

Photographer Angela Bailey had studied in Brisbane before moving to Melbourne to study fine art and photography at the Victorian College of Arts. Writer Angela Costi came to the project with ten plays already written and produced. A lawyer who turned to writing in 1993, she says she found herself relatively poor but incredibly enriched by experiences such as Kensington.

By 2002 a large amount of material had been gathered through the exhibitions, workshops, sound recordings, performances and many other contributions of residents. It was decided to publish a book with free copies given to all tenants. But much of the same material could be used beforehand in a final performance, a true on-site culmination, a ritual event. Barry Laing joined the team as a theatrical director and dramaturg (script adviser). He worked with Angela Costi on the script, both of them believing that the work should not be a piece of naturalistic theatre with a single narrative plot: there were instead many individual stories to be shared.

The performance/installation entitled *reLOCATED* was produced in April 2002. The stage was a large grassy area between two walk-ups, with the audience sitting at banquet tables. Familiar sounds, such as those of demolition and pigeons in flight, were amplified through the space. Images of the estate were projected through windows or blown up and projected onto buildings. Professional actors and tenants performed together or, in many cases, the tenants performed alone.

The event continued, scene by scene, before an audience of hundreds. The stories were familiar to some, unknown to others, but always provided a strong sense of both communal grieving and shared proud celebration.

At one stage, all the balconies of the flats suddenly blazed into light. On every balcony was at least one woman, banging a pot. They were re-enacting their welcome of the New Year, banging away at the pots.



There was no thought initially of it turning into a long-term residency. But Angela Costi came aboard, we were given a room to work out of, next to the Tenants Union, we visited people who had already moved out... and everything just grew organically as we spent more and more time with a mix of Anglos, some of whom had been there for thirty years, and Greeks, Italians, Vietnamese, people from Somalia and the Horn of Africa. A varied, extraordinary, invigorating mix...

It wasn't a sealed-off enclave but you didn't see a lot of people just walking through, it did have a stigma attached because it had been ear-marked for demolition. The people who still lived there actually had a good range of services nearby in terms of health services, the recreation centre, the adventure playground, bus, transport, shops... and the actual environment of the estate, in terms of what had been planted and allowed to grow, was amazing. There were all these simply wonderful pockets. Like a garden which had been planted by boys long ago as a part of an employment program and the older people were very proud of the luscious environment.

I realised that people had formed a close relationship not just with their neighbours but with the place itself. Hardly your stereotyped ugly housing estate? Some wanted to move out, of course, couldn't wait to go. But for many it was loaded with recollections, memories and beauty.

Angela Bailey, interview



WOMAN CHORUS:

Happy New Year!

It's gonna be bigger and better

It's gonna be louder than ever

Gonna give up the smokes, I am

Sweet biscuits an' soapies, pokies

An bingo -- give 'em all up, I am.

Happy New Year!

It's gonna be bigger and better

It's gonna be louder than ever

Watching our boys playing footy

Watching our girls wearing lippy

Watching our boys ...

We were at 504, 100 Altona Street: that's me, my 2 sons, 5 cats, 1 dog and my Oscars – they're the large black and orange fish in my aquarium. My neighbour at 503 was Evelyn MacMillan, 502 was the Vietnamese family with three girls, 505 was the Kosminskis, 506 was Pierre, 507 was Dot and her sons Michael and Jimmy (Michael's now dead), 508, that lady died, 404 were the Coffeys, Edith, Bill, Keith and Andrew, 401 were the Dosleys, 307 was her grandson Tony, 206 were Mr. And Mrs. Kemp, 306 the Cedelands family... on Derby Street, at 20, were the Cattons, at 24 were the Swanstons and the Shells, in flat 1 of block 2, there was Shirley and in the same block was Donald, Robby, Gary, Mark and Dianne, at 44 Derby Street were the Gottingers at 72 Derby Street there was Sandra Lawrence and Tommy, the Spanish couple, Mr. and Mrs. Cung were at 100 Altona, 30 Derby Street Ruby, Guy and Margaret Campbell, the Lucas' lived in 72 Altona, the Reirdons in 74. Oh, and Lucy Winkworth at 303, 100 Altona Street – she's passed on.

Sandra Joy, tenant, performing in *reLOCATED*

Suddenly, unexpectedly, a male stalker comes running through the crowd.

Go slower, go slower

Is that your son, Bev?

Nah, it's Trev, Pam's boy.

Little Trevor Watson?

My God he's grown.

He's a big boy.

Sure is.

Not now Elaine ...

Aw what's the harm.

Happy New Year!

Then another male stalker comes running through. The women continue to bang and bravo him on but now more as a background experience: as Wendy's vivid memory is evoked.

WENDY: *(To the stalker.) Ronnie, I know it's you.*

The stalker looks up at one of the balconies as he's running by.

STREAKER: *(Sheepishly.) Hello sweetness ... I mean Mrs. T.*

WENDY: *Sweetness – that was my nickname. Jim's name for me. Sweetness, can you get me a packet of cigarettes?* When he knew I was going up the shops. Whenever you walked up Macauley Road you'd be there for a couple of hours, you'd bump into someone you know. I'd see Beryl, or someone. We had 3 banks, 3 butchers. 2 supermarkets including Johnsons. Now no banks, 1 butcher and Safeways is now up at Racecourse Road. *But as long as your nails are clean, your hair is done, and your shoes are clean, you can go anywhere.* Jim lived by that – God rest his soul.

SCENE SEVEN: *Banging Our Pots and Pans, reLOCATED.*

Scenes from the public performance *reLOCATED*, Kensington housing estate.



Hundreds of little, colourful origami cranes hung together by string and wire as curtains. We also came across a photo of a little girl standing proudly in front of these origami curtains. The tradition of shenbazuru states that once you've made your thousandth crane, you can make a wish for such things as health, peace, a happy home... what did the little girl wish for? Unfortunately the girl and her family couldn't be traced.

They're somewhere in Yarraville, someone said. But the little girl, Marilyn Ngo, was eventually found. Through serendipity her Grandfather, Mr. Tran, attended the exhibition at the Esate and saw the cranes. He was so overjoyed that he promptly left to fetch her. Marilyn Ngo said she had made every crane herself but her wish will always remain a secret.

Angela Costi, Angela Bailey, from the book *reLOCATED*

*Hundreds and hundreds of paper birds
The wishes cranes carry
Almost in flight
Make a wish
Why did the little girl leave them behind?
Maybe they were too fragile for her to take with her
Maybe she wanted them to stay
Her wish had come true?
After her very last bird
She would have sat down before
all of them
Looked up and wished for ... for?
Good health? A great birthday?
A party dress?
A happyhome in Yarraville
A happyhome
What would you wish for?
To leave and be happy
To stay and be happy
To return and be happy
Make a wish
A wish ...*

SCENE 13, *The Cranes' Story, reLOCATED*

The group was united in its desire to work against stereotyping and objectification and to avoid becoming too controlling. This meant, among other things, that no specific outcome was envisaged or expected and no time frame firmly set. It meant the artists could spend a significant time on the Estate without pressure to achieve predetermined results. This was crucial to allow connections with tenants whose trust of photographers and writers was not too strong given the way in which their homes and lives had been depicted by media in the past. People could control the degree to which they became involved and could in a real sense determine what happened in the project. The *reLOCATED* project ensured the individual and collective memories associated with the estate were not erased with its physical demolition. It invited the public onto the estate to share these memories and it provided opportunities for change to happen with dignity and pride. It also made great art.

The Lord Mayor of Melbourne, John So, in the preface to the book *reLOCATED*.