

## The Shilo project

I own a lot of records. Most I've bought in op shops and at garage sales; it's my hobby, I suppose. *The Shilo project* started when I found two copies of Neil Diamond's 1970 LP, *Shilo* (#1 and #2 in the exhibition), in an op shop. One sleeve was clean, the other had been filled-in with fibre-tipped pens. Driving home, a thought occurred out of the blue: Why not invite artists to respond to the challenge of the blank *Shilo* sleeve?

Artists were not approached to join *The Shilo project* at random. The character of the sleeve determined the direction. It's a paradox. It promises a portrait of Neil Diamond but doesn't deliver. It's professionally designed but allows amateurs to complete it. It's a cool, minimalist package for a collection of songs offering pleasure and fantasy. We invited artists who had an interest in portraiture, pop music, cover design, games, repetition, formulas and patterns.

While artists' responses were diverse, there is an important common characteristic. None surrendered to the sleeve. All made it *theirs*. But none of them denied the sleeve either. They kept its physical, historical and even psychological character in mind. There's a spirit of fun in *The Shilo project* but also evidence of how seriously artists take the task of establishing a dialogue between their personal vision and the everyday world.

Surrounded by record sleeves, it's impossible to ignore their essential purpose. They are a marketing tool, produced to stand out in a crowded retail environment. So our exhibition design recalls the record shops of the 1970s, where records were pinned to walls and stacked in bins. Customers rifled through rows of LPs and gazed longingly at the rarities kept out of reach in cabinets.

The lounge room was the second home for LPs. In a quieter, less cluttered space, a fan could listen to a disc over and over again, scour the liner notes for information, and gaze reflectively at pictures of their idol. Perhaps they might pick up a biro, find dot #1 and, very carefully, begin to trace his portrait.

*The Shilo project* is a celebration of pop music, record collecting and vinyl LPs. Please use the Potter's turntable to discover the joys of vinyl and the magic of Neil Diamond's hits on *Shilo*.

## The Shilo saga

Released in 1970, *Shilo* was a compilation of tracks Neil Diamond had recorded several years earlier for the Bang label in the United States. In Australia, the record was released on the Stateside label, a division of EMI managing the licensing of American recordings into Australia. Diamond signed with Bang Records in February 1966 and quickly scored chart hits with songs like 'Cherry Cherry', 'You got to me', 'Girl, you'll be a woman soon', 'Thank the Lord for the night time' and 'Kentucky woman'. But at the end of 1967, unhappy with the way Bang was handling his releases, Diamond left for a new label. Bang, however, retained the rights to release around two dozen tracks that Diamond had already recorded for the company. These were repackaged and re-released in numerous formats until Diamond eventually bought back the master tapes in 1977.

Born in 1941, Diamond had begun writing and recording in his teens. In 1965, he formed a partnership with the writing and producing team, Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, who had worked with the legendary Phil Spector on hits like 'Da doo ron ron' and 'Baby I love you'. From 1966 to 1967, Diamond, Barry and Greenwich made the recordings eventually repackaged on *Shilo*; AM radio gems combining energetic pop rhythms with soulful folk stylings.

By 1970, Neil Diamond was emerging as a pop music superstar. This gave Bang an incentive to release a new compilation, *Shilo*, only two years after issuing a *Greatest hits* LP. With five albums in the US charts, Diamond was ranked at #28 on the list of best-performing album artists of 1970. He was ranked as the #2 singles artist for the year, with eight singles in the charts, between The Jackson 5 and Simon and Garfunkel. In 1972, Diamond's iconic status was established with the release of the live album *Hot August night* which rode the Australian charts for 239 weeks and was owned by an estimated one in eight Australian households.

Chris McAuliffe

The Potter gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Neil Diamond, Azoffmusic Management and Sony Music Entertainment in the development of *The Shilo project*.

*The Shilo project* will tour art galleries in regional Victoria and Sydney 2010–2011, managed by NETS Victoria and supported by Arts Victoria.

An exhibition catalogue is available for sale at the information desk on the ground floor.