

Northam Multicultural Arts Festival: “Telling the Migrant Story”

Sunday 27 October 2024

Venue: Global Room TAFE College, Hutt St., Northam

9am – 13.00pm

As part of the Northam Multicultural Festival on Sunday 27 October 2024, the Northam Army Camp Heritage Association (NACHA) in collaboration with the WA Migrant Research Network (MRN) and Tracs at Edith Cowan University (ECU) are proud to present the inaugural ‘Telling the Migrant Story’ Multicultural Arts Festival in honour of the 75th anniversary of the official arrival of the first batch of displaced persons and migrants at Northam’s immigration accommodation facilities, in August 1949.ⁱ

The venue for this event, the TAFE College, is poignant. Located as it is on the site of the former Military hospital, that treated severely injured Australian troops from conflict zones in the Asia Pacific Region during WWII. However, in 1948, it was hastily refurbished to become the Department of Immigration Holden Immigration Reception Centre which functioned, from 1949-1966 as a receiving centre for migrants from Western and Southern Europe and the women and children of Displaced Persons (DPs) sent to work on road and rail on a two-year contract in lieu of passage assistance. Its first residents were Displaced Persons (DPs) disembarked from the *MS Mozaffari* directed to prepare the Northam Army Camp (NAC) to receive batches of DPs starting in August 1949, this facility was operational until 1954. Northam was for around 40-50,000 migrants first home in Australia. It is now 75 years and three generations we can speculate as to what that would mean in numbers! The government policy on resettlement also impacted on every aspect of the migrants and DPs lives.

When postwar migration began in 1947, the 1937 Assimilation Policy conceptualised to Westernise (become British Australians) mixed-race Aboriginal children by removing them from their homes and –expecting them to abandon their cultural heritage and language – was imposed on “new” Australians. It silenced both migrants and DPs as it had done Indigenous Australians. However, migrant children were not removed from their homes and could access the welfare system. Even so as everything Australian was glorified and everything migrant denigrated, migrant children came to feel ashamed of their origins. Hence their story will now join the plethora of stories generated by the many diverse ethnic groups who have made Australia home since multiculturalism was introduced in 1973! What better way to re-engage with these lost and new stories (Indigenous, DP & migrant), than a storytelling arts festival! There is so much to tell and share about the complexity of the psychological impact of migration and resettlement. For as Somerset Maugham observed:

... men and women are not only themselves they are also the region in which they were born, the city apartment or farm in which they have learned to walk, the games they played as children, the old wives' tales they overheard, the food they ate, the schools they attended, the sports they followed, the poems they read and the God they believed in.

An additional aim of the inaugural storytelling festival event is to relaunch the WA Migration Research Network and introduce our audience to the varied approaches possible of telling the migration story: books, children’s books (public and academic), short stories, poetry, artworks, digital/documentary style, exhibitions, podcast, rap, music, dance and standup comedy. We will have a panel presenting on some of the various methods and seek the audience participation about their response to these methods and what they considered the most effective means of conveying their stories.

Storytelling festivals are a reflection on where our country is at any given moment. They put a megaphone to the national and global social issues that our governments are either creating, exacerbating or ignoring completely. They provide a safe space for those effected and marginalised by the masses. A space to speak freely and offer an alternative experience of the world, in the hope it may trigger the right kind of empathy in enough people, to create real, systemic change towards greater personal, family, national and global security.” As migrant crises unfold all over the world, it is critical that we understand the impact of geopolitical upheavals from the perspective of the people whose lives they

disrupt and that we understand their diverse histories. In acknowledging the emotions of the past, preserving the present and imagining the future our Storytelling Arts festival seeks to provide a vital space for community and critical discussion on the issues that matter to us most. To raise awareness of the lens through which judgements are made; how we ‘other’ newcomers in our midst and how words shape our worlds. Our presenters will expose the power of storytelling and ideas that embrace and understand that the future is in the hands of the present, which we look at with open eyes and a sense of joy and hope.ⁱⁱ

Our inaugural/pilot festival panellists will include known and established and award-winning authors, digital storytellers, artists, poets, curators and a comedian. The program will include a 15-minute introduction to launch the WA MRN, 15 minutes for each presenter, a 15-minute break for morning tea and two interactive panel discussions.

DRAFT PROGRAM

Presenter's Name	Affiliation & Awards	Ways of telling the migrant story
Loretta Baldassar Distinguished Professor ECU	NSW Premier's Literary Award Relaunch Migration Research Network Loretta's father was Italy-born	MC and Chair 15 mins intro and launch of the MRN
Manonita Gosh (ECU) Simone Marino (ECU)	Music and migrant health Manonita comes from Bangladesh Simone from France	Telling the multicultural migration story around music 20 mins
Verena Thomas ECU Germany born	School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University	Co-Creative Media and Digital Storytelling: Beth's story (Indigenous) 15 mins
Susanna Iuliano Perth City	WA Premier's Literary Award (book). Her parents were Italian immigrants.	Publishing migrant community histories. Susanna will share her journey from academic publishing to community histories and the challenge of capturing migrant and community histories in publications. 15 mins
Q & R	Above talks	20 mins
Panel discussion	How do we reach youth and "other voices" to tell the migrant story?	Mins 15
	MORNING TEA	30 mins
Lesia Melnyczuk Ukrainian Community	International book award Her parents and sister were accommodated in the NAC.	Children's migration stories books (Ukrainian) DP Northam Army Camp 15 mins
Nonja Peters ECU Nonja grew up in Northam she is Dutch	Displaced Persons Stories Shorted-listed Premier's literary awards WA, NSW & QLD (ECU)	Museum exhibitions That tell the stories of Dutch, Displaced Persons, Italians, Vietnamese and Greek migration stories. 15 mins
Matt Dyktynski Comedian, actor (NIDA), radio announcer.	Matt's father, uncle and grandmother were Polish DPs at Northam Army Camp.	Standup Comedy 15 mins
Q & R	Above talks	15 mins
Interactive Panel discussion	Telling the migrants story via the spectrum of creative arts genre?	The audience's voices 30 mins

ⁱ <https://annafeatherstone.com/writing-resources/list-of-australian-writers-festivals-2024/>: What Writers Festivals are on in Australia in 2024? Bookmark this page for a list of some of the writers' festivals bringing authors, readers, book lovers, the writing community and the publishing industry together. There are a huge number of literary festivals and events in the first half of the year, and less so in the second, so start planning now. Will update dates as they come to hand for 2024.

ⁱⁱ <https://power-of-storytelling.com/storytelling-quotes/>: Haebich, A. (2015). Neoliberalism, Settler Colonialism and the History of Indigenous Child Removal in Australia. Australian indigenous law review, 19(1), 20-31.