sub-class of women who would never again be able to rejoin the lives they had left. From the moment they were shunted out of the door of the home they would have to learn to lie. Their core values had been seriously modified by their forced incarceration, and the taking of their newborn. Yet the torture of them steeled many of them into formidable warriors to emerge 30 years later to testify to their treatment and reclaim what was stolen.



HEATHER BURTON MOORE

Holding it together....but not quite fitting in 2016

Collagraphic print on Fabriano paper

AP Artist's proof

Produced at the Jigsaw Printmaking Workshop June 2016.

The print depicts an old wooden fence in the country. The fourth post along is obviously different and stands out as being comparatively new (it's not an organic shape) and covered in spots (a pattern to which I'm often drawn). This fence post represents how I see

myself fitting into the world.



MARIANNE WOBCKE

Grandmother Dreaming (bringing them home) 2016

Linocut

Grandmother Dreaming: Bringing them Home is about the imperative of reconnecting the stolen (removed) babies with their mothers. Biologically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and physically rebuilding the bond between mother and baby.



MARIANNE WOBCKE

Toxic Womb: Red Foetus 2017

Digital print from screenprint

SP (State Proof)

Traumatic circumstances surrounding conception often results in a pregnancy that is unwanted and the inevitable consequence of being carried in a toxic womb. The inter-uterine environment created is, to varying degrees, biologically hostile and threatening to the psychological, emotional, spiritual and physical development and well being of the foetus.



CHRISTINE DENHAM

Why was he taken from me?

Acrylic on canvas

I started to paint the image of myself and how I felt. It represents my memories that have haunted me since that first pregnancy, naive, trapped, unmarried and too young, alone in my shame.

The government had the law.... and so did the churches, to hide the shameful act of a teenage pregnancy, and get rid of the evidence.

My parents, who took their little girl to be locked up, abused and laboured, out of site from society, taken, because I was unworthy, filthy

“Not allowed to see him” they said to me, “just sign and be out of our sight, you must have a low IQ to make such a mistake, we’ll make it right and give him to someone more worthy”.

The torment of being trapped and disgraced, enduring the pain of childbirth only to have part of you wrenched away. Why does he (the father) smoke a cigar in celebration of my suffering? Why does he gloat in pride?

I live with the injustice of it all, the destruction of my life, helpless to change the event. Taken from me.....



CHRISTINE DENHAM

Despair

Acrylic on canvas

I wanted to express my life time of anguish, so alone with my tears, powerless to change the events of the separation, the yearning to back and have the secret revealed. This self portrait of my feelings at the time, and ever since, has been my daily despair. My son, left alone in the nursery, always wanted, never given, taken from me and always with me in my despair.



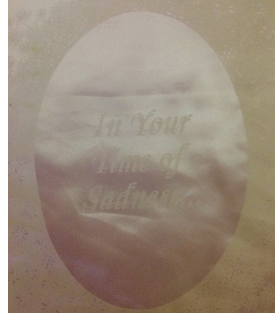
CHRISTINE DENHAM

Connecting

Acrylic on Canvas 2017

38 years, 5 months and one day, I connected with my Son. Now it's time for happiness and healing. The joy of familiarity, instant bonding, overcoming the sadness of so many lost years. The completeness of the family tree, your roots, your belonging. Really big noses, funny walks, and strange, quirky behaviour, a new book in 'Pandora's Box'.

I prayed for my baby, that God would watch over him for me, he did and brought him back to me..... for me, for his sisters and brothers, for his nieces and nephews, his family connecting.



JENNY SANZARO-NISHIMURA

Twenty-four Years of Mourning 1996

Screenprint on satin, cotton, acrylic wadding, machine embroidery. Unique print.

For twenty-four years after surrendering my daughter for adoption I mourned her on her birthday. I decided it was time to find her and make contact, my heart and soul would not be at peace until I found out if she was ok and had experienced a happy family life. My fear was that she wouldn't want to know me.



JENNY SANZARO-NISHIMURA

Missing Link 1996

Screenprint on perspex, screws

Unique Print

This was a family photo I had taken in 1995, the year I started searching for my daughter. It was the same year I split with my ex-husband, in the photo I replaced him with a photo my first (adopted) daughter had sent me of her at high school, after we made contact. Finally my family felt whole.

Wondering

I wonder what you look like,
I wonder who you are,
I wonder if you are happy,
I wonder if you are sad,
I wonder if you've had a good life
Or if it has been bad,
I wonder if you've had the life
I would give you if I'd had the chance.
I wonder if you'll ever know
That it wasn't really my choice,
I didn't have a say in it,
I didn't have a voice.
I wonder if you'll love me
Or if you'll bear a scar,
I wonder if you'll ever know
How much I've missed you from afar.



ANDREW KENT

Connecting to The Family of Humanity 2005
Oil on board

My son who was adopted out at Royal Brisbane Hospital because I was very young. I was told I could never try to make contact again. This was until the law changed. Then I began the painful process of trying to make contact with my son.

My journey has been one of rejection as he does not want to know me. The adoptive mother died over twelve years ago and yet he still has no interest to know me

The healing thing has been a growing awareness of the oneness of us all. I became a teacher and worked in many different situations including Woorabinda, Tarumbal Kindergarten and a Preschool in Rockhampton.

My awareness on a spiritual level of the fact that we are all one family has increased over the years and my involvement with UNESCO clubs in South Australia brought me to commission my husband to paint this picture for humanity, not for me, but in memory of all the children, families and friends who are affected by loss in some way or another through adoption, displacement or war.

I have submitted this artwork that was painted by my husband. It reflects my family. The family of humanity.



ANDREW KENT

We are all brothers and sisters
Oil on board 2005

When I discovered that the laws changing for the Stolen Generation were allowing me to be able to access my son's birth certificate and identifiable information I was elated.

I felt a great bond of love with all other mothers who had lost their children in one way or another. From that time onwards I saw all children as important and developed a need to help other people see that we are

all one.

The pain of one member of the family affects the pain of the whole. When we know and acknowledge that we are all one family, regardless of race, religion or cultural background, then the pain of one member of any family is felt by the others of all families. We are all brothers and sisters.

NANCY KENT



VICTORIA FITZPATRICK
A Time For Giving 2009
Acrylic on canvas with clock
workings

This work is a statement about the anonymity of the past adoption practices, which could almost seem like a lucky dip. Who will get which baby?
Let's give them all away. It will all work out in the end!

The reference to time has two purposes...the first is that these practices were locked into a finite time in our past, that still reverberates in its effects today, but also, it is the time for forgiving. A time to move forward into a new future with its endless possibilities, with the gift of the National Apology that brings a degree of healing and affirmation for wrong done and a chance for leaving it in the past where it belongs and working towards ensuring it isn't repeated.



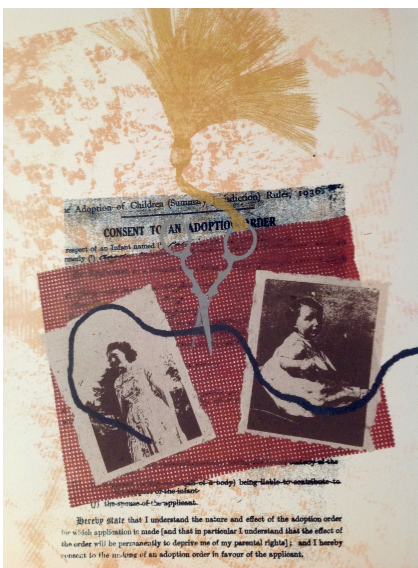
LANA SYED
Memoirs of my adoption life (unhappy
journey) 2017
Mixed media

This is part of the story of my adoption journey and life.
The reason I made this was to give people an insight into:
why I am
who I am
all the experiences of my life, in and out of homes, adoptions and foster care which made me who
and how I am today
the painting is colourful like my life journey
through the good and bad times
back then children had to be seen and not heard



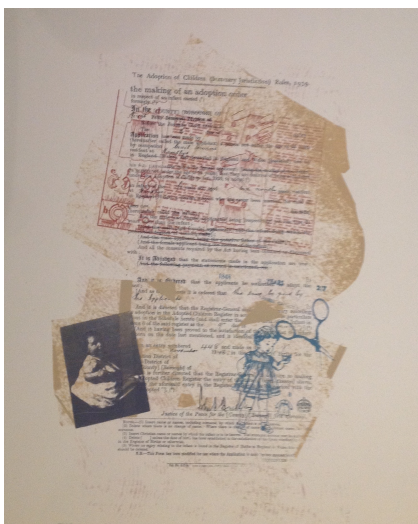
TERESA JORDAN
Pandora IV 2007
Screenprint with hand colouring

Pandora IV an illustrative response to Pandora's Hope, an anthology of poems by Penny Callan Partridge. Partridge uses the story of Pinocchio and myth of Pandora in her search for meaning, identity and veracity within her own adoption story.



PATRICIA ZUBER
Angela's Birthday
Screenprint 2006

I made this silk screen print after being reunited with my mother and finding out that she had called me Angela at birth and that she was a textile artist. I built a layered image onto a background print of one of my mother's textile pieces, using my adoption consent document and its profound statement, tapestry webbing, photos of myself as a baby and of my mother taken a few months after I was born - printed onto hand made paper we bought together when I visited her, tapestry wool and a pair of scissors with a tassel that she made which she gave to me.



PATRICIA ZUBER
Dressing Up
Screenprint 2006

This layered screen print reflects on the dress my mother never made for me and suggests that this was replaced by the making of an adoption order. I found an old pattern of the dress I am wearing in the photo of myself as a baby, which was a common type of baby girl dress at that time. The background are prints of the actual pattern pieces over which are layered my adoption order, pattern instructions, the photo and the image of a little girl holding a bird from the pattern packet.