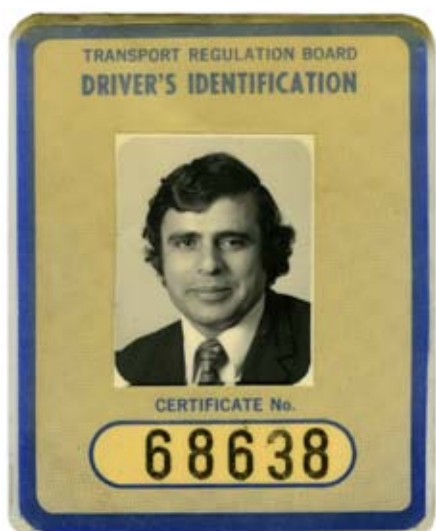
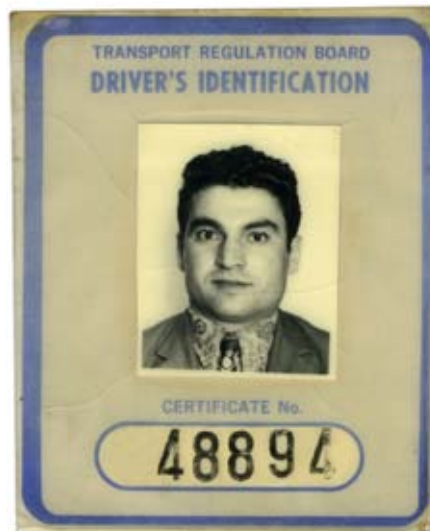
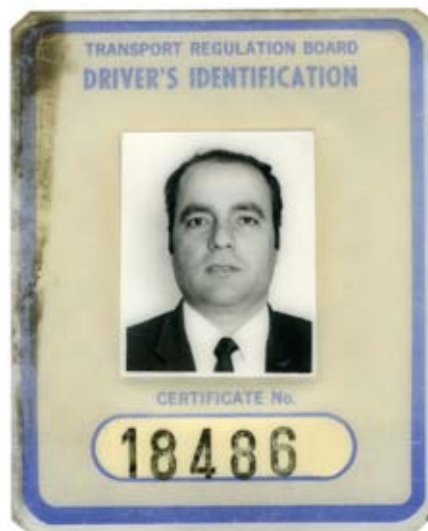
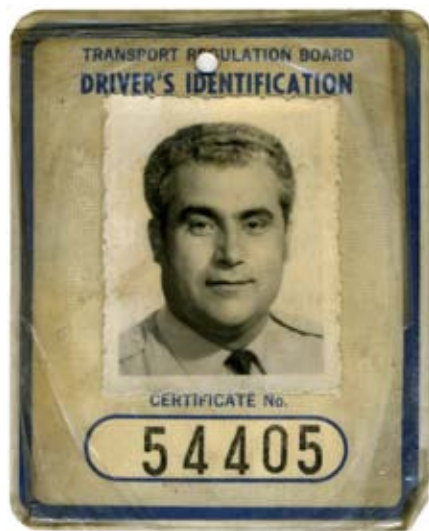
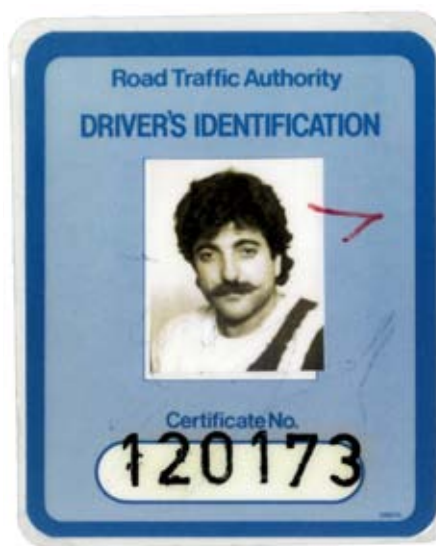
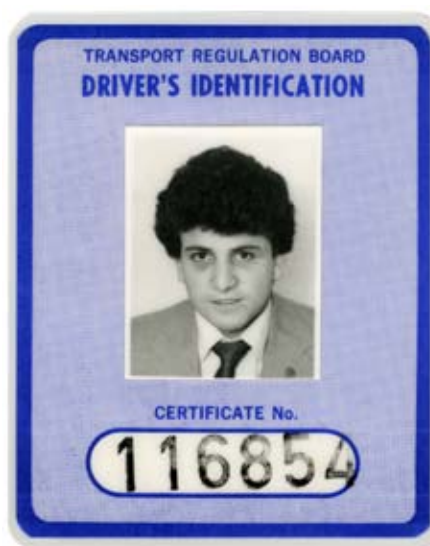
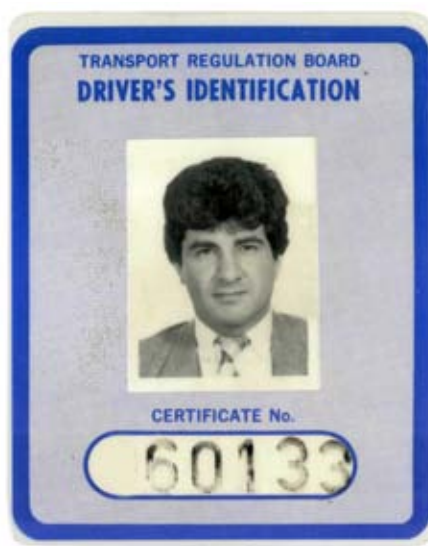


*Hello*

MELBOURNE TAXIS – STORIES, COLOURS & MANNERS

*Yellow*





**Hello Yellow:**  
*Melbourne taxis*  
– stories, colours  
& manners

28 May –  
28 July 2014

City Gallery  
Melbourne Town Hall

[melbourne.vic.gov.au/  
citygallery](http://melbourne.vic.gov.au/citygallery)



Have you ever opened up to  
a complete stranger?

The relationship we have with  
a taxi driver is unique, as trust  
becomes critical when you're thrust  
together in the confines of a cab.

*Hello Yellow: Melbourne taxis – stories,  
colours & manners*, considers this  
special relationship. Through art,  
film, historical photographs and  
artefacts, it gives you a free ride  
into the Melbourne taxi story.



‘It’s all about the meeting, the greeting, the caring and the sharing of two people who’ve never met each other and most likely [will] never meet each other again. People divulge amazing things to cab drivers; [things] you couldn’t believe, things they’ve never said to anyone else.’

**GREGORY GIUIVER**

*Taxi*, 2011

‘Why do men and women in all walks of life seek advice and share their utmost confidences with cabdrivers, bus boys, soda jerks and the like? ... but all of them sooner or later take a ride in a cab and spill their troubles (real or imagined) to cabdrivers.’

**JAMES MARESCA**

*My Flag Is Down*, 1948

‘The cabman has the supreme advantage of being able to see without being seen. He sits on his cab in the rank and watches the world go about its business and pleasure, within arm’s length of him. Yet he himself is so much a part of the landscape that hardly anybody realizes he’s there.

When I started driving, I discovered that my badge itself was a marvellous key to human nature. It proclaimed to every stranger that I was absolutely harmless, simply motor cab driver 3306. Few people bothered to be on their best behaviour with me, for there is no point in unnaturally good behaviour towards one who can do you no harm, and for whose opinion you have no respect. Only people who were naturally polite, therefore, were now polite to me. And it was surprising to find how few of them there were.’

**HERBERT HODGE**

*Fact No. 22: I Drive a Taxi*, 1939

**Have you ever opened up  
and shared your story  
with a complete stranger?**

People working in service industries often have this experience; hairdressers, waiters, retail assistants and sex workers hear the highs, the lows, the yays and the neighs of their patrons. In a time

in which we all yearn for connection and have ample online friends but feel socially disconnected in day-to-day life, we readily share stories with the butcher, the baker, the barista and the grocer, making us feel part of a community.

But the relationship we have with a taxi driver is unique. When strangers are thrust together in the confined space of a taxicab, the feeling of risk is intensified and trust plays a big part in any negotiation. Anything is possible and the likelihood of misunderstanding is heightened. An unintended intonation or an uneasy look may be all it takes to throw things off kilter. This fragile interaction could be influenced by any number of factors – how we are feeling, our last experience in a taxicab, the driver's last experience with a passenger. Whatever the case, this temporary bond in a transitory space offers rich opportunities for human connection and storytelling.

**COLOURING OUR EXPERIENCE**

Growing up, I lived with the nightly anxiety of not knowing whether my father would return home safely from driving a taxi. With every news report about an assault on a taxi driver I would listen attentively, taking in every detail of the driver's description. I was always relieved when the identity didn't match that of my father, but I felt guilty that it was likely to be somebody else's father. Conversely, as a lone female passenger, I understand the apprehension many feel when riding alone in a taxi late at night. If ever I feel uneasy I ask the driver if he has a daughter, and then proceed to tell him about my father. That usually resolves any tension.

**FIRST PAGE**

Angus O'Callaghan  
(1922–)  
*Pedestrians*, c.1969

Archival print on  
rag paper 1/15  
signed lower left  
editioned lower right  
60 x 60cm

City of Melbourne  
Art and Heritage  
Collection

**OPPOSITE**

Tamsin Sharp (1978–)  
Singing Bowl Media  
*Taxi* (still), 2011

720p HD,  
6:30 minutes

Courtesy of the artist



Stories about driver–passenger relationships can be surprising. My parents often recount the story of one of my father’s regular passengers many years ago, an 80-year-old woman who enjoyed having a nip of whiskey while in transit from her Ascot Vale home to the Centre for Adult Education on Flinders Street. They would chat about their lives, and after hearing that my mum had recently given birth to me, the woman visited our home and presented a hand-knitted cardigan to me. She even came to my christening. Her gift, a babushka, was my most treasured possession for many years, until it was unwittingly tossed out. My mother was surprised by my tears, but when you have very little to connect to you hold on to what you have. This woman’s gift sparked my deep connection with babushkas.<sup>1</sup> I was always amazed that this mysterious woman, my father’s passenger, went to that trouble. She would never have known how her kind gesture had touched my life and inspired a life-long love for the little Russian dolls. Years later, while pregnant with my son, I bought him the same special gift.

One time my father had a passenger who requested to be driven to many different destinations. After each journey the passenger would ask: ‘Would you like me to pay now?’ Taken in by his fine presentation and eagerness to pay, my father would reply: ‘No, at the end is fine’. After many hours of the meter ticking away the passenger did a runner. My father called the police, who looked around but concluded they could do nothing to assist. He lost the earnings of half a shift. You can imagine his frustration. The following day a passenger who had no cash on him requested to go inside his flat to collect the money. My father agreed but asked for the number of the flat. The passenger was insulted by the question, as it inferred distrust, and this led to an altercation. As it turned out, this passenger had ridden with a number of my father’s taxi colleagues and always paid his fare. But how was my father to know? As they say, once bitten twice shy: you have a runner one day so you’re paranoid the next. This is how misunderstandings occur and how easily the driver–passenger relationship can deteriorate.

My father recalls another night:

*A couple of troublemakers got into my taxi and immediately began insulting me. For my own sake I knew I had to get rid of them fast. I put the car in drive and turned the ignition. The car wouldn’t start. I pretended to be frustrated and asked them to push-start the car. Once they were out of the taxi I quickly drove away.<sup>2</sup>*

He diverted a potentially tricky situation. Safety has long been a concern for taxi drivers the world over. Regulations have tried to address this by setting parameters around the negotiation between driver and passenger, and outlining taxicab etiquette. But despite regulations, my father’s story illustrates that when it comes to safety, taxi drivers have to think on the fly and be creative with their response.

## REGULATING MANNERS

In 1909, Melbourne became the first city in Australia to introduce the motorised taxicab. Almost three years later, Melbourne City Council’s By-law N<sup>o</sup> 123 came into operation to license and regulate taxicabs, their owners and their drivers. Comprising 81 clauses, the by-law was published as a public notice in the *Argus* and *Age* newspapers, ensuring the public was aware of acceptable taxicab manners.

### Conduct

A number of the clauses pertained to the conduct of drivers and passengers:

#### CONDUCT OF OWNERS, DRIVERS ETC

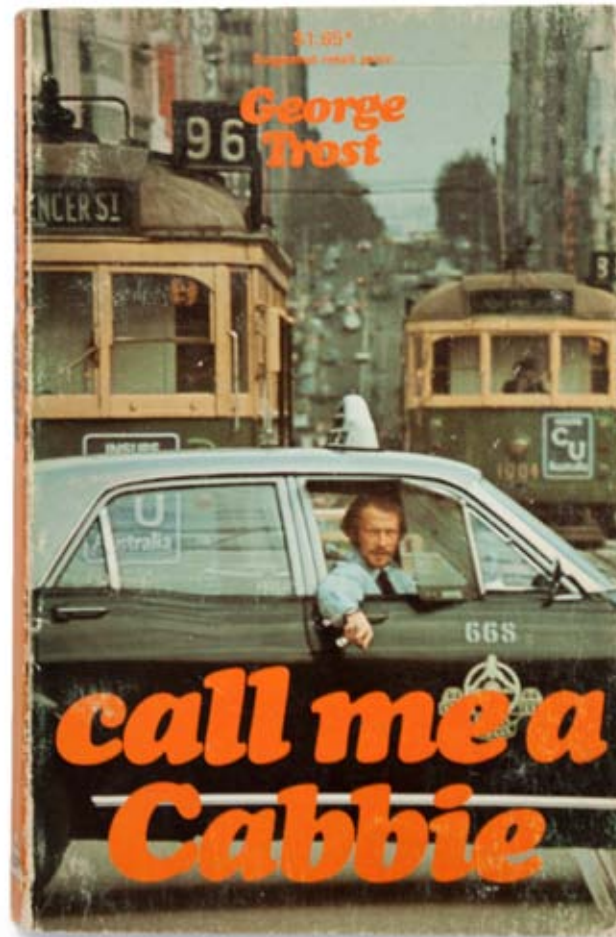
*No driver or conductor shall carry, or knowingly permit to be carried, in any licensed motor-car, except to some police office, or watch-house, or hospital, any person in a state of intoxication, or so violently or noisily conducting himself, or otherwise so misbehaving, as to occasion any annoyance, or disturb the public peace.<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Technically, these dolls are called *matryoshkas*.

<sup>2</sup> Recorded conversation with Tansa Eid, 15 October 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Clause xxxviii, By-Law N<sup>o</sup> 123, City of Melbourne Public Notice, *Argus*, 31 August 1911, p. 3.





**LEFT**  
Unknown  
photographer  
A female taxi driver  
behind the wheel  
of a Yellow Cab in  
Melbourne during  
the Second World  
War, c.1944  
Digital print  
36 x 22cm  
045099  
Australian War  
Memorial Collection

**CENTRE**  
George Trost  
*Call Me a Cabbie*  
Melbourne, Gold Star  
Publications, 1972  
18 x 11.5cm  
Christine Eid  
collection

**ABOVE**  
*Taxi* (still), 2013  
720p HD,  
5:20 minutes  
Courtesy of  
Kulbir Singh  
Director:  
Kulbir Singh,  
CAM Films  
Singer:  
Jassi Jasraj  
Musician:  
Sahil Hoogan



Bourke St. from Parliament House, 1967 Mark Strizic '67



#### AS TO HIRERS AND PASSENGERS

*No person using a licensed motor-car shall wilfully or negligently injure the same, or damage the person or property of any person, or be guilty of any breach of the peace, misconduct or misbehaviour or be intoxicated or make use of any threatening, abusive, obscene, indecent, blasphemous, or insulting language or gesture.<sup>4</sup>*

Not much has changed over the century. Melbourne's current taxicab regulations stipulate:

#### PASSENGER BEHAVIOUR

*(1) The driver of a taxi-cab may refuse to carry, or to continue to carry, a person in the taxi-cab if, in the opinion of the driver – (a) the person is violent, noisy, misbehaving, filthy or offensive.<sup>5</sup>*

#### NO DRINKING LIQUOR OR POSSESSING OPEN LIQUOR CONTAINERS

*(1) A passenger in a taxi-cab must not drink from a container that contains, or purports to contain, liquor.*

*(2) A passenger in a taxi-cab must not possess an open container that contains, or purports to contain, liquor.<sup>6</sup>*

Immediately apparent is the disjuncture between the regulations and the reality on the job. When a passenger enters a taxicab it is not always immediately evident whether they are going to be problematic. And what about when there is more than one passenger? How does a driver eject such passengers without endangering himself or herself? It is a catch 22: while it is important that regulations address bad behaviour and enable a driver to refuse such passengers, no comprehensive framework is provided for how to realise that in the confines of a taxicab on the streets of Melbourne. My father would often say:

*You can't always judge a person by their appearance. Sometimes the ones that are well dressed, with nice suits and expensive bags, and that talk nicely are the ones that give you more trouble. With their smart talking, we trust them very much, and they would be the ones that would run and we'd end up with no payment. I used to worry about people with tattoos*

#### FOLD-OUT PAGE

LEFT  
Mark Strizic (1928–2012)

*Bourke Street from  
Parliament, 1967*

Digital print  
38 x 27cm

Copyright, the estate  
of the artist

City of Melbourne Art  
and Heritage Collection

#### OPPOSITE

Unknown photographer

Two taxis making their  
way up what is now  
Bourke Street Mall,  
c.1963

Digital print from  
scanned negative  
Engineering photofile  
39 x 39cm

City of Melbourne Art  
and Heritage Collection

<sup>4</sup> Clause xlv,  
By-Law N<sup>o</sup> 123,  
City of Melbourne  
Public Notice, *Argus*,  
31 August 1911, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Regulation 36,  
Transport (Taxi-Cabs)  
Regulations 2005  
(authorised version  
N<sup>o</sup> 14), s.E. N<sup>o</sup>. 67/2005.

<sup>6</sup> Regulation 46A,  
Transport (Taxi-Cabs)  
Regulations 2005  
(authorised version  
N<sup>o</sup> 14), s.E. N<sup>o</sup>. 67/2005.

*because I thought they'd be rough, but they were not like that. Sometimes they'd be the ones who'd say, 'have a good night, driver', and give me a tip.*<sup>7</sup>

### **Fare's fair**

When it comes to paying the taxicab fare, Melbourne's 1911 By-law N<sup>o</sup>. 123 stated:

#### **AS TO HIRERS AND PASSENGERS**

*Any person who, having hired or used a licensed motor-car, shall fail to pay the legal fare when demanded, shall be deemed guilty of a breach of the provisions of this By-law, and upon conviction shall forfeit and pay the same, with such additional sum as damages, costs and charges for loss of time or otherwise as the justices, by whom he shall have been convicted, shall think fit.*<sup>8</sup>

*In case of a dispute between the hirer and driver, the hirer, if required to do so, shall state truly his name and address to the driver.*<sup>9</sup>

As it is impossible to force passengers to identify themselves correctly, it is doubtful that they could be convicted for not paying the fare. The regulations have been revised now to include:

#### **CAPACITY TO PAY**

*(7) The driver of a taxi-cab may refuse to carry, or to continue to carry, (as the case requires) a hirer and any person accompanying the hirer if the hirer— (a) does not demonstrate to the driver's reasonable satisfaction that the hirer is able to pay the amount of the estimate of the fare for the hiring; or (b) does not pay a deposit required under subregulation (4) or (5).*<sup>10</sup>

Asking a passenger to pay up front, leave a deposit or even demonstrate they can pay the fare can be insulting. Regulations have long allowed taxi drivers to ask passengers if they can pay the fare, but in practice it is an uncomfortable request. The driver–passenger relationship is so tenuous that this question could tip things over the edge, prompting an altercation.

Did my father ever ask a passenger if they had the fare?

*If you were to ask genuine people this question they would be very hurt. I'm not comfortable. I have a very soft heart and I don't feel comfortable asking this question. Maybe others do, but it's not in my nature, I trust everybody and I'm not hungry for money.*<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, he found his own way of dealing with this issue:

*I never asked anybody, regardless of how they are dressed, if they have money. But through conversation from point A to point B I would establish whether they have the money. If I suspect that they didn't have the fare I would find an excuse, like the car won't start or I'll have to wait for the RACV and ask them to find another way home. But I wouldn't continue to take them because I'd be wasting my time and end up with no money.*<sup>12</sup>

### **The messy truth**

One of the most surprising omissions from the regulations pertains to soiling the taxicab. If a passenger soils a taxicab with vomit, urine, faeces or food, they are not liable to pay a cent more than what is displayed on the meter. It's not considered a valid additional charge, even though the driver is out of pocket for the rest of the shift, cleaning and airing the car. If the smell persists, the next shift driver may also feel the pinch. And yet regulations in Melbourne do not deem passengers liable.

On asking my father about his experiences, he recounts:

*One night I was taking a passenger home and she started to vomit in the taxi. We were on the freeway so I couldn't stop. She kept vomiting and vomiting on the windows. She filled up the whole windows and doors with vomit. You see, from the window it went down into the door and it filled the door on the inside and the outside. At the end she paid her fare. I didn't ask for extra money and I don't think she paid any extra. I drove home to clean the taxi and lost the rest of the shift.*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Recorded conversation with Tansa Eid, 10 March 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Clause xlvii, By-Law N<sup>o</sup> 123, City of Melbourne Public Notice, *Argus*, 31 August 1911, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Clause xlviii, By-Law N<sup>o</sup> 123, City of Melbourne Public Notice, *Argus*, 31 August 1911, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Regulation 41, Transport (Taxi-Cabs) Regulations 2005 (authorised version N<sup>o</sup> 14), s.e. N<sup>o</sup>. 67/2005.

<sup>11</sup> Recorded conversation with Tansa Eid, 10 March 2014.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

When I asked how he felt while he was cleaning the taxi, he said:

*What could I do? I was angry but there was nothing I could do. You can't tell. They look like there is nothing wrong with them and then they get sick on the way. I have a very weak stomach. I'm the type of person where I can't stand vomiting, I can't stand the smell and I was vomiting as I was cleaning the car.*<sup>14</sup>

I have a childhood memory of my father out in the driveway with gloves on, a bucket in hand and every cleaning product imaginable. While he was cleaning the taxi, I could hear him cursing out loud and vomiting. My mum recalls going outside to help him. She put her hand on his forehead, as he was vomiting on the side of the driveway. She couldn't stand hearing or smelling vomit, so she also began to vomit. He said, 'What are you doing? This is not helping!'

### BAGGAGE

Nobody ever wants to feel like they've been taken for a ride. When we catch a taxi, we all want to arrive at our intended destination safely and in a timely manner. But when we have a negative experience we tend to take that baggage on our next taxi ride. This can cause tension on both sides. My father remarks:

*Because some drivers don't know the way, they [the passengers] think all drivers are the same. I picked up a woman from the Spencer Street Station rank and she asked if I could take her to Heidelberg. Then she kept repeating, 'Are you sure you can take me to Heidelberg? Are you sure you can take me to Heidelberg?' She wanted to make sure I knew where I was going. Maybe she had a bad experience with other drivers and she thinks all the drivers are the same.*<sup>15</sup>

Taxi drivers are often accused of refusing short fares. Regulations disapprove of this conduct, but usually drivers do this because they have been waiting at a rank for a long period. My father recalls:

*One night I was waiting on the rank at the casino and a black American woman came up to the taxi and asked if I'd take her to the Kingsway Motel, I said I would. She asked, 'How come the first two drivers wouldn't take me? Is it because I'm black or because I'm a woman?' I said, 'I don't know but I think its because it's a local fare and they may have been waiting a long time for a job and they may not like short fares, but I don't mind, I'll take you.' It was a short trip; the fare was five dollars, she gave me twenty dollars.*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

### Conclusion

As you can see, the interactions between drivers and passengers in taxis are complex, varied and at times unresolved. These human relationships are a microcosm of the city. They can shape the way we view and understand our city and society, and reveal glimpses into our humanity. Despite the best civic intentions, such delicate negotiations can never be truly regulated. Instead we must fall back on notions of fairness, honesty, compassion, manners, common courtesy and above all humanity.

*Christine Eid*

May 2014

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*Melbourne taxis*  
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**LEFT**

Louis Porter (1977–)  
*PS\_89\_1 Dandenong*, 2007  
from the series *Unknown Land*

Pigment print  
27.4 x 34.4cm

City of Melbourne Art  
and Heritage Collection

**INSIDE COVER**

Drivers' identification cards  
issued to (*top row, left to right*)  
Youssef El-Fahkri, 1975;  
Noor El-Aine El-Fahkri, c. 1976;  
Akram El-Fahkri, 1982; Moses  
El-Fahkri, 1987; Daniel El-Fahkri,  
1986 (*bottom row, left to right*)  
Joseph Harb, 1976; Youssef Eid,  
1972; Romanos Eid, 1972;  
Tansa Eid, 1975

Digital reproductions  
Dimensions variable

El-Fahkri family collection,  
Joseph Harb collection,  
Eid family collection

**INSIDE BACK COVER**

Diecast models of (*top row, left  
to right*) a 1958 Silver Top Taxi  
Holden FC sedan; a 1960 Red Top  
Taxi Service Holden FB sedan;  
a 1960–62 Associated Radio Taxi  
Ford xx Falcon sedan, (*bottom row,  
left to right*) a 1970–72 Yellow Cab  
Co. Taxi Ford xv falcon sedan;  
a 1971–74 Frankston Taxis  
Holden HQ Belmont sedan;  
a 1979–82 Silver Top Taxi Ford  
XD GL Falcon sedan

Metal and acrylic  
Dimensions variable

Christine Eid collection

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