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## Memoirs from Alumni - 2006 - 07

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### Rosa Tato

*Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia  
 Exchange to East China Normal University, China*

I am a visual artist, coming to the end of my Honours Programme in Fine Arts at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). The idea of spending time in China to research one's arts practice is exquisite and decadent to say the least! I have no doubt that it will unravel for many years to come as the benefits, unique experiences and memories will begin to appear in my work.

That initial one and a half hour taxi ride journey from the airport to East China Normal University (ECNU) averaging speeds of 140km/h, zig-zagging through traffic can be visually compared to being the passenger in a video game. This perhaps summarized my stay in China, as I experienced a myriad of interesting and unexpected situations, emotions, and culturally memorable experiences.



Having operated a Work and Travel Organization for 12 years in Melbourne, one would have thought it would have put me in good stead for the gamut of possibilities of what an overseas experience was all about. This time I was the participant! Being on the other end, as a recipient of such a generous scholarship, was extraordinary. I was immersed in a culture and language so foreign from my own cultural heritage. It has enabled me to extend my art practice in a way that is rich, culturally loaded and defined by my love of textiles.

My experience was broken up into two stages due to my personal circumstances. ECNU School of Art provided an art studio, and after several meetings with staff we were left to our own devices to source materials, and essentially develop a body of work related to our studio practice and studies in Australia. The sourcing of materials and equipment took me to places far and wide. Every day it enabled me to interact with suppliers and/or practicing artists. Every day brought new experiences, as I ventured out into the streets, sometimes without my phrase book.

I am so grateful for the opportunity as the funds and experience allowed me, as an artist, to experience Shanghai at a time where the art community is growing and establishing itself to be placed at the forefront of the international art arena. Physically, culturally and historically, Shanghai embodies vitality and a drive to move forward. This was reflected in the way it has embraced contemporary culture. The experience gave me an opportunity to visit many artist-run spaces during the Shanghai Biennale, as well as state and private art spaces. I also attended talks and forums, performances and art festivals, enabling me to engage with many Chinese emerging artists. This has fostered much communication and further interest in exchange of ideas.

The visit to Hangzhou Silk Museum has further enriched the historical context of my research, along with visiting several textile factories and markets in Shanghai and in the surrounding provinces.

The RMIT School of Art had a vision to further internationalize their artist in residence programmes, and I would like to thank all those involved. This experience gave me the opportunity to generate artwork that I was able to reinstall quite literally into the streets of Shanghai, and discuss the nature of my artwork with the locals.

Some important things to consider before heading to China:

- Design your namecard before you go and have them printed over there. I cannot stress the importance of this enough;
- Attend all pre-departure orientation sessions;
- Try and meet other people who have been to your university; and
- Go with an open mind.

Thanks to Cheung Kong, for fostering international exchange, and to Peter Westwood, Elizabeth Grierson and the staff at the RMIT Abroad Unit for overseeing the first Cheung Kong Scholarship for RMIT School of Art. For that I am grateful.

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