

Sacred ground

From a Straddie midden to an underground marble mine and sci-fi housing, two IMA shows cover new territory

Phil Brown

Artist Megan Cope's midden says volumes about the idea of home. Her ancestral place is Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), a place home to the Quandamooka peoples for millennia.

Cope's work *RE FORMATION* consists of hand-cast concrete Sydney rock oysters and copper slag and it sits in Gallery 1 at the Institute of Modern Art (IMA) as part of the exhibition *Haunt*. This show was curated by Aileen Burns & Johan Lundh, co-directors of the IMA for the past few years. They have now moved on, to fresh pastures in New Zealand (new director Liz Nowell starts in June). The exhibitions now showing make up their swan song.

Haunt explores ideas of location and displacement and presents works focusing on the conceptions, creations, developments and experiences of home as they are affected by colonialism, urban development and gentrification.

Cope's work does this cleverly and it's impressive that she cast all the separate pieces and put them together herself.

Middens have an interesting place in our history. The vast heaps of discarded oyster shells that remain on Minjerribah are a testament to the deep roots of the Aboriginal community there.

They also form an evolving architecture that refutes the founding lie of Australia ... Terra Nullius.



HOMING IN ... (top) Megan Cope's *RE FORMATION*; former IMA directors Aileen Burns and Johan Lundh, who've moved to NZ; Megan Cope. Pictures: David Kelly, Dominique Elliot

For that reason a midden is a symbol and middens should be preserved. Many were destroyed in colonial times however, burned to create lime for construction, which is awfully ironic.

Cope's midden is a powerful statement.

Next door in gallery 2 you'll watch a rather intriguing single channel video by American artist Amie Siegel called *Quarry*, which takes viewers into the world's largest underground marble mine in Vermont, USA. *Quarry* tracks the stone's journey into the world of sleek

extravagance in swish New York apartments. All this to a great soundtrack by composer Gisburg Smialek.

Another work in *Haunt* I liked was Zanny Begg's video *The Beehive*, which explores the life and death of journalist and heiress Juanita Nielsen who disappeared in 1975, thought murdered to stop her writing about the destruction of Sydney's heritage around King's Cross in particular. The film brings together documentary interviews, fictional script and other material on a continuous loop.

Haunt has several other strands and in gallery 4 is another exhibition, *New Eelam: Brisbane* by Christopher Kulendran Thomas. (The Eelam bit refers to Tamil Eelam, the Tamil people's proposed independent state in Sri Lanka.)

The theme of this exhibition is collective housing worldwide. It's a sci-fi vision of an alternate reality, a future that involves us living as truly global citizens. The artist has partnered with landscape designer Pete Shields, furniture designer Reuben Schafer and ceramic artist Tim Wilson to create a work that may take some effort to get your head around.

HAUNT; NEW EELAM: BRISBANE
Until Jun 8, Institute of Modern Art,
Judith Wright Centre, 420 Brunswick St,
Fortitude Valley. ima.org.au



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