

ARCHIE MOORE

Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)

Samstag Museum of Art
11 October—29 November 2024



SECONDARY EXHIBITION GUIDE

KEY ART CONCEPTS

CONCEPTUAL ART

Traditionally, Western visual art focused on the art object itself—what the artwork looked like and the expressive qualities of its compositional elements, such as line, form, colour, texture, balance, etc. Whether the art object was a sculpture by Michelangelo, a painting by Rembrandt or a work of modern art like a Picasso, its physical appearance was the source of its expressive power. In Conceptual Art, the focus moves away from the object and instead places emphasis on the concept that underpins the work. The artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) was the first to explore this idea, particularly with his 'readymades' (found items, signed by the artist) like *The Fountain* (1917) that raised questions about what actually made something 'art'. Duchamp referred to this type of art as "not retinal" because what registered in the mind was more important than what registered with the eye.⁰¹ During the 1960s, as artists began to question and challenge the power of art critics, curators and collectors (and the standards by which they assessed the value of an artwork), the same theory of artistic expression began to re-emerge as 'Conceptual Art'.

In the practice of Conceptual Art, the concept (or idea) behind an artwork is its most important feature. When translating the concept into a physical form to create an artwork, how the artwork is made and what it looks like is less important than the intellectual rigour of the concept and the successful communication of this concept to the viewer. This way of thinking opened up endless possibilities for different ways of making art. Art no longer needed to be a permanent object that you could see, touch or possess. Anything capable of expressing an idea could be used to make art, giving rise to new mediums including sound, performance and installation. Conceptual artists often work in a variety of mediums, selecting the materials and forms that will best support their concept. Furthermore, many conceptual artists do not think that it is necessary to produce a final work at all—these artists consider the development of the concept to be the artwork itself. For example, Sol LeWitt (1928-2007), a pioneering conceptual artist, often simply wrote instructions explaining his concept and how a physical representation of it could be made. Whether anyone ever carried out these instructions did not matter as, for LeWitt, his idea was itself the work of art.

INSTALLATION ART

A three-dimensional form of art that involves arranging materials within a space—the resulting artwork is called an installation. It is the combination of the materials and how they relate to the space that forms the artwork, rather than an individual object (like a sculpture). Installation art can be mixed-media (composed of different materials or media), site-specific (designed to exist in a specific location) and/or temporal or ephemeral (only existing for a limited time).

The word 'immersed' describes the state of being completely surrounded by something—for instance, when you dive into a pool you are immersed in water. In visual art, the term 'immersive' relates to an artwork that creates a strong sense that the viewer is physically immersed in the world created by the work—in this case, an immersive installation.

01 Ashton, D. (1966). "[An interview with Marcel Duchamp](#)". *Studio International*, 171 (878), 244-46.

DWELLING (ADELAIDE ISSUE)

Can we ever really know another person? What if we could see into their memories? Would that help us to understand them? These are the questions that artist Archie Moore (Kamilaroi/Bigambul) explores in his immersive installation series *Dwelling*. With *Dwelling*, Moore attempts to let others experience his memories of growing up as an Aboriginal boy in a small country town with a predominantly Anglo-Celtic Australian population. Yet he also knows that his mission is technically impossible—after all, we can never really experience something that only exists in another person's mind. As Moore explains:

That's an ongoing motif in my work; I'm trying to put the viewer in my shoes. It's highlighting the impossibility of knowing another person, how they feel or what they think. I think that might be a metaphor for [the] failure of reconciliation. Maybe we'll never fully understand or know the other person, or group of people.⁰¹

Nevertheless, he persists.

Bringing together visual (what can be seen), auditory (what can be heard), haptic (what can be physically touched or felt) and olfactory (what can be smelt) elements, Moore creates an installation that attempts to transport us into his mind. When we enter *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)* at the Samstag Museum of Art, we are invited to step into Moore's childhood as he remembers it. Open one door and we are inside young Archie's bedroom, with his sketches, books, a mix tape and other belongings. Another door leads to the kitchen of his family home, while yet another opens into a school classroom furnished with a simple desk and chair. These public (educational) and private (domestic) spaces are tangled together in this physical recreation of memory, in the same way that they overlap as small fragments within our memory of childhood. Our memories are not like a movie that plays from beginning to end—they are more like a kaleidoscope of small incidents and feelings that are scattered together in unlikely ways. In this way, the *Dwelling* series represents Moore's specific, personal memories, and also the nature of memory itself. The installations are composed of a combination of real artifacts from Moore's childhood and building materials, furniture and other objects that have been chosen because they resemble the rooms he is trying to recreate. This blend of the one-hundred-percent-accurate and sort-of-similar echoes the way that our memories are a collection of the real, the half-remembered, and the spaces where our imagination—or the stories of others—has filled in the gaps.

Moore's memories of childhood are inseparable from the racism that underpinned the society he was born into. He remembers that:

'Aboriginal' as a descriptor was always either negative or of little importance, whether that was from white people, my own family, or from other Aboriginal people I met. I did my best to be less Aboriginal—to be inconspicuous, quiet, avoid the sun, and avoid other Aboriginal people... Although I didn't really fully know what the word meant, just that it was something horrible.⁰²

01 Tamsen Hopkinson, "STUDIO presents: In Your House, Archie Moore and Tamsen Hopkinson in conversation," *Artlink* 42, no. 3 (2022): 99.

02 Steven Dow, "Archie Moore interview," exhibition catalogue, *Archie Moore 1970 - 2018*, 31-32, Brisbane: Griffith University Art Museum, March 8 – April 21, 2018.

Dwelling (Adelaide Issue) contains some direct references to the unquestioned and socially accepted racism of the 1970s and 80s, such as the popular children's book *Little Black Sambo* (with its caricatured depictions of African people) that Moore remembers reading, and the racist stereotypes featured in the television programs that play in the lounge room. Aside from this, it is mostly left to our intuition to sense the effects of racism through the atmosphere of the house and the clues that it reveals to us. The small rooms that open directly into each other (in government housing, no space was 'wasted' on a hallway), a hubcap used as decoration on the wall, and the violent imagery in a child's drawings all point to the transgenerational poverty caused by dispossession—as Moore describes it, "...the things that contributed to my Aboriginal grandparents living in a corrugated iron hut on their own land in a town where everyone else lived in houses."⁰³ Each room, each memory, bears the invisible tension of being 'different'.

For the First Nations peoples of Australia, the idea of memory has a special significance in a country that still struggles to accept the realities of its past. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' stories and experiences are not a firm part of our nation's official, collective memory, it is left to individuals to ensure that the truth is not forgotten.⁰⁴ Yet, while memory is an important part of truth-telling, it can also have the dangerous ability to leave its holder frozen between the past and the present. In the bathroom of *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*, you will experience a strong odour of Dettol disinfectant. This smell is an important reminder of Moore's childhood: his mother would bathe him in Dettol before sending him to school to ensure that he appeared extremely 'clean'. Moore believes that she learnt this from her own mother during the era when it was government policy to remove children who possessed both Aboriginal and European ancestry from their families. The excuse used to do this was that the children were not being properly cared for. [These children are now referred to as the Stolen Generations.⁰⁵] Although these policies no longer existed when Moore was a child, the memory (and the fear) remained with his mother and continued to shape the present. This process of traumatic experiences being passed on to future generations is called 'transgenerational trauma'. The concept of transgenerational trauma, evoked by Moore through the harsh, chemical fumes of the disinfectant, is evidence of both the power and complexity of memory.

Dwelling (Adelaide Issue) is the fifth iteration (or version) of this installation concept. Each time the concept is brought to life, it will be both the same and slightly different from the one before. For example, there will be an appropriate television in the lounge room, but it probably won't be the same television that appeared in the last iteration, and neither television will be the actual one owned by the Moore family. This restaging echoes the nature of memories. Like the installation, memories are not perfect copies of the past but reconstructions of it. As Moore notes, "...every time you remember something, something gets added to it."⁰⁶ The process of repeatedly remembering and reconstructing memories, especially difficult or traumatic ones, is a key element in the practice of psychology. Psychologists use these techniques to help their patients deal with events from their past and enable them to move forward. Moore talks about a similar form of catharsis (the experience of releasing emotional pain held within oneself) that he achieves through the practice of transforming memory into art:

03 Hopkinson, "STUDIO presents: In Your House," 99.

04 For a more detailed discussion on this concept, see Helen Hughes, "Archie Moore's Memory Work," exhibition catalogue, *Archie Moore: Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*, 5-9, Adelaide: Samstag Museum of Art, October 11 – November 29, 2024. https://www.unisa.edu.au/siteassets/samstag/docs/catalogues/2024/samstag_archie-moore_dwelling-adelaide-issue_catalogue.pdf.

05 More information about the Stolen Generations can be found on the [Bringing them Home](https://www.bringingthemhome.org.au/) website.

06 Lancaster University, "Archie Moore, Artist: Biographical Interview," YouTube video, 17:09, posted by "A Cross-Cultural Working Group on 'Good Culture' and Precariousness," Feb 29, 2016, accessed October 02, 2024, <https://youtu.be/aqQITSpN1bo>.

A lot of my work is cathartic I suppose. I've always been interested in memory, my past... It's really important to me while I'm making it and it's a big cathartic release at the end of purging stuff out.⁰⁷

Could a similar catharsis be achieved for the nation of Australia if we were willing to really listen the memories of First Nations peoples and integrate them into our national identity, instead of hiding from them to avoid discomfort or shame? Moore's work seems to suggest it might.

Moore spent much of his childhood trying to “be invisible”.⁰⁸ Like most young people, his bedroom was his haven—a place where he could hide from the outside world and express himself through the creativity that would one day become the basis for an artistic practice. Drawing, reading and music were an escape from the isolation Moore felt in a community where “people would not encourage you to do anything other than drink, fight and chase feral pigs.”⁰⁹ The music of post-punk band The Cure and the lyrics of their lead singer Robert Smith were particularly important to him. Moore has said, “I really related to the lyrics which is kind of weird—this Aboriginal teenager relating to this white English goth.”¹⁰ While on the surface it does seem unexpected, dig a little deeper and the connection is easy to understand. With his outlandish makeup, described by Moore as “big black eyes and red lipstick on and crazy hair. He kind of looked like a panda”¹¹, Robert Smith was using his appearance to express his sense of alienation from British society. Through his lyrics and persona, Smith was able to connect with a young boy on the other side of the world, in very different circumstances, who felt the same difference and alienation from the world around him. The ability of art, in all its forms, to communicate and create connections between people who appear to have nothing in common is, without doubt, one of its greatest powers. Moore has said that his *Dwelling* series is:

...more about the impossibility of having a shared experience with another—the idea that two people or two groups can never fully understand one another. All the objects in that show had a significance for me—an aura, a feeling attached to a memory—and they would have different associations, or none at all, for the viewers of the show. But there's a kind of paradox, too: I can never be certain that others haven't had the exact same thoughts and feelings as me.¹²

It may be impossible to completely share an experience with another person, but when the power of artistic expression allows us to see the connections between our feelings and experiences and those of others, perhaps we don't need to. Perhaps what is important, as Moore's work suggests, is that we try.

07 Hopkins, “STUDIO presents: In Your House,” 99.

08 Dow, “Archie Moore interview,” 31.

09 Ibid., 31.

10 Hopkins, “STUDIO presents: In Your House,” 101.

11 Ibid., 101.

12 Dow, “Archie Moore interview,” 31.

REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Consider the specific meaning of the word 'dwelling'. How is it different to the words 'house' or 'home'? What different ideas or feelings does it suggest? Why might Moore have chosen to title this work *Dwelling*?
- *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)* is a very effective example of an immersive installation. Reflect on the different ways that Moore has created the illusion that we are inside his memories—think about medium, scale and sensory stimuli. Discuss how being inside the installation affected you personally. Which room had the greatest impact on you? Why?
- Moore drew on memories from his childhood and teenage years to create this work. As young people, you are very well placed to understand the experiences that the artist is trying to convey. Do you think that most young people have experienced a sense of 'being different' or 'not fitting in' at some point in their life? Did you connect with these feelings in the artwork?
- What do you think about the idea that really listening to the experiences of First Nations peoples could not only help the individuals telling their stories but also our nation as a whole? As young people, do you think that you are more aware of these issues than the adults in your life are?

Year 7/8

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REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

ACTIVITIES

- Think about a place that holds vivid memories for you. Brainstorm words that describe how this place makes you feel.
- What objects do you own that remind you of this place? What memories are attached to each object? Write a sentence describing your memories.
- How could you use these objects to create an artwork that conveys the way this place makes you feel? Sketch your concept.

Year 7/8

> [AC9AVA8C01](#) > [AC9AVA8C02](#)

Year 9/10

> [AC9AVA10C01](#) > [AC9AVA10C02](#)

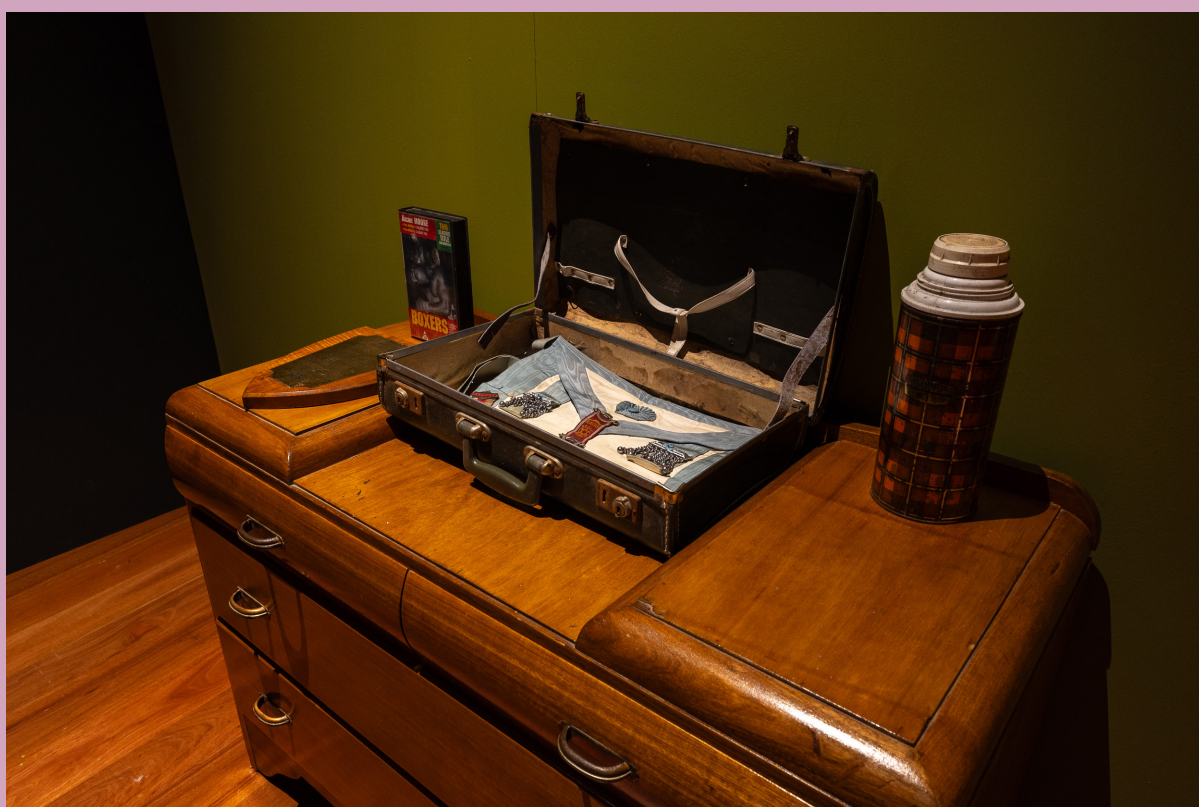
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Archie MOORE, *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*, 2024. Mixed media installation with moving image, commissioned by Samstag and the Adelaide Film Festival. Installation view at Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, 2024. Photography by Sia Duff.



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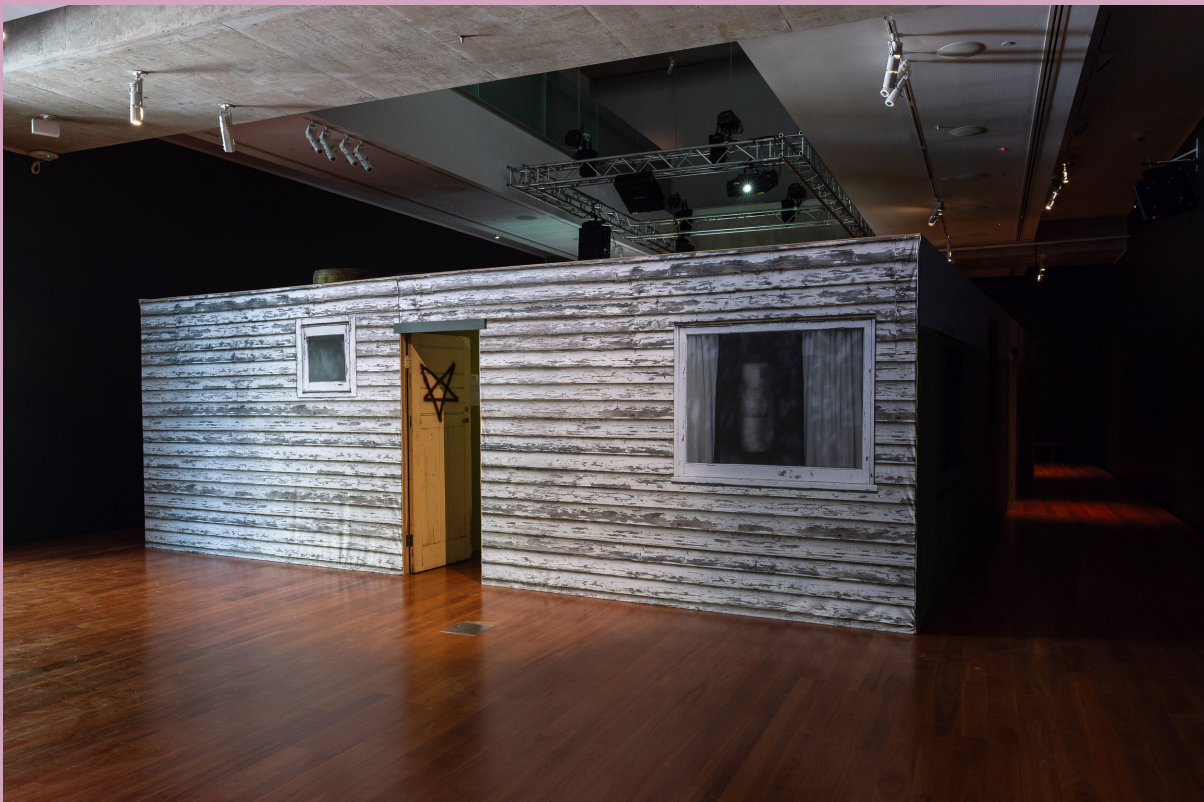
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