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Cameron Robbins, *silver sun, feng da 14 hrs 27-04-2010*, ink on paper
Cameron Robbins, *Portable Wind Drawing Machine, Winter Solstice 2008*, Queenscliff Jetty, Victoria, photo: Rodney Nicholson
Cameron is a recipient of The Janet Holmes à Court Artists' Grant, which is a NAVA initiative, made possible through the
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•||•
COVER IMAGE
Eric Bridgeman
Boi Boi the Labourer (2008)
Inkjet Print on Photo Rag 110 x 130cm
Image courtesy of the artist.

EIGHTEEN

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THE UNIVERSE AT OUR FEET

THE WAY WE PERCEIVE our connections to a place and our relationship to culture and history are constantly in flux and negotiation. Our ability to move from location to location – whether virtually on the internet, physically across the world or even on the bus to a neighbouring suburb – illustrates how our daily interactions might be ordered differently than in the past.

The theme of this issue began with a series of questions and ideas: How might where we work or live define how we think about the world? How does our increased ability to communicate, connect and access information change the way we relate to one another? Does the communication of different historical, cultural, political and artistic viewpoints also shift how we view art, imagine borders, or change where we feel we belong?

Just as artists reinterpret our everyday existence, eloquently turning things on their heads, so here the themes of this issue have taken divergent paths. The following pages reveal some different thoughts and viewpoints which contribute to the idea of what a contemporary art practice might encompass.

Thank you to all the contributors and special thanks to Nick and Bronwyn for the invitation to be part of Das Superpaper. Enjoy!

GUEST EDITOR **JANE SOMERVILLE**



TROY EMERY FAKE TAXIDERMISTRY

PICTORIAL

TROY EMERY MAKES "FAKE" ANIMALS USING HIGH-DENSITY FOAM MOULDS FROM A TAXIDERMIST, REPLACING THE PELTS WITH BRIGHTLY COLOURED POLYESTER POM POMS AND TASSELS. BY EXAGGERATING THE QUALITIES THAT POACHERS MIGHT SEE IN EXOTIC WILDLIFE, THESE WHIMSICAL CREATURES COMMENT ON THE IDEA OF ANIMALS AS DECORATIVE OBJECTS.





•\• (L-R)
Troy Emery
Wild Thing (2010)
polyester pom poms,
polyurethane mannequin, glass eyes
Photo: Troy Emery

Wild Thing (2009)
polyester pom poms,
polyurethane mannequin, glass eyes
Photo: Michael Myers

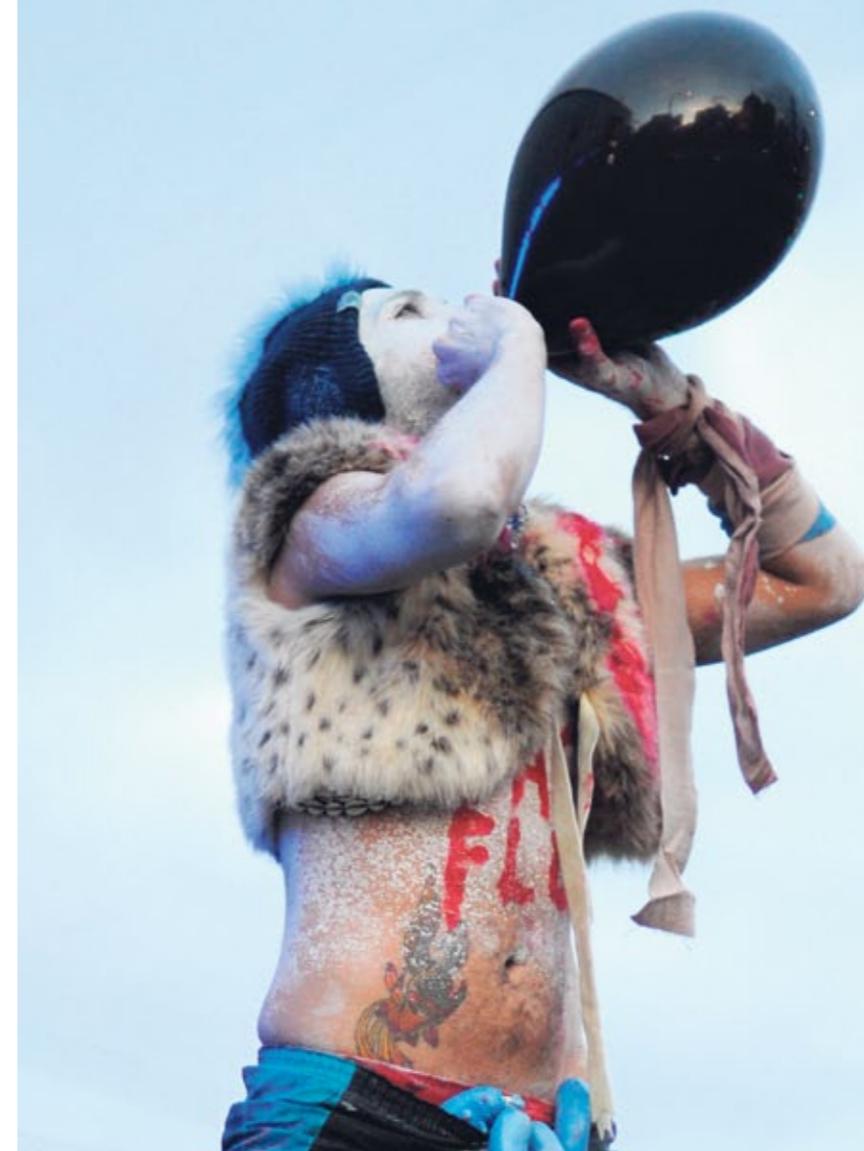
*Wild Thing I -
The Aesthetics of Natural History* (2010)
polyester pom poms,
polyurethane mannequin, glass eyes,
plastic teeth, painted timber stand
Photo: Michael Myers

•|
Tree of Life (2009)
Polyester pom poms, high density
foam mannequin, glass eyes, plastic teeth,
painted timber stand
Photo: Michael Myers

ERIC BRIDGEMAN

INTERVIEW SUMMAR HIPWORTH

AS A BRISBANE BASED ARTIST WITH PAPUA NEW GUINEAN (PNG) HERITAGE, ERIC BRIDGEMAN'S WORK PRESENTS A NUANCED PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF PLACE IN AN ARTIST'S PRACTICE. A KEEN OBSERVER OF HOW CULTURE SHAPES OUR PERCEPTIONS OF OTHERS, HIS PRACTICE REFLECTS THE COMPLEX EXPERIENCE OF BEING BOTH INSIDER AND OUTSIDER, VOYEUR AND VIEWED.



•|
Eric Bridgeman
Gayer Than All The Rest (2009)
Next Wave Time Lapse
at Federation Square, Melbourne
Image courtesy of the artist.

I've noticed a shift in your focus since the period you spent in PNG. Has this change been evident to you?

Place is important to a lot of people, and artists are no different. When I started making work I was conscious of my need to find a place to plant my feet in this world. I've lived in Brisbane most of my life, so I already knew I had this place in Australia that was somehow mine. When I was finishing up at art college, something happened. Depression and dissatisfaction with this place and the people perhaps, most probably. The ground was all concrete and my feet were hurting in my shoes. I channelled something inside of me and unleashed it, giving birth to my first body of work *The Sport and Fair Play of Aussie Rules* (2008-10). Looking back at my early work though, I see myself wanting some place else. My people and place in PNG seemed like a dream or fantasy, not real, and my connection to that place at that point was only through old family photographs, objects, my grandma's bilums and the lingering spirits of my bubus (grandparents).

Your early investigations into contemporary stereotypes and how preconceived ideas are formed becomes a questioning of the historical nature of works produced in PNG, such as in your film *The Fight* (2010).

I thought if I could get somewhere with this work, it would also be a way to get back to my ground in PNG. And that's what happened. The work I've made since has shifted and grown as much as I have. They're products of experience, and shift like me, from place to place. The more time I spend on my ground in the highlands in PNG, the stronger its presence in the work will become. It's simple like that, and I'm constantly aware of it. I now return to my village every year, sometimes twice a year, and it's important to me regardless of art making. I have a need to secure this place as mine, not for art, but for my feet. Art is something I do along the way.

So place, geographically speaking, begins to directly inform your work once a sense of genuine and personal connection is felt?

I agree with that somewhat, and in some instances it's caused problems when producing work. A bit like having performance anxiety in bed, I've had problems with performing specific tasks because of where I'm expected to carry it out. I try my hardest these days to be flexible and let the work adapt to the site and situation, but it's been hard due to travelling between geographical and cultural portals like Australia and PNG. Even early performance works that were created in Brisbane I struggled to place into situations in Sydney or Melbourne. I had plans for a performance in the Mardi Gras 2010, but I pulled back on the material so much that I ended up with almost nothing. It was a good idea, but I had problems adapting the work to such a specific cause and cultural audience. Mardi Gras is great and so is Sydney, but I couldn't just shift my work and all its meaning into a

new context. I did do some stuff of course. But the connection wasn't there, because I made the work in Brisbane, in the streets I've grown up in, and performed it for the sites and people that spawned a lot of the ideas. I'm half suburban/country Queenslander and half Papua New Guinea Highlander, and at the time that's what I was working with.

I guess being a performance artist, in particular, means that direct connection to the environment that you produce work in or about is important?

Performance is a pretty sensitive medium. I rely mainly on mental energy, like the Hulk when he transforms into the angry green muscle man ready to attack. I have a lot of emotion linked to Brisbane, and I suddenly felt that the emotion needed to do the performances wasn't there in Sydney at the time. And I can't do something if all of the pieces don't fit. But I've had really good performances in Melbourne and Sydney since that time. For the Next Wave festival in Melbourne last year I had a last minute change of wardrobe from Rugby League to AFL uniforms because it was relevant at the time. So making work for me is generally brought on by place and gathered experience. I guess a lot of people work this way. For me, any strong feeling is able to form connections to place, good and bad, joy and apathy, humour and confusion, anger and ecstasy, attachment and dislocation. I rely on everything like ingredients in a soup, and I'm always brewing ideas wherever I am, always making personal connections. Being in Queensland around the time of State of Origin made me want to make my video *Gayer Than All The Rest* (2009). Being in-between PNG and Australia made me confused about my position vis-a-vis ethnographic photography. This led to the series *New Photographs From Kokwara Trail* (2010). Probably like a lot of other 'mixed-race' or immigrant artists, I am always trying to resolve (even temporarily) the questions I create about 'where am I now', 'who am I here' and 'what is the difference'? Everything affects me, but maybe a lot of it is about confidence in the subject matter, my knowledge and the product. I've made some video work in my village in PNG, and some photographs too. I just haven't shown them all (to the art world) because I'm still struggling to find their place.

Perhaps art-making is a way of interpreting, and subsequently understanding yourself within that new context?

Yeah art helps. It calms a lot of heavy thinking. That's true, I've become more confident and my voice is louder here in Brisbane and Australia, and also in PNG. PNG is a work in progress for me still, and will probably be a long one. I haven't made much work there, it's all still brewing. I have plans to go to Europe later this year. That will be a new place for me to penetrate and gather up material. I would like to go to Africa too. My identity has become clearer in the last few years. I know who I am, but I'm not always sure what to do with it. So I make art.

<
Eric Bridgeman
Woman from Settlement with Boobs (2010),
Inkjet on Tarpaulin, 110 x 130 cm
Image courtesy of the artist.



>
Eric Bridgeman
Fuzzi Wazzi (2010)
Inkjet on Tarpaulin, 110 x 130 cm
Image courtesy of the artist.



<
Eric Bridgeman
Young Simbu Boy in Traditional Costume (2010).
Inkjet on Tarpaulin, 110 x 130 cm
Image courtesy of the artist.



<
Eric Bridgeman
Black Beauty (2010).
Inkjet on Tarpaulin, 110 x 130 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

Peter McKay

PLACES SPACE

INTERVIEW CHLOE HUGHES

PETER MCKAY IS A CURATOR, WRITER AND ARTIST. HE WAS RECENTLY APPOINTED DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIMENTAL ART FOUNDATION. SINCE 2007, MCKAY HAS WORKED AS A CURATOR AT ADELAIDE'S CONTEMPORARY ART CENTRE OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA.



I see art as an uncommon opportunity to engage with people on a meaningful level, it's my way of trying to make the world a better place to live in. We have an abundance of communication in our present era, but so much of this communication is meaningless and unnecessary. All these empty and excessive demands for our attention dull our perceptions. I believe art can be helpful to people by showing them something fantastic about the world that would otherwise go unnoticed in a wash of media reports, advertising and polite conversation. In this way art is like caffeine for humanity, waking us up to the remarkable brilliance of it all.¹



How do artists imagine place?

I think each artist's relationship to location is going to differ greatly, and so this question of place and what it means for an artist is a very complex topic. I don't think 'place' is an inherently Australian challenge as it once might have seemed, in an era when people still read Robert Hughes, but I would acknowledge that Australian artists do continue to share some particular cultural conditions and a general physical location/isolation that loosely groups them together. To my mind there are two separate underlying and fairly universal questions here: one about the kind of artist whose practice is specifically about certain places or events, near and far, and how that dictates their methods; and another separate question regarding the importance of being in proximity to places with career opportunities.

Speaking very generally, some artists will focus on contributing to the place in which they have spent some formative period, perhaps mindful of a particular contribution they can make to their history, community, scene or family. Others will personally identify with a certain mode of practice, lifestyle or opportunity elsewhere that will inevitably draw them to new cities or countries, either temporarily or permanently. I think each and every artist will feel the tension of being pulled one way or another at various points and in different ways throughout their career as their concepts and contacts evolve.

1. McKay, Peter, "Primavera – 2006," Art Right Now 2, Discovery Media, August 27, 2006, <http://gallery.discoverymedia.com.au/artzinePub/story.asp?id=350§ion=ExNews> (accessed February 11, 2011).

With regard to the importance of being in proximity to 'the action,' it's worth keeping in mind that an artist in Melbourne or Sydney is inhabiting quite a different professional environment compared to an artist in Adelaide or Perth, or for that matter Alice Springs or Cairns. Australia is a big country with an awful lot of distance between cities and I would say that most artists based anywhere outside of Melbourne or Sydney are going to struggle to come in contact with the kind of curators or arts workers that are most able to assist them in progressing their career internationally, either directly through exhibition opportunities or generally through introductions.

In Adelaide very few artists with ambition stay more than five years after graduating. Basically they leave out of frustration. I've stayed, but I've done alright by diversifying my involvement in the field to include curating. On another level, artists participating in the international biennale circuit may not really live at a fixed address at all – though realistically this probably doesn't include many Australians. These artists' popularity with curators may keep them 'on tour' most of the time, flying from one exhibition, residency or guest lecture to the next for as long as they remain current. Again it's complex and individual.

What is the impact of shifting cultural influences, travel and residencies in defining an artist's influence and practice?

The apparent proliferation of international residencies and affordable air travel is unquestionably opening up new opportunities for Australian artists, and in fact is probably accelerating the development of their ideas and general ambition. I myself have just returned from spending two weeks with the largely unacknowledged inventor of the digital watch at his home in rural Texas and this was possible because: one, this travel was relatively inexpensive as well as supported through a travel grant; and two, I could make contact with my subject through the internet and continue to build a relationship via email over six to twelve months. Ten or fifteen years ago this kind of an artwork probably would have just been too difficult for a part-time artist like myself to achieve.

On the broader question of shifting cultural influences I would say that Australia's cultural interest in its immediate region has been fairly strong for quite some time, in step with shifting economic ties, linked to the rise of Asia and decline of the West generally. Skype, Facebook and email have made working across time-zones as well as outside the old wealthy cultural centres of New York, London and Paris much more feasible. We can now network on our own terms, on limited resources if need be, to produce evermore forward-minded and geopolitically relevant projects of our own criteria. Establishing such networks is perhaps the real challenge – the means to collaborate is all there.



Does where you work influence your practice and view of art practice?

As an artist I've never really felt that my art practice fit in locally. My inspirations have rarely been other artists, local or otherwise, so maybe I don't really fit anywhere. To me art isn't really about fitting in anyway, it's more about standing out and exciting people with something different. At times my work has manifested itself as an action taken within my immediate environment – planting strawberry plants in the cracks in the pavement throughout the city for instance, however the concept is readily transferable. Cities are everywhere, and increasingly interchangeable. It's a bit of a cliché but I always keep in mind the principle 'think globally act locally'. A sophisticated audience is rarely going to be rewarded by going to see an exhibition by an artist who keeps themselves ignorant of national and international tendencies and histories.

How do artists circulate and how do they fit into the art world locally, nationally and internationally?

Travelling abroad to major international art events (as a spectator not a participant mind you) I am often a little depressed to think that maybe one or two Australian artists could have been a great addition if only this or that curator wasn't so adverse to sitting on a plane for 12 or 24 hours and the inevitable jetlag. But there are other more fundamental factors that I think are prohibiting Australian artists from circulating internationally, such as high living costs and the lack of a domestic market for the kind of work that I believe would be most viable for export. This day to day experience prevents Australian artists from working globally because their lack of career development lets them down. I would even go on to say that these issues are probably a greater limitation than the question of place. Regardless, I am always grateful for the opportunity and insight that travel brings and think it is an essential part of the 'job'. Moreover I should acknowledge that most of my own international travel has been supported by grants or the Qantas Foundation Encouragement Award I received in 2009, which in itself might be a positive indication that the nation's relationship to cultural support is already evolving in meaningful and significant ways, to alleviate the predicament of artists here.

In summary, I find that at this time in my life I identify with certain egalitarian and compassionate ideals which I feel are more present in Australia than in most other countries, and this keeps me here. Australia has a lot of unresolved social and environmental issues that need attention – and for a widely prosperous nation its contribution to the arts falls short – but in the wide-view Australia is doing very well comparatively, and there is reason to believe it will continue to do better. Adelaide specifically will convince me to stay as long as the benefits of technology and the potential to travel remain.

•|
 Peter McKay
Butterfly Kiss (detail) (2006)
 Digital C-Type Photograph
 1220 x 1620 mm
 Image courtesy the artist

Khaled Sabsabi

INTERVIEW JANE SOMERVILLE



• |
Khaled Sabsabi
Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement (2010)
Installation view, commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre
for *Edge of Elsewhere* (2011)
Image courtesy the artist.

WHEN KHALED SABSABI WON THE 2010 HELEN LEMPRIERE TRAVELLING ART SCHOLARSHIP IT WAS HAILED AS A SUCCESS FOR WESTERN SYDNEY. THE MULTIMEDIA ARTIST WAS BORN IN TRIPOLI, LEBANON AND HAS LIVED AND WORKED IN THE AREA SINCE HE MIGRATED TO AUSTRALIA IN 1978. SABSABI HAS EXHIBITED INTERNATIONALLY AS WELL AS WITHIN AUSTRALIA AND HIS WORK EXAMINES SOME OF THE COMPLEXITIES INHERENT WITHIN ISSUES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND BORDER IDENTITIES.

You have exhibited all over the world yet virtually the first line of any description about you is the fact you live and work in Western Sydney. How important is where you live and work to your art practice?

What I have learnt as an arts practitioner and as an artist, is that discourse with an international audience needs to happen. Australia has a lot to contribute but we tend to undervalue what we can add to that discourse – we tend to follow international trends. The first thing that artists do is, as soon as they have a profile, they want to exist in their area. For me Western Sydney – the people, the diversity and the evolving nature of the region – informs my practice and it is almost reflective of that whole notion of globalisation as well.

Before my practice was acknowledged by the high-end institutions [such as the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney] I was already exhibiting overseas – Berlin, Shanghai, Beirut, Poland, Argentina, Colombia, all over the place. The notion of Western Sydney is like that preconceived notion of the Wild West! [laughs]

Lately I've started to notice that a lot of the artists that come from Western Sydney are staying here and that feeds back into the prosperity of the region and the people. It adds these other layers of culture. I don't want to sound like a 'captain save-'em-all' but it is important. It provides role models for people whether they've come from Iraq or Sudan or wherever. It shows them it's possible to remain in your community with your family and maintain a practice locally. It has so many residues on schools, on environments... teachers can access them and it can inspire other people to work towards an artistic practice and profile. And that is the same whether you live in North Sydney, the inner city or Western Sydney.

Let's talk about the work *Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement* on show at *Edge of Elsewhere* at Campbelltown Arts Centre. You worked with a Sufi community who meet each week in the local Scout Hall to practise a spiritual *Zikr* ceremony. How did you go about making this work?

My background has always been working with communities through workshops and teaching. Not everyone can work with communities and not all communities want to work with an artist either. There are clear rules that have to be set. It's a two-way situation. Usually what happens is that I go in with my 'bag of tricks', my skills, something to teach whether it be digital media, sound, photo media, whatever. What was different in this engagement is that I didn't go in with anything. I went in there as a person who was invited into their place, into their ceremony.

The engagement was over a three-month period. I pretty much went in, got to meet them, sat down and absorbed the space, the feelings and the experience. After the third week I joined in their chants. What I found was something that was really familiar in the whole experience. I don't know what it is even now.

What caught my eye as soon as I came into the space in this scout hall, on the main wall, there were three flags draped – one was green, one yellow and the other black. I associate these colours with the likes of Hezbollah, Islamic studies and the Shiite movement, not the Greenacres First Scout Hall! It took me off guard and it really broke down the idea of space. How one image can be easily shifted from preconceived ideas and learning – that was the first thing for me.



The other thing I realised was that it didn't matter where this ceremony was being held because over the period of time you could see people leaving their chants and leaving the space – that physical space – by meditating. So the idea of space becomes void and that was the really nice thing for me. I thought if physical space doesn't matter then the idea of nationhood is irrelevant and maybe this is something that we as people really need to consider. All these people in the circle in ceremony weren't of a single race. They're Bosnians, Lebanese, Serbians, Indians, Turks, Anglo-Australians and the majority of them were born here. They don't speak politics in the space. They are interested in the inner soul. So that thing of identity and nationhood was something that just flew out the window.

After a few weeks they asked me 'what do you do?', so I took my laptop the following week and showed them some of my work. I showed them a ceremony from another Sufi order that I did in Tripoli, Lebanon [which hasn't been exhibited yet] and they started talking about the meaning and significance of that order and the different practices within the Sufi orders and things started to fall in place for me. They were impressed with the work and I asked them if it would be ok for me to video the ceremony or take photos or record audio. They said go ahead.

I wanted to keep this as simple as possible to maintain a genuine connection with the community but at the same time I wanted something that was sophisticated and original. I decided to do a three-channel video work in real time. Each week I would set up the cameras in different places to try to capture the whole circle that everyone sits within. It's quite simple.

I think there is a real beauty in that simplicity and the way it embodies the spiritual aspect really comes across when you are viewing the work. What did the community think?

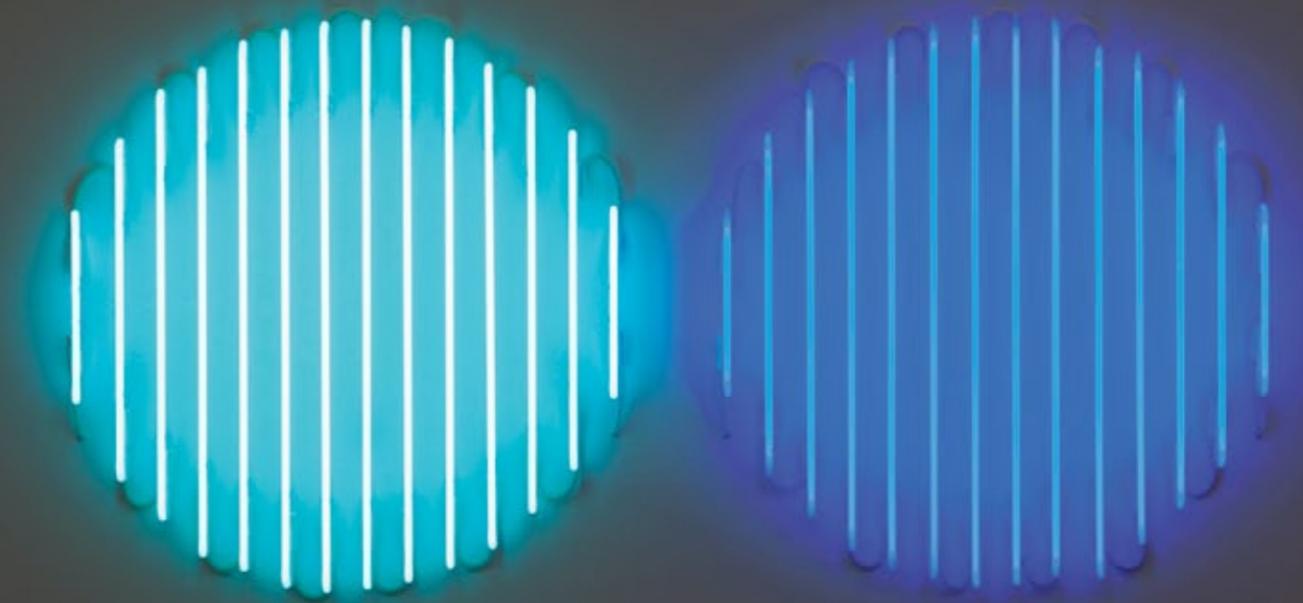
It was really important for me to show them the work even before I handed it over to the gallery. They loved it. We still speak all the time and they came to the opening of the exhibition. They loved the idea of the kids running around. That's the other thing – the symbolism of the work is really important because Sufis are about an inner spirituality. You have to have a strong relationship with the exterior and acknowledge that before you work towards your inner spirituality. So having the kids run around, crossing from one frame to the other signifies all these day to day things – the pleasure or the chaos of the everyday. There are these little connections every now and then when one of them starts nodding in time to the chants. In one video one of the kids starts spinning around ...those are the things you can't explain. You just feel.

•|
Khaled Sabsabi
Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement (2010)
Stills from installation
Commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre
for *Edge of Elsewhere* (2011)
Image courtesy the artist.

BRENDAN VAN HEK: *SOME KIND OF LOVE STORY*

PICTORIAL

Known for his installation and neon works that query our place within urban spaces, Perth based artist Brendan Van Hek's recent show at Anna Schwartz Gallery, *Some Kind Of Love Story*, examined universal questions around love, empathy and the way humans might, or might not, connect with one another



∨
Brendan Van Hek
Two Colours (turquoise, soda blue) (2011)
Neon
800 x 1700 mm
Photo: Paul Green

•|
Some Kind of Love Story (colour suite) (2011)
Neon
Eight parts, each 800 x 1700 mm
Photo: Paul Green

|•
Some Kind of Love Story (2011)
Installation views
Photo: Paul Green

All images courtesy of the artist
& Anna Schwartz Gallery Melbourne and Sydney



•|
 Brendan Van Hek
Daydreamer (2009)
 Installation: hand coloured mirrors, hand coloured mirror balls
 Dimensions variable, Photo: Paul Green
 Image courtesy of the artist & Anna Schwartz Gallery Melbourne and Sydney



NEWELL HARRY A ROLLING STONE GATHERS NO MOSS



INTERVIEW MARISSA BATEMAN

In an issue that explores the influence of space and place in artistic practice, there seems no better artist to interview than Newell Harry. As post-colonialism and globalism continue to be the foremost concerns of society, Harry's multidisciplinary artworks form intelligent and witty observations of contemporary society. Cultural exchange is key to Harry's work. From installations that retell the swapping of his Cannondale V900 mountain bike with a Ngunese village bicycle, to his dissection of vernacular and Afrikaans phrases in traditional Vanuatuan woven mats, Harry's work stems from his experiences and observations travelling between Australia, Vanuatu and South Africa. While Harry's works speak for themselves, we pick his brain on his insights to the intangible notions surrounding identity, space and place.



Newell Harry
Reverse Missionary (Easy Rider) (2009-10)
 Exchanged Ngunese village bicycle for artist's Cannondale V900 mountain bicycle
 Variable dimensions
 Image courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
 Photo: Susannah Wimberley

Newell Harry
(Untitled) Tapu, Nuku'alofa (2010)
 Colour photograph (1 of 8), 435 x 650mm
 Commissioned Campbelltown Arts Centre for 'Edge of Elsewhere' 2011
 Image courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney



What is the impact of shifting cultural influences, travel, residencies et cetera in defining an artist's influence and practice?

Travel has never been easier than it is now but it remains largely a leisure activity for those of wealthier nations. Migration, of course, is something altogether different. In terms of the impact of shifting cultural influences, although it's occurring more consistently today than in the past, I'm not so sure anything that different is occurring now than in the days of the Dutch East India Company and early colonial expansion. Trade and economics are still run by large global entities and shipping remains the predominant mode of global industrial transport. Slavery might have been abolished, but many people the world over remain enslaved. So long as nations continue to trade or be at war people will continue shift and migrate at the prospect of better opportunities. This has been going on since year dot and will continue while humans populate the earth. As people move, cultures inherently shift and are influenced by one another.

For me, travel has been a strategic compromise, given it's cheaper to live and work abroad than deal with inflated rent and exorbitant living costs in Sydney. But it's also a personal choice of where one would rather be. Travel, for me, is as much

a practical 'medium' and strategy of process as it is an activity that essentially informs my work and thinking.

Where you work clearly influences your work...

Yes, undoubtedly it does. Time spent in my mother's home city of Cape Town continues to inform, as do numerous trips through parts of India, Japan and China. However, the Pacific and predominantly the Vanuatu archipelago have left the greatest mark on me. Since 2004 I've worked on a number of projects and travelled between various islands from Espiritu Santo up north through to Mataso, Nguna, Pele and Tanna, down south. I've plans later this year to spend time on another southern island, Erromango, the island from which it's claimed Bislama may have first emerged as a result of the British sandalwood trade, and later on the Queensland cane industry. That is exciting to me given my obsession with 'broken' languages and Pidgin dialects. During my years in the islands I've been fortunate to form many deep and long-lasting friendships. This has enabled me to experience parts of Ni-Vanuatu life and culture rarely seen by outsiders. In 2007 I was customarily inducted to the island of Nguna, which was a great honour. It goes beyond words to talk of such experiences in relation to 'art', so let's leave it there.

Newell Harry
Lomu Family home, Nuku'alofa (2010)
 Colour photograph (documentation), 435 x 650mm
 Commissioned Campbelltown Arts Centre for 'Edge of Elsewhere' 2011
 Image courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney



Do Australian artists share a unique position in the art world?

I guess that depends on your take of what the 'art world' is, but I don't think so. No more unique than any Italian, Mexican, Afro-Caribbean or Lithuanian artist working today. Uniqueness is relative. Personally I find many Australians still quietly desiring some kind of heads-up from the northern hemisphere, which I feel continues to expose a sense of cultural self-doubt. Perhaps this points to a lack of faith in our own position. But it also depends I suppose on what you look at as being 'uniquely Australian'. For me, the question lies within the wider Asia Pacific region and our discourse within that, rather than Australia itself. In looking at our broader region by default you end up defining some sort of Australian context. Incidentally, very few younger Australian artists I meet know anything of the broader Pacific region and our historical discourse within it. Hardly anyone I meet knows anything of contemporary or traditional Oceanic art forms. This I find rather sad, especially given the obvious significance it's had on the West, especially its relationship to early Modernism and the thinking behind Surrealists such as Breton. As an avid collector of Oceanic Art, I'm also quite ashamed by the poor representation Melanesian Art is given in some of our local institutions, especially given our colonial connection with Papua New Guinea. Australians

harp on about the tyranny of distance, yet the idea of distance is only an issue for those continuing to see European or American acknowledgement as some sort of comparative gauge of quality. I think such thinking is clearly well dated.

They say 'home is where your hat hangs'... where do you feel you belong?

My personal history and sense of 'home' is a complex one. For me the idea of home, or rather my lack in identifying with one is innately tied to my own experiences of migration and dislocation. I was conceived in Durban but born in Sydney. My mother is South African Cape Coloured, of Dutch, Malay and Khoikhoi descent, while my father is French-Mauritian with distant Indian and Javanese ancestry. Between the ages of one and fourteen a stoic, 'she'll be right mate', Anglo-Australian father raised me. I carry his surname. With that contrast in backgrounds I don't claim any singular affinity with one culture, place, language or identity. I acknowledge the various cultural strands of my ancestry and how historically they came to be intertwined.

Newell Harry
Circles in the Round (2010)
 Neon, anagrams, palindromes
 6 parts, overall dimensions variable. Circle dimension: diameter 105cm ea.
 Image courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
 Photograph: Ivan Buljian



Is home where your studio is?

For me the studio is a malleable space, at times as much a psychological state of mind as an actual physical place. As I've travelled consistently over the past few years, I try working with flexible strategies sympathetic to circumstance and place. It's about adaptability. I'm also quite superstitious - a trait from my mother's side — and hold a firm belief in not returning to studios I've previously held or shared. One always has to move on physically and mentally in order not to be enslaved by the past, positive or negative. As the cliché goes, a rolling stone gathers no moss. Ridding past attachments to place also allows you to act and respond more freely to the present. In any event, one always carries the past with them, internally and through memory. Most of my projects and ideas emerge from no particular place, they emerge from many, as opposed to somewhere fixed, sedentary or concentrated.

The process of exchange is integral to your work...

As with most of my projects, I engage with themes that centre on currency, value, exchange and economy. The gift mat project was about this, as 'gift mats' are actually a form of 'tribal' monetary currency in Vanuatu. Hence my interest in colonial trade, shipping and economics. With a piece like the bike

exchange what I'm trying to do is pose the question of where the value of an art object resides and who determines this value? Value, of course, is relative and I'd hope that a piece like the bike exchange proposes that. It's quite simple: a supposedly 'worthless' village bicycle is swapped for a collectable and highly valued Western mountain bike. But which is bike is really worth more and how do our ideas of value change in regards to context, or indeed the museum. To me the 'art' resides not in the object but in the exchange itself yet the village bike, by default, ends up becoming an esteemed work of art simply because of a contextual shift. I guess it's quite Duchampian. I suppose there's also a reference to the types of underhand trading that went on during colonisation, where the colonists would exchange things of lesser value (such as mirrors, cheap beads or booze) for items of higher value like gold or land from 'the natives'. So in another sense a reversal of sorts has gone on with my exchange. I've swapped something of supposedly higher value for less - hence the loaded title 'Reverse Missionary'. And what is swapped here is a simple bike, an item a tad more benign than a Christian bible.

JEFF GIBSON

PICTORIAL

JEFF GIBSON IS AN AUSTRALIAN BORN ARTIST WHO HAS BEEN LIVING AND WORKING IN NEW YORK SINCE 1998. HE IS ALSO THE MANAGING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM INTERNATIONAL.



Jeff Gibson
Smoke (2010)
 Still from a color digital video
 2 minutes 48 second.s
 Image courtesy of the artist

•|•
 Jeff Gibson
Asylum (2010)
 Stills from a color digital video
 6 minutes 4 seconds.
 Images courtesy of the artist



JANE SOMERVILLE:

How do you think your idea of Australia might have shifted by living away from it?

JEFF GIBSON:

To be honest, my idea of Australia hasn't shifted a lot since leaving because I have been more focused on coming to terms with where I live now. That said, I do think about Australian society, art, and culture from time to time, but mostly in comparative terms in order to assist my efforts at comprehending the society, art, and culture of other countries—particularly America—and my relation to them. In this regard, it's conceivable that my idea of Australia has become more complicated and dimensional, and perhaps, with distance, more objective, but I can't say my thinking has been influenced by significant shifts in the culture itself because I haven't been close enough to it to know with any authority what they might be.

•/
 Jeff Gibson
Clinical Radicalism and Misconceptualism (2010)
 Archival inkjet print, 13 x 19".
 From the *Asylum* series (2010)
 Images courtesy of the artist.



Beyond that, I guess my view of Australia over the last decade has been coloured to some extent by fairly standard psychological processes concerning separation and longing. Absence has perhaps made the heart grow fonder, and once nostalgia kicks in (not quite there yet), this will surely be more so. But these are merely subjective impressions that I try to separate from any remotely objective account I might attempt to formulate regarding Australia as a geographic or cultural location.

For me, place is not so much a primary artistic influence as it is a set of circumstances that must be negotiated in order to think and operate in broader terms. I'm sure that locality is a major concern for those who deal with concrete cultural issues, but these days my interests are more abstract, aesthetic, psychological, and philosophical. While the unique demands of any given context certainly play a role in determining how and what we perceive or apprehend, I'm more interested in the inner working of the human subject. Therefore, the "place" that interests me the most is the one that lies at the intersection of intuition and intellect.

clinical radicalism
raising hell in a highly
conservative context

misconceptualism
the mistaken belief
that all concepts are
inherently interesting

SANGEETA SANDRASEGAR
GHOST GUMS AND
PINK-GLITTERED MOMENTS

INTERVIEW ANNALICE CREIGHTON

LAYERS OF ORGANZA sway back and forth, delicate appliquéd fauna, ghost gums and wait-a-while cane vines, hennaed feet suspended in mid-air. A beautiful and bittersweet portrait of coming home; or as described by artist Sangeeta Sandrasegar: 'Our returns to, or *re-arrivals* to place – the decisions, thoughts and feelings which mingle so confusingly and heart-achingly'. Her work witnesses the perpetuation of place-bound connections, a sense of home that remains significant to an artist who has spent many years in the midst of global itinerancy. Sandrasegar's work addresses cross-cultural debates, post-colonial and hybridity theory, and draws upon her mixed Indian-Malay and Australian heritage. Her investigations of place and race intersect with cultural narratives, the in-between spaces of felt experience, and tangible histories made manifest in bejeweled, shadow-lit papercuts, and layered, laborious fibrework. In between posting exquisite corpses and travelling cheaply through the imaginary portals of literature, we talk.



What are you making at the moment?

At the moment I am working on a collaborative project with Sydney artist Luke Parker. It is for a show here in Melbourne at *Death Be Kind* – a twelve-month program run by artists Claire Lambe and Elvis Richardson. Their project is designed to research and exhibit contemporary art and collections that engage with the subject of death... the aesthetics of horror, the afterlife, the memorial and the museum display. Luke's and my project is based on the surrealist *Exquisite Corpses*. We have been sending our separate pieces back and forth between Melbourne and Sydney – so there has been this wonderful correspondence – each week there is a new parcel to unwrap of partly concealed body parts to which we add our next section and send off. When we meet up, revealing the bodies has been this amazing show of relationships, sensitivities and surprise.

You have travelled and spent many residencies abroad as part of your practice, to Milan, Spain, London and most recently to India. How did being away from Australia and working in another cultural and artistic contexts inform your practice?

My first residency in Milan was in 2005, a year after I had finally finished at art school, so it was very new for me to be both out of uni and in Europe for the first time. I think that was a huge shock for me – my greatest realisations were those stock standards you so often hear – that the art world was massive and there was so much contemporary art and how overwhelming all this felt, and really how far away Australia was, and how much more integrated both classical and contemporary art was in people's lives in Europe. After the residency we lived in Rome for about six months and by

this time I think I was learning to like living abroad! In 2006 my partner and I moved to London. At the time I really wanted to isolate myself from other practices and learn how to make art on my own. I spent most of this time just learning it by feel. Basically it was everyday life, the different people you meet, the diverse languages and rhythms, the greater heterogeneity and access to wider opinions and debate that really influenced my work – or my ways of seeing. The writer Geraldine Brooks said 'Every place I've lived has given me a book.' I can agree that every place I have lived has given me an artwork.

Do you think it is important for Australian artists to travel?

Yes, I think for the exposure I have just mentioned it is important. But then maybe it depends on how you make your work, or how you need to live. There is this Indian story that my Dad loves telling...

One day Shiva comes to his sons Ganesha (of the thresholds and spiritual demeanour) and Kartikeya (scientist and army commander to the Gods) and says 'It is time for you to go out and learn about the world and discover your meaning in Life.' Kartikeya flies off on his peacock, he travels for many years and encounters numerous wonders and adventure. When he returns he finds his brother Ganesha already seated at the feet of his parents. 'But how did you of slow feet return quicker than I?' To which Ganesha replied, 'I circled our parents, they are the world.'

Is nomadism unfairly valorised as an important activity for contemporary artists? Are artists culturally and economically rewarded for being displaced, transient and globally mobile?



Yes I think it is unfairly valorised... with the growing focus on the International art star – globally mobile and travelling for exhibitions, biennales and art fairs – there also comes this new pressure for artists to travel and take up residencies and international workshops. Again, I don't think it necessarily makes for good work or situations. Sometimes with travel, schedules or demands, you don't find enough time to sit still and consider.

Then there is also the valorisation of the 'exile' artist who works in a different country to where they were born/grew up – I want to see what their work is about, rather than label them with ideas and/or agendas of cultural alterity and displacement. I am a firm believer that the work should speak for itself, and not just about where the artist is from.

What influenced your work *Its hands were tied with a silken thread of my own hand's weaving*? What ideas does a work like this bring to the question of place/locality/belonging and its influence on the artist?

This series is about my return to Australia – and I was trying to reconcile the decision with my feelings of being back. It is a heady and heartfelt contemplation about my return to Melbourne after about five years away from the country. It is about the adjustments we make to ourselves in our returns to, or *re-arrivals* to place – our assessments or *re-assessments*. In a way, primarily it is about love – the ties that bind – yearning and obligation to place and to people. In constructing these pieces there were two poems that I was thinking of, *He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven* by W.B. Yeats, and *I had a dove, and the sweet dove died* by John Keats, a line from which lends itself as the title to this project.

- Sangeeta Sanrasegar
Its feet were tied with a silken thread of my own hand's weaving (2010)
Installation view Murray White Rooms
Photograph John Brash
Image courtesy the artist
- Sangeeta Sanrasegar
Untitled (domestic)
The Shadow Class, (2007-08)
Felt, cotton, glass beads and plastic beads
990 x 720 mm, Photo: Gary Trinh
Image courtesy the artist
- Sangeeta Sanrasegar
Untitled (sex worker)
The Shadow Class (2007-08)
Felt, hosiery, plastic beads and cotton
740 x 1230 mm, Photo: Gary Trinh
Image courtesy the artist

I have also realised that since coming back I have really been thinking about our natural landscape. I think I am trying to use that as a way to re-connect with place, to understand Australia's history, which I look at through fairly critical eyes in regards to race relations and ethnicity and aboriginality. So the natural landscape has been a central aid in trying to connect all these overlapping emotions – my deep love of Australian flora and the bush, my family and close friends, and my continuously fluctuating sense of belonging here.

You produce works from unassuming, beautifully decorative materials, but which often speak about very serious political and cultural issues. What first drew you to working in these mediums?

I think this way of working is about smallness and the individual, and about intimacy – the time spent with these works. I like the relationship I develop with these works as I sit there sewing and/or cutting. It is my dreamtime. Lately the use of materials and embroidery have been for me a nod to pernicious forms of contemporary labour – child workers in India and China, and historically the role of feminism – what were considered primarily female roles and how feminism has brought us beyond that. We can't forget the rights that were worked so hard for, and which still need working for.

But, I think primarily it is about the horror. I see so much pain and inequity in the world, and these are the themes that start my work, but I see so much beauty in it too – the drenching light of our skies and the ghost-like softness of certain hours – these pink glittered moments are what allow me to deal with the serious issues, in the hope that we can try and move towards... something new.

