

## Artquest journal – Getting down to work

Having spent 2007 Christmas in Australia I knew what to expect this year. Christmas day was pleasantly warm, and slightly overcast. I spent the day with my relatives who live in North Sydney. It was a relaxed day, aside from a quick trip to the emergency GP, as I had been bitten by something and half my hand became numb. I was worried that it might have been a poisonous spider, but the doctor told me that I would know about it if it was. He told me to call him if the numbness started to spread to my arm, which thankfully it didn't.

New Year's Eve was spent at a house party at Parramatta Artist Studios (PAS) members Heath and Jodie, in North Parramatta, which was a lot of fun. It was 'Bogan Pride' themed, which is a television show that celebrates the underdog, in this case an overweight working class teenager. 'Bogan' is similar to 'Chav', although I think is used to encompass more of the working class than 'Chav' does.

This month I've revisited [North Head](#) for a tour of the tunnels, and also [South Head](#) for fortifications around the lighthouse. I met with the [Bankstown Historical Society](#), where I was able to access a wealth of information about the [Bankstown Bunker](#) and surrounds. I was interested to find out that even though it was top secret base during WW2, many locals knew of its whereabouts, which obviously makes sense once you think about the logistical nightmare of constructing a large two and a half story underground bunker in secret. I also learnt that famous Australian artist [William Dobell](#) painted the camouflage nets to cover the planes at Bankstown airport, and also papièr maché chickens were constructed and dotted around to make the airfield look like a poultry farm.

I spent a few days in Canberra with my mum's old school friend Ping, and her husband Warren, who conveniently is a war enthusiast. Canberra is a strange city, cross between a student campus, Disneyland and *Close encounters of the third kind*. Viewing the city at night was very surreal, with the Parliament House flag pole looking like a space ship, and the Telstra tower situated on Black Mountain looking equally alien.

Canberra is good for museums and state galleries. I enjoyed going to the [War Memorial](#), which looked like the Disneyland castle designed by a war enthusiast. Inside there were exhibits about Australia's participations in the wars, and how the country suffered badly from considerable loss of life during the world wars - a higher percentage of the population than many other participating countries. My favourite exhibit was an armored plated fake tree that was used by German spies in no man's land. Evenings in Canberra were filled talking to Warren about war related topics, and he would dig out videos to watch, such as *Sink the Bismarck!* and *History of the RAF*. He told me that the government advice to citizens during an air raid was to lie in a ditch. Later when I watched *When the war came to Australia* there was some film footage of a man lying beside the curb of the pavement with his hands over his head, which I found quite absurd.

Back in Sydney, as galleries take time off over Christmas the exhibition circuit has been rather quiet this month. I've been to private views at [Gallery 9](#), [MOP](#), [First Draft](#) and [James Dorahy](#). Michael has been arranging networking opportunities for me. I went to a barbeque held by Aaron, the director of [gallery 4A](#). Last week, the curators from [MCA](#) came around to view my work, and we lunched afterwards.

January is a great time to be here, because the [Sydney festival](#) is on. On the first night, the whole of the city is transformed into one big free festival. I went to see Grace Jones play at the Domain; *All Tomorrow's Parties* festival on Cockatoo Island; a screening of *Fantastic Planet* at Darling

Harbour, complete with a live score played by Ben Walsh and the Orkestra of the underground. Aside from the festival, I've managed to check out some local bands in various venues down Oxford Street.

This month I've been working industriously in my studio. Maria Ionico and I are using the gallery as a project space, to culminate in a finished show to open on Feb 11. I've settled into a routine, where I would work in my studio or the gallery all day, and intermittently pop into other studios to say hi and talk to other artists about our work. I really enjoy this exchange of ideas and discussion, and feel very much a part of PAS.

I met with Steve and Rebecca from [Anglicare](#), situated next doors from PAS. They are a youth drop-in center for those who are at risk of becoming homeless, or are already homeless. I spoke to them about my work, and asked them whether it was possible to install a sculpture in their garden. They agreed to my proposal, and so I was able to construct a listening wall underneath the overgrown trees. You can view the sculpture from the gallery from a pill box shape hole through the exhibition wall of the gallery. I am particularly pleased with this work, and I continue to work in the space to install my show.

I will be displaying my models of Bankstown Bunker, the tunnel towards Chullora, Picnic Point, and the ADI site in the gallery space. These will be wrapped up with blankets soaked in sand and cement, and so will be inaccessible to the audience. I am constructing a website in the style of those set up by bunker enthusiasts (i.e. very naïve and colourful) as a platform to display my photographs. Maria is casting large wax ladders to lean against a corner for the space, and also latex skins, using her trademark flock wallpaper design transferred from paper to latex. Finally, I hope to install a pill box in the front porch of the gallery, and I will be curious to see whether any of the homeless population uses it as a shelter.

This month has been industrious and busy socially. I'm learning to get around without a map and surprise myself on occasions by talking with an aussie accent. I've done heaps this month.

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