



**After the Fall:  
Cultural Exchange and the Historiographical Artwork  
Foreword by the National Museum of Singapore**

*After the Fall: Artworks by Angela Tiatia and Debbie Ding* presents artworks that reflect upon the shared landscapes of memory that define, and yet blur, how we remember War World Two in the Pacific. Respectively inspired by personal accounts of war survivors and representations of war landscapes that relate to the fall of Singapore, *The Fall* by Angela Tiatia and *War Fronts* by Debbie Ding are artworks that emulate historical spaces and events in an effort to reflect upon the after-effects and memories of the fall of Singapore.

These artworks are the result of the first Australia-Singapore Joint Artist Residency exchange programme, a partnership between the Australian War Memorial (AWM) and the National Museum of Singapore (NMS). The residency aimed to facilitate two-way cultural exchange through the celebration of the rich shared heritage and friendship between Australia and Singapore which dates back to World War Two, when Australian servicemen helped defend the Republic. This residency is NMS' first artist residency programme and part of NMS' collaboration with AWM on the World War Two exhibition *Witness to War: Remembering 1942*.

The "historiographical aesthetic" is a term used to describe artworks which examine the nature and production of history. Such artworks go beyond illustrating a historical past, they act as interpretive frames in which history is not just told but also considered. Based on such a premise of encouraging historiographical art production, the residency programme represents a new frontier of knowledge production for the museum. In being informed by historical research and based on original sources and artefacts, the artworks are themselves "interpretive frames of history" that allow us to read World War Two history through new lenses.

As part of this programme, the artists spent four weeks in residence at each museum, beginning in Singapore at NMS and finishing in Canberra at the AWM. In Singapore, the residency programme included visits to the NMS' permanent galleries, the Heritage Conservation Centre to view NMS' World War Two artefacts and visits to World War Two monuments and memorial sites in Singapore as well as in-depth discussions with historians,

academics and archivists. In effect, both artists were exposed to little-known and more widely shared accounts of the fall of Singapore.

*The Fall*, a two-channel film installation depicting a contemporary interpretation of memories of 15 February 1942 by Angela Tiatia, began with an investigation into how individuals respond to commemorative World War Two statues and sculptures in Singapore. Intrigued by how people touch and place their hands in the hands of such statues, her research was based on a sincere empathy for how we physically represent history and how these representations in turn move us. *War Fronts*, holograms of three archetypal war landscapes related to the fall of Singapore by Debbie Ding, began with her making extensive studies of war landscapes and an in-depth interview with Prof. John Philips, who has published research on contemporary technologies of perception and their relationship to the World Wars.

Historiographical work is based on elaboration. The AWM and NMS have not just commissioned two new artworks, we have also provided the groundwork for new perspectives and elaborations upon a shared history. *War Fronts* needs to be seen from a specific perspective, and if not properly illuminated, would be nothing more than a black slab of glass. *The Fall* is deafening in its silence for the viewer, who slowly comes to realise the gravitas of each memory being re-enacted. In effect, the artworks by Angela Tiatia and Debbie Ding have positioned viewers as witnesses of history as it “unfolds”. Moreover, these viewers become active participants in the “imaging” and “telling” of our shared history.

NMS has been profoundly privileged to work with the AWM. We are grateful to the artists and all of our partners, including the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, without whom this exhibition would not have been possible.

**Wong Hong Suen**

Deputy Director, Curatorial and Programmes

**Kathleen Ditzig**

Assistant Curator and Manager, Curatorial and Programmes

National Museum of Singapore

**After The Fall:  
Foreword by the Australian War Memorial**

The Australian War Memorial is delighted that these artworks, commissioned in partnership with the National Museum of Singapore, are on public display for the first time in the exhibition *After the Fall*. Located in Australia’s capital, Canberra, the Memorial commemorates the sacrifice of those Australians who have died in war, and assists in interpreting and understanding the Australian experience of war more broadly. Combining a shrine, museum and archive, the Memorial’s collections include approximately 38,000 works of art.

The Memorial has commissioned contemporary artists to respond to this theme since the start of the official war art scheme in 1916, a scheme that continues to this day. Thirty-five artists were deployed in World War Two, including Murray Griffin (1903-1992), the only official artist to be imprisoned as a prisoner-of-war (POW). Griffin created an invaluable record of Changi, including his sensitive pencil portrait of Lieutenant General Arthur Percival, Commander of the British Empire forces in Malaya, on display in *Witness to War: Remembering 1942*.

Commissions are also sought to mark significant anniversaries as a means of exploring and interpreting the contemporary legacy of past events. The 75th anniversary of the fall of Singapore is one such occasion, as a defining moment in the Australian experience of the World War Two, and also in the history of the Asia-Pacific region. A new approach was taken with this commission when the opportunity arose to collaborate with the National Museum of Singapore on an exchange residency, motivated by the desire to include international perspectives on this history. Debbie Ding spent four weeks in residence at the Memorial and Angela Tiatia at the National Museum. This enabled multiple, in-depth responses to this shared history that will be a lasting record in the Memorial’s collection.

The residencies presented opportunities both for the artists and the host museums. Behind-the-scenes access to diverse collections meant Ding could explore how World War Two has been preserved and remembered by Australians. Generously, she shared her responses with staff, enabling us to see our history through her eyes. Ding closely examined material from across the collections, particularly focusing on technology, including drawings of POW inventions; Canberra as a site of optical munitions production; and

Australian inventors' submissions to the Army Inventions Directorate. (This included, notably, "Jeffrey the Robot", a prototype for a small remote-controlled weapons delivery vehicle.)

Ding's use of holography developed from visits to galleries and science centres, revealing how the medium has been used in recent decades to project a vision of the future. The medium is physically engaging, requiring the viewer to move to fully see the landscapes of Singapore where the war unfolded. This illusion of a 3D space that cannot be entered invites reflection on the impossibility of truly knowing what happened in these places.

A striking feature of this project was the relationship between the two artists. Unknown to each other prior to the project, Ding and Tiatia worked together for significant periods of time and shared their responses with the other. One of the less predictable consequences of the project is the complementary nature of their works. With Ding's path into this history through technology and Tiatia's through empathy with Singapore's civilians in February 1942, the works combine to offer an expansive response to the fall of Singapore. They invite viewers to consider what these events must have been like to experience first-hand, as well as to reflect on the distance in time, culture and demographics between then and now.

We congratulate and thank the artists for their works. We would also like to express our gratitude to the National Museum of Singapore for their partnership with us on the exchange residency program, the Australian Government's Anzac Centenary Arts and Culture Fund for their support, and to Assistant Curator of Art Hannah Hutchison for all her work on this project.

**Ryan Johnston**

Head of Art

**Anthea Gunn**

Acting Senior Curator of Art

Australian War Memorial

# WAR FRONTS:

# AN ARTIST STATEMENT BY DEBBIE DING

*War Fronts* is a series of three large-format landscape digital holograms depicting iconic World War Two battlefronts in Singapore: the beach (site of enemy landing), the tropical jungle (site of battlefield), and the concrete bunker (site of surrender). These are the three most iconic and identifiable wartime frontiers in Singapore: Singapore's battle lines were drawn over places like these.

Historically, the depiction of landscape in art has often been motivated by ideological imperatives, whether as a means of articulating ideas of national identity, as social critique, or as a vision of a preferred future. Landscape can also be read as history, a landscape whose external appearance is the cumulative record of man in that place.

The holograms force the viewer to continuously reposition themselves in order to reenact a physical search for war memories – searching the Singaporean landscape for traces of a history that cannot be seen or observed.

As a Singaporean, I've been thinking about the curious detachment I feel towards World War Two as national war memory. When I visited World War Two sites together with Angela and when we discussed our experiences, I noticed the difference in my own personal response even more keenly. Where does this sense of emotional detachment for the World War Two narrative come from? When I hear the oral history recordings made by Singapore's World War Two survivors, or see the photos and drawings made by Australian prisoners-of-war held in Changi prison, I empathise with their stories and emotions,

but I have difficulty comprehending the traumatic event as part of the imagined continuous timeline of "Singapore".

Witnessing tens of thousands of Australians attend the solemn dawn memorial on Anzac Day at the Australian War Memorial on 27 April 2017, it seemed to speak of how the birth of the Anzac spirit and sense of unified Australian national identity were triggered directly by the events of World War One and World War Two.

I've been struggling to find a word to describe the "Singaporean during World War Two". Perhaps because Singapore's national identity had not begun to exist during the years of 1942–1945, it makes it difficult to process the events of World War Two as a national experience and shared trauma.

I wanted to use a 3D imaging medium whose ability to carry symbolism is in doubt – to represent World War Two as an event whose significance and impact has been so very different and diverse for people from different generations, communities and countries. I am interested in the changing symbolic value of war memory and the seemingly parallel path taken by the medium of holography – where the work can also exemplify what Marshall McLuhan speaks of as "the medium as the message".

From historical illusion to technological illusion, from national aspiration to technological aspiration – faced with increasing detachment from reality, the holographic memory of war continues to expand in fiction and in our minds.

## Bunker

Before working on the holographic images, I collected and studied various landscape images of bunkers, jungles, and coasts. I interpreted the images and derived my own list of attributes for each individual image. These lists of attributes were used to determine the different elements presented in each holographic image.



Fort Canning Battle Box  
Singapore

2017

bunker  
construction  
metal  
concrete  
reconstruction  
growth  
jungle  
incline  
camouflage



Balikpapan Area  
Borneo

1945

A Japanese bunker shelter on Yellow Beach  
  
Collection of Australian War Memorial  
Collection ID 111027  
  
ruins  
concrete  
incline  
mound  
burial



Torokina Area  
Bougainville

1945

A bunker after it was hit by a shell during trials for the War Office of a M24 General Chaffee

Collection of Australian War Memorial  
Collection ID 094883

ruins  
concrete  
incline  
mound  
burial



Fallout: Computer  
Game Bunker

2017

bunker  
virtual  
graffiti  
shelter  
ruins  
concrete  
reconstruction  
growth  
jungle  
incline



Ninth Fort  
Kaunas, Lithuania

2017

jail  
escape  
claustrophobia  
interior  
concrete

## Jungle



*Nature Reserve,  
Singapore*

Circa 1910

Collection of National  
Museum of Singapore,  
National Heritage Board  
Accession No.  
1994-04895

trees  
road  
journey  
leaves



*A jungle view,  
Singapore*

Early-mid 20th Century

Collection of National  
Museum of Singapore,  
National Heritage Board  
Accession No.  
1993-00285-029

trees  
drainage  
water  
road  
anticipation



*The track up the  
mountain, New Guinea*

William Dargie

Collection of Australian  
War Memorial  
Collection ID ART23181

exersion  
challenge  
danger  
journey  
survival  
darkness  
maze  
battle



*A tropical jungle,  
Singapore, photograph  
from the album of an  
RAF pilot*

1938–1939

Collection of National  
Museum of Singapore,  
National Heritage Board  
Accession No.  
2007-50928-051

grass  
trees  
sunlight  
overgrowth  
maze



*Halt during the  
withdrawal from Bakri*

January, 1942

Murray Griffin

Collection of Australian  
War Memorial  
Collection ID ART24490

friendship  
shelter  
trees  
danger  
safety  
injury  
death  
battle

Coast



*Jennifer in Paradise.tif*

1987

John Knoll

beauty  
island  
nature  
paradise  
relaxation  
woman



*Changi Beach, Singapore*

2017

palm trees  
exercise  
grass  
islands  
nature



*The beach at Marine Parade*

Circa 1970

Collection of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board  
Accession No. 2008-04004

palm trees  
recreation  
trip  
family  
play  
tourism  
crowds  
spectator  
children



*Amphibious training exercises, Palm Beach, QLD*

1944

Collection of Australian War Memorial  
Collection ID 084398

machine  
sand  
trees  
military  
tank



*Bubblegum card depicting the Japanese invasion of Singapore from across the Causeway*

Circa 1942–1950s

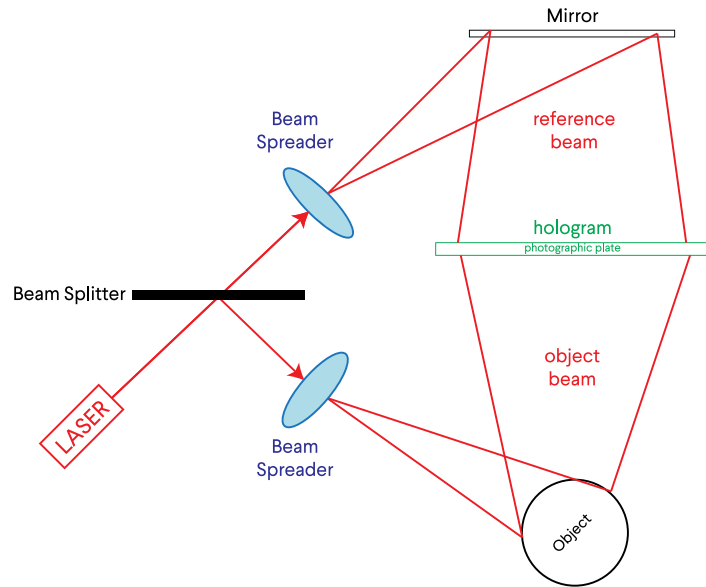
Collection of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board  
Accession No. 2000-03808-001

boats  
invasion  
islands  
military  
rocks  
sand  
tank  
trees



## AN INTRODUCTION TO HOLOGRAMS

The hologram is a lens, or rather, an optical device that carries within it the ability to generate three-dimensional imagery (the holographic image) which sits detached on another plane beyond the image plane (the flat plane on which a photograph's image exists).

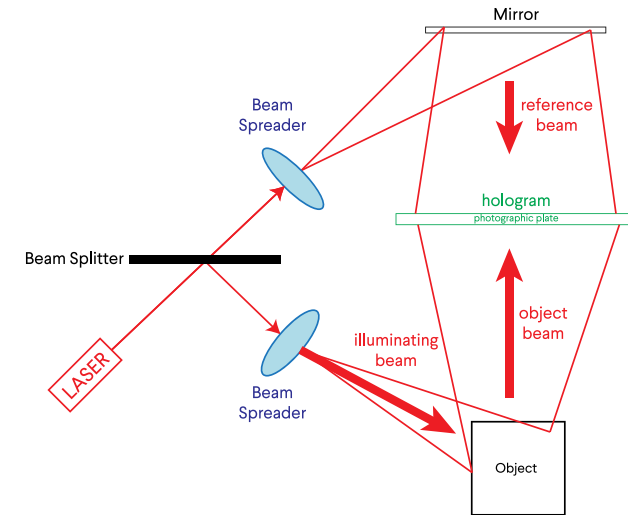


**Making a Hologram.** Figure 1. How a holographic plate is prepared.

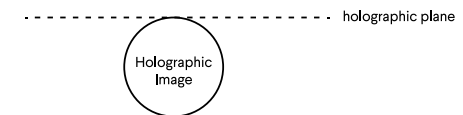
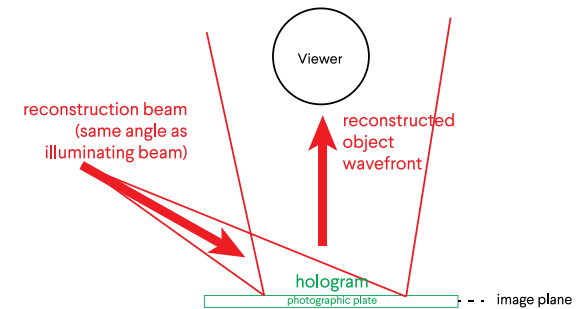
During the recording of a hologram, a laser is used to provide a coherent source of light which is split into two – an object beam and reference beam. The object beam is widened with an expanding lens and reflected off the object and projected onto a photographic plate. The reference beam is also widened with an expanding lens and the light is made to shine back onto the photographic plate after reflecting off a mirror. The object beam and reference beam meet at the photographic plate and create an interference pattern.

To see the holographic image of the object, a beam of light has to be positioned at the same angle as the illuminating beam used during the recording phase. When the hologram is lit, a virtual holographic image appears behind the image plane at the same position as the original object.

## Recording Phase



## Playback Phase



**Making a Hologram.** Figure 2. Recording Phase compared to Playback Phase.

# THE FALL:

## AN ARTIST STATEMENT BY ANGELA TIATIA

The work focusses on particular moments from 15 February 1942, the day of the fall of Singapore. It is inspired by written and oral accounts of survivors of World War Two: soldiers, civilians, military and medical support.

While researching these personal accounts in the National Archives of Singapore, I was struck by the difference between “history” as told by historians – geo-political, contextual, global – and “history” as told by the participants – intimate, personal, minutiae. It was the intimacy of the latter that has motivated me to make this work.

A common event retold by many of the civilians and soldiers was the silence that fell over the city on the eve of 15 February and the following day of the “fall” itself. For example, I found an account in the archives from Mr Rudy William Mosbergen, who stated that “There was an eerie silence that fell over Singapore and we knew that something was wrong” and from Mr Charlie Hock Hye Gan, who stated that “It was just very quiet”.

In spite of the silence, there was an abundance of activity occurring as people went through feelings of confusion, fear, uncertainty and compassion. There were stories of burning: Burning to stop what was precious getting into another’s hands; burning of money; burning of clothing; burning of family portraits. There were stories of abandon: Soldiers gorging on food, thinking it was their last meal; soldiers taking baths in water that had been saved in case of scarcity. There were stories of power and compassion: Cans of peaches being opened with a sword, and these peaches being fed to patients in hospital.

The unusual nature of these activities set against the silence left a real impression on me. It occurred to me that when people are pushed to extremes, they react with extreme actions. My work responds to these stories. Comprising of two moving images, *The Fall* represents personal accounts through actors performing actions and gestures that depict these stories. The following pages present stills from *The Fall* alongside the corresponding survivors’ accounts that inspired them.

My intention was to leave the audience with a moment and place to reflect. Even though Australians and Singaporeans have lived in a long period of relative peace, we now live in uncertain times, and the choices that we and our leaders make can have far-reaching consequences. To bring these consequences to life, we can reflect on the past experiences of individuals who have lived through great upheaval.

# ARTWORK REFERENCES:

## SURVIVORS' ACCOUNTS OF



“So we thought it’s better to lock the house, put all our belongings inside and go for [a] better safe[r] area. So what we did, together with our family, my uncle, my cousin brothers, sisters and my aunties ... [was to take the] ... very ... essential items with us and [go] into the jungle - about three miles away [and] ... full of rubber trees. Then one of our friends said, ‘All right, rather than staying in isolation, it’s better that we all gather together.’”

**Shanmugasivanathan**

7 Apr 1983

*Japanese Occupation of Singapore*

Accession Number 000263, Reel/Disc 1, 00:27:49

National Archives of Singapore

# THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

“There [were] no police ... Like [a] no man’s land,  
you [could] do anything you want[ed].”

**Guan Bee Soh**

17 Aug 1983

*Japanese Occupation of Singapore*

Accession Number 000310, Reel/Disc 1, 00:29:32

National Archives of Singapore



“ ... Even the British Government, some of their things such as liquor ... were all being smashed ... [and] the liquor was being thrown down the drain. These [were] taxable goods. So based on the Japanese arrival [in] Singapore, everybody went wild ... in order to get a hold of something [rather] than to let the Japanese have them ... They started ... to loot.”

**Lee Tian Soon**

23 Apr 1983

*Japanese Occupation of Singapore*

Accession Number 000265, Reel/Disc 2, 00:27:50

National Archives of Singapore



“For the first few days, looters ... were busy stripping the houses of furniture and anything else they could lay their hands on. They were Singapore people, not Japanese soldiers. [They] came in vans, station wagons or on foot bringing with them long poles to carry away their loot.”

**Tan Kok Kheng**

13 Aug 1983

*Pioneers of Singapore*

Accession Number 000232, Reel/Disc 45, 00:28:31

National Archives of Singapore

“[Do] you know how they eat sugar? As if they [had not] seen sugar in their life ... We give them a cup of coffee or tea [and] they [would] fill it half with sugar and eat it up. [They said] sugar was ... ration[ed] in Japan since 1936 [in] preparation for war.”

Damodaran s/o K Kesavan

19 Nov 1981

*Japanese Occupation of Singapore*

Accession Number 000127, Reel/Disc 1, 00:27:49

National Archives of Singapore



“Oh, we just took off [our uniforms] and put on our civilian clothing... We used to have our civilian clothing with us.”

Charlie Hock Hye Gan

11 Dec 1984

*Japanese Occupation of Singapore*

Accession Number 000514, Reel/Disc 2, 00:29:28

National Archives of Singapore

“I assumed at once he wanted my watch.  
So I just took it off and handed it to  
him. It was a cheap one. So [it was  
alright], no love lost ... we carried on.”

**Charlie Fook Ying Cheah**  
30 Dec 1983

*Japanese Occupation of Singapore*  
Accession Number 000385,  
Reel/Disc 2, 00:27:41  
National Archives of Singapore



“They were along the roads ... the Japanese  
soldiers were stopping people who were  
wearing wristwatches and they just took  
the wristwatches ... I saw one Japanese  
soldier ... wearing five or six wristwatches.”

**Lim Choo Sye**  
7 Oct 1983

*Japanese Occupation of Singapore*  
Accession Number 000330,  
Reel/Disc 8, 00:27:48  
National Archives of Singapore

“Her hair was matted with powder, to make her look like an old lady.”

**Mrs Myna Ruth Segeram**  
3 Jul 1985

*Japanese Occupation of Singapore*  
Accession Number 000580, Reel/Disc 2, 00:29:12  
National Archives of Singapore



“General Yamashita was visiting the Alexandra Hospital. It was clear that he had heard about the massacre there on the previous day, and [it was] also evident immediately that he was trying to make amends for the killings. He went and visited the injured and saluted them. He walked past the beds saluting the occupants - the survivors of the massacre. Apologising profusely, he brought crates of tinned fruit and with his bayonet he personally opened the tins and doled out peaches to the inmates.”

Corfield, Justin J., and Robin S.  
*The Fall of Singapore: 90 Days: November 1941  
 – February 1942.* Hardie Grant, 2012, p. 657



Angela Tiatia would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their contributions to *The Fall*:

**Angela Tiatia**  
 Artist, Director, Executive Producer,  
 Production Designer, Casting Director

**Cast**

Tony Albert  
 Nicola Bruni  
 Eugene Choi  
 Kieren Cooney  
 Bianca Cruse  
 Kalolaine Fainu  
 Ryuichi Fujimura  
 Raghav Handa  
 Phineas Hartson  
 Koco  
 Koumbah Semega-Janneh  
 Patrick Lartey  
 Talei Mangioni  
 Kenneth Moraleda  
 Tammy Moir  
 Andrijan Miler  
 Rhiannon Newton  
 Tony Osborne  
 Gideon Payten-Griffiths  
 Tracy Quan  
 Apimeleki Rainima  
 Courtney Stewart  
 Shahmen Suku  
 Latai Taumoepeau  
 Athena Thebus  
 Kym Vercoe  
 Elizabeth Windsor  
 Christopher Zylstra

**Crew**

Benjamin Shirley - Director of Photography  
 Sonia Whiteman - 1st Assistant Director  
 Kieren Cooney - Assistant Director and Artist Assistant  
 Latai Taumoepeau - Assistant Director and Casting  
 Fran Vivieaere-Baits - Co-producer (to Artist)  
 Cath Anderson - Co-producer (with Finch Company)  
 Ellie Craven - Production Manager  
 Grant Wilson - 1st Assistant Camera  
 John Balbi - Key Grip  
 Nicholas Towle - Grip Assist  
 Mark Kavanagh - Gaffer  
 Andy Timms - Head of VFX  
 Hazel Gibson - VFX Producer  
 Jordan Swioklo - Editor  
 Alina Birmingham - Colourist  
 Quade Biddle - VFX Artist  
 Martin del Amo - Casting  
 Koumbah Semega-Janneh - Research Assistant  
 James Nguyen - Assistant Set Design  
 Phu Nguyen - Set Installer and Artist Assistant  
 Verity Mackey - Wardrobe  
 Scarlett Gibson-Williams - Artist Assistant  
 David Harris - Artist Assistant  
 Stella Middleditch - Artist Assistant  
 Valerie Williams - Artist Assistant  
 Samia Sayed - Catering  
 Mona Sayed - Catering  
 Noica Omero - Catering  
 Matt Downey - Carriageworks Technician  
 Greg Nicholls - Carriageworks Technician  
 Aiden Psaltis - Carriageworks Technician

With special thanks to Finch Company and Carriageworks.

**Angela Tiatia** is a visual artist who lives and works in Sydney. She explores contemporary culture, drawing attention to its relationship to representation, gender, neo-colonialism and the commodification of the body and place, often through the lenses of history and popular culture.

Her exhibitions include: *Personal Structures* (2017), 57th Venice Biennial; *Sulman Prize Finalists Exhibition* (2017), Art Gallery of New South Wales; *Countercurrents* (2017), Samstag Museum of Art; *Art of the Pacific* (2016) at the National Gallery of Victoria - International (NGV); *Eighth Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (2015/2016), Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA). Her works are held in the collections of NGV, QAGOMA, the Australian Museum and private collectors.

**Debbie Ding** is a visual artist and technologist based in Singapore. She reworks and reappropriates formal, qualitative approaches to collecting, labelling, organising, and interpreting assemblages of information – using this to open up possibilities for alternative constructions of knowledge.

**The Australia-Singapore Joint Artist Residency** exchange programme aimed to facilitate two-way cultural exchange through the celebration of the rich shared heritage and friendship between Australia and Singapore which dates back to World War Two, when Australian servicemen helped defend the Republic. The joint residency programme is one of the many bilateral arts and cultural programmes which are part of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the field of Arts and Culture between the governments of Australia and Singapore.

The Australia-Singapore Joint Artist Residency Programme is the National Museum of Singapore's first artist residency. The programme saw Australian artist Angela Tiatia and Singaporean artist Debbie Ding participate in one-month residencies at the Australian War Memorial (AWM) and the National Museum of Singapore (NMS). Facilitated and organised by the NMS with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the residency in Singapore ran from March 27 to April 21 2017 and provided the artists with the opportunity to not only visit local cultural institutions and meet local artists but to also view and study artefacts from the National Collection. The residency programme in Australia took place from 24 April to 24 May 2017 and was facilitated by the AWM with the support of the Ministry for the Arts in Australia. The artworks that Angela Tiatia and Debbie Ding developed as part of this seminal residency will be presented at NMS from 23 September 2017 to 25 March 2018, in conjunction with the exhibition *Witness to War: Remembering 1942*.

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