

Artquest Journal - My month of military sites

When I first arrived at Parramatta Artist Studios (PAS), despite my jet lagged state, I felt very much at home. Located centrally, a few minutes from the train station, and, most importantly, close to [Westfields shopping center](#), I was able to get set up and orientated easily. Everyone at PAS has been very welcoming, and people that I have met on my travels are always happy to help.

Michael Dagostino, the coordinator at PAS has been extremely helpful with practical issues, and has driven me to the [Bankstown Bunker](#), [Picnic Point](#), and to the [Australian Defense Industries \(ADI\) site](#).

Due to a fire in the seventies, the Bankstown Bunker has been filled with concrete and the entrance concealed, so it is now under a mound at the back of a housing estate with a few large rocks to mark the site. The South Sydney power station has been built on the site of the remote receiving station at Picnic Point. Land developers are encroaching on ADI site land to be developed into new (and ugly) housing estates. The remaining parts of the ADI site no longer has the 'Stalker'-esque landscape of discarded, nature enveloped military vehicles, although we did see a few kangaroos, emus, and some cacti.

My visit to the secret ammunitions factory at Chullora proved to be marginally more successful. It is located underneath the site of a railway workshop, and although I could not find a way in, there was evidence of ventilation grates, and potential entrances or exits.

On the other hand, places such as [Middle Head](#), [Fort Denison](#), [Cockatoo Island](#), [Bare Island](#) and [Newington Armory](#) are in good condition and popular tourist attractions. Around Middle Head, the old gunner's barracks have now been turned into an expensive tea room, and Fort Denison can be booked out for corporate functions. Cockatoo Island is a fantastic place, which was used as a prison, and then subsequently a ship yard. Now you can camp here, and in January it will host the music festival 'All Tomorrow's Parties', which I will be going to.

I find it interesting that the Western Sydney defense structures, in less beautiful and less affluent areas have been discarded and mostly forgotten. The preserved military sites are predominantly

in picturesque coastal spots in well to do suburbs. Newington Armory is an anomaly, and could have suffered the same fate as the ADI site, if it wasn't for the Sydney Olympics.

Newington Armory is now home to the cultural quarter of the Olympic Park. I was shown around by Tony Nesbitt, who is the arts programming manager. There, I met [Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy](#), who were constructing a large floating house to sit on a lake in the park. They will be representing Australia in the 2009 Venice Biennale.

Around [Taronga Zoo](#), [Bradley's Head](#) and [North Head](#), are bunkers of all sorts, mainly in an overgrown and graffitied state. I also stumbled across [a red bellied black snake](#) in the bush, but it was quite placid and slinked away. My favorite bunker was a three story tower right on the cliff edge. I climbed into this, and the view from the top was amazing. Sydney is truly spectacular.

What interests me is the fact that these fortifications were seldom used for their main purpose. The huge fortress on Bare Island was built because the fear of invading Russians back in 1877, but it never had to use its guns for anything other than target practice. [Fort Denison](#) proudly holds the one and only [Martello tower](#) in Australia, and it is in immaculate condition, aside from an accidental shot from the US Navy.

Army training and preparation for defense also intrigues me. At Middle Head you can still see the [Vietnamese torture 'tiger cages'](#), used as part of army training. These were used to accustom soldiers to Vietnamese torture methods, should they ever be captured during the Vietnam War. At Lancer Barracks there is a photograph of one soldier practicing his aim by shooting at an artificial landscape with moving targets, complete with miniature palm trees, whilst a line of soldiers wait their turn.

During my travels I have noticed that some of the older folk still preserve their hatred of the Japanese. At Lancer Barracks I was asked by a man cooking some sausages where my family is from, which, and as I look Japanese, I knew where the conversation was headed. I told him that my parents are Malaysian and Singaporean, and that they had, as very young children lived through Japanese occupation during WW2, where they saw a lot of brutality. In response to this he told me that he hated the Japanese, and invited me to join him and his wife for lunch.

In addition to visiting these military sites, I have been going to art galleries, working in my studio and enjoying what Sydney has to offer.

Art in Sydney is a mixed bag. [The Museum of Contemporary Art](#) is a fantastic art deco building and I have seen some good work, currently a large show of Yinka Shonibare MBE's work, plus a show of new acquisitions.

Around Paddington there is a mix of commercial spaces, not dissimilar to London's Cork Street, with a scattering of some interesting galleries, such as [Roslyn Oxley](#), [Kaliman](#) and [Stills](#). There are also galleries dotted around Waterloo, Chippendale, Redfern and Central. I particularly like [First Draft](#), which is a slightly rougher edged artist run space, located in an old abattoir.

I went to the [Locksmith fundraiser art auction](#), which PAS artist [Tom Polo](#) was involved with. I wished I had more money to spend on art, my favourite being a sculpture in black glass of a ghost by Nell, which I think went for \$600, which later I found out was a bargain. Further out towards the Blue Mountains I went to [Hawkesbury Regional Gallery](#) to PAS artist [Lada Dedić's](#) show 'Knit one, purl one, knit one...' which, as the title aptly describes, is a show of contemporary art created using the knitted medium.

This month has sped by. From January 12 I will be using the PAS gallery as a project space, and will be working along side my Australian counterpart [Maria Ionico](#) to create work in response to my research. In the mean time, it's Christmas in a magnificent city.

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