

Odyssey Quilt 11 Exhibition

'First impressions of Australia'



Under the guidance of Frances Larder, a group of women from the Netherlands and the former Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia), have expressed their their lives - early childhood memories, experiences of war and impressions of Australia – through the Odyssey quilting project.

The exhibition was launched in 2002 at Casula Powerhouse Museum (NSW) and toured to Liverpool, Fairfield and Coffs Harbour (NSW) and Fremantle (WA) in the years 2003–2010. In 2011 it was handed over to the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney as part of their permanent collection.

This quilt, known as Odyssey 11, was created by Frances Larder, Gerarda Baremans, Yvonne Chapman, Jo Brinkhorst, Wilhelmina de Brey, Anna Dijkman, Inneke McIntosh-Eichholtz, Vera Rado, and Vicki van der Ley.

The theme is the quilter's first impressions of Australia, and the emphasis upon water, so important to Dutch from the East Indies and the European homeland, mirrors the importance that Australian people place on the sea and the beach. An equally rich emphasis is the Australian bush, and its richness and diversity is reflected in vast array of images, from farms and tea plantations, to the Red Heart of Australia, and new homes built in bushland on the fringes of cities before it was absorbed into suburbia.

Every image is rich in meaning and nuances, a departure and point of relief from the experience of war, internment and occupation, and will speak to you, as it did to each artist, of life transitions and the Australian landscape.



FRANCES LARDER, born in the late 1930s, moved with her mother and sibling to the Netherlands after the Japanese capitulation in 1945.

In her words: “A few years later we returned to Java and in the early 1950s from Java to Australia. The family settled in Northern Queensland, where my father instigated [an outlet of] the Nerada Tea Plantation.”

IMAGE LEFT: Frances Larder’s quilt fragment, the Nerada Tea Plantation, blends elements of the landscape of Java with that of Northern Queensland. The images of packets of Nerada tea are reminiscent of food packages parachuted by Allied forces to civilians and former internees who were starving at war’s end in 1945.

The call of the bush was also important to **GERARDA BAREMANS** when she migrated from Holland to Australia in 1959 at the age of 22, with her husband of eight months.

Together, they built a new home at Birrong, some 25 kilometres south-west of Sydney, far removed at this early point in time from the hustle and bustle of suburban city life. They both worked at Amalgamated Wireless Australia, and had “three beautiful children, a boy and two girls”.

IMAGE RIGHT: They liked to explore the bush, and among her first impressions of Australia was this rustic bush home, surrounded by Eucalypt trees, a kangaroo, koala, o’possum and magpies.



VICKI VAN DER LEY, who lived in Holland during the German occupation, traveled with her husband and three children to Australia in 1951 on the French cargo boat, ‘The Chung Kung’.

She explains that her “husband’s mother lived in New South Wales, Australia, so our family was able to stay at an Uncle’s house for some time while he was overseas. Three months later we

moved to a block of land we had bought in Hay Street, Ryde. It took eight years to build our house, during which time we lived in a caravan. These were long and difficult years and I had to do the cooking in the backyard over a gas primus. Our wonderful friends and neighbors were always very helpful and made this time much more enjoyable.

IMAGE, PAGE ABOVE: Vicki Van Der Ley's quilting fragment shows the beginnings of a new life in Australia: the caravan and tent, the structure of a new house, mountains, trees, and the makings of a new garden. The work put into a new start is very evident, yet it is imbued with an aura of calm and peace.

JOHANNA BRINKHORST was 27 years old when Holland was liberated from German occupation.

She recalls: "When finally the much longed for liberation came in May 1945, our red, white and blue flags appeared everywhere. People, who had gone underground returned from their hiding place and many street parties took place, celebrating our longed for freedom. After the liberation, the rebuilding of our country began. However, extreme housing shortages and continuing rations made life difficult. We wished for a better life and in 1950, were tempted by advertisements for people to come to sunny Australia. With the promise of a fresh start, we packed up and moved to Australia with our daughter that year, to begin a new life."



IMAGE ABOVE: Jo Brinkhorst's contribution to the quilt shows life on the farm when the family migrated to Australia. The home with its wide verandah, the shed, and fencing are Australian, yet one can still see all manner of Dutch influences including the flowers in the window boxes.



VERA RADO was born in Purwokerto, Java, in 1926. Sixteen years of age when the Japanese invaded Java, she recalls surviving three-and-a-half years of occupation in a country with "no laws, no constitution, no army, or police to protect us". Dutch colonialism had been replaced by absolute Japanese rule, and life was problematic for Dutch, Eurasians and many Indonesians alike.

Her contribution to the Odyssey quilt shows a very different response to life, a montage of her first impressions of Australia.

The images are evocative of: the flight to Australia, Ayers rock, indigenous artworks, batik, tending the garden, fishing, wildlife and native flowers, shrubs and trees. Hovering above her new life, uploaded to the cloud, are memories of the past, and her reflections of the homeland. There is a sense of irony in the image on the cloud, as it was what she expected Australia to be.

ANNA DIJKMAN was a teenager in war during the German occupation of Holland, and as part of survival, she would travel to the twice a week to the Scheveningen Forest to fell small trees that would provide fuel for heat and cooking.

Life in Australia was far removed from the Flying Bombs of World War 11, the Hunger Winter of 1944, and the razias in which men were rounded up by the Germans for forced labour in Nazi ammunition factories.

Anna's quilt fragment (right) reflects this new life, with a focus on the Australian Grass and Boab trees, wildflowers, and rugged outback mountains set against the interplay of colours found in the country's Red Centre in the Northern Territory.



Many of **WILHELMINA DE BREY'S** images of the war years were in memory of those people she tried so very hard to help, but who did not survive.

Her impressions of her new life in Australia, however, are an inspiration—a mark contrast to the experiences she left behind.

Her craftwork (left) reveals the carefree manner in which young boys, including her son, could play at the beach. It was a new world, a new start, for Wilhelmina and her family.



The quilt fragment to the right crafted by **FRANCES WIDITZ-BUYTEWEG** shows a family sitting on the rug at the beach, the quintessential Australian beach umbrella and a nearby tent.

The emphasis on colour is shared by Australians and Dutch from the East Indies alike.

The piece also reflects the emphasis that many of the quilters placed on sun, sand and sea as part of their first impressions of Australia.

Yet there is more. The inclusion of tents, boats, and the fluidity of water captures a delightful sense of transition, mobility, and freedom following the European and Pacific wars.





When Indonesia gained independence from Dutch rule, the family of **INNEKE MCINTOSH-EICHHOLTZ** lived in The Hague for three years.

They then set out on another ocean journey, an adventure, this time to Australia.

She recalls that their “new home was in one of the northern beaches in Sydney, by the sea. Although it was difficult adjusting to an entirely different school regime and learning a new language, I was greatly helped by some very wonderful teachers, whose names and personalities I will always remember. That was more than fifty years ago, and in that time I have revisited both Holland and Indonesia – but Australia will always be my home.”

IMAGE ABOVE: This is an idyllic image of life by the sea, calm water, clear blue sky, rich green grass, children playing safely, with a foreground of Australian native flowers and bushes.

YVONNE CHAPMAN was a post-war baby, born in The Netherlands in 1946.

She recalls that: “As one of five children, my youth was carefree and creative. We often travelled abroad with our caravan, experiencing the delight in colours and traditions of the different countries. After High School I travelled to Brussels and London to further my French and English languages. In 1967, I entered the Art Academy of Amsterdam studying Graphic Design. During one of my backpacking trips I met Bernard, an Australian. We married in Holland and I migrated to Australia in 1970. ... My love for the Australian bush deepened during the many bush walks we did with the children in the Blue Mountains, where we settled.

IMAGE RIGHT: Yvonne’s first impressions of Australia are portrayed as a festival of colours in this Odyssey quilt fragment.

There are so many influences open to interpretation. The vase holds a collection of Australian native flowers, flanked by butterflies, kookaburras and other native birds surrounded by fish in the sea.

What else can you see?

Inneke was clearly delighted with her decision to migrate to Australia.



The Odyssey collection is on display at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, NSW.