

Where once bread, now crumbs lie...

LOUISE MORRISON, 2011

WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER AND MY GRANDMOTHER was in her last years, she told me the same story every time I saw her. It was about her escape from wartime London, after bombs had set the city ablaze. I didn't mind. I figured that she wanted to ensure that I would never forget where my family came from nor their home that was left behind. During one visit, as I half listened to the tale, I thought I should make notes, just in case place names or other details should elude me in the future but my next thought was that since I'd heard the story so often, I would always be able to repeat it word for word.

Louise Morrison is a Western Australian based artist whose practice ranges from large, collaborative public artworks to small assemblages and wooden works. In addition to working part-time at Artsource as the Manager of Membership Services and as a casual Lecturer in Visual Culture at Central Institute of Technology, Louise writes, lectures and curates on a freelance basis.

Memory is the subject of Elisa Markes-Young's series titled *The Strange Quiet of Things Misplaced*. Markes-Young describes the mixed media works as ideographs or graphic representations of her ideas about the structure of memory and the acts of remembering and forgetting.

A traditional lace-making, embroidery or crochet pattern is the starting point for each of these pieces. Markes-Young thinks of these as diagrammatic references to the structure of memory. Working in pencil, acrylic and stitch on stretched Belgian linen, she reproduces the original pattern onto the fabric and begins to replicate it across the surface. As she progresses, she deliberately corrupts the pattern to cause mutation. "Stitches" are dropped or miscounted and the perfect repetition of the pattern fails. Instead, imperfections form and the pattern alters. In some cases, negative spaces become

positive shapes. In others, elements are isolated and become free-floating forms, making the traditional motifs of stars and flowers spill from their original pattern. Whilst Markes-Young uses some traditional techniques, she is more inclined to use mock methods, a blend of techniques or her own, invented processes (for example, bundling) to produce the works.

The artworks in this series have often been discussed in the context of the artist's heritage. Markes-Young was born in Southern Poland in a region famous for bobbin laces. Her father accepted embroidered tablecloths as payment for the medical services he provided to poorer households (tablecloths that collectively became an impressive collection, a part of which is now owned by Markes-Young) and her mother, like most homemakers in that time and place, sewed; often altering hand-me-down clothing for family members.

Markes-Young remembers learning to crochet and to sew as a child but did not continue with either, finding sewing, in particular, too boring. She can recall a particular crocheted skirt of her Mother's but light-heartedly refutes the suggestion of any significant influence of a national or familial heritage on her current work. When quizzed on the subject, she laughed and said "*don't forget, this was the 1970's, these items were simply part of the landscape of my childhood*", and gave embroidery and wooden churches equal weight in her answer.

Markes-Young's childhood featured frequent relocation and this, as well as her more recent history of immigration, has greatly contributed to her sense of identity. Feelings of displacement in Australia have not eased by the realisation that her memories of homes past are becoming incomplete, inaccurate or lost. As time has passed, she has become uncertain which elements in particular

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memories are truly remembered and which are affected by distortions caused by retelling and re-remembering. For a while, she anxiously sought to re-collect her memories.

The very act of making these works is an attempt to overcome the fallibility of memory. Each piece is produced according to a mathematical logic that Markes-Young determines in the early stages of production and she must avoid long absences from the studio to ensure that her logic is not forgotten. Numbered according to the order in which her ideas formed, these thirty something works constitute the complete series. Reflecting the imperfect structure of memory, some pieces are permanently missing. These were works in which the logic of the pattern became lost to Markes-Young or the mutation of the pattern was unsuccessful.

In viewing them in numerical order, it is possible to detect an increasing level of chaos in

the way each pattern mutates. Later works are more disordered and colourful than the early works in the series, some even have a celebratory feel. And whilst earlier works in the series can be considered as distinct pieces, some later works are multi-panelled. In these, fragments of patterns missing from one panel can be found on another, much in the same way as we attribute a clear memory to the wrong year or location.

It has now been twenty years since my Grandmother passed away. I can still see, in my mind's eye, my imagined view of London burning from the hill on which she paused as she left the city behind. Despite all that she told me on so many occasions, my own visualisation is all that I can recall. That and some mention of a piano. I don't know if my word-for-word memory of her story simply disappeared from one moment to the next or if it slowly faded.

In either case, I have no idea when that happened and for how long her story has been missing. ☹