

ARTWORK IN A BOX ALFREDO AND ISABEL AQUILIZAN

EDUCATION RESOURCE for TEACHERS

This secondary school resource for teachers accompanies *Artwork in a box: Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan*. It includes information about the artists and their artworks, discussion points, and activities. Teachers are encouraged to utilise it before and after the in-classroom art experience.

INTRODUCTION

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LEARNING AREAS...

that this project can link to are as follows: English; History; Geography; Visual Art; Design and Technologies; Work Studies, Civics and Citizenship; and Study of Society and Environment.

GENERAL CAPABILITIES...

that the activities encompass are as follows: Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking; Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding; and Intercultural Understanding.

CROSS-CURRICULUM...

priorities addressed are Sustainability and Asia, and Australia's engagement with Asia.

1. THE PROJECT

Artwork in a box brings real artworks and activities directly to you for a unique in-classroom art experience.

The box is a custom-made crate. It contains an artwork titled *Lodge: Another Country*, produced by artists Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan. The crate serves as a storage container, transport case, and display plinth.

During the in-classroom art experience, students will observe and discuss the artwork to gain an understanding of the ideas that underpin the Aquilizans' practice. Students will role play in order to enhance their understanding of the range of roles within the visual arts, including curator, art installer, arts educator, and artist. They will then have the opportunity to create their very own artworks out of everyday materials drawn from their own stories and experiences. If time permits, students will have the opportunity to install their artworks in their classroom to form a temporary display.

Artwork in a box: Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan forms part of a larger project currently under development, *A Country Too Far* (working title). This project will bring together hundreds of the houseboats made through the *Artwork in a box: Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan* program by young people across Queensland into one large installation that will be exhibited for the public to view and enjoy. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for your students, and schools are encouraged to store their students' artworks in the short term for collection at a later date.

2. THE ARTWORK

Artwork in a box features a new artwork titled *Lodge: Another Country* that artists Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan made specifically for this project. This artwork is a small sculpture of a slightly tilted boat on top of which sits a myriad of tiny dwellings, complete with scaffolding, satellite discs, and other miniature details. It is crafted from used cardboard transport boxes, and painted to give the appearance of rust.

A lodge is a shelter that someone resides in either temporarily or permanently. Therefore, the title suggests the seeking of a home in a new country. Being lodged also refers to becoming stuck, embedded, or fixed, and so can carry both negative and positive connotations—referring to what is left behind and what is gained by becoming 'lodged' in another country. The precarious jumble of dwellings on the boat appears to be in a perpetual state of collapse and construction. The dwellings form a central peak, giving the appearance of a large triangle-shaped sail. Jammed together, these 'lodges' look unsafe, at once demonstrating resilience and resourcefulness as well as desperation and fragility. The rust colouring, suggests deterioration and aging, enhances this appearance. Metaphorically, the precariousness of the structure may represent the unreliability of what lies ahead.

Lodge: Another Country is about a place, a juncture of a journey. It is a space in between two places, a moment when someone leaves home and there will be no place they can call home any more; a risk that is undertaken, like a voyage to a land of uncertainty.

—Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan, 2015

ARTWORK IN A BOX

ALFREDO AND ISABEL AQUILIZAN

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2. THE ARTWORK CONTINUED

This artwork references the artists' personal journey of migration and questions around their personal identity, as well as experiences of new immigrants more broadly. The Aquilizans are, in a sense, global citizens, who frequently travel to all corners of the world for their projects and exhibitions. The Philippines was their base until 2006, when they decided to migrate to Brisbane to seek better opportunities for their young family. However, when visiting the Philippines after having become Australian citizens, they felt like tourists—a feeling heightened by having to re-apply for their Filipino citizenship. The artists found that, for them, this process confused their identity and the idea of home being tied to one place.

More broadly, this artwork prompts discussions around issues in contemporary Australian culture to do with migration—particularly, refugees and asylum seekers who travel to Australia by boat—as well as national boundaries and border protection. It raises universal concerns, such as longing to belong, having a strong sense of identity and a connection to place, and somewhere to call and feel 'at home'.

Moreover, the work is about an imagined community that reflects global predicaments in economic, cultural, political, geographical, environmental areas, and that affect our life in the past, present, and future.

—Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan, 2015

3. THE ARTISTS

Alfredo Juan Aquilizan, born 1962, Ballesteros, Cagayan province, the Philippines
Maria Isabel Gaudinez-Aquilizan, born 1965, Manila, the Philippines

Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan are a husband-and-wife team whose collective art practice spans over 20 years, during which they have shown in over 100 exhibitions throughout 25-plus countries and counting.

Originally from the Philippines, Alfredo and Isabel immigrated to Australia with their five children in 2006. For the Aquilizans, art and life are integrated and inseparable. Their art practice is autobiographical as well as responsive to people and place, and is built with a strong focus on community engagement. Through this process of collecting and collaborating, they create artworks that explore ideas of home, family, memory, sustainability, migration, and Australia–Asia relations.

Their artworks are often accumulative, meaning the artists continually build upon and rework them by adding more by way of material and narrative. Often, they invite members of the immediate community to contribute to their artworks in different ways, such as through the process of making, contributing ideas, and negotiating the direction the piece will take. This means that their artworks are often co-authored. Co-authorship means working with other people (as opposed to working under the direction of one person) to create an artwork and to share the acknowledgement for it.

The artists use everyday materials to make their artworks, and this choice supports their conceptual premise and resourcefulness. The works are often made out of materials associated with moving or travelling, such as cardboard packing boxes, tape, toothbrushes, or reclaimed and recycled materials. They attribute this to their experience of moving their whole family to a foreign country, and to living in a developing country for many years where resourcefulness is a part of everyday life and survival.

A community of particular inspiration to the Aquilizans' current practice is the Badjao people. The artists stayed with members of this community on a recent visit to the Philippines and were inspired by their plight, living conditions and evolving cultural traditions. Also known as 'sea gypsies', the Badjao people have been displaced and now live scattered across shorelines in the Philippines, Borneo, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The Badjao people are traditionally nomadic and seafaring, living in temporary dwellings built upon high stilts in the water's edge. Over time, changes to border control policy have restricted their ability to be nomadic, so now their previously temporary structures have become permanent, yet still precarious, water-based settlements. They are under increasing pressure to assimilate and move to more permanent housing, facing persecution for their traditional lifestyle and religion. This community is continually finding ways to evolve and adapt to displacement in a changing world environment. The Badjao people exemplify the Aquilizans' interest in ideas of self-identity and how they are impacted by displacement.

ARTWORK IN A BOX ALFREDO AND ISABEL AQUILIZAN

LOOK LEARN MAKE CURATE

IMAGE

Alfredo and Isabel AQUILIZAN
Lodge: Another Country 2014
cardboard, wood, paint
Courtesy of the artists and Fruitjuice
Factory Studio



DISCUSSION

Years 10–12

Think about different cultural groups throughout the world. How is place important in defining their sense of identity? How does displacement through migration or forced relocation impact identity?

ACTIVITY

Years 6–9

Activity 1

Think about a journey that you have taken. Where did you go? Talk about your memories of a journey that you took, describe where you went, and how you felt.

Activity 2

Consider what is needed to make somewhere feel like home. A home is more than a shelter or place to live—it is somewhere that is familiar, safe, and welcoming. Create a collage of words and images with what you think are needed to make somewhere feel like home.

Years 10–12

ACTIVITY

Activity 1

Research and write about your own ancestry, either in recent history or in the distant past.

Questions to consider in your research and written response: Where did your ancestors come from? Did they migrate or relocate from another country or different part of their country? Why did they leave? Was it by their own choice—were they seeking a better life? Or was it not by choice—were they forced to relocate?

Activity 2

Design an artwork using any medium that features the boat as symbol to communicate ideas around migration. Do a sketch of your artwork and write a short paragraph on the meaning you are aiming to convey through your choice of medium and depiction of the boat.

Questions to consider: What are different ways in which you can depict the boat? What medium can you use—is it 2D, 3D or digital? How does your choice of medium and depiction inform the viewer of your chosen meaning?

DISCUSSION

Years 6–9

For the Aquilizans, the boat serves as a universal symbol of new beginnings, hope, but sometimes tragedy. What else can boats symbolise?

Why is using cardboard important to the artists? What do you think cardboard can represent?

QUT Art Museum

Artwork in a box: Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan is a QUT Art Museum touring education program. This program is a QUT Widening Participation initiative ded by the Australian Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program.

ARTWORK IN A BOX ALFREDO AND ISABEL AQUILIZAN

LOOK LEARN MAKE CURATE

IMAGE (right)

Alfredo and Isabel AQUILIZAN
Settlement public program installation in
conjunction with *Fragments: Another Country* 2013
Courtesy of the artists and QUT Art Museum

IMAGE (bottom)

Alfredo and Isabel AQUILIZAN
In-Flight-Project: Another Country 2009
Courtesy of the artists

ACTIVITY

All year levels

This activity should be completed if your students' works are to be included in the ongoing project *A Country Too Far* (working title).

Activity

Return to the houseboat you made during the *Artwork in a box* in-classroom program and start to build on the form and narratives that you created. Through experiment and play, become more aware and sensitive to the qualities of the cardboard, introducing textures and smaller details in the re-working of your houseboat. You may wish to add to your text on the label tied to your houseboat. This is also an opportunity to ensure your houseboat is secure and sturdy. Use hot glue guns, additional tape, staples, etc., to make your work more durable.

The artists' only request is that the students leave the cardboard in its raw state—not painted, coloured, or covered up—because the fact that the houseboat is made of cardboard is important to the meaning of the work. As discussed above, the cardboard references packing boxes, the container of precious personal items during transit, but is also a symbol of migration and displacement. Aesthetically, the raw state of the cardboard will make for a visually cohesive artwork when the houseboats are installed collectively.

GROUP ACTIVITY

All year levels

Work together to install a semi-permanent display of the boats created by the students. Before installing, consider the space carefully—discuss qualities and limitations of the space, and best approaches to displaying the works.

The Aquilizans employ a number of techniques to show their collaborative, co-authored artworks. These include:

Placing artworks in a large pile, with some carefully suspended from the ceiling above;

Pinning the houseboat to the wall in either a random pattern or a formal grid;

Placing them on shelves or inside boxes.

As a group, talk about methods to document the display and store the artworks after the installation comes down (for students not wanting to keep their work). As mentioned above, the Aquilizans will collect a sample of the student-made artworks at a later date for their project, *A Country Too Far* (working title).

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