

## Reflecting

Wednesday 14 May 2008

I'm writing this final installment back in London a few weeks after returning from Australia. And it is a bit of an odd experience. I had so wholly immersed myself in where I was and what I was doing in Parramatta that everything at home seems unfamiliar.

The residency for me was more than an opportunity to have time and space to think about ideas, it has been instrumental to the extension of my practice and enabled me to make proper substance of a project idea that was pretty fluid before my trip.

During my last three weeks I immersed myself in producing pieces for an exhibition at the Parramatta Artists Studios (PAS) gallery with John Spiteri – the Australian artist who was in residence at the ACAVA studio last year. I'm not a huge fan of doing shows but I was very grateful for the opportunity to review and distil what I'd been producing. It made me make choices about images, ponder creative dilemmas and make definite plans for the next stage of the project.

What I showed was a back projected, scaled down movie of photographs taken during the walk and talks with the six women at the children's homes previously mentioned. I made a simple card box to frame the images; the idea was to give an impression of the work I will be making now I am back. Interestingly, this simulation became an artwork in itself and triggered a whole new set of ideas. This piece was accompanied by a series of imprints of objects I found along the walks annotated with notes hand written directly on the wall. This component was a facsimile of the way I had been working at PAS and Newington because I wanted to give the audience a sense of the process.

It was good to stand back and see tangible evidence of the stuff that had been swimming around in my head – ideas from ages ago and newly formulated ones. It was good to have people ask me questions about what I did and what I am planning to do next. And it was good to hear that there may be opportunities to develop my project in Parramatta in the future.

Aside from all the activity for the exhibition I did manage to see some other shows: Fiona Hall at the Museum of Contemporary Art ([www.mca.com.au](http://www.mca.com.au)), a group show at Artspace ([www.artspace.org.au](http://www.artspace.org.au)) in Woolloomooloo and some smaller shows at Arts Run Initiatives (ARI) in Surry Hills including Firstdraft ([www.firstdraftgallery.com](http://www.firstdraftgallery.com)) and Gaffa ([www.gaffa.com.au](http://www.gaffa.com.au)). I also went to the reopening of the newly refurbished Casula Powerhouse ([www.casulapowerhouse.com](http://www.casulapowerhouse.com)) which is situated in Liverpool about 40 minutes

drive from Parramatta; it feels like rather a remote place. The building is very interesting, previously a powerhouse with the turbine hall as the central gallery. The work in the inaugural show *Australian* was of a monumental scale and made all the more spectacular by an amazing kinetic work by Suzann Victor – a series of deep red chandeliers which swung above our heads throughout the evening.

'Like most Australians, the artists have cultural ties in other places and it is this that informs the work. *Australian* celebrates the complexities that make this country such an interesting place to live and presents some of the freshest and most dynamic work being created here'. (Exhibition leaflet.)

So much seemed so familiar about this place not least because of it's similarity to the Tate Modern albeit on a slightly smaller scale but also because London curator and artist Paul Howard, formerly at the Tate, has just been appointed as Senior Curator there. I have worked with Paul in the past and it was nice to catch up on the other side of the world. So an excursion to a Liverpool in the southern hemisphere began to feel like a very British occasion. This opening became one of the highlights of my experiences in and amongst the Sydney/NSW art world. But my top ten list has to be:

1. Michael Dagostino and Tia McIntyre at Parramatta Artists Studios (PAS) for the fact they are such excellent people to work with, supporting me with practicalities, making time to discuss artistic ideas and giving me the space to develop the residency in my own way.
2. Tom Polo for being such a brilliant studio neighbour; his enthusiasm for the British and Australian art scenes, his very unique aesthetic and great sense of humour.
3. The proximity to the Parramatta train and bus station – 5 minutes walk away for the convenience of getting into the CBD and traveling out of the city.
4. Rea, artist and historian, for being such a supportive friend and giving me a vital insight into a very complex country and showing me bits of NSW.
5. The bike loaned to me by Sydney Olympic Park Authority and the journey to the Newington Armory. Having the opportunity to work there as well as at PAS really helped shape my project ideas.
6. Walking and talking with the women I met as part of my project and their generosity and willingness to share very personal stuff with a stranger.

7. All the artists at the studio especially Kay, John, Heath and Fiona for being so welcoming and helpful.

8. Meeting and having regular lunch with the Artsmart artists during their professional development course and keeping my studio door open so I could get snippets of very useful information whilst working (because I didn't have time to give the sessions my undivided attention.)

9. Making real connections and contacts with professionals – artists, curators, project developers in Sydney and Parramatta in particular, their enthusiasm and generosity was invaluable.

10. Being in Australia in the summer, apart from the great weather which always makes me function well I was totally enamoured by the landscapes, flora and fauna and this had a profound effect on the way I developed my work, and I discovered I'm not a bad photographer.

And an honorary number 11 which has to be the artist's flat, it began to feel like home for me very quickly.

First impressions are precisely that, first impressions. After three months in Sydney and other parts of Australia I grew to like it very much. There is no denying it is a complex place historically and culturally and there are many aspects of the society I found difficult to come to terms with but the opportunities open to me to develop my work and be amongst like-minded people were many and this experience and the 'no worries' frame of mind are what I have returned home with. In short, this artist's residency was ideal for me. So thank you Artquest for making it happen.

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