

# anzjat

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## Plumb bob lines

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### Plumb bobs in flight

I (Anita) was in transit at Shanghai airport, en route from Sydney to Goldsmiths College in London, when I was called aside by airport security and questioned about my cargo of 15 vintage brass builders' plumb bobs, barrels of string, and metal pulleys, all placed carefully at the base of my luggage. These shapes appeared on the x-ray security as dense, suspicious-looking objects. In an age of terror, heightened anxiety, and distrust of all things different, my steely response went down a practical line: "Oh, they are just tools for building".

To declare that they were, in fact, a pivotal component of an art installation at the International Art Therapy Conference 'Finding spaces, making places'<sup>1</sup> felt, in that moment, too complicated and somewhat less convincing.

With too much at stake to risk provoking increased tension and even confiscation, I felt that a purely utilitarian response, devoid of political or artistic inferences, would provide a clear passage. (After all, these objects are builders' tools, even if my pragmatic response faintly echoed a stereotype about the literal and metaphorical construction of modern China.)

Months earlier in Sydney, in response to an invitation to Sheridan Linnell and me from our Goldsmiths colleagues, Leslie Morris and Jill Westwood, to join them in constructing the major conference art exhibition, I had begun to imagine an installation of builders' plumb bobs and string: an exploration of negative spaces, boundaries, border crossings, and the weight of memories. The need to respond to the ethical call of difference, transience, and displacement – in light of the unprecedented numbers of people crossing land, sea, and borders in

search of refuge and safety – had resonated as strongly with us in Australia as it had with our European colleagues. My father had been a builder, and Sheridan's a stone mason. When I showed Sheridan the first plumb bob, our memories, feelings, ideas, and associations multiplied and our course was set for London.

In that moment in Shanghai it appeared that the plumb bobs' attempt at border crossing was being contested. Then an arbitrary wave of the customs officer's hand offered these objects safe passage to their next destination.

Anita Lever

### plumb lines

*autumn infusion*

*in my tent-shaped studio*

*dripping pearls of tea*

*in an art brochure*

*'tent city' sounds romantic.*

*wake up. smell the shit.*

*dangling from false strings*

*hope has insecure borders*

*fear hits the marked ones*

*the angel merkel*

*at the gate won't keep them out*

*just to get back in*

*asylum seeker*

*on the island that chokes dreams –*

*a plumb bob, hanging*

*cockatoos shriek out*

*on our isle of conviction*

*boat docks and wharf groans*

*you draw something good*

*from hoardings of memory*

*brass, wood, ink and string*