

Anita Heiss: Indigenous Australia in Austria

One of Australia's most prolific and well-known authors, Dr Anita Heiss, visited Vienna, Austria, from 3-6 June. The Australian Embassy supported her visit and developed a program of events that introduced Austrian audiences to Dr Heiss's work and provided a forum to discuss questions of identity and Aboriginal writing.

Anita Heiss is a member of the Wiradjuri nation of central New South Wales. Her father was born in the Lungau region near the city of Salzburg in Austria. Against this background, Anita made her personal history the focus of a reading at the Australian Residence on 3 June. She read from her memoir on identity *Am I Black Enough for You?* and talked about her father's experiences after arriving in Australia in the mid-50s and meeting her mother, and about her own experience as daughter of a marriage between 'outsiders'.

"Same but Different – How can we be the same when we have different cultural heritages and identities?" was the topic of Dr Heiss's presentation at a central Viennese café and literary hang-out, the Café Prückel, on 4 June. An appreciating audience stayed well after hours to continue a lively information exchange.

On 5 June Dr Heiss gave the keynote Stephen Wurm lecture at a half-day seminar on "Languages, Literatures and the Australia-Europe Connection" which the Embassy co-hosted together with the University of Vienna, the Australian National University (ANU), the Austrian Australian Society and the Austrian South Pacific Society as part of an annual lecture series. The keynote lecture is named after Stephen Wurm, an Austrian linguist who worked at, and left his bequest to, ANU. Anita Heiss spoke about "Aboriginal writing: celebrating the new Australian literature". She provided many insights into Australia's contemporary Indigenous cultures and values that went well beyond stereotypes. She also provided practical advice about resource material about Aboriginal writing and culture.

The seminar provided a platform for discussion among Australian and Austrian academics about literature and Australian-European linkages. Austrian university professors spoke about interpretations of the Australian film "Ten Canoes" and Australian literature such as Kate Grenville's "Lilian's Story". An Australian writer with Austrian heritage picked up on Dr Heiss's topic of identity and spoke about the "Narrenfreiheit" (the "freedom enjoyed by a fool") of a person that does not belong to any nation. Dr Rudolf Agstner from the Austrian Foreign Ministry provided an overview of consular relations between Austria and Australia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Approximately 130 people attended the three events, including representatives of Government, academia and civil society. The Embassy plans to issue an interview with Dr Heiss in the near future. As one of the immediate result of the events, the English language department at the University of Vienna and Dr Heiss intend to explore opportunities for further cooperation.

Dr Heiss' visit to Vienna followed her participation in the inaugural Australia & New Zealand Literature and Arts Festival in London. Her travel was supported by the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, UTS.