

## Case Study: National Stories/Health

### ***Bushfire Response***

Museum Victoria

2011



*Stories of Despair and Renewal*

In the wake of the 2009 Victoria bushfire disaster Museum Victoria has developed the Victorian Bushfires Collection project which involves the active collection of stories, images and objects that document the immediate impact of the bushfires, the community response, the aftermath, and the process of recovery and renewal. It also aims to collect material from previous Victorian bushfires.

One of the most challenging items collected was the 7 metre chimney from 'The Uplands' 19<sup>th</sup> Century homestead in Kinglake. The chimney was installed in the Forest Gallery at Melbourne Museum to commemorate the Black Saturday bushfires and provide a place to reflect on the impact of fires on Victorian lives, across time and place.

The development of the collection has been strongly influenced by community needs and partnerships. The Healesville Primary School has worked closely with Museum Victoria to exhibit over 40 works of art by students from grades 2 to 6. These artworks offer visitors a very powerful and personal insight into the experience of living with the daily realities of bushfire. Most of the children knew people who had lost property, homes or friends to the fires, some had lost their own home, and everyone had been through the trauma of evacuation multiple times. The inclusion of these works in the collection captures the experience of children, their families and the broader Healesville community, and demonstrates the role of art in the process of making meaning and contributing to community healing.

The Victorian Bushfires Collection is already being used in exhibitions, public programs, oral history, research and community engagement. Its use has highlighted the healing power of stories, their importance in affirming the lives and experience of those affected, the strongly symbolic power of collections and the ways in which such a project can contribute to the rebuilding of a sense of identity and place in the wake of disaster.

Liza Dale-Hallett and Mathew Higgins, 'The Victorian Bushfires Collection', reCollections, Vol 5, No.1, April 2010

[http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol\\_5\\_no\\_1/notes\\_and\\_comments/the\\_victorian\\_bushfires\\_collection/](http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_5_no_1/notes_and_comments/the_victorian_bushfires_collection/)

<http://museumvictoria.com.au/collections/themes/3032/victorian-bushfires-collection>

Image: Artwork 'Black Saturday' Healesville Primary School 2009