



*Gina*

**CASULA  
POWERHOUSE  
ARTS CENTRE**

**EDUCATION KIT**

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## CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Glossary	2
Biography	3
Part One: War	4
Part Two: Migration	8
Part Three: Eugen - Gina's husband	10
References	13

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION



Me, 2006

**A**RT IS MADE TO TELL A STORY. From the artist to the viewer, which is you and me. We are going to discover some of the stories from the exhibition, GINA. What's really important about art is what makes it matter to you. It might be a lovely shade of blue that you like or the way the sun looks in a painting. Art can matter for all sorts of different reasons and none of them are wrong. The art that is made for this exhibition, GINA, is all about the life and experiences of artist Gina Sinozich. It tells of her history in Istria, her memories of World War II and migration to Australia, her family, her garden and caring for her husband Eugen. The artworks in this Education Kit are a selection chosen by Casula Powerhouse's Public Programs team from the many that are on show.

We would like to acknowledge the Cabrogal Clan of the Darug Nation who are the traditional custodians of the land that now resides within Liverpool City Council's boundaries. We acknowledge that this land was also accessed by peoples of the Dhurawal and Darug Nations.

## GLOSSARY

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<b>Migration</b>	Human migration involves the movement of people from one place to another with intentions of settling, permanently or temporarily, at a new location (geographic region).
<b>Dementia</b>	Describes a collection of symptoms that are caused by disorders affecting the brain. It is not one specific disease. It affects thinking, behaviour and the ability to perform everyday tasks. Brain function is affected enough to interfere with the person's normal social or working life. The most common experiences of dementia are confusion, forgetfulness, losing the ability to read and do maths. It affects thinking, behaviour and the ability to perform everyday tasks, making it difficult for people to maintain independence.
<b>Communism</b>	A philosophical, social, political, and economic ideology and movement whose ultimate goal is the establishment of a communist society, namely a socioeconomic order structured upon the ideas of common ownership of the means of production and the absence of social classes, money, and the state. As such, communism is a specific form of socialism.
<b>Nazism</b>	The ideology and practices associated with Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in Nazi Germany. During Hitler's rise to power, it was frequently referred to as Hitlerism.
<b>Partizan/partisan</b>	A member of an organized body of fighters who attack or harass an enemy, especially within occupied territory; a guerrilla.
<b>Self-taught</b>	Having knowledge or skills acquired by one's own efforts without formal instruction
<b>Repatriation</b>	Returned to one's homeland

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## BIOGRAPHY

As many of her paintings come from Gina Sinozich's memories, this education kit will make a lot of references to her life. Please use the biography to help you if you need clarification around her life.

Gina Soldatic was born in Istria (Croatia) in 1930, the only daughter of seven children. Her father died when she was 8 due to complications from injuries from World War I.

By 1943, during World War II, Gina's five older brothers were forced to fight, leaving Gina, her Mother and her little brother at home for two years to tend to their farm. The school had closed down and life was very much about survival during the war. Gina did a catering course at the age of 16 after leaving home when she was 15.

She married Eugen Sinozich in 1950 and had her first son Peter two years later. Gina and Eugen lived in Rijeke (a city in Croatia) until 1956. Gina and Eugen and their two children left all of their belongings behind and fled to Trieste (Italy) to visit Gina's mother. They stayed in Italy for eighteen months before traveling to Australia in 1957. They bought a plot of land and settled in Edmondson Park, Liverpool.

Eugen was diagnosed with dementia in 1998. As Eugen's dementia worsened Gina was unable to take care of the Edmondson Park farm. She needed to be closer to shopping and transportation as she became Eugen's carer. Gina and Eugen moved from Edmondson Park to Casula in 2000. It was this year, after having moved to Casula, that Gina started painting at the age of 70.

*One day I was walking home from Casula Mall Shopping Centre and the council workers who were working in the street left this big sign behind. A 'warning workers on the road' sign. I picked the sign up, took it home and washed it and cut it in half and did a little painting of a church. It didn't come out exactly the way I wanted, but anyway it was a memory of back home. Since then, I love painting" Gina Sinozich, 2003*

Gina painted almost daily for the following twenty years. She began painting on found materials and is self-taught. Gina painted about issues and events that resonated with her, memories of war, migration and the loss of Eugen to dementia. She also painted her garden, her family, and her Catholic faith. She painted to communicate and retain her memories for her family and future generations. She wanted those that endured war to feel heard and cared for and to help make sure that by telling the story of her experience it could possibly be avoided happening again. She painted the good, the bad and the ugly.

Gina returned to Istria for the first time in 2004 and spent much of her time there studying documents in the library for traces of her family and memories from the war.

Gina died in 2020.



## PART ONE: WAR

On the 22nd June, 1941, Operation Barbarossa began, it was the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union. The area of Istria was under Italian rule and many people were persecuted in the attempt to Italianize the national identity. The German forces reached Senovik, the small village in Istria where Gina lived with her mother and six brothers in 1943. By this time Gina's five older brothers were forced to fight in the military leaving Gina, her

mother and younger brother at home for two years. The Partisan party was a home army which actively rebelled and fought against foreign occupation. Gina's mother would leave for long stretches of time, providing food and clothing to partisan members in the mountainside, leaving Gina in charge of the house, farm and younger brother. They did not have any luxuries but they had what they needed to survive.

Through Gina's imagery we can see the arrival of German troops in Senovik and the surrounding villages. We can see soldiers marching, tanks and military vehicles travelling through the small villages. These images are ingrained into Gina's memory as a thirteen year old girl. Gina recalls an incident in which speaking Italian feigning her ignorance of the Partizan Party (of which 3 of her brothers were members of at this point) saved her life when German soldiers took her from her home.

**Big ideas:** Home, childhood, family, memories, history

### Questions and Activities:

- What about the painting tells us that the soldiers are German? What can you see?
- What colours are used in this painting?



*Germans in our Home, 2002*

Following the war, Istria was under communist rule and people had to queue in line for everything. Sometimes queuing for hours only to be left empty-handed. Life was very hard. Food and milk were rationed.

Gina left home at the age of fifteen and met her future husband Eugen Sinozich. Gina and Eugen lived in Rijeke until 1956. They got married in 1950 in secret. They had their first son Peter two years later. Gina was beginning to make a life for herself, but it was very difficult in post war Istria. Eugen and Gina knew that they had to leave but they couldn't let anybody know or they would be thrown into jail.

In the artwork we see a long queue of people. It captures the sombre feeling that Gina remembers in waiting hours for rations.

**Big Ideas:** Home, childhood, family, memories, history

**Questions and Activities**

- What clues does the title of the artwork give you about the story in the artwork?
- What significance does the colour orange play in this work?
- If you had to ration food, what would be on your food list. Write down your food supplies.



*in this painting is true story. I been queing from 3 ocl. in the morning in very cold winter until 6. ocl the shop open for 1Lt of milk, 2002*



*our wedding i.1950 becose of comunist regim we HAVE NOT been alowed in the church. we been marryd secretli at night 12.Oct, 2002*

This artwork is Gina's way of capturing a keepsake of her church wedding to Eugen for her children. They were unable to have photographers present because of how dangerous it was. This image, like many of Gina's artworks, has been painted completely from memory.

**Big Ideas:** Home, childhood, family, memories, history

**Questions and Activities:**

- Think about a big event that happened while you were very young. How would you show this as an image? What small details do you remember? How would you tell the story without using words?
- Make an artwork that has been inspired by your own memories.



## PART TWO: MIGRATION

In April 1956 Gina, Eugen and their children left all of their possessions and fled from Istria to Trieste, Italy. They sought asylum in Italy for 18 months until they were able to migrate to Australia in 1957. In 'Our Story' Gina elaborates on the journey from Italy to Australia. The text in the image reads:

"This is my story (Gina story)

*We left the green hill of Istria and my favourite little church on the hill and left all our possession, but that was not the hardest part to do my hardest thing was not be able to say goodbye, specially to my brother Riko. We lived in about 100mt distance. He would come everyday to see my children and play with them. The night before we left Riko come to see the kid, He could not stop cuddle and kissing them and he thought we are going away only for a while. Riko ask me How long will we be gone away, and he said don't be too long because I will miss my kids! Now this was a very hard for me!!! My heart broke in pieces and a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes I mumble 2 weeks. I could not tell Him we will not be back. Because of a strong communist regime was ruling Yugoslavia, and if they come to know that we are leaving the country we would all go*

*in jail (prison)we stay in Italy for 18 months when our paper come thru. We embark on the ship Neptunia on 19.7.1957 from Genova, Italy to Melbourne Australia, on 16.8.1957. in the Indian ocean a strong sea storm come we thought we will be tipped over. Finally arrive at our destination in this beautiful country, land of opportunity and friendly people. All our dream fulfill. We are HAPPY to call Australia Home Sweet Home!!!"*

This story was so important to Gina, which is why she included it as text in this painting. It tells of the heartbreak Gina felt at leaving her brother without saying goodbye. The little church on the hill in Istria can be seen in the top left of the image whilst Australia, surrounded by black and ocean, is upside down in the bottom right. The Neptunia, the boat that the family migrated on is perched precariously on the edge of a waterfall. Suspended between the known and loved landscape of Istria and the mysterious land of Australia.

Gina, Eugen and their children settled on a farm in Edmonson Park near Liverpool, NSW.



Our Story, 2004

**Big ideas:** Home, family, safety, journeys

### Questions and Activities:

Tell the story of how you get to school each day through image and text. Here are some prompts to help you:

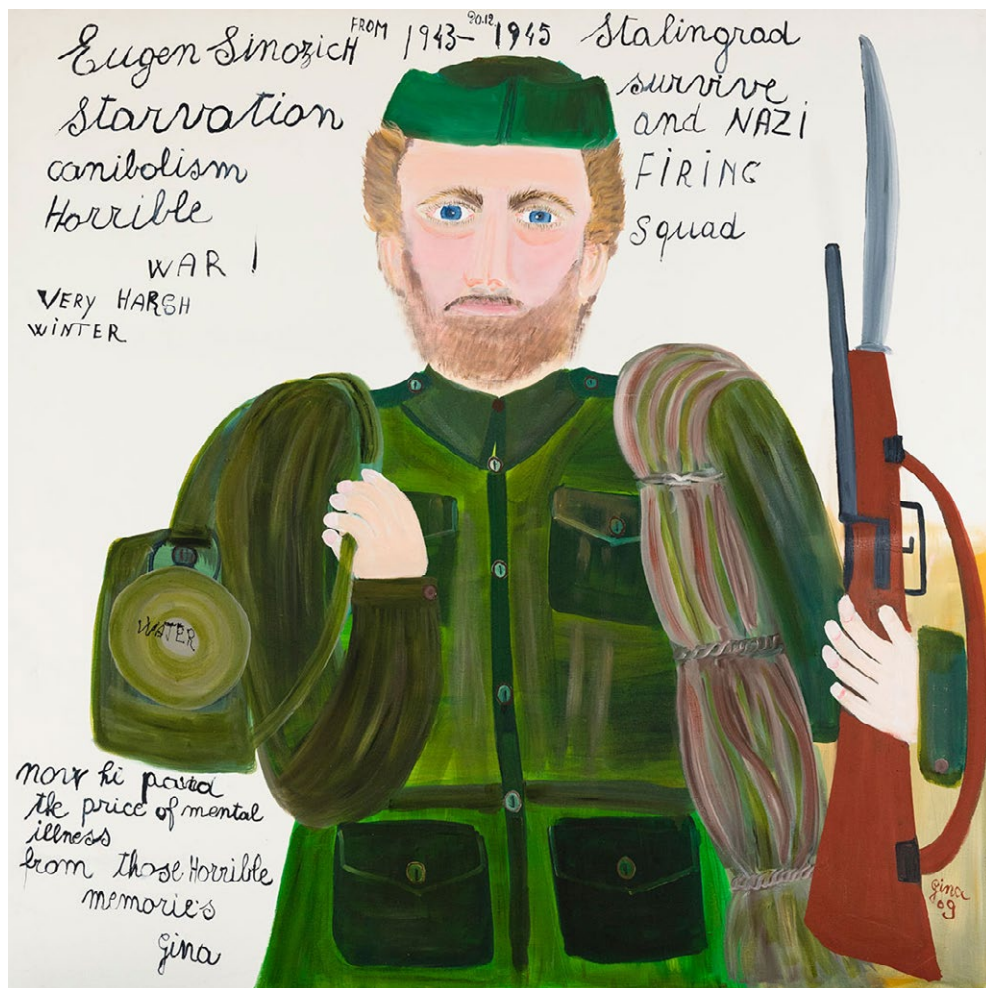
- What do you walk/ride or drive past?
- What do these places mean to you?
- Are there any landmarks along the way?
- Have you ever moved house or gone on holiday?

- Do you remember leaving your house?
- How did it feel to be going to a new place to live, even if it was just for a little bit?
- Make a code out of colours and shapes to represent your different emotion states. Excitement, fear, joy, tiredness.
- Make a map of the adventure using the code.

## PART THREE: EUGEN – GINA'S HUSBAND

Eugen is a big part of Gina's life and a major subject in her paintings. He was a member of the Partizan Party when it first began. Many of the paintings Gina made of Eugen are drawn from stories Eugen told Gina about his life before they met each other. The

image below is painted from Eugen's experiences after the war. Around the figure of Eugen we can see words like starvation, firing squad and very harsh winter. These words tell us that his experiences were horrible and he was lucky to survive.



Portrait of Eugen, 2009

There are other images that share the journey that Eugen went on as a prisoner of war with his friend Rudi, in a cattle car and surviving the harsh winter with only the clothing on their backs.

Gina and Eugen moved from Edmonson Park to Casula in 2000 due to a decline

in Eugen's health and a diagnosis of dementia. As Eugen's dementia worsened Gina was unable to take care of the Edmondson Park farm alone and needed to be closer to shopping and transport.

**Big Ideas:** Memories, Caring, Fear, Health



My Rose is Fading in the Dark, 2005

interesting that Gina has chosen to show Eugen as solid in the painting while the roses are fading into the background. It is like Gina is telling two stories at once. Her love and joy in her husband's presence and her grief in his illness and its impacts upon their relationship. This image of Eugen is very different to the portrait as a soldier. We can see how age and illness has impacted Eugen.

**Big Ideas:** Memories, Caring, Fear, Health

### Questions and Activities:

- Paint a portrait of someone you love. How do you show what they mean to you as well as how they look?
- Use the two images to compare and contrast, what are the differences between the two paintings? What feelings do these paintings evoke?





*My studio at Casula is like jail with no bar, 2004*

In this image we can see Gina and Eugen at their Casula home. Gina is working on a painting in the garage while Eugen sits outside in the sun. Gina needs to keep a close eye on Eugen and keep him safe. We can see the detail and patterning in the chair that Eugen is sitting on and in the paving on the ground.

This is a painting of Gina and Eugen's everyday life. It shows us that even the little details about our everyday lives are important.

**Big Ideas:** Memories, Caring, Fear, Health

**Questions and Activities:**

- Find a space around your home and focus on the patterns that you can see. It might be from details in furniture or patterns made by shadows. Sketch it out and colour in contrasting colours. What is your most prominent memory?
- Do you have an object from that memory? Can you paint it and the memory in one picture?

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