



**Being Together
Parramatta Yearbook**

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Being Together

Cherine Fahd

I like meeting and talking to strangers. I want a small suburban shop where I can set up an old-school photographic studio and wear an all-red uniform. People could drop in and chat, and we'd make pictures of them that they'd be proud to take home and share. But businesses like that don't exist anymore. Instead, for a short time, under the guise of art, I take to the streets of Parramatta, approaching strangers and cautiously asking, 'Can I make a portrait of you?' And, because it's for art, the person says, 'yes.'

Being Together: Parramatta Yearbook begins in this moment of artistic and communal cooperation. Between November 2021 and July 2022, we made portraits of people at various locations in Parramatta's CBD. We set up a makeshift studio to create portraits of the people who live, work and play in the eternal becoming of Parramatta. While people stirred within the city's numerous construction projects, with new buildings emerging and not so old ones dissolving, we spoke and posed and preened against the backdrop of scaffolds, cranes and abseiling window cleaners.

Making portraits brings people together. Principally, me a photographer *with* a stranger or strangers. Photography makes me social. I like people. I want to look at people, how they dress, if in colours or patterns or brands; how they do their hair; whether they wear face masks or fake eyelashes and painted nails; how they hold their bags; how they walk, their gait. These are

talkative details. My looking is never judgmental, but curious and purposeful.

The representational modes of the portrait and the yearbook are ritual performances that entice us into familiar photographic scenes. We know their forms well. People are organised to face the camera. They are instructed to smile, be serious and then silly. The camera captures their likeness, status, their classification and belonging (or not) to a group or class. Think of the school portrait and group portraits of sporting teams, corporate portraits, community gatherings, family portraits, and individual identity shots organised in an annual yearbook.

Parramatta Yearbook wants to show you the moments leading up to, during and after a portrait is made. An assortment of cut-up images, bright colours and kindergarten shapes reveal the outtakes and minutiae. There are formal portraits as well.

Don't just look at the faces, though. There are handbags, shoes, a camera. What about the organisation of hands and knees, the behind-the-scenes crew, the studio gear, the fluffy microphone, the wind, the crane and abseilers, the videographer and curator, the architecture old and new, the Ibis birds, shop signs and passers-by?

Imagine the city's sounds, the drills and hammers, the reversing truck beeping incessantly. In the montage, try to hear our conversations, the negotiations, verbal and non-verbal cues, the revelations of personal stories, the pronunciations hinting at lives lived in faraway lands, the sharing of personal insecurities, the pointing out of perceived deficiencies in one's appearance, the need for guidance and reassurance from the photographer all dressed in red, the reliance on her instruction, the desire for comfort, a sense of being okay and being good enough.

Can the *Yearbook* convey all this? Photographic images of ourselves are inherent to social life. Twenty-first-century existence is incessantly mediated by and through a technology that envelops, absorbs and challenges us — the powerful pull

to see ourselves in a photograph persists. Since photography's invention we have wanted to be conserved, to be able to see ourselves the way others do, to be visible, represented and valued. We want to look beautiful and handsome and funny and say, 'I was here.'

Like a time machine, the *Yearbook* is a record of a people and a place at a particular time. The time is Covid-19, the place is the City of Parramatta. The people are, above all, friendly, trusting, open and affectionate. They are teachers, nurses, builders, beauty therapists, bankers, baristas and drivers; counsellors, social workers and hairdressers; security guards, florists, refugees, restaurateurs, reformed criminals, activists, authors and athletes; gardeners, tradies and singers; librarians, public servants, train drivers, garbage collectors, football fans and families; artists, bakers, street cleaners, students, retirees, shoppers, teenagers, mothers and fathers — and a hundred other vital things.

Street as Studio

Eda Gunaydin

Cherine Fahd says that she is a photographer who is less interested in photographic outcomes than in everything that surrounds and precedes them: human dynamics, process and interactions between people. She stopped painting, she says, despite training as a painter, because it's too solitary an activity, one that does not place a premium on being with others, communing with people as people.

Being especially drawn and committed to the artistic potential of the photographic portrait, Fahd brings a relentless warmth and energy to each of her Parramatta encounters, chatting easily with her subjects as she seats them, asking them to pose, sometimes seriously — capturing a steely glint in a unionist's eye — and other times playfully — encouraging a local who has stepped into the artist's orbit off the street to lift his shirt to proudly show off his chest tats. Everyone's laughter is genuine. Often Fahd is so absorbed in conversation or charmed by an encounter that she steps in front of the camera herself, wanting to be captured alongside her subjects who, in these moments, cease to be merely subjects alone and are instead fully alive and equal collaborators.

And yet process is a thing, I joke, that photographs are particularly bad at distilling. All the movement and flux of life, all of the world's contingencies are flattened and often hidden within the still image. Portraiture in particular has frequently been employed to reify, to stop time: cement the rule of a leader,

for example, or freeze an important figure in their life's prime. Nothing is really static, though. Nothing ever really stops moving. Dynasties may rise and fall, but new ones take their place; faces may age and wither, but their likenesses live on in the eyes, the quirk of the lips and the strong noses of their descendants; we graduate from high school, we cry (some don't), we move towards the next milestone.

Just as photographs can sometimes sell us the myth of finality, so too do cities. While witnessing Fahd at work on the streets of Parramatta, I get to chatting with a local, a fellow artist, who has just finished sitting for a portrait. I ask a silly question, our conversation punctuated by the click-click of the camera, the mill of bodies in and out of Centenary Square. 'When do you think this will all be done?' I gesture out in one of five directions, to the scaffolding that peppers the skyline and has become the norm. She responds, 'What do you mean by done? Urban development is never done.'

Headlines about Parramatta will tell you that it is a city on the move, a city that won't sit still. Soon, it will be Sydney's 'second CBD', a moniker it is well on its way to claiming via the pounding and banging of construction that underscores every moment one spends outside. This is the soundtrack of new high-rise housing, office towers and a multi-billion dollar light rail being assembled on the landscape. On match days, traffic in and around the city is so bad that you're better off parking in Granville and taking the train to Western Sydney Stadium. Lines for the off-ramp — dubbed 'crash alley' by many — queue for hundreds of metres and slow motorists to a crawl. But when you arrive, the mash of bodies on Church Street is so dense and the people wearing the same colours and singing the same songs all look so different.

In one of the most multicultural parts of Australia, Fahd does not have to try in order to capture the area's cultural diversity. It is neither an explicit mission nor an end-goal of these portraits, but rather a fact of life here, just part of the process; an

inevitable result of the relentless hum of people moving in and out of a place that is indeed central, not only for business but also for governance, family, art and play. This is what Fahd's people-centric account of Parramatta instils: portraits that put people front and centre, remind us that if you go somewhere that everyone wants to be, that's where you will find everyone.

Like photographs, cities often obscure the histories of their development. Fahd never puts outcome over process and nor should we. To make meaning out of where we are we must remember how we got here. These portraits do not only tell us about what is new, but also about the history of this place. Heritage, conservation and environmentalist community groups question what these new buildings are erected on top of. Although heritage activism is a modern phenomenon, this question — what is the human and cultural cost of 'development'? — is not a new one, but rather one that has been posed since the colonisation of this continent commenced over two hundred years ago. When I think of Parramatta, I think of some of its oldest trees which sit in Parramatta Park and bear scars from where bark had been stripped away by the Burramattagal people of the Dharug nation to build canoes. They remind us that in among everything that has changed and will keep changing, First Nations peoples' connection to this land is permanent. These photographs are another kind of permanency and ask us, again and again, to think about Parramatta as if people matter.

Eda Gunaydin is a Turkish-Australian essayist whose writing explores class, race, diaspora and Western Sydney. Her essay *Second City* (2019), published in the Sydney Review of Books, explored the changing social and urban landscapes of Parramatta. Gunaydin has been a finalist for a Queensland Literary Award and the Scribe Non-Fiction Prize. Her debut essay collection *Root & Branch: Essays on Inheritance* (2022) is published by NewSouth Publishing.













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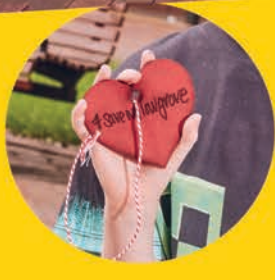
















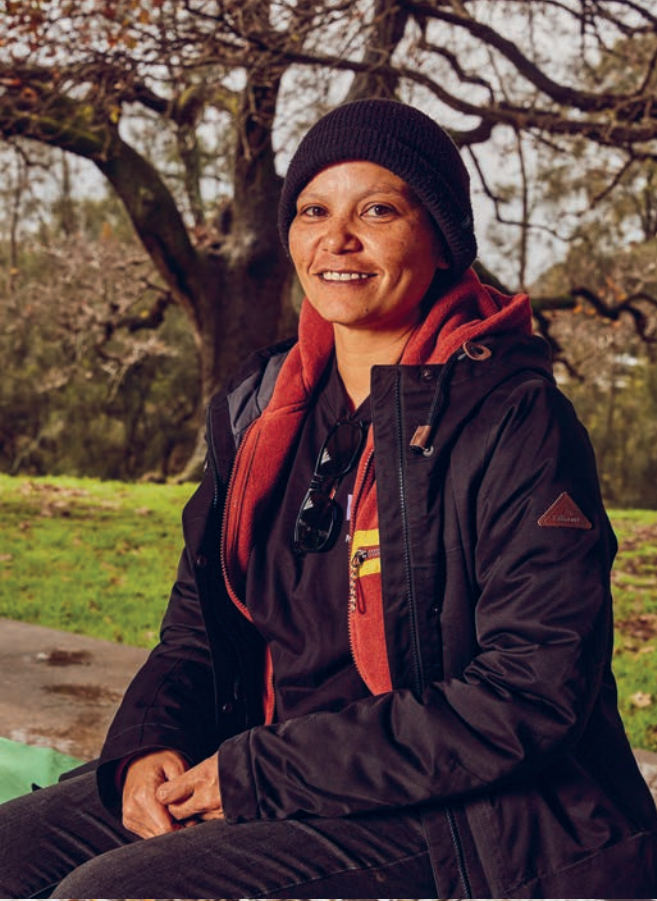




















































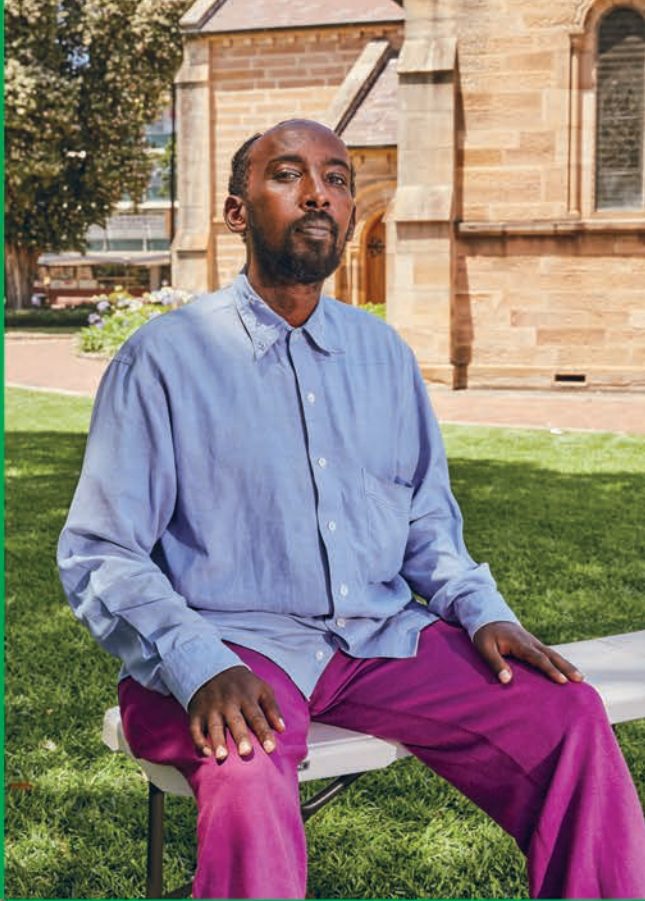


































Being Together: Parramatta Yearbook
Cherine Fahd

8 August – 3 October

Being Together: Parramatta Yearbook was the outcome of a series of conversations and shared experiences between artists and community members. It was conceived and produced by Cherine Fahd in partnership with Parramatta Artists' Studios, an initiative of the City of Parramatta. The yearbook is a collection of stories, images and voices that celebrate the diversity and richness of the Parramatta community. It is a testament to the power of art to bring people together and create a sense of belonging.

Parramatta is a culturally diverse place, home to a wide range of communities and backgrounds. The yearbook captures the unique stories and experiences of these communities, from the traditional to the contemporary. It is a celebration of the many faces and voices that make up the Parramatta community.

The yearbook was created through a series of workshops and conversations with community members. It is a collaborative effort that reflects the shared experiences and stories of the Parramatta community.

The yearbook is available for free viewing at the Parramatta Town Hall. It is also available for purchase from the Parramatta Artists' Studios. The yearbook is a beautiful and meaningful work of art that celebrates the diversity and richness of the Parramatta community.

Behind the art

The yearbook is a collaborative work of art that celebrates the diversity and richness of the Parramatta community. It is a testament to the power of art to bring people together and create a sense of belonging.

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Cherine Fahd, *Being Together: Parramatta Yearbook* (2021–2022), produced and presented by C3West on behalf of the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in partnership with Parramatta Artists' Studios, an initiative of the City of Parramatta. Photo courtesy and © the artist. Photo: Garry Trinh.



About the artist

Cherine Fahd is one of Australia's leading photographic artists. For over twenty years she has exhibited, written and curated works that focus on photography and video performance. Her projects often incorporate members of the public as well as her immediate family, friends and community. Concentrating on portraiture, as a cultural and social practice, *Being Together: Parramatta Yearbook* is focused on the ways photography can bring people and communities together. Cherine's work has been commissioned by major cultural institutions in Australia including Sydney Opera House, Carriageworks, Performance Space and the Art Gallery of New South Wales. She is also an educator and Associate Professor at the University of Technology Sydney in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building.

cherinefahd.com

About C3West

C3West is a curatorial program of the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. It is predicated on the belief that artists can bring unique value to situations beyond the gallery context. Through careful brokerage processes, C3West creates contexts in which artists work strategically with businesses, non-arts government organisations and arts partners across Western Sydney.

C3West's mission is to place contemporary artists at the core of projects that align corporate social investment with community development—giving voice to local issues and collaborating with the business sector in new ways. C3West's business partners work with us to define each project's scope. Our commissioned artists highly value the specialised knowledge about participant communities held by both our arts and business partners.

Since its first project in 2007, C3West has delivered 23 groundbreaking projects and established a reputation for developing ethical partnerships with Western Sydney partners and communities, delivering uniquely creative and strategic outcomes.

Being Together: Parramatta Yearbook is C3West's first partnership with Parramatta Artists' Studios, an initiative of the City of Parramatta and the energetic home for creative production in Western Sydney that supports artists' practices and careers.

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