Prosperity

During fourteen days of mandated home quarantine I stare into the backyard of my rental property in nipaluna (West Hobart). The suburb, like many houses close to the CBD, sits on top of a large hill. Visible from the street is a view of kunanyi (Mt Wellington) and in the other direction the River Derwent (also known by the Aboriginal names raagapyarranne and nibbalin). The cold from the mountain often changes the temperature of the town below, especially when there is ice on the mountain. It is the beginning of winter and this Federation era house with its decorative fireplaces, tall ceilings and large glass windows, do not keep the cold air out or insulate well.

Unable to leave the edges of this property during home quarantine, I stare through large glass windows into the front garden and see neatly trimmed hedges, a wraparound veranda and paving between sections of neatly clipped lawn. Unable to leave the edges of this property I stare through large glass windows into the front garden and see neatly trimmed hedges, a wraparound veranda and paving between sections of neatly clipped lawn. I notice the shoots of a young Eucalyptus tree sticking out from under the letterbox. The landlord described this native plant as a 'weed', remarking to us renting the house that 'that pesky weed is back again.' Her statement makes me think about the positioning of this native plant (known as Snow Gum) as an invasive species, in the context of a house that is built on stolen land.

My partner is trawlwoolway a palawa/pakena Tasmanian Aboriginal person whose Country is in Northwest Tasmania (Big Musselroe to Port Headland) and their dad tells them the endemic gum tree might have existed here before the house was built, that it was likely removed when the garden was erected; the tree is reshooting and resurfacing after some time underground. I ask if we can remove the small tree to replant it in a more hospitable area but am informed it is likely the roots of the small tree are longer than the tree itself, they may go at least two meters underground and are firmly attached to the soil under the paving.

The landlord's statement about the tree-as-weed reflects a certain view of natural world; the everyday use of the English language reflects cultural histories and human relationships to plants, and I decide this small statement invokes further consideration. For example, the use of the words 'native' and 'invasive' in relation to plant species are not often reflected upon within the context of the colonisation of 'Australia' by English settlers of First Nations peoples and their land.

In this house, a picket fence reinforced with trimmed hedges form a kind of wall demarcating the inside of the garden and house and the outside world of the street and neighbourhood. What is within the edges of the property is owned, private land. The garden reinforces this sense of property ownership; it is designed, maintained, kept, organised neatly to form an unchangeable static image.

Plant life and matter are organisms that grow and develop at their own pace and in relation to their geographic location and environmental conditions (grass grows sometimes higher than a person's knee when it is not mown, weeds and mushrooms spring up amongst the grass and ground) but through the monthly visit of the contracted gardener, my rental garden's image does not change.

This year I started making paper from the common garden grass and the English ivy vine in the backyard, which was taking over a walnut tree. I would hack and strip the vine down to the stem and mix it with cotton to bind together into a sheet. I also collected sea grass from toorernomairremener Country (where I went on a holiday), blending this material with cotton to form sheets that dried in the sun in the backyard.

These different papers have been cut and to a standard size and collaged to resemble Joss papers (or prayer papers) used in Chinese and other cultures.

Portals

The paper is usually made from bamboo with bright coloured ink (which can be gold, silver and red) and is burnt in a form of prayer, the concept being that the paper is activated by fire and arrives to the ancestors or deceased loved ones as a form of money, giving them wealth in the afterlife.

In this gallery setting the paper is not burnt. It is a signal or representation of the wealth extracted from the land where I have been living, which makes up part of the collage of my life as an Australian citizen and a body in a specific geographic location. Making this paper is also a way to connect with my grandparent's physical actions of planting and harvesting through a kind of physical echo.

Most of my paternal family follow the Taoist Chinese religion and as well folding and burning Joss paper as a form of ceremony or common prayer in Malaysia, we would burn the papers in Australia. I have memories of my dad giving me and my brother an emptied old paint tin and some Joss papers to burn on his balcony in Moonee Ponds. They were often

1. Says Syed Husin-Ali: 'British officers carried out geological surveys and studied the soil for agricultural practices. Favourable discoveries led to large scale tin mining and rubber planting later.' Husin Ali, S 1964 Social Stratification in *Kampong Bagan—A study of Class, Status, Conflict and Mobility in a Rural Malay Community*, Monographs of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society, Malaysia Printers Limited, Singapore.
2. Today, Indigenous communities in Malaysia are asserting their right of care for land and waters, for example in the case of the Indigenous people in the Malaysian state of Sarawak on the island of Borneo (36 Indigenous Penan and Kenyah Jamok communities) objecting to the logging of certain regions of forest by the Samling Group (2021 Al Jazeera Staff 2021. July 6 viewed 20th July 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/6/malaysia-borneo-timber-mediation>.

given with some urgency and was never made clear whether it was a prayer day, or we were catching up with a missed date on the Chinese calendar. Either way we were told not to come back inside until we had burnt every piece. Dad rented a flat on the top floor and I watched my brother with a BIC lighter turn the paper into black and grey ash which would float fall into the can or into the air and through the steel railing.

Like the nation named 'Australia' (a name derived from the Latin *australis* meaning 'southern' which imposed a balance of the theoretical 'northern' hemisphere by early colonisers), the archipelagos of the Malay Kingdom (the early state of what is now known as Malaysia) also fell victim to the influence of British colonisation.[1]

Chinese and Indian migration to Malaysia was encouraged as people were brought in large numbers for from their homelands as contract labourers (or indentured labourers) for tin mining and the cultivation of rubber and palm plantations.

My grandparents settled (respectively from Kinmen island in Taiwan and Guangdong Province in China) in a place called Batu-Pahat as economic immigrants, creating an area of farming land in rural Southern Malaysia near the village Bagan. Bagan is a village that originally developed from an inflow of migrants from Java.[2] They planted and cultivated latex (rubber sheets), coconut and their husks and finally palm seedlings to make palm oil.

What is my relationship to harvesting in comparison to my grandparents? I do not wake early and tend to the fields until the last light of the day. How do I measure the change of seasons, the cultivation of plants from seedling to picking, the physical labour and daily investment in the natural world around me? My livelihood does not depend on my ability to maintain, produce and harvest organic matter from the designated acreage of land. Further, farming is an extractive mode of engaging with the land. The accumulation of this wealth has led to my grandparents sending many other their children (my aunties and uncles) overseas and to me and my brother being born in Australia.

For this exhibition, ceramics have been loosely crafted in the forms of fruit, fruit being a significant food to offer for prayer in many cultures and religions including Taoist traditions. These objects have been fired at 1300 degrees celsius in a fire kiln (heated over 36 hours), an old manual technology used in the traditional Chinese ceramic production process. Fruit was always a connector for me and my dad (my mum and my brother did not eat it). He would buy me all kinds of fruits; mandarin, orange as well as nashi pear, dragonfruit, jackfruit and starfruit. He was influenced by his exposure to Western culture and one thing I enjoyed was when he would cut up strawberries for me in a bowl with sprinkled castor sugar. These clay objects have no glaze on them and have instead been scarred and coloured by the element of fire before cooling and hardening into a more permanent state. A video plays nearby and is comprised of interviews with family members and family friends which reconstructs their opinions and memories of Bagan through new and collected footage.

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of nipaluna (Hobart), the muwanina people who were dispossessed during colonisation. I pay my respects to the Elders of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people whose land I have been living on in lutruwita (Tasmania).

I study at RMIT University, on the land of the Wurundjeri people and the Boonwurrung people of the Kulin nations in Narrm (Melbourne). I was born on their unceded land and have grown up on it for the last 30 years. I offer my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

I acknowledge the many Indigenous groups (Orang Asli and Orang Asal in Malay) who are the traditional owners of the lands and waters of the Malaysian archipelago, predating and surpassing the division of Malay kingdoms followed by western colonialism. My paternal family settled on these lands as economic immigrants from Taiwan and China.

Recognising the movement engendered by migration, I offer my respects to the Elders of world Indigenous communities.

Many thanks to those that helped me realise the many parts of this ongoing project: my family and Neika Lehman, Rosie Isaac, Lauren Burrow (thank you!), Bonnie Cummings, Ben Richardson, Nunzie Madden, Grace Herbert, alongside the advice and support of Polly Stanton and Kristen Sharp.

Graphic Design: Lloyd–Mst

This photo shows an image of unripe Carambola or starfruit growing on the tree.
Monniaux, D 2005, *Averrhoa carambola*, image, viewed 2 December 2021 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carambola>.

Olivia Koh, October 2021