

Two Homes

Kate Daw and Stewart Russell

While much of Daw and Russell's past work has been more research-based, engaging, say, with particular cultural narratives, or responding to a particular context, *Two Homes* grew out of their physical engagement with the extraordinary spatial arena of the Melbourne Cricket Ground. In the early days of their Fellowship at the MCG, Daw and Russell would spend many hours sitting in the empty arena, discussing project ideas, and they were struck by the peacefulness of the experience, the only sounds being birdsong and the toiling groundsmen, crafting the pitch with deliberation and care. In the empty arena the methodical and striking patterning of the lawn became obvious and of growing interest, as did the scale, monumentality and the almost spiritual peacefulness that would settle over the entire empty site. They had started to do some initial research into the significance of the site for aboriginal communities, and about the place it held now in the hearts and minds, not only of many Melbournians, but indeed, of many Australians.

Six months later, in July, 2010, Stewart and I sit in a hotel foyer with four Walpiri women who have just arrived from Yuendumu, a small town in central Australia. They have come to Melbourne to talk about doing a project at the MCG with us. We are all just getting to know each other and Cecily is talking about her grandson Liam Jurrah, a star recruit with the Melbourne Football Club. We are discussing the

MCG and its significance as a place. Cecily remarks that Liam now has two homes, one in Yuendumu and one in Melbourne. The concept of two homes can apply to many people. And for the four visitors from Yuendumu – Cecily, Elsie, Nikita and Chantal – the visit to Melbourne was inextricably linked to family and home; it made sense for them to come here because that’s where Liam is. Their interest in creating a large scale project for the MCG isn’t motivated by the opportunity, iconic presence or history of the MCG, rather it is entirely linked to bringing something of their home to Liam, to make him feel cared for. It’s all about the people, and the relationship. As Brett Badger was quoted saying to Martin Flanagan (in talking about black and white relationships and projects), “everything (for the indigenous community) is about respect. Once you have respect, you have a relationship. And with relationship, anything is possible.”¹
K. Daw, July, 2010

In having unique access, as artists, to the MCG, The National Sports Museum and the community that work there, Daw and Russell attempted to utilise both the physical aspect of the ‘G’, but also its influence, status and presence in the Australian cultural community in the development of their artwork. They were keen, too, to continue their investigations into examining *how* art could sit alongside issues of social justice. During the development time of this project they were especially aware of the *positive* nature and narratives of indigenous football. They became aware of the Liam Jurrrah story—the young man, heavily engaged with his own cultural laws, language and culture, from remote Yuendumu (33kms north-west of Alice Springs) who was signed by the Melbourne Football Club in 2009.

Daw and Russell began working on a (deceptively) simple idea. They decided to take the MCG to Yuendumu by the act of drawing the dimensions of the MCG into the desert sand and reproducing the lawn patterns mown into the MCG into this surface area. Ground painting is traditional to the Walpuri people (the people of Yuendumu) with a ceremony/dance held on the painting after its completion. Daw and Russell plan to hold a football match on their surface after it is completed, to complete the ceremony of this ‘ground painting’ and engage the entire Yuendumu community in this spectacle. They began discussions with people who have lived and worked in Yuendumu, connecting with the Mt Theo (a project set up to help young people, including those affected by substance abuse, in the local community) manager Brett Badger, who is heavily involved and respected in the community, as well as Cecily Granites, artist, teacher and maternal grandmother to Liam Jurrrah. Other supportive bodies have been the Melbourne Cricket Club, the Melbourne Football Club, the Industrial Magpies (a group

responsible for Liam Jurrah coming to Melbourne), and Liam Campbell (filmmaker of *Bush Mechanics* and *Aboriginal Rules*) among others.

The second part of this project involves artists from the Yuendumu community coming to Melbourne to do a traditional drawing on the ground of the MCG. In July, 2010, the first stage of the project was held in Melbourne with four visitors from Yuendumu visiting the MCG for three days. This included two artists/elders and two teenagers, all with close ties to Liam Jurrah. The key event was an afternoon at the MCG, hosted by the artists and the National Sports Museum.



Figure 1. Yuendumu women at the M.C.G. Photograph by Kate Daw and Stewart Russell. Printed with permission.

In August, 2010, Daw and Russell, with Helen Walpole, Curator of the National Sports Museum and Tony Gordon, Senior Groundsman at the MCG, in turn visited Yuendumu for an initial site visit and to meet key community members. This highly successful trip yielded many positive outcomes, the main one being the discovery that the Yuendumu local football oval, made of vivid red desert sand, is almost exactly the same scale as the MCG, and perfect for making lawn patterns. Daw and Russell met with several elders in the community who reaffirmed their interest in having the project take place at Yuendumu and at the MCG.



Figure 2. Kate Daw and Stewart Russell at Yuendumu. Photograph by Kate Daw and Steart Russell. Printed with permission.

Daw and Russell's Fellowship at the National Sports Museum formally ended at the end of September, 2010, but the ties, friendships and exchange of artistic practice has continued well past this date, and hopefully will continue into the future.



Figure 3. Cecily's feet on the M.C.G. Photograph Kate Daw and Stewart Russell. Printed with permission.

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NOTES

Stewart Russell and Kate Daw have been collaborating for the past six years on visual art projects. They share a strong interest in bringing other people's memories, opinions and experiences into their artwork, and have continually used concepts of narrative and the documentation and chronicling of aspects of contemporary culture as the basis for their ideas, inspiration and project outcomes. Daw and Russell are particularly interested in locating and resurrecting forgotten histories.

Daw and Russell worked at the MCG during 2009/2010 as recipients of the inaugural Basil Sellers Fellowship and through this experience developed a major new project, *Two Homes*.

¹ Martin Flanagan, "The red dirt Demon president delivers on promise." *The Age*, 14 November, 2009.