

**MEDIA RELEASE
28 JUNE 2017**

A portrait of Connection: House of Welcome enters 2017 Archibald Prize with a challenge to the political discourse about people seeking asylum.

The House of Welcome has joined forces with Atefeh Hekmat, an artist and art teacher seeking asylum in Sydney, to create a collaborative portrait designed to evoke moments of connection with people who have sought Australia's protection.

Born out of relentless frustration with the negative discourse most often used by Australia's politicians and conservative media surrounding the issue of refugees and people seeking asylum, the project aims to provoke the viewer into considering their own positive interactions and relationships.

Using the theme of 'Connection', the portrait celebrates the contribution of Guo Jian, a former refugee and now internationally renowned Australian Artist. Jian is flanked by 27 tiles, each carrying personal stories of connection contributed by clients who are seeking asylum, volunteers and friends of the House of Welcome community.

According to House of Welcome CEO, Lyn Harrison:

"Many of today's politicians purposefully choose language that dehumanises people seeking Australia's protection. It is heavily focused on removing the human connection that exists between people."

The Archibald Prize presented House of Welcome with the opportunity to remind people of the personal connection they have made with friends, relatives, classmates and colleagues who have fled their country of origin. We want people to reflect on how that connection has positively touched their lives and then choose to take positive action to ensure Australia provides a welcoming home to those who need our protection."

For lead artist Atefeh Hekmat, a former gallery owner and artist in Tehran, the opportunity to lead the project was immensely personal:

"I jumped at the chance to do this project because it's an opportunity to appreciate all those who have welcomed me and seen the contribution I can make, both as an artist and a friend."

Portraiture deals with truth. Sometimes it is the truth we want to see, sometimes it is the truth we want to hide. Everyone will have their own story, but it is my hope that upon viewing, each person will recognise the good in themselves and the personal connection they can make to enhance the lives of others."

To donate to House of Welcome, please visit: www.stfrancis.org.au

FOR INTERVIEW / PHOTO OP: Ina Mullin / 0412 377 217 / ina.mullin@stfrancis.org.au Katherine Nelson / 0430 413 011 / k.nelson@houseofwelcome.com.au

About House of Welcome

Since 2001, the House of Welcome has existed to welcome, shelter and empower people seeking asylum and refugees regardless of their age, gender, sexuality, nationality or religion. We provide client-centred holistic supports that nurture hope, advocate for justice and promote self-reliance, whilst acknowledging the dignity and the rights of each individual. Services provided include: Accommodation, case work, employment & financial assistance, household necessities, English lessons, community luncheons and the Welcome Feast social enterprise.

House of Welcome is a project of St Francis Social Services. Our vision is for a society in which there is full recognition of the dignity, equality, human rights and humanity of all people. We work towards this by providing services that uphold the dignity of each person by providing support and advocacy to the most disadvantaged and marginalised within our community.