

Jewish Museum of Australia’s touring multicultural arts project is coming home

After touring for six months around Melbourne and Regional Victoria, **The Babel Project** is coming to the Jewish Museum in October. Conceived by the Jewish Museum of Australia in collaboration with Cardinia Shire, City of Port Phillip, Hobsons Bay Council, Hume City Council and The Substation, **The Babel Project** is a three-year venture inspired by the famous story of the unfinished Tower of Babel, involving 36 participants from all over Melbourne.

Participants from 15 countries around the globe, speaking 14 different languages between them (including Portuguese, Greek, Chinese, French, Sri-Lankan, English and Spanish), had the opportunity to take part in the Project, involving workshops and creative collaboration with Melbourne documentary photographer Georgia Metaxas.

Georgia asked participants to convey what they have in common through photographic images of essentially ordinary and domestic subject matter. Using disposable cameras, more than 1000 photos of shared domestic commodities and environments including fridges, breakfasts, living rooms, couches, gardens, families, friends, shoes, the street and sky were taken by the participants. Together the photos make up a contemporary Tower of Babel installation along with a dense soundscape incorporating all 14 languages.

Adriana Gomberg, Jewish Museum Project Officer, herself a Brazilian migrant, says “For six months we worked in an artistic medium with participants who aren’t artists and who came from such extremely different cultures and backgrounds – it is really incredible to see how much these people actually have in common.”

Jewish Museum’s Director Rebecca Forgasz says: “For the Museum, as a community cultural and arts organisation, to use art is a way of uniting disparate groups in Melbourne, is a really wonderful opportunity. But more than that, it allows our own Jewish community to forge real and lasting connections with other communities.”

Set in Babylon, the story is about the building of an immense tower by the generations that followed the Great Flood. They spoke a single language. But the height and ambition of the construction displeased God who, as punishment, confused their languages and scattered the people over all the Earth.

It is this fable that inspired the workshops, run by Georgia Metaxas: “The grid reflects the repetitive nature of the images, embodying the power of language and illustrating the relationship between photographs and languages. The final piece - a composite person conveyed metaphorically through photographs.”

The Jewish Museum, The Pod, Georgia Metaxas, project partners and the participants worked together to compile the suite of photographs, stories and languages to build the contemporary structure.

The project is part of VicHealth’s Arts About Us program and is supported by the Victorian Multicultural Commission. VicHealth Acting CEO Associate Professor John Fitzgerald says: “Through Arts About Us, projects like The Babel Project are encouraging dialogue in the community about the benefits of cultural diversity and the harmful impacts of race-based discrimination.”

TOURING PROGRAM

- The Substation – 3 March – 10 April 2011
- Hume Global Learning Centre - 15 May - 26 June 2011
- Cardinia Cultural Centre - 31 July – 7 August 2011
- Jewish Museum of Australia - 23 Oct - 11 Mar 2012

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