



LONG BLACK

That famous can of Campbell's tomato soup has a cheeky rival from Vietnam.

Not since Andy Warhol has soup been elevated to museum status. But then, some dishes just have a certain aura.

One of these is pho (pronounced "fur"), the Vietnamese noodle soup brought to Australia by mainly southern Vietnamese refugees and the focus of a new exhibition, aptly titled *I Love Pho*.

Based on a scented beef or chicken stock and fresh rice noodles (known as *banh pho*), here pho is mostly served in the southern Vietnamese style, with a mountain of fresh herbs, chilli, lemon wedges and bean sprouts on the side. First consumed in northern Vietnam, however (the original beef version is referred to as "pho ha noi"), the origins of pho are surrounded by myth and speculation.

Some think it came from China while others credit the French. Ask any Vietnamese and you'll get a whole range of opinions on how best to make it, eat it and serve it. And don't start them on which Sydney noodle shop serves the best broth.

It's a short path, apparently, from cult item to cultural artefact. According to Casula Powerhouse curator Cuong Phu Le, pho can be seen as a metaphor. "Its story is like the story of migration and the history of Vietnam itself," he says. The evolution of the dish, he continues, is mirrored in country's north-south split, the ensuing

war and the post-1975 "reunification", not to mention the huge wave of emigration that took pho to the world.

For Australian Vietnamese, he says, pho is nostalgia for home but also a symbol of identity. "It's so popular in Australia. Everyone eats it," he marvels. "And yet many people haven't been exposed to its history and what it means to Vietnamese culture."

The first part in a multi-stage exhibition opens at the Liverpool Regional Museum on Thursday, incorporating art works, photography (above), video and multimedia installations, all inspired by pho.

The featured artists are both Vietnam-born and second-generation Vietnamese-Australian. There's also a catalogue of pho-related essays. It's likely to stimulate the mind - and the appetite.

Luckily there are pho cooking classes on the program and some tasting sessions are planned. You'll also be able to buy pho ingredients, including a ready-made broth in a can invented in the US. Pho-natics will be horrified. Andy Warhol would have loved it.

Joanna Savill

Liverpool Regional Museum, Elizabeth Drive, Liverpool, June 8-17, 10am-4pm, free. Cooking class bookings, 9824 1121 or email reception@casulapowerhouse.com.