



...he came over... 2012  
 (detail) digital print on Phototech  
 850 x 900mm

Front cover >>  
*Bocce and cards at 'the little club'* 2012  
 (detail) digital print on Phototech  
 850 x 900mm

Back cover >  
*.Dancing to the Bungabee Band...* 2012  
 (detail) digital print on Phototech  
 850 x 850 mm



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Trade & Investment  
Arts NSW





LEONIE LANE

BANANAS, BUSINESS AND BOCCE - THE LISMORE ITALIANS

20 JULY - 26 AUGUST 2012



LISMORE  
REGIONAL  
GALLERY

## BANANAS, BUSINESS AND BOCCE: THE LISMORE ITALIANS

### LEONIE LANE

ESSAY BY LESLEY JENKINS

Leonie Lane is interested in community and the region. In particular place, personal narrative and social identity via digital imagery and installation. This informs her role as a lecturer in Digital Art and Design in the Visual Arts Program, School of Arts and Social Sciences at Southern Cross University, and her own visual arts practice. Her vast body of work also includes being an active partner in Redback Graphix in Sydney and working as a freelance designer with the Antart studio. Commissions have ranged from community art projects and public awareness campaigns (Literacy, Amnesty International, Aboriginal Health, Occupational Health and Safety) to museum, music, film and theatre promotions.

In her exhibition *Bananas, Business and Bocce: The Lismore Italians* she has applied a lyrical eye to a rich vein of material. Migration stories have held her captive for some time. Connections made while designing the Wilsons River Experience Walk

Lesley Jenkins is author of *Power of the Land - Il Potere della Terra: A social history of Italian Settlement in Lismore - Una storia delle attivita' dell 'insediamento Italiano di Lismore* Northern Star Printery Lismore 1993

She currently works as an Historian for the Office of the City Architect and Heritage for the Chief Executive Officer, Gold Coast City Council, Queensland.



story sites, assisting with the implementation of the Continental Club memorial in Lismore and participation in the reinvigoration of displays through teaching and design projects at the New Italy Museum Complex have developed particularly strong working relationships with the Northern Rivers Italian community. Research and design for this exhibition informed the development of the Lismore Italian Memorial Project – a mosaic tribute by another local artist Scott Harrower, located on the levee wall in Spinks Park.

Some projects take on a life of their own. Before you know it they have swept you up in their joyous complexity so that the outcome is the last step in a long and rich journey. In my case that was the publication of the book *Power of the Land – Il Potere della Terra* in 1993. In this case Lane has been on a similar path. Both projects are linked, although 19 years separate them, because they have used similar material and community connections. Both have only



been possible because of the initiative, drive and support of a core group of hard working women: Ellie Gava, Ida Ros, Eni Perin and Julie De Nardi along with their connections to the broader Italian community in Lismore. Here the similarities end, because Lane is an artist who has creatively interpreted the material to explore the intersection between memory, place and identity.

Memory, both individual and collective, is a quixotic creature. It is reconstructed in the present but references the past. It is subject to change over time, yet the core facts usually remain unchanged. It is easily triggered by smells, sounds, pictures and objects from the past, which each bring up a rich brew of reminiscing and storytelling. The pleasure and the pain associated with this is evident when we come together to tell our stories of the past, yet we have an imperative to do so no matter the cost. This mixture of fact and remembered fact is a creative act, it twines the biographical bones

of a particular life with clues to the narrator's ideas and consciousness, what they judge to be important, how they have interpreted and come to terms with their experience.<sup>1</sup> This becomes the bedrock of our identity. Leonie has woven these fleeting and intangible threads to create a series of images and sounds that reference the complex migration story.

Some source images and stories are familiar and appear in the *Power of the Land – Il Potere della Terra* book yet they seem other-worldly. Maria Pagotto as a child playing under the grape vines is transported, almost disappearing just as our memories of events and places dissolve and change. The power of these works, resides in their subject matter and in their dreamlike construction. Many have a particular luminosity associated with the person or the place telling a shifting story changing shape over time.

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<sup>1</sup> Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson, *Listening for a Change*, Panos Books, London, 1994, p.141

Interviews have been added to, edited and mixed to create an evocative soundscape. Disembodied voices mixed with sounds from the landscape interface with wall based digital imagery and borrowed objects describe local Italian culture and life in Lismore.

For the exhibition Lane has sourced historical material from local Italian families to help tell this story. Objects include the Gava family's handmade tilling plough, agricultural equipment, including banana boxes and stencils, wooden sea chests, Florian Volpato's cappuccino machine (the first in Lismore), and various cooking implements and recipes that helped bring new flavours to Lismore. While images are sourced from family photo albums, colours are souvenired from early twentieth century postcards from Northern Italy. There is also a map of settlement and internal migration via which people from the Italian community can contribute to the exhibition and research.

- <<< Lismore's first cappuccino machine from Florian Volpato's cafe at 97 Keen Street, Lismore  
courtesy of the Volpato family and New Italy Museum  
Complex - photograph Leonie Lane
- << Florian Volpato and Hungarian tenor,  
Miklos Gafni at Florian's cafe  
courtesy of the Volpato family
- < Maria Pagotto (nee Griffani) playing at her home in  
Recaoro, Veneto, Italy  
courtesy of Maria Pagotto



*...sometimes we would go into town...* 2012  
digital print on Phototech  
1520 x 850mm

Sorting and selecting is a key to the production of the work and it forms the basis for the themes explored in the exhibition. Just as we do this to make sense of our own lives, Lane has wrestled with ideas of belonging, community and Italian/Australian identity to document and celebrate the steps from the old country to the new. The exhibition references life in Italy, the reasons for departure, the journey itself, the shock of arrival, settlement and adaptation and the role of place.

Life goes on and for the Italians this meant a continuation of the hard work they had become accustomed to in Italy. Landscape, cultural practices, language and seasons were different at the other end of the world, but hard work remained a constant. The continuum of agriculture, food retail and life celebrations is all evident in the contributions made by the local Italian community. Music and celebration was an accompaniment and bocce, a very leisurely game, came along

with this. Many Italian family names can still be recognised in the businesses established in Lismore, and many of them continue to flourish through the work of succeeding generations. Enterprises won through hard work, family and community enterprise are evident in the local landscape. Connections to Italy have remained strong and some people have returned to the land of their birth only returning to their second home, Lismore, to visit.

The Italian presence in Lismore exposed a rural community to an unfamiliar language and to cultural practices that were very different to their own. It was their first opportunity to see a different approach to food, cooking and to the growing of little known herbs and vegetables that had rarely made their way onto Australian plates. Lane focuses on before and after World War II when immigration to Australia was encouraged and numbers were at their highest.

By the 1970s the Italians had established businesses and clubs and passed through the worst phases of discrimination and harassment. The second generation, those who are now in their late 60s and 70s, are justly proud of their heritage and they retain their language and many of the cultural practices that shaped their identity.

Leonie Lane has paid tribute to this community by capturing individual and group stories with static imagery, sound and objects and placing them in ways that cause the audience to reflect upon the themes before them. The exhibition will continue to inform, challenge and delight once its time at Lismore Gallery is over. Much of the material will be re-purposed to suit its permanent home at the New Italy Museum Complex Italian Pavilion south of Woodburn.