

2000 Years

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Exhibition dates: Tues 10th-Fri 27th Sept 2002
Gallery Hours: Tues-Fri 11am-5pm Sat 11am-4pm

Fremantle Arts Centre
1 Finnerty Street
Fremantle
Western Australia 6160

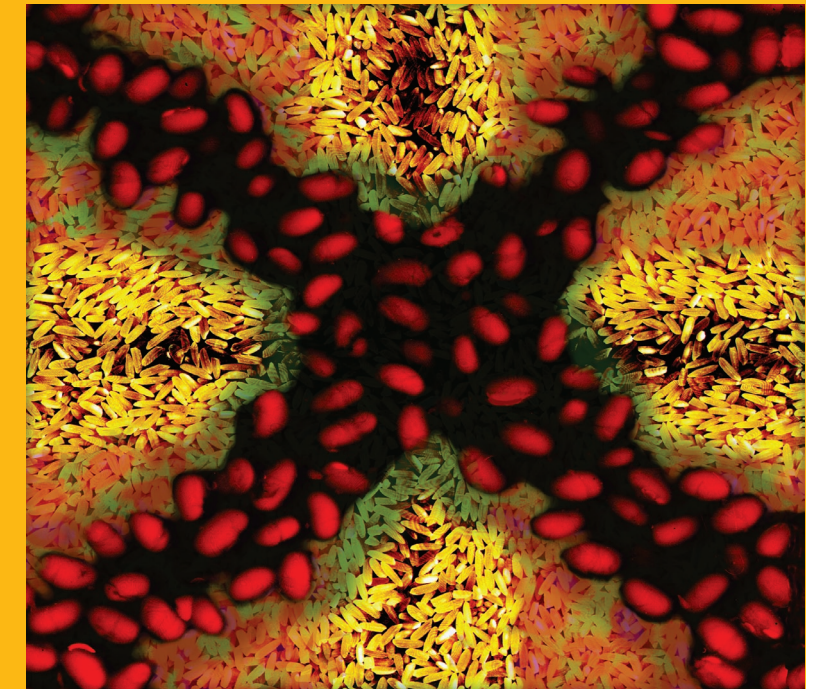
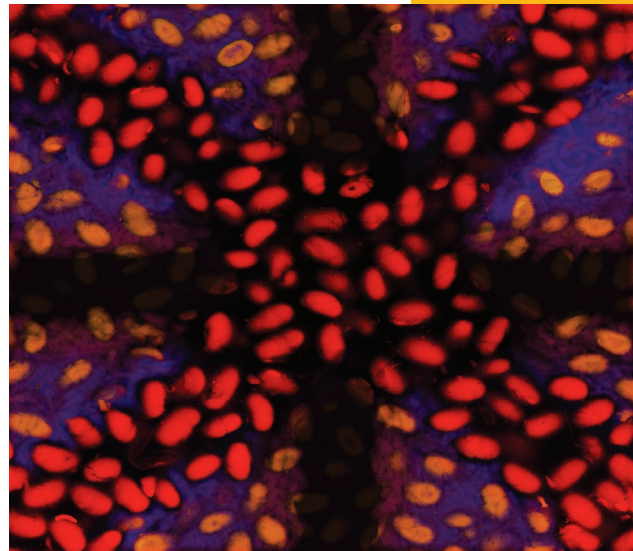
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Exhibition dates: Sat 21st Dec 2002-Wed 22nd Jan 2003
Gallery Hours: Daily 10am-5pm (except Christmas Day,
Boxing Day, New Years Day)

Acknowledgments:

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Clive Barstow

Span Galleries Melbourne
Fremantle Arts Centre

"MMMDCCXLII"
Digital Jigsaw
509mm x 440mm

"MMMDCCCLXXI"
Digital Jigsaw
509mm x 440mm

Unlearning *(artist's notes)*

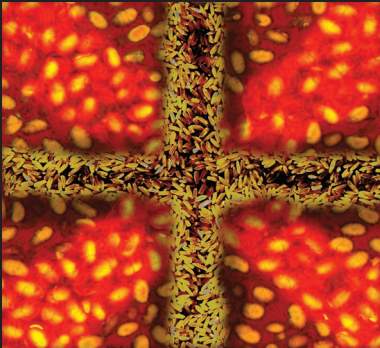
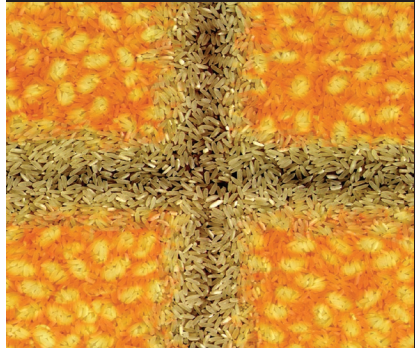
Too many wet winter afternoons spent piecing together jigsaws of world maps and flags, in retrospect contributed to my rather distorted and Euro-centric view of world order. As a young child, I was unaware of the significance of this indoctrinated education and blissfully detached from the reality that maps and flags like the jigsaw itself, were simply constructs of a rather powerful and significant kind.

*"Every piece the puzzler picks up and picks up again, and studies the strokes, every combination he tries and tries a second time, every blunder and every insight, each hope and each discouragement have all been designed, calculated and decided by the other"*¹

Perec's analysis of the jigsaw as a metaphor for life, social power and control could be expanded to include the history of cartography itself. This seemingly innocuous subject matter has supplied the puzzle maker with the irresistible opportunity to simulate cultural and political construction through the innocence of play.

Discovering a world map later in life with Europe as an orbiting satellite to Central Asia therefore, marked a more humble position in my learning curve and removed any point of reference from that time forward. Maps and flags are relatively fixed structural devices and as a consequence pertain to truth and stability, yet they attempt to represent nations in perpetual transition, an improbable scenario for even the most synchronic cultures.

Perhaps a more incidental but no less significant influence in my re-orientation has been the multi cultural food hall. A seemingly unlimited and indiscriminate mix of cultural references all on the same plate. Unlike the inert nature of flags, the food hall offers a sensory taste of world dis-order, a hint to a future of hybridity and mis-representation where no one owns the cutlery.



Double chilli on that ice cream please!

This playful and eclectic series of works reconfigures this "iconography" and projects ahead 2000 years to a time when the Union Jack might briefly signify the nation it represents. A time when cartography can accommodate political, cultural and even metrological flux, a position of incommensurability perhaps but with a realisation that national identity can no longer be achieved.

On Collaboration

Reflecting an obsession with national identity forms the ground rules to this collaboration with friend and artist Nicola Kaye. While our strategies and methods are worlds apart, we have often managed to arrive in the same place at the same time. Collaboration involves compromise and can take many forms, in this instance it has forged a unique position in our individual celebration of hybridity and more importantly it contributes the final and most unpredictable piece to the puzzle. It represents a commonality of themes and issues that have influenced our individual works to a point where ownership, like identity, can be mutual.

Clive Barstow 5.7.02

"CHINESE WHISPER"
Animated Short Film
Shanghai Biennale 2002

"DUNCE"
Jigsaws , carved chairs,
etched glass and
tic-toc biscuits
4m x1.7m x 1m
Installed at SpECtrUm Gallery
Perth 2002

Photography John Green

Mapping cultural incommensurability

Maps and flags perpetuate the illusion of clearly defined boundaries and harmonious internal consensus in modern societies. These constructed national truths however can only ever be situational and political; nationalisms are processes of conditioning and socialisation defined by the dominant cultural groups. The modern nation-state is increasingly being forced to confront its own national fictions and to come to grips with the fact of cross-cultural incommensurability, especially in this age of migratory flows and transnational border-crossings. As the local social demographic increasingly changes in a relatively rapid manner, the likelihood of one's daily encounter and engagement with cultural alterity proportionally intensifies. At any rate, only certain aspects of certain minority group differences are absorbed and reflected by the national imaginary—noticeably in the form of an easily digestible and commodifiable difference, such as food.

Consider the example of a multicultural food hall. To be sure, it offers a space where varied culinary permutations can be assembled and consumed at any one occasion. At the same time, however, the range of tastes on offer at any given food hall is never a true reflection of the diversity of ethnic groupings within the nation-state. The range of choices at any given locale is always reassuringly (or depressingly?) finite and familiar. The multicultural food hall is, as such, a study in the sociology of admission and social visibility within the corpus of the nation-state. Accordingly, we learn to consume particularistic versions of sanctioned state multiculturalism through our takeaways.

Clive Barstow's re-workings of maps and flags testify to the necessity of unlearning what we have learnt. Central to this re-configuration of knowledge is the emancipatory potential of a politics of difference, where incommensurability is negotiated as an inescapable facet of globalised multicultural co-existence. A continual rhetorical commitment to the sameness of people only ignores perpetuated structures of privilege and oppression. Correspondingly, it has to be acknowledged that the organic hybridisation of cultures that occurs within the multicultural nation-state will not necessarily guarantee the creation of a new consensual culture of

synthesis or amalgamation. The process of hybridisation cannot afford to be envisaged as yet another version of the assimilatory ideal that seeks to absorb formerly marginalised groups into the imagined mainstream. As the history of Indigenous people has palpably demonstrated for example, group differences, cultural politics and ideological specificities cannot simply be bred out of the multicultural-hybrid equation. Hybridisation is a lived process whereby such incompatibilities or incommensurabilities are continually highlighted. In this respect, hybridity is an on-going site of interrogation and alteration, ultimately placing pressure on a necessary relativising of dominant national cultural values.



Barstow's current artistic project goes some way towards imag(in)ing a transnational understanding of one's history—and future—through heterogeneity, hybridity and incommensurability. The discontinuities and disjunctions in his maps and flags signify the incongruities of unassimilable differences. Disparate elements cannot simply be 'jigsaw-ed' together to form a coherent national or global picture. Harmony is seemingly only achievable through a disharmony of sorts, whereby stability or consensus is itself deliberately and permanently left open to contestation. Therein lie the possibilities for inscribing a condition of belonging without the fixity of policed national boundaries and standards.

Dr. Dean Chan 18.7.02