

are my feet in the way

(a blog by kári gíslason)

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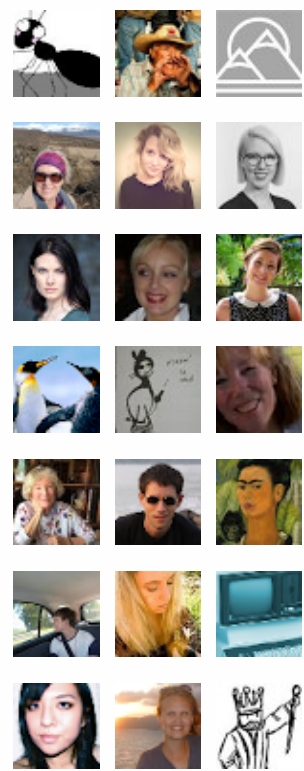
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Drawing to Write

Sometimes you need to draw or take photographs before you see a building or landscape properly. Here are some of my sketches, all but one o...



Saga Land

A four-part radio series about Iceland and the sagas that I made with Richard Fidler has been released on podcast, and is available for free...

Craft: A Clive James Piece (in Rome)

Here is a breakdown of one of Clive James' travel pieces, his 1979 "Postcard from Rome", which is available in full on James&#...



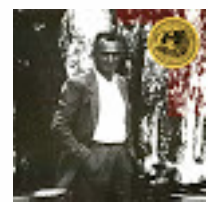
Avid Reader Big Breakfast Book Club

On Sunday 1 November, I'll be speaking at Avid Reader Bookshop's Big Breakfast bookclub. As I understand it, you don't need to b...



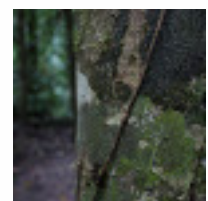
Year of the Memoir (Express)

Over five Saturdays in the first half of 2016, I'll be teaching a masterclass course for the Queensland Writers Centre called 'Expre...



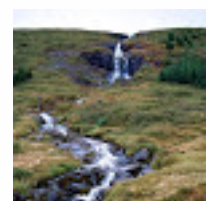
Of Romulus, My Father

My Reading Australia introduction to Raimond Gaita's Romulus, My Father (Text, 1999) has been published in Australian Book Review and ...



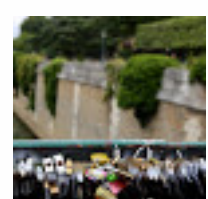
Outspoken Maleny

On Sunday 21 August, I'll be in conversation with Richard Fidler and Steven Lang as part of the "Outspoken Maleny" series. F...



ABC Bookworms interview

An interview that I recently did with David Curnow on ABC Radio's "Bookworms" program is now available online (here). David ...



Working with Words Interview

Last week, I was interviewed by Melbourne's Wheeler Centre for their Working with Words series. The centre grew up around Melbourne'...



Pictures that ask the right questions

Last week, I published this short piece in the Queensland Writer's Centre magazine, WQ, about photographs and memoir. "I expect man...

Saturday, March 23, 2013

Letter from Vietnam, by Bernard Appassamy



In transit at Tan Son Nhat International airport, I felt a shock, albeit of delight, reading a sign inside the cafeteria: 'Bánh patê sô/ patê chaud'.

Like many Mauritians brought up as Catholics, my childhood on Sunday mornings was marked by pastries after mass at the patisserie inevitably located across the road from the church. Pâté chaud could be found at Patisserie Unic across from our parish church, Notre Dame de Lourdes in Rose-Hill and Patisserie Golden across the Sacré Coeur church in nearby Beau-Bassin. But the absolute best, stuff-of-legend pâtés chauds were sold at the aptly named Sainte Thérèse Patisserie in Curepipe at the centre of the island.

Not to be confused with hot liver pâté, patê chaud is a round puff pastry with crinkled edges and a piquant minced meat and onion filling cooked dry. Always served

hot, the pastry is crisp on the outside and flaky-moist on the inside. Whilst in Mauritius the meat is invariably beef, it can be pork or chicken sometime mixed with potato mash in Vietnam. Originally from Brittany in France, it would seem to have disappeared from France.

At 'Une journée à Paris' patisserie in Ho Chi Minh City, we sampled an altogether different patê chaud, this time stuffed with chicken mince cooked with turmeric, a traditional recipe of the owner's originally from French Guyana.

While still living in Mauritius as a young adult, my first experience of Vietnam was through the sound of Indochine, a French new-wave rock band with oriental chords reminiscent of The Cure. Launched in 1981, Indochine remains France's biggest selling band overseas. In 2006, to celebrate their 25th anniversary, Indochine played in concert with Hanoi's Symphony Orchestra at Hanoi's Opera House, a smaller copy of the Paris Opera Garnier. Perched above that same stage for a Christmas gala concert, I pictured Indochine's provocative '3 nuits par semaine' (3 nights per week) and '3eme Sexe' (3rd Sex) lyrics being sung to a most likely unsuspecting audience.

A few days later, in the remote village of Lat in Lam Dong Province, I found myself listening with astonishment to nursery rhymes I had not heard for close to fifty years, 'Il y a un rat dans le grenier' (There's a rat in the attic) and 'Sur la route de Louviers' (On the road to Louviers). That same day, back in Dalat and over dinner at 'La Grenouillère' restaurant on the edge of Swan Lake, I recognised 'Petit papa Noel' coming through the speakers in Vietnamese.

My time in Vietnam was punctuated with such flashes of familiarity. Those cultural beacons drew parallels between the common French colonial past of our two countries, but also dug up sketchy memories, like a horizon abruptly brought into closer view. More than the pâtés chauds, Vietnam gave me a forgotten taste of Mauritius.

The author:

Bernard Appassamy is a Sydney-based artist and writer. Some of his other work can be found [here](#).



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