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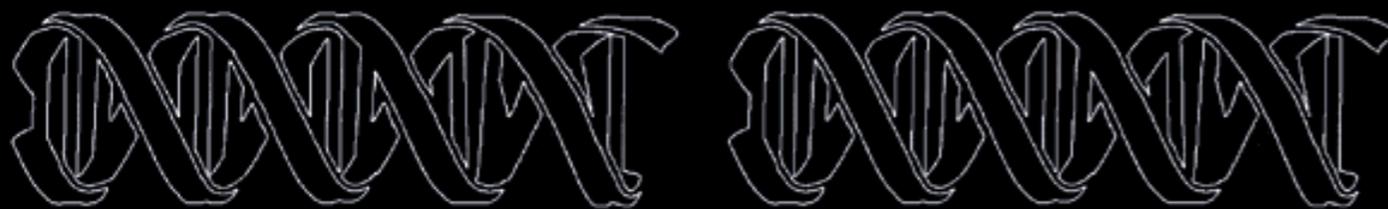
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FRONT COVER

Elizabeth's Mission.

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Regina Walter.

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MICHAEL MOHAMMED AHMED is a writer, editor and actor. He was recipient of the 2012 Australia Council Kirk Robson and is currently the Director of SWEATSHOP: Western Sydney Literacy Movement. His first novel, *The Tribe*, is forthcoming in 2014 (Giramondo Press). Mohammed's acting credits include *Fast Cars & Tractor Engines* with Urban Theatre Projects (2004 – 2005), *Stories of Love & Hate* with Urban Theatre Projects and Sydney Theatre Company (2008 & 20011) and *I'm Your Man* with Belvoir Theatre and Sydney Festival (2012). Mohammed is a doctoral candidate at the University of Western Sydney's Writing & Society Research Centre.

PEDRO DE ALMEIDA is a curator, arts manager and writers and is currently Program Manager at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Previously he worked at Campbelltown Arts Centre (2008–11).

DAVID CAPRA has lived in Western Sydney since birth. He works in performance, often with his two year old dachshund, Teena. He currently is a resident at Parramatta Artists studio and works in cultural development in nearby suburbs. Last year he was a recipient of an artist in schools residency at Rydalmere Public, collaborating with Mikala Dwyer and Justene Williams. Supported by an Australian Council New Work grant and Campbelltown Arts Centre, David will perform Birthing things in the Spirit: The Water Birth in December.

MICHAEL DAGOSTINO is currently the Director of Campbelltown Arts Centre. Prior to this, he has project-managed, curated or assisted in over 150 exhibitions over his 15 years experience in the commercial/creative/ community arts sector. He was the inaugural Director of the Parramatta Artists Studios and has worked for the Artbank as acting senior curator and Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre as acting curator. He has sat on many arts company boards and panels including the Chair or Artspace, current board member of FBI radio and arts funding panels for the state (Arts NSW) and federal government (Australia Council for the Arts).

JAGATH DHEERASEKERA is an Amnesty International Human Rights Innovation Fund Grant recipient. Jagath's human rights activism led to his exile in France as a political refugee. His second spell of photography began in mid 1990's with his return to Sri Lanka. He settled in Australia with his family in 2008. Jagath has presented his work in a number of solo exhibitions, selected group exhibitions and photo festivals. He lives and works in Campbelltown (Sydney). jd.photoshelter.com With humble beginnings as an aspiring home cook with a zest for uploading phone-photos of brunch to Facebook,

ALANA DIMOU gradually became more and more enamoured with the relationship between food and camera. She recently graduated from UNSW's College of Fine Arts majoring in photography and now works as a food and lifestyle photographer in Sydney. www.alanadimou.com

SUSAN GIBB is a curator based in Sydney. She was formerly Associate Curator at Campbelltown Arts Centre and Curatorial Assistant at Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.

MARLA GUPPY is a cultural planner and public art strategist who has spent over twenty years working on projects that explore social environments and identity. An experienced curator, Marla's public art projects include the Inner West Light Rail Extension, new urban areas at in Blacktown, Fairfield and Bankstown, town centres art including Top Ryde and Merrylands, and civic architecture including NSW Police Headquarters and the new Narellan Library in addition to numerous smaller projects. Marla was a founding member of the Australia Council's Community, Environment, Art, & Design (CEAD) Committee.

LISA HAVILAH is the Director of Carriageworks, Sydney. From 2005 – 2011 Lisa was the Director of Campbelltown Arts Centre, and from 1998–2004 she was Assistant Director of Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre. Curatorial projects include *Anita & Beyond* (2003), *For Matthew & Others: Journeys with Schizophrenia* (2006), *What I think About When I think about Dancing* (2009) and *Edge of Elsewhere* (2010-12).

JOHN KIRKMAN is Executive Director, Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE). As part of Sydney Architecture Week 2013 ICE will be presenting *Pearls of Granville. A Tour of Architecture and Suburb* – a series of guided minibus tours (with geo locative iPad narrative) of selected architectural 'wonders', aesthetic and cultural transition and related community histories of Granville.

DANIEL KOJTA is an Australian interdisciplinary artist based in the Blue Mountains. In the tradition of Panamarenko and Bill Viola, Daniel's works engage the senses, often through an interactive experience that presents a combination of media elements including stills photography, video, performance and large scale media projections. Most recently Daniel Kojta won first prize in the Scenic World Sculpture Exhibition and is currently establishing an artists residency in the Blue Mountains, 'Z Block Studios', to open in late 2013. Daniel does not have a mullet.

SOPHIA KOUYOUMDJIAN has worked in the arts sector for over 15 years across directorial, curatorial and exhibition management roles. Currently the Coordinator, Parramatta Artists Studios and previously the Acting Director and Curator at Blacktown Arts Centre, Sophia has comprehensive experience in Western Sydney's contemporary arts sector.

ANNE LOXLEY is a curator and writer who works with contemporary artists both in and outside gallery contexts, in communities and in public spaces. In January 2011 she took up the position of Curator, C3West, for Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. Her Western Sydney projects include Garry Trinh's *Within Walking Distance* (Western Sydney Parklands 2012) *The Visitors – the Australia Response to UFOs and Aliens* (Penrith Regional Gallery 2007), *C'town Bling* (Campbelltown Arts Centre, 2005) and *Tuba rai metin – firmly gripping the earth* (Casula Powerhouse, 1996). A former *Sydney Morning Herald* art critic, she has published numerous essays and articles and edited many visual arts publications.

VAUGHAN O'CONNOR is a Sydney based researcher, curator and artist. He has worked as a curator and project officer in several Western Sydney art spaces. Vaughan is currently a Director at Firstdraft Gallery and Holoshop Research Assistant, College of Fine Arts (UNSW).

GISELLE STANBOROUGH is an emerging intermedia artist whose practice often addresses online user generated media and the way in which such technologies encourage us to identify and perform notions of self. She graduated from COFA in 2010 with the University Medal and since then has exhibited in galleries around NSW and in Melbourne. Her work has been shown online in The Washington Post's "Pictures of The Day" and in Hennessy Youngman's "Art Thoughtz".

GARRY TRINH is an artist working with photography. He holds a BA in Psychology and a BA in Visual Communications / Photography and Digital Imaging from the University of Western Sydney. Trinh uses photography to capture unexpected and spontaneous moments in daily life and to express his personal ideas. His photographs are about a way of looking at the world, to reveal magic in the mundane. He hopes his photographs are read not just seen. He is never bored. Trinh lives and works in Western Sydney.

REGINA WALTER was born and bred in Western Sydney. Her public artworks are predominantly Western Sydney based, and short films and zines incorporate Westie themes. This issue features stills from the film 'In', a response to the female smokers in her life. These women were filmed outside shopping malls in Parramatta, Fairfield and Wetherill Park, NSW.

BY DAVID CAPRA

WESTERN SYDNEY: A PORTRAIT OF A PLACE.

In 2005 I spent a year living in Italy, staying at my great uncle's house. He ran the Laurus Robuffo publishing house and was quite wealthy. I slept in the room where Mussolini learnt fencing, bathed in the ground's Olympic swimming pool and had my own Roman Holiday affair with the family dachshund. After all this indulgence, I wasn't looking forward to coming back home.

Home is Western Sydney, where I have lived all my life.

When I arrived back, I became aware of Parramatta Artists Studios, which was co-ordinated at the time by Michael Dagostino: the 'art dad' to a generation of Western Sydney artists. Fairly soon I had a studio myself and made friends with artists that came from "out west" too. I began to discover Western Sydney on a deeper plane, and met mentors who had already figured out its tracks.

Talking about Western Sydney can feel tiresome at times, especially when funding comes into conversation (arts funding bodies often require organisations to run programs out west). "Rough. Cultural wasteland. A place people don't go (unless they have to find ingredients for an exotic dinner). Too many people." All things I have heard when the west is brought up. When approaching this edition of Das Superpaper I wanted to go beyond those familiar stereotypes and instead focus

on what I find truly exciting about Western Sydney. Das, being a responsive format set in the now was perfect to address the topic.

All across Australia similar social and economic landscapes sprawl inland from the coast, from the western suburbs of Sydney to the eastern suburbs of Perth. Transport is particularly significant to Sydney's extensively spread out west. There are always adventures to be had on the T-80, the government-funded bus from which Tom Polo took inspiration for his addition to Das. Polo has used the T-80's carpeted seat patterns and phrases overheard in conversations on the journey. There is Elizabeth who, willed by God, shakes people's hands on trains from Ashfield to Campbelltown after her nightshift. JD Reforma has found another way to get around: an epic swimming pool saga, starting at Ingleburn and ending on the other side of Sydney to see how the other half live.

This issue of Das features a section dedicated to presenting new works by artists from Western Sydney, including Justene Williams reflecting on her dance eisteddfod days, Heath Franco's heavily mascaraed man in what appears to be a grocery catalogue, Paris and Tacky morphing into madcap decoupagists, and Regina Walter taking a break with the smoking women of Stockland Wetherill Park. Elsewhere in the magazine, Giselle Stanborough and Alana Dimou take us on a two-day Big Mac eating extravaganza,

and we learn about future project Funpark, which shares Mt Druitt's fascination with themeparks.

It's all happening out here.

Thank you to Anne Loxley who generously mentored me through this process and the Das team for making it all happen.

1. INTERVIEWS & PERSONAL REFLECTIONS.

BY JOHN KIRKMAN

PEARLS OF GRANVILLE.

The Australian ugliness is bigger and better here, but in substance Sydney is only a sharper example of the general Australian townscape. There is beauty to be discovered here, in two categories, natural and artistic, but the trouble is that it must be discovered.

The fine things, from the glimpse of magnificent landscape to the rare good buildings, old and new, are all but suffocated by the ugliness...

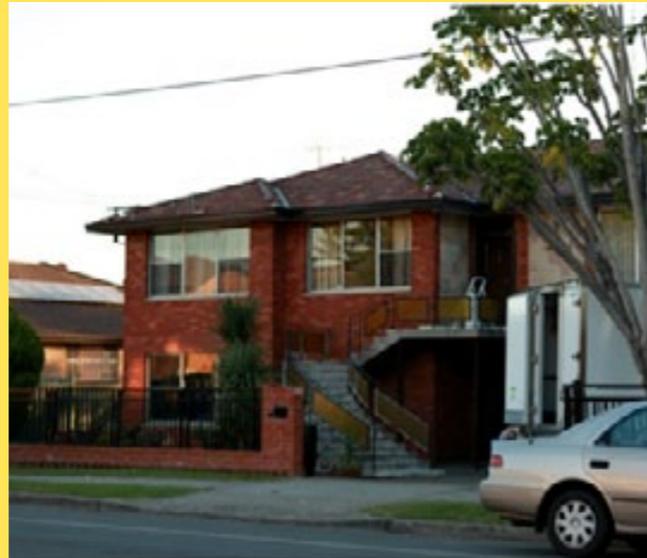
— Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (1960)

As a youth I thought Robin Boyd was on the money as far as Granville was concerned. But in hindsight I think Boyd was full of shit. Pretentious and patronising, *The Australian Ugliness* is, at best, an overwritten period piece of utopian aesthetic analysis and critique. What's missing is people, and the relationship they have to, and the power of, vernacular and 'ordinary' domestic architecture. Indeed, what was considered ugly and irrelevant to Robin Boyd was, more than likely, considered beautiful and important by my parents in Campbell Hill Road.

The poet Kenneth Slessor wrote "you find this ugly. I find it lovely." I agree, and similarly concur with architect Graham Jahn that "architecture reveals many things about culture...the resourcefulness and originality of the people. It reveals the consistency or diversity of those that were drawn there or were born there, their influences, expectations and knowledge. Each building is a time capsule." And a memory.

For instance...

**BLAXCELL STREET CEDAR TREE HOUSE:
BLAXCELL STREET, GRANVILLE. BUILT CIRCA 1964.**



In a powder blue Ford Falcon driving past the freshly completed 'Cedar Tree House' in Blaxcell Street, Granville, my parents became agitated about the blonde brick 'trees' in the building's sidewall (see image above). "What does that mean? Look how they've spoilt that wall. Why would you do that? What a waste of money and brick." As explanation for us kids in the back my Dad said, "the lesbians live there." Lesbians in Granville! Correcting him, my Mother drolly replied, "he means Lebanese. Not lesbians." Lebanese in Granville! ...And the subject was never mentioned again. Still standing, the 'Cedar Tree House' – in double brick veneer – is testament to a time long gone when Lebanese and lesbians could be confused, and when the presence of either in Granville was cause for comment.



In the summer of 2005, as Director of the Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest, I was asked by the Sydney Morning Herald to write a piece on my favourite 'artwork' in Sydney. I suggested a building – The Crest Ballroom in Granville. I have loved that building from childhood. I saw my first movie there (*The Guns of Navarone*), made my theatrical debut on its stage (*The Sound of Music*) and danced the 'Pride of Erin' at a friend's debut. However, after much toing and froing I was told *No go. It can't be a building.* (Well, not a building in Granville.) My replacement article (submitted and published) was about a drainpipe.

Catering to pre-television Granville and the post-World War II explosion of Housing Commission and War Service housing developments in the area, the Hoyts Crest Cinema was designed by Cowper, Murphy and Associates and built by A. W. Edwards Pty Ltd in 1948 (and was one of the very few cinemas built in the late 1940s). The Crest's distinctive façade, signage and corner location made it a prominent local landmark. The main structure was of a Quonset-hut design, with façade, interior designs and fit-out reflecting post-Art Deco and post-Moderne 'Picture Palace' architecture.

Bringing Hollywood glamour to Blaxcell Street Granville, The Hoyts Crest Cinema, seating 852 patrons, opened on Saturday the 27th of March, 1948 (screening *The Swordsman* and *Dangerous Years*) and closed on Saturday the 24th of August, 1963. After closing as a cinema, The Crest was used as a ballroom and bingo hall. The building is currently owned and operated as a community and function centre by the local Blouza (Lebanese) community. It is now the Blouza Hall and retains its original form and decoration. It is not to be missed.



**THE CREST
DEBUT PHOTO COURTESY
OF GRANVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



MILAT HOUSE (CIRCA 1950S) AND DELLWOOD BUTCHERY (1948) ARCHITECT/BUILDER HOUSING COMMISSION OF NSW

Whilst living up the road from Parramatta at Castle Hill, Patrick White wrote his 'Sarsaparilla' plays. Unlike Robin Boyd, who felt 'suffocated' by the Australian suburb, White was fascinated and aroused by its gothic majesty and horror – and its idiosyncratic characters such as Girlie Pogson and Miss Docker who 'appeared' respectively in *The Season at Sarsaparilla* (1961) and *A Chery Soul* (1962).

Like one of White's characters, my mother 'knew' the neighbours. For her the front yard was a surveillance post. The local shops, particularly the butcher shop at Dellwood, were perfect for a chat. Charming to the core, my mother knew everyone – and usually their business. Except one: Mrs Milat from up the street. They spoke occasionally – usually at the local scout troupe (where my brothers and some of the Milat boys learnt knots and bushcraft) or at the butcher's while buying the chops. My mother never quite figured Mrs Milat out. When the backpacker murder story broke, she commented "so sad really. Such a lovely woman. Same street and the same butcher. Who would have thought." ■



BY MICHAEL DAGOSTINO

I ALWAYS THOUGHT I WAS AUSTRALIAN, UNTIL SOMEONE TOLD ME I WASN'T.

I was born in a small country town on the edge of Western Sydney in the mid-1970s. A quiet town with the main street full of the usual shops you find in any small town: a pub, a baker, a butcher and a petrol station. It was the stereotypical Australian country town. You know this place; everyone knows it, as it's the stuff of the Australian folk paintings that adorn the walls of any local arts society.

My grandfather was your archetypal Australian – a person that loved to smoke, gamble and drink. Who didn't? When they demolished his house for rebuilding they found thousands of empty beer bottles that he used to throw under the verandah. My dad was the same, but he also had a passion for 1970s muscle cars, which he drove fast. He had very little respect for himself or authority. He followed the Cronulla Sharks in NRL, but hated cricket. Maybe that was a sign. My family worked the land. They lived on a large property in a timber weatherboard house, and it had a corrugated tin roof with a wrap-around verandah. They knew the hardships of flood and drought. This was Australia, like the cliché represented on current affair programs, and with an authenticity that Baz Luhrmann could only dream of.

I attended the local primary school and everything was fine until Year 3 when someone called me a wog. What!! A wog, mate, what was that? I looked a little different – darker, with bigger eyebrows – but that was Australian, wasn't it? I didn't know what the term truly meant at that age, but having the word "dirty" or "dumb" in front of it made it obvious. The cracks from the students continued and I thought about who I was. When I was a teenager, we moved away from the small town and lived closer to the more suburban Western Sydney. The first week of high school began with an orientation led by older students. They walked us around and one introduced me to the 'wog's corner', where I was welcome to hang out, and where, if I had any problems with the Aussies, I would be looked after. I wasn't sure why this was pointed out, but I realised that everyone had picked sides: mine was picked for me, determined by the way I looked.

The racism continued into my high school years and reached a low point when a student figured out that the first two syllables of my surname (pronounced dag-o) was a racist slur if pronounced slightly differently: day-go. The English language had screwed me. From this point I started punching on with these fuckwits as a means of retaliation, but I lost often. The more I lost, the worse it got, and there was no end to it. Fuck it was hard, but by the time I hit my senior years in the late 1980s, things started to settle down.

When I was growing up I always thought I was Australian – why wouldn't I? I was from here too, right? However, as I grew up, I was quickly introduced to the cultural divides that were commonplace in our society at the time. My grandfather was your typical Australian, but could not speak a word of English, and I only spoke Italian to him. He lived off the land and butchered pigs to produce air-cured salami. My dad's muscle car obsession was with the 1973 Chrysler VJ Valiant Charger 770 E55, not a Holden or Ford.

Since the 1970s, the demographic of Western Sydney has changed. Increased migration, the end of the White Australia Policy and cheap housing has created a place where multiculturalism thrives. Much has been written about Western Sydney, as it's a place like no other, a place with a higher-than-average diversity of people from different backgrounds and cultures. It's a place I love. While racism is everywhere, this high diversity has made the population of Western Sydney confront the issues of inclusion, race and identity. Although it was pretty tough, growing up in Western Sydney has given me the perspective that you can break conventions that are placed on you and that you do not have to choose sides or be defined by the way you look. ■

BY ROBYN STUART

COMPLEXITY IN THE SUBURBS.

An interview with Sweatshop founding director Michael Mohammed Ahmed

You're the founder of Sweatshop, a literary movement for Western Sydney. Can you describe Sweatshop – its history, what it does and how it works?

Sweatshop evolved from another program called Westside Publications, which started in 2006 with the goal of creating a literary culture for Western Sydney. At the time there was no literary community, and very little representation in literature of Western Sydney communities; there was almost nothing coming *out of* the Western suburbs, just a lot coming in.

In retrospect, I call Westside Publications 'Phase One' – it was about creating a culture and a community. When I moved on and created Sweatshop, it was about taking the thing that we created and using it to spread the word, and to reach out to other communities and other parts of Australia as a Western Sydney collective. A lot of the projects we're doing at the moment are about relationships and partnerships, about going to other places. It's really important that the politics are clear here, because it's not about us going to other places and saying, "this is how you should do it" or, "this is how you can become better people". We have an anti-colonial approach – we're not about going into communities and telling them how to do it, what we're about is lifting the profile and the understanding of Western Sydney as a community – as the most densely populated, most culturally diverse region in the country. It's not about what we can teach; it's about what we can share.

What kind of support framework does Sweatshop provide for the writers?

Sweatshop consists of The Sweatshop Collective – an ensemble of Western Sydney writers and arts practitioners that we've been

working with for the last 10 years. They are first and foremost professional artists – and when I say professional I mean I never ask them to do anything unless we're paying them – but also, they are developing writers constantly working towards improvement. The ensemble meets fortnightly at the University of Western Sydney [where Sweatshop is housed] to develop work as an established group. We are extremely critical. No punches are pulled, and we have 4–5 editors present. Someone will read and then we'll spend half an hour deconstructing a piece: discussing it, and often those discussions will go into issues of race, gender, class, sexuality. We're not interested in art for art's sake: I think that's about privilege. Our model of literacy is about empowerment.

The collective is the heart and soul of Sweatshop, but alongside it, also important, is the community engagement model. While we're training these writers we're also employing them as writers, to work in school residency programs and joint projects with other institutions and organisations aimed at improving literacy. That's one of the ways in which we've been able to financially support our artists. There's a political reason for this as well: it's about engaging our own community to work within their own community.

Is it important to work with your own community (as opposed to someone else's?)

I think that for anyone at all, the best thing that you can do is to work with your own community. Even the "middle-class heterosexual white guy" is justified in this – no middle-class heterosexual white guy's going to get in trouble for saying, "I want to work with my community". No-one is going to say you're not allowed to do that.

Can't it be politically problematic for the middle-class heterosexual white guy to not want to work with people of Asian background, say, or women – isn't that a sort of exclusionary model?

Maybe the way I can talk about it most specifically is in relation to a story that Malcolm X tells in his autobiography. A girl came up to him, consumed by white guilt, and said that she sympathised with his cause and wanted to know what she, as a white person who was apologetic for what her ancestors had done, could do to help. Malcolm X said, "Nothing!" And she ran off in tears. Then, toward the end of his life, he said that he wished he could see that girl again, because he had come to realise that there was something she could do. But not what she thought. He says that what these people usually want is to be seen helping black people – to be seen holding hands, showing love... and any time you allow this to happen, you will always see those well-intentioned white people find ladders and end up in positions of power, in control of the movements that were originally about black empowerment. Malcolm X said he wasn't interested in people coming into a movement like that, but he would be interested in her going into her own community, and working from within for change – maybe confronting her peers about the way they view people of colour, maybe opening avenues for more diversity in her workplace. We need this on all fronts. If men want to do something about sexism, then they need to be willing to confront and discuss sexism with other men. This is what I mean when I talk about the importance of, and right to, work with your own community.

What do you think about the role of government? It seems from what you've been saying that you'd be cynical about it.

I'm slightly anarchical when it comes to the idea of government, yes. I'm not interested in discussing hypotheticals, I'm more interested in discussing what actually happens. I think government *can* play a constructive role, but I don't think it does. I think government and politics is and always has been about the distribution and management of power.

Although, to be honest, I actually also don't believe in the idea of individual resistance and individual change. I believe that change is dependent on systemic ideas, and small-g government plays a really important part in that. Individual resistance is grounded in ideas of privilege – you need to have the right kind of education, the right tools, resources and networks. Individuals need to fight for change, but governments need to actually enact it systemically. So in a broad sense, I think government is essential to what we were talking about earlier with communities.

Going back to Sweatshop and the writers that you work with – do you generally encourage people to follow the "write about what you know" model?

It's not a model for everybody, but it's a model that I would argue is for the repressed and the marginalised. It fits with a term that [American author, feminist and social activist] bell hooks uses, called 'coming to voice'. Coming to voice is 'moving from silence to speech as revolutionary gesture'. If you've already got speech, that's different. But I'm asking the people in my community, why aren't you writing about Western Sydney? There's a degree of self-hate embedded in the mentality that produces answers like "because it's not interesting", or "because no one will like it". Why is a girl named Fatima from Bankstown who has six siblings and grew up in a working-class Arab-Australian Muslim household writing characters named David and Jon and Jill instead of Hussein and Ali and Khadija?

For a lot of young people that we work with, the idea of writing about Western Sydney doesn't even occur to them. I've been accused of forcing the burden of representation on kids, and I say, well you clearly haven't read our books – there's a lot of stupid vampire stories in there too. I don't make people write about themselves, but I encourage it. No one else is going to do it for you. And usually if someone else does do it for you, they disempower you. They misrepresent you, or they take your story from you and use it to empower themselves.

I think about Toni Morrison, who was asked in an interview once when she was going to

write about something other than race. And she replied, "Everybody writes about race. James Joyce writes about race." I believe there's an inherent burden of representation in everything we do because everything is representation. So if you reject the burden of your own representation, that doesn't mean you are now free from representation, you just end up with the burden of someone else's representation. You end representing Jill and Jon instead of Ali and Khadija. I would prefer you to represent yourself than someone or something else.

Sweatshop published a story anthology in 2012 called *On Western Sydney*. You wrote in the introduction that you "don't mind a story that makes us look bad as long as it's honest and complex"...

It might be okay to tell a story simply if it's accurate, but in order to be accurate, you're almost always going to require a lot of detail. Take, for example, the representation of people from Lebanese background in Western Sydney in the mainstream media. The first problem is that they're not Lebanese. They're Australian-born, so they're Australian. So maybe you change it to Lebanese-Australian. That's more honest, but even that's way too simple. What does Lebanese-Australian mean here? I had a friend in high school of Indonesian background, and when he treated women badly he would say to them that he was Lebanese. I would ask him why, and he would say, I don't want them to think badly of Indonesians. Then I had good honest friends of Lebanese background who were denying their heritage and pretending to be Anglo – unlike me, they looked Anglo – because they were sick of being feared and rejected. These are complex situations!

This issue of *Das Superpaper* is a sort of portrait of a place... it's really more of a self-portrait since everyone involved is from the area. Your anthology might also be considered as a self-portrait. What does your portrait represent?

The typical portrait of Western Sydney as a violent and dangerous place is something we're always working against. I'm not saying that there's been no drugs, guns and sexual assaults in Western Sydney, I'm saying what we always get is a simplistic and misappropriated version of this. A colleague of mine named Luke Carman is currently in the final of stages of completing his first novel, *An Elegant Young Man*, which is set in Liverpool. In one of the drafts I had once read there's a character of Lebanese background who carries around a

gun, and one time he pulls it out and threatens to shoot a group of guys. I was doing an edit, and I said to Luke, I bet you the gun is fake. And Luke said, yeah, how did you know that? I go, because that's the real Western Sydney! The Western Sydney that we've been given in films and media is that young men of Middle Eastern background have guns. The real Western Sydney is that they pretend to have guns – they're full of shit! They're performing! And they're performing because they're living up to the stereotype that's been given to them and appropriated by them. That's the reality – there are no guns. I've lived here 28 years, my whole life, and I've never seen a gun. But I've seen a lot of fake guns.

That's what I mean by honest and complex, even though it still doesn't make us look good. And that's the kind of self-portrait we are attempting to create.

Cynthia Freeland (a Texan-based philosopher of art) wrote that part of the definition of a portrait is that the subject poses: ("people 'put on' an identity before the artist, and artists try to reconcile that self-presentation with their own vision of the person being depicted"). When thinking about portraiture of a place, what do you think this means?

I was thinking about this question for a while – it was the only one you sent me that threw me. I realised that when I talk about the geographical position of Western Sydney, I use place and people synonymously. We are both the subject and the artist; it's a self-portrait. So if portraiture is a dialogue between the subject interpreting themselves and the artist creating their own interpretation, we are always getting people to write about themselves as a process of coming to voice, as political empowerment, they have to live in a constant state of self-reflection. I think it's the best way to write, to create a portrait – it requires you to look at yourself, to be critical of yourself. It's funny, the first-person can often be the perspective of the observer; he or she is always watching what's going on.

I wanted you to ask me this question, though, because I know that sometimes I can come across as arrogant and opinionated and certain of myself, like I have with all the answers so far, and I wanted to finish by saying I'm still thinking about this one. ■

BY DANIEL KOJTA

FLANNO TO FLANEUR: DANIEL KOJTA & TONY SCHWENSEN FIGHT OVER THE FLANNO.

My mother often recalled a bedtime story of the love she shared with my father. Coming home from work as a nurse at Penrith hospital, heavily pregnant with me, my mother walked into the kitchen to find the floor covered in oil and tools, and my father's Norton Commando motorcycle in pieces on the dining table. That menu determined my cultural destiny. Emerging from the womb soon after with 'mother' tattooed in birthmark on my shoulder, I awoke 'Endorsed' a 'Westie'.

Linked and Inked, from Flanno to Flaneur.

– Daniel Kojta, Journal Extract 1987.

Tony Schwensen and I met at his recent exhibition at Sarah Cottier Gallery, where his latest installation, *Creationism Triptych (Idiocracy)* (2013), provided us a stage from which to discuss our shared experience as westies.

As the sun travels from east to west across the sky, the concept of the west has long been a symbol for unexplored lands, for humanity's drive into the future. The west of Sydney is a unique blend of colonial history and international cultures who have cultivated a style of being – from 'flanno' to 'flaneur'.

'Westie', a term of derision and division used to describe the lower class, has been adopted as an identity by those it was intended to demean. As a child, the label meant only

the freedom to seek out fun. Western Sydney offered less regulation and more to do. We exploited every architectural feature in the area in order to defy gravity in profound ways.

Since then, it has been absorbed into a contemporary culture nostalgic for the icons of the western suburbs founding class. Today, junior advertising executives drive muscle cars, hipster models strut through the café scene in Ugg boots, and high-end labels position the flanno as haute couture. The stereotype has been subdivided and sold off to developers of trend.

Australian contemporary artist and fellow westie, Tony Schwensen, describes being a westie as a state of mind. He explains:



Expedition *Gigantopithecus Westiemicus [Yowie]* 2011.
Day 7, Habitat discovery,
Western Sydney
[undisclosed location]
Adam Cullen; Evidence
Authentication, Tracker:
Daniel Kojta;
Documentation,
Navigation, Trapper.
Image; Daniel Kojta;
Adam Cullen at entrance
to site X-TG88

I had always understood being a westie to be both a pejorative label applied from outside (more colonialism) and a badge of pride, of self declaration, of an acceptance of oneself and who one is/was, a form of love, a state of mind. It is in that regard that I see/define myself as a westie.

The contemporary Western Suburbs act as a fluid repository of creative content that generates unique artistic inquiry. Tony, your performance characters often explore themes of masculinity and the Australian male. How have you used your experience as a westie in your arts practice? The construction of the *fat straight bald white guy* was certainly informed by my experiences of maleness and the perpetuation of ideas of maleness that dominated media in the 1970s, which is when I was growing up. I am thinking now about Paul Hogan and the huge influence he had upon Australian culture (the permeation of the humour within his TV persona, all the way down to the Winfield cigarettes he promoted, tucked in his t-shirt sleeve).

I first recall seeing your work at the University of Western Sydney. You also responded to the character of the westie during your time at UWS when you worked with Terry Hayes, well-known lecturer in arts theory and the early questions of postmodernism. What was the result of your inquiry into the culture of the westie? This is interesting, especially when I think about the year I met Terry Hayes, 1988. I am recalling there were a large number of Australian flag items of clothing throughout Australian culture in the years leading up to the bicentennial in 1988, and I do not recall there being the same nasty jingoism that we have come to have with this symbol in the post-Howard, Cronulla, cape years. That is not to deny the racism that comes when, as Richard Bell terms it, you 'scratch an Aussie'. Terry certainly instilled a sense of examination of both self and place, an interrogation on equal terms, not about beginning from a negative but actually looking at what is there, what could be found there, what made something special or unique (in both its positive and negative qualities). This in combination with a version of identity theory which attempted to deconstruct an ideology of centrism became very influential. I began to

understand that culture is made everywhere and where you live is where you make, in response to the direct and specific conditions of each place.

The theory I explored as a result of lectures with Terry Hayes, Anne Finnegan and Caleb Kelly were a profound influence in the development of my own practice methodologies. At the time it was well known that most who attended UWS were proud of the cultural division created by the westie association. How did this affect your practice methodology?

Terry and the conversations we had about rugby league were hugely influential in considering both place and the myriad forms of culture that coexist in place. It began to instill in me a refusal to discern between high and low, a refusal to be apologetic for who I am and where I come from, to see the beauty and the terror in both, to be as excited by endless rows of treated pine fencing as by a sculpture, to understand the land and place to be containing its own myth, some sort of 'Bogan Dreaming'. This gave me a conceptual framework and approach that I still utilise today.

The use of the term 'westie' was shorthand for a population considered lowbrow, coarse and lacking education and cultural refinement. This cannot be said for the contemporary westie of University of Western Sydney Arts Degree fame. Is higher education a rite of passage for the contemporary westie?

I would think that in some way everyone who came out of the UWS program can be labelled a westie. This program instilled a specific way of thinking that was rooted in place not a fashion, in a form of honest interrogation not fey emulation. In some ways the artistic equivalent of the state of mind I mentioned earlier. And this is not to say that there was not an intense rigorous intellectualism there; in many ways I feel it was harder, tougher, more critical and more driven than any of my peers' work from inner city schools. I think of yourself, Lucas Ihlein, Raquel Ormella, Paul Greedy, Justene Williams, Regina Walter, David Haines and Joyce Hinterding. ■



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Trace Collective,
TRACE: Displaced (Post-Colonial-Cluster-Fuck),
documentation of live performance,
Saturday 29 August 2009,
installation view, Artspace, Sydney.
Photo: silversalt photography.
Image courtesy of the artist,
Artspace and Sarah Cottier Gallery.

BY DAVID CAPRA

ELIZABETH & HER MISSION TO SHAKE HANDS.

Meet Elizabeth, the woman who inspired artist David Capra's Ministry of Handshakes, in which David shakes people's hands with a 2.5 metre prosthetic hand. David managed to track Elizabeth down. Handing him a ripe persimmon, her favourite fruit, she had no idea it was his favourite fruit too...

Where were you born Elizabeth?

I was born in Nigeria. New states were created, but I was born in the former Benue state of Nigeria.

What was your childhood like? Did you have many brothers and sisters?

Of course. Back in my country we have what we call polygamy. My dad was married to three women. My mum was the last woman of the sultan. I have up to eighteen brothers and sisters. My mother has four children to my dad.

I'll just tell you briefly about my early [life] from babyhood. Well, you can see my complexion, which is odd for the area I come from. When born as a baby I was completely white. So every time my mum took me to the market, people gathered around me and they said "take her home, take her home". My completion really gave me a lot of problems. Where I lived people called me "white baby", "white lady", "white girl". I was really angry. My mum said "don't worry about that!" I said "No, they must not call me that." And to cut a story short, after I finished my primary school, I had to go and study in a boarding school in another state in Nigeria. When I got there, the same thing, the tribal people they start to call me "white girl" again. I tried to rejoice and keep ignoring them.

When did you leave Nigeria?

It was 1990.

Did you go straight to Australia?

Yes. My husband came here to study first and I came later. We had three children together. He came to study electrical engineering. We lived in Melbourne for two years. I was working as a casual nurse. Since I came to Australia it is always what I have been doing.

Did you settle straight into Campbelltown in Sydney?

No, when my husband finished his degree course in 1993, he got a job in Sydney. Our first settlement was a place called Marsfield, near Epping.

Then you moved to Campbelltown?

In Campbelltown, but not as in Campbelltown, just Campbelltown metropolitan [area]. We bought a house in Macquarie Fields, where we lived for nine years.

I want to get an idea of what an ordinary week looks like for you. You were saying you often work quite late hours?

I work at Ashfield in an aged care facility.

Do you? Which one? Because my great aunty is in one in Ashfield.

Ashfield Baptist Homes.

I think that is where my aunty is! Her name is Piera. I go there regularly with my grandmother.

I know Piera. Berta! Berta!

Yes, Berta! That's my great aunt, Piera Berta. That is so bizarre!

I know. Every time I talk to her I say "you look very nice". She takes her time to settle and I sit beside her and say "tell us about your children, do you have children?" She says yes, think about good things. That is what we call a small world! I work only night shift. Quarter to ten and then finishing at quarter past seven in the morning.

So you sleep in the day, travelling in the train from Campbelltown. That must be really difficult. I first came across you when I was in a busy train one morning and I saw you gesturing to shake a man's hand. He refused and you gestured again. I remember you tapping the chair in front of him, putting your hand out again, and he finally gave you his hand and you shook it. Then to my surprise (because I thought you knew him) you moved onto the next person, and finally the rest of the carriage. Then I turned to see where you had gone and you were a few rows behind me, your hand gently raised in the air, eyes closed and you appeared to be praying. I'd be interested to know what you were doing that morning?

(Pause) It's kind of weird and interesting. It started in 2008, May the 15th.

May the 15th 2008, okay.

I love God a lot and really I have every morning. I have devotion at 5 or sometimes before 5 o'clock in the morning. So after my morning devotion, it was on a Sunday morning. Then all of.. from nowhere, it came to me, from nowhere, it was like audible, sounds like audible, but it's a voice from within: "When you get into the bus, shake hands with everyone." And it kept reminding me, I had hardly ate breakfast that day, I was just approaching the kitchen, because the kitchen is like a chapel to me. I receive a lot of revelations. So it kept reminding me, "I hope you are going to do it" until I stepped out of the house to go to church. I said okay.

As soon as I got in the bus I paid my fare and I told the passengers "I have been here in Australia for years and never done anything like this, however this is what I have been instructed to do."

Were you nervous?

No. After I did that in the morning, in the evening I went to the city for something. When I got into the train, the train was packed full. I went and sat in the corner and the voice again "do it again". I said "far out, far out!" I stood up and shook hands with everyone in the carriage. I sat down in front of a guy and said "how's that feel?" "Phenomenal," he said.

Then I asked God, "This is getting out of... is it a one-off thing or what?" He said "no, because I love them every day." So since then, especially if I am going to enter a bus, I say to him "here I am, here I am," making myself available to God.

The following day, that voice told me, "observe the first girl on the train.." As I observed they all sat beside the windows, the middle was all empty. Then God said to me, "you see how people always go and sit on the far end, leaning on the window?" I was just observing it for the first time, never took notice before. He said, "it's because they want to lean on something; they are all leaning on me." People will think that this is bizarre... and it's true.

I kept doing it, I kept doing it. After I finish I will go and sit; I say nothing. I just keep praising: "Lord, help them, release their stress, give them success. Father help them to get over that hurdle that they're in. Please resolve that burden in their heart." Whatever comes to me.

A few months later, I met you again. It was almost midnight one Wednesday evening at Ashfield station last year. I saw you doing a twirl with hand in the air in the glass elevator. You seemed to be rejoicing. I ran down the stairs, chased you down the street

calling out "hello, do you shake people's hands?" You said yes and I handed you my hand and that's when I first shook your hand. You gave me your phone number that night. My phone deleted it and I have spent months trying to find you. Even this week, you called on a payphone to give me your landline, because you had lost your mobile. I wrote down the wrong number and thought I had lost you again, yet here we are... Yes, a friend of mine has said they have shaken your hand, he said it felt charged, electric and really appreciated shaking your hand. What do you feel when you shake people's hands, do you enjoy it, is it like a job?

It's very joyful. It's very humbling.

Yes, I can see it on your face.

In the same month I was told to do this, I had a dream. And in my dream I didn't know what assignment there was to be done and I said "MEEEEEE!" I volunteered, I opened my eyes in the middle of the dream. I woke up! It reminds me of a prophet in the Bible, called Isaiah. He heard the voice of God: "Who will go for me?" He said "Here I am, send me. Isaiah chapter 6." Is that the prayer I pray? Was that what I was volunteering in my sleep to do?

Initially people look at me, "she must be crazy." (Laughs.) And later I just sit down and be myself.

Yeah, when I first saw you I remember your phone rang. You answered the phone and you were very normal. I was thinking, this lady is really intriguing. It really stayed with me. Have there been any healings, miracles, any praise reports?

I shook hands with a lady at Macarthur Square and she said "ohhh you made my day!" (Giggles.) So many, so many. This particular man, after I shook [his hand] in the train he was like going to squash my hand, it was very tight. [Later] I was in Lifeline in Campbelltown and then the man, he came and shook my hand, pressing. He said "do you remember me?" I said no. "But I told you my name." I said "I meet a lot of people, I am sorry, I can't." Then he said "I will never forget how you shook my hand for the rest of my life." I said thank you.

Oh my goodness! Different hands, different responses. Some people give me two hands, some people they give me four, some they cup their hands or knuckle. Or there is one finger. Others they give me their left hand. And when they do that I just know, "touch other people with your right hand, I give you my left." Sorry,

on two occasions, especially today, a hand just came like this, no fingers. Two weeks ago in the city and today it was a lady, she just brought her hand, very soft like a baby, no fingers.

And when you shake their hand, you don't offer any words, it's just the gesture isn't it? What do you think the world would look like if more people showed each other this type of kindness?

I just wish, I say to myself, "Lord, where would the ripple effect take place for others to do what I am doing!"

I think you have started something. I really do. Do you believe it's what you have been put on this earth to do?

It's a commission, commission, I'm commissioned to do this. When I do this the energy just comes on me. This guy at Astral, before I even get into the train. When he comes he shakes [my hand] first and when I get into the train, he says "you sit beside me," and then he says "I can't believe since three years you've been shaking my hand." I can't keep count of the thousands or many millions that I have shaken. If you multiply every day by 500 it's going to be thousands of thousands.

Also one greeter, he said there are 200 healing nerves in the hand.

It's such a delicate part of the body isn't it!

I read in Women's Weekly, Princess Diana, while she is shaking people[s hands], she has the paparazzi – if anyone messes up, they go fight for Diana. She has physical protection, but God protects me. I said Lord, you must confirm if it's truly the Lord is telling me to do this; I don't want to assume it's you. So one night I just lay down; when I lie down I see mirrors of pairs of eyes, thousands of them. Then straight inside me, God is telling me, the eye is the window to the soul. You know people wear sunglasses, very dark, I can't see their eyes I tell them to take the sunglasses off away, straight away they take it off. Only recently, someone said "I can see you". Straight away I don't ask them to take it away anymore. Even till now, I'm connecting to their souls, so if I shake hands and their heads are drawn down, I draw the faces up of the people. I love them! I love to see you!

Well, it's such a generous thing you do. Thank you Elizabeth, I hope everyone reading this will have the honour of shaking your hand one day. ■

Elizebeth's Mission Photo: Jagath Dheerasekera



BY SOPHIA KOUYOUMDJIAN

WALKING THE WESTERN LINE: A CONVERSATION WITH GEORGE TILLIANAKIS & GARRY TRINH.

The Western Sydney landscape is a prominent influence on artists living and making work there. I am interested in the strategies artists employ to represent this connection to place. This led me to the act of walking and to the practices of two artists: George Tillianakis and Garry Trinh. Walking the line is an idiom about the middle-ground, about walking the straight and narrow, about doing what is socially acceptable or upholding a balance between extremes, such as love and hatred.

George, in your video works *Diamond in the Rough Fucker* and *Black*, you are walking through public streets in an unconventional way. What informs those movements and the intention behind the work?

GT: Personal experiences created those characters. In *Diamond in the Rough (Fucker)* I am walking through Blacktown streets, painted pink wearing my mother's lilac underwear and an orange beehive. I am walking in a way that is disjointed to encapsulate a whole bunch of high school experiences. He is a character who knows he is different, but is trying to hide in an environment that obviously knows who he is. The character walking in *New York in Black* is the opposite – wearing sequined high-waisted underwear, a black helmet and covered in black paint – he is in a big city, a city that is larger than life. This is someone who is completely overwhelmed and is walking and exhausted. The character represents the underside of New York, something that has been seeded from the dirt and debris of that city. He is other-worldly.

Garry, your practice centres around photographing whilst walking and often the moments you photograph are slightly askew. For example, a recent image on your Instagram feed shows a 'Stop Theft' sign with the Operation boardgame jammed beside it with the vital organs missing.

Trinh: The two things spoke to each other. Someone jammed them together to make a statement that I read straight away. It is about positioning two elements that are not meant to be together, that are not quite right and form something else. My photos are about looking from a different angle or waiting for someone to walk past something else to create a statement or narrative. My photographs are waiting for those moments.

GT: I really find that admirable because the art you create means that you would never get bored.

Trinh: That is part of my artist statement – "He is never bored". As long as I have camera recording equipment with me, you can drop me anywhere and I will be looking, trying to define what that place means to me. As an artist I find that similar themes pop up in my work, so when I am in a new place



I am always looking for those similarities. It may not be an actual thing; maybe it's humour or an attitude. I am always looking for it.

Do you see your work as a form of self-analysis or having a sense of portraiture?

Trinh: Yes, with a lot of my photos, there is a value system. It is not the big news story that I photograph. It is not the razzle dazzle. I want to photograph the quiet moments, the little moments. I want to photograph what people do not look at, but is beautiful. When I was a kid I was the one that played with the cardboard box and saved all the scrap paper and used that rather than a brand new sketchpad. In a strange way my photos are about that, about what people discard and think is not valuable, or neglect. I want to reinsert value.

GT: My work used to be a really strong point of catharsis. When I did the *Back in Black* show I was moving away from past work that was hardcore catharsis and was an outpouring of everything in my life expressed through dramatic characterisation. I am still doing that but in a more abstract and conceptual way. Deconstruction and self-analysis is always part of my practice, to understand who I am and who I have been in order to understand the present.

Is the act of solitude important to the process of making your work?

Trinh: Yes, it is meditative. I am starting to think that it is more about that than the actual work. It is more about me wanting to have time by myself and think on my own. The camera is there for the ride. The meditative aspect comes first and the photography second. I think the requirement for me to be in that state has led me to this path of walking and photographing. It's formed my practice.

GT: For me it is about the landscape offering a double-edged sword. The landscape is a character but I am also exposing the landscape. It's a dialogue. There is that connection to place in the solitude, so in fact it's not exactly solitude.

In your work, why do you choose the places that you do and the journeys that you make in Western Sydney?

Trinh: I photograph Western Sydney because I live there [in Lidcombe] and I am photographing my environment. It is nothing specifically about Western Sydney. I am not trying to represent culture, I just happen to live there and have a train ticket there.

GT: Do you think that Lidcombe has had an effect on who you are as a human being, so therefore that is why you photograph it?

Trinh: It does definitely have an effect on your value system, but I don't consciously think about it. How I pick where I walk, I open the street directory and randomly pick a place I have not been. I pick public areas – parks, creeks, rivers, roads. That's where I am walking. It is the in-between places, it's the back of laneways, the back of someone's house. It is those areas where things can happen. People can act however they want to act, it's loose, it's not so gentrified. They are the most interesting spaces, there is no agenda.

There is potential in those spaces. That reminds me of the "terrain vague" concept, finding value in abandoned or obsolete spaces that are free of capitalist constructs familiar to us, thus creating a space of potentiality.

GT: That is why I live in Blacktown, it is free of pretentiousness. I can be in Blacktown without inhibitions and do what I want without external societal pressures. It is a space that no one gives a fuck about and has such a bad reputation, that you can take it, use it and claim it for yourself. ■

GARRY TRINH is an artist working with photography. He holds a BA in Psychology and a BA in Visual Communications/Photography and Digital Imaging from the University of Western Sydney. He is never bored. Trinh lives and works in Western Sydney.

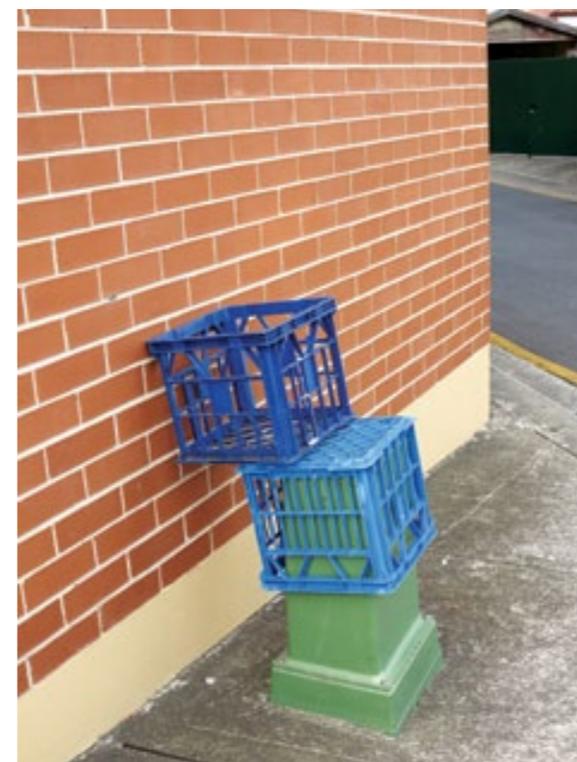
GEORGE TILLIANAKIS graduated with BA Honours, Fine Arts from the University Of Western Sydney, and was awarded a scholarship and residency at the Casula Powerhouse and Liverpool Regional Museum. He has had numerous solo and group exhibitions in Australia and internationally.



\•
 George Tillianakis
Diamond in the Rough (Fuck)
 2007, Video still
 Commissioned by
 Blacktown Arts Centre,
 courtesy of the artist

•|
 George Tillianakis
Black, 2012
 Video still
 Courtesy of the artist

|•//•
 Garry Trinh.
*All images courtesy
 and copyright the artist*





BY ANNE LOXLEY

EAST OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS: AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN SPITERI, KHALED SABSABI & RAQUEL ORMELLA

I was born and raised in Forbes, a small country town in the heart of the NSW wheat/sheep belt. Let me not understate this fact: I have my own skewed notions of The Centre and The Exotic. I started my curatorial and writing life in Sydney's big end of town in 1987, but from 1996 I have worked on and off in Western Sydney. For me the huge pluses of Western Sydney have always been the rich diversity of people living there and the innovation of its cultural institutions. For a plumber's daughter in a town where the doctors, pharmacists and solicitors were the top of the social order, where to be a 'townie' was lesser than being from the land, there has always been something very right about the melange of Western Sydney. Perhaps it is something about the rules being messier. It is definitely to do with the sheer number of good artists to come out of Western Sydney.

With the crazy hope of perhaps unpacking something of the enigma of Western Sydney, I suggested to David Capra that my contribution to this issue of *Das* could be an interview with three of the most interesting artists to emerge from Western Sydney during my watch: Khaled Sabsabi, John Spiteri and Raquel Ormella. Only four years separate the three: Sabsabi was born in 1965, Spiteri in 1967 and Ormella in 1969, and while theirs are three very diverse practices, each artist strikes me as conceptually rigorous in their approach to their work. Sabsabi's multimedia works explore the arcane realities of migrant communities and border identities, Ormella's installations explore taxonomies of natural systems and nationalisms and identities, while Spiteri's predominantly painting practice is an alluring but somehow troubling pastiche of disparate references.

Here are their responses to a set of emailed questions.

1. Where were you born?

JS: Camperdown.

KS: Tripoli, Lebanon.

RO: Cronulla – Sutherland Hospital.

2. Where did you grow up?

JS: Wentworthville.

KS: Between Tripoli and Auburn/Granville.

RO: When I was two we moved to Emu Plains and that is where I was living when I started studying art at Penrith TAFE.

3. What art school did you attend?

JS: CoFA and Goldsmiths.

KS: CoFA UNSW.

RO: I did an Associate Diploma in Fine Art at Penrith TAFE then a BA Honours at UWS, followed by a Masters of Fine Arts by Research at UWS, and I have just finished a PhD at ANU.

4. Where do you live now?

JS: Wentworthville.

KS: Bonnyrigg.

RO: I live in Marrickville and I spend half my week in Canberra where I work at ANU. (I take the bus – it takes three and a half hours.)

5. How would you describe your current artistic practice?

JS: Patchy.

KS: Multimedia and site-specific media/installation work. Since the late 1980s I've worked to present arts projects that explore the experience of people across social, political and ideological spectrums.

RO: I'm not sure! Working with video, drawing and flag/banner works. Thinking about interactions between birds and humans, and national

identity in relation to the Australian flag. Teaching is also an important part of my life, although I would not like to suggest that it is part of my practice, just that it brings balance to my life by looking outward and dealing with lots of other people.

6. What projects are you working on now?

JS: Finishing work for a solo show at Sarah Cottier Gallery in July.

KS: Several, a three-year project with Carriageworks titled 24 Frames, the University of Queensland Self-Portrait Prize, Mosman Gallery, Sydney Festival 2014, maybe Marrakesh Biennale 2014 as well as being the community cultural engagement worker at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre.

RO: I am making a new series of works using the Australian flag. Two were just on display in MUMA in a show called *Direct Democracy* and two more are in the first Californian Pacific Triennale in Orange County. I have started to think about a couple of large projects that will take a couple of years to see through. I quite like this stage of work when you start to think about something in the abstract: you have some ideas and start thinking about how you might explore them.

7. What does Western Sydney mean to you?

JS: Well, if you stand in the city it's west but if you're in the blue mountains it's east. An artist can operate in any location. I don't feel any difference "out west". It's a myth.

KS: An alternative, diverse, dynamic, inspiring, challenging place where people are trying to find a commonality.

RO: It's where I grew up and where my parents still live. It shaped me, in terms of circumstance in what was available as employment and opportunity, how that part of Sydney has been historically treated, how it has a particular character and identity – the so called aspirational class, while still being also very disadvantaged in areas. All of these things form me and also don't. I feel like I have made choices that have meant my life has been completely different from most of the people I grew up with. I see some similarities with other Western Sydney artists but can also see the ways that we don't define a category.

8. What does Western Sydney art scene mean to you?

JS: Apart from having a studio in Parramatta I don't get out much.

It's lovely to meet other studio workers there for a chat.

KS: Very broad question, but to describe it, it's like running into someone in some other country that attended the same school as you did and was inspired by the same teacher as you were. A sense of achievement against wider misconceptions.

RO: The wonderful now defunct University of Western Sydney Art School – I owe so much to those who taught me and who were my fellow students, especially Lucas Ihlein and Christine Staniforth, two relationships that continue to be touchstones for me. Key experiences in my early career such as *Anita and Beyond*, and showing in various group exhibitions at Casula and Campbelltown. Good friends and fellow artists: Regina Walter, Justene Williams. Good people I have worked with: Lisa Havilah, Victoria Harbutt, Anne Loxley, John Kirkman, Kon Goriotous, Toni Bailey. Galleries with great programs: Lewers, Casula, Campbelltown, Blacktown. Other artists who are based here who are also doing interesting things: Motel Sisters, and Liam Benson's and Naomi Oliver's separate practices, David Capra, and Spitz and Khaled of course!

9. Does your relationship to Western Sydney have a significant bearing on your artistic practice?

JS: It might to someone who is looking for it. On the face of it I can't tell.

KS: I am inspired by my surroundings, so yes and in a major way.

RO: It did at one point and might again but at the moment most of my

exhibiting opportunities seem to be not in Western Sydney and I no longer have a studio in the area. Regina has moved into the mountains and so our zine *Flaps* has relocated to Canberra/Marrickville/Bilpin. I think I will always have a connection to Western Sydney, I am just not sure what that will be.

10. Who are the artists (or others) who have most influenced your work?

JS: I wouldn't know where to start. The ones I miss will pop into my head later and I will regret I missed them.

KS: There are so many people that have and continue to influence and support me and to list them all wouldn't be possible because more than likely, I would end up forgetting or leaving someone out. So no names, those who have influenced and supported me pretty much know who they are and what they've done. There is a common thread amongst the majority of these people being involved in the Western Sydney experience.

RO: Rather than particular artists I think the time I spent studying and living in Vienna and Berlin over a couple of periods in 1997–2004 was the biggest influence on my practice. Seeing survey exhibitions of Alighiero e Boetti, Martha Rosler, Harun Farocki, Valie Export, Mark Dion, Marcel Broodthaers, Bruce Nauman, Allan Sekula – so maybe the shift from conceptual to site specific and site discursive works. And this is not to discount the influence of my peers and friends in Sydney and Canberra.

11. What is your favourite place in the world?

JS: I'm not sure. I enjoyed my time in London when I lived there, but that's a distant memory now. It was the people I knew that made it so. People are important to the place I live. That's why I live here.

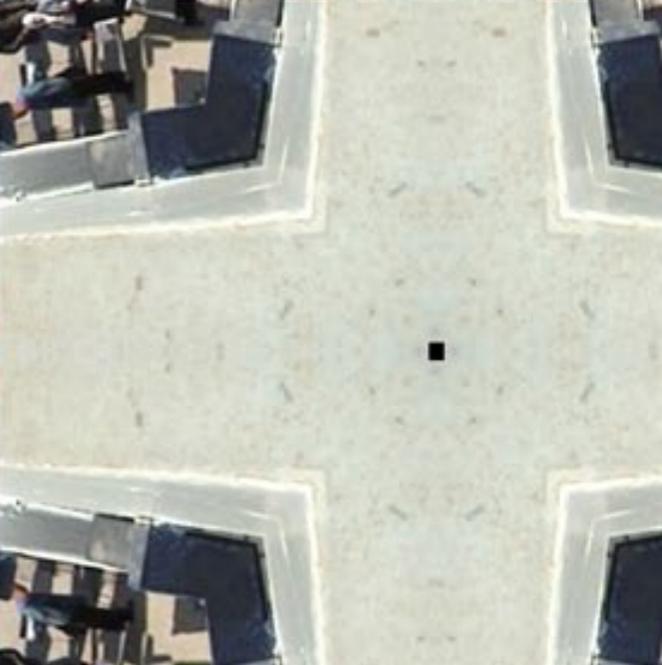
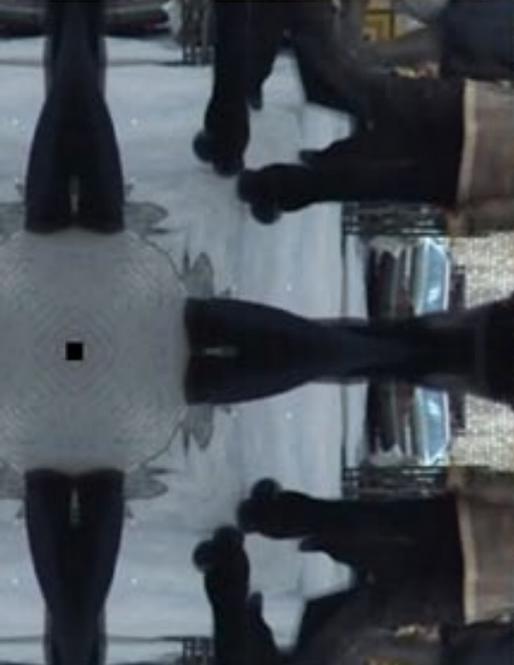
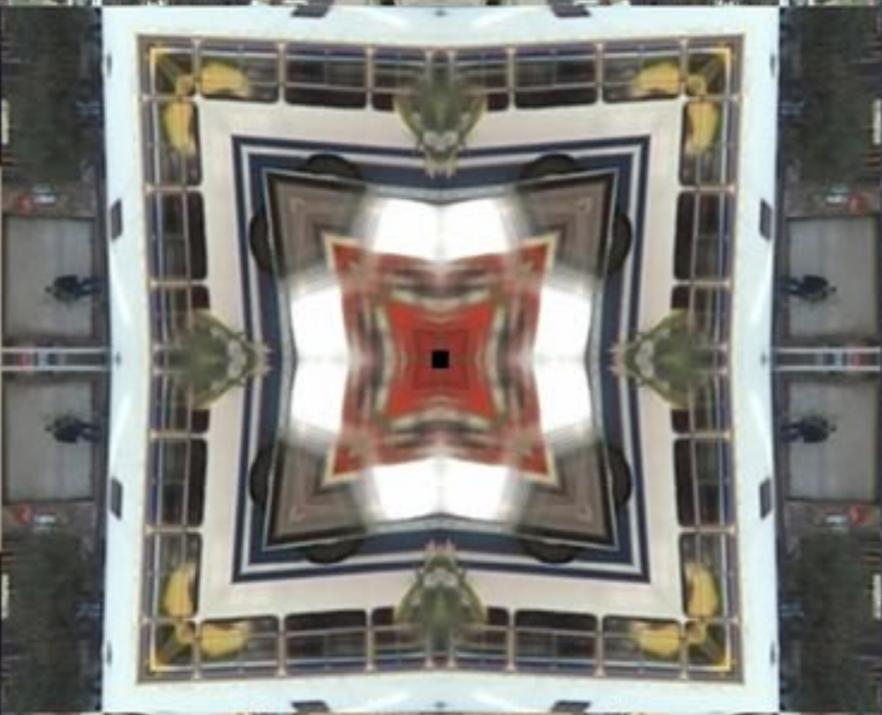
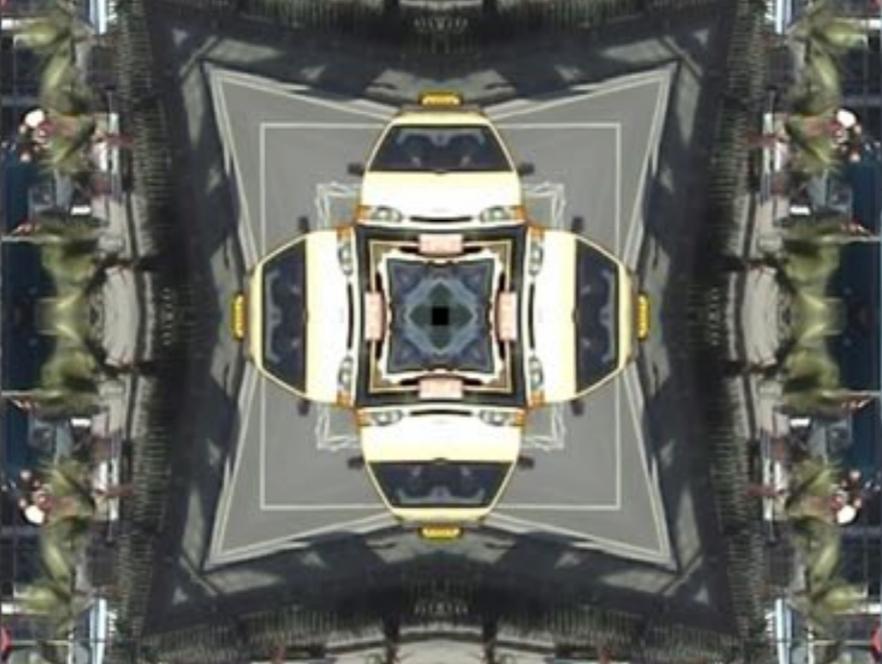
KS: Everywhere.

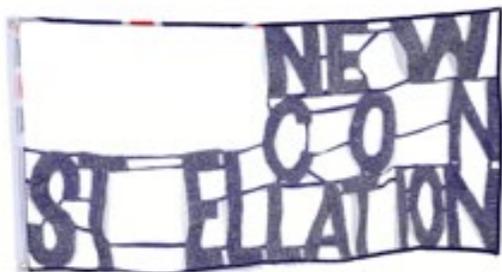
R: I find this question hard. This week, it would be my home in Marrickville. I went up to Newcastle last week and I loved that too, and next week I hope to visit Kelly's Swamp in Canberra to go bird watching - that is a great nature space in the centre of Canberra. I guess this is a way of saying I find wherever I am to have something to love. Maybe also I am recovering from my PhD and can't think very far ahead.

The last two questions were sent after the first lot, accompanied by an invitation to comment on each other's initial responses. Raquel's and Khaled's final remarks make a fitting conclusion to this discussion:

RO: Khaled and John, after reading your responses to Anne's first questions I am wondering whether we could say that being a "Western Sydney artist" is a self-selecting social identity or one which is physically defined? I like your description Khaled of it being something like a shared experience that gives you a sense of connection with others no matter where you are – and conversely that for you John, it is just a description of your current physical location and reinforced by your interactions with other artists in the location of Parramatta studios. I don't wish to suggest that these two positions are mutually exclusive but they are two variations of how a n imagined community operates.

KS: Very true Raquel and informed by various social, political, cultural factors and situations. Also relevant is the decision whether to associate with or disconnect from the "Western Sydney" experiment – and it is an experiment in terms of multiculturalism and urban and industrial development. As you know nearly ten per cent of Australia's population lives in Western/South Western Sydney. I would like to see proportional arts and services funding leveraged into the area.





••
 Khaled Sabsabi
Syria, 2012
 Video installation
 Courtesy of the artist and
 Milani Gallery, Brisbane



•|
 Raquel Ormella
New constellation, 2013
 Nylon, 348 x 250cm
 Courtesy the artist and Milani
 Gallery, Brisbane



|•
 John Spiteri
The gates of paradise, 2013
 Oil and enamel on linen; acrylic and
 enamel on glass; wood and nail
 fixture, 190 x 153 cm
 Courtesy of the artist and Neon Parc

HEATH FRANCO [pp 50-51] is a visual artist living in Western Sydney, working primarily in performance-based digital video. Franco has exhibited nationally and internationally and in 2012 won the Churchie National Emerging Artist Award. This year Franco's work will be included in Primavera 2013 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Heath is a resident at Parramatta Artists Studios, an initiative of Parramatta City Council supported by ArtsNSW.

YOU WANT SOME O' THIS, 2013
Digital Print, 39 x 27 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and
Galerie pompom, Sydney

JUSTENE WILLIAMS [pp 52-53] lives and works Sydney and has been exhibiting nationally and internationally since 1991. Recent solo shows include *Walk Like a Cow Drink Like a Fish*, 1 Shanthi Rd Bangalore, India; *Turnstile Heaped on Pour down*, St Paul Street Gallery, AUT Auckland, *She Came Over like a Drainpipe Shaking Spoon Infused Mixers in Outer Spaces*, Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch. Some recent group shows include *Contemporary Australia: Women*, GOMA Brisbane; *Behaving bodies*, UP Film Institute, The Philippines.

THE MOTEL SISTERS [pp 54-55], Paris and Tacky Motel, are a collaborative and multi-faceted duo from Western Sydney. Their work engages with society, pop culture and the contemporary art world. Having risen to fame as 'art scene socialites' and daytime television show crashers, they use their profile to explore the relationship between their suburban roots and their identity as emerging artists. The Motel Sisters recently performed *My Little Kony* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, as part of the 2013 program *Workout: 7 days of experimental performance*.

Sister Brides, 2013
Digital image, 39 x 27 cm
Image courtesy of the artists

TOM POLO [pp 56-57] is a visual artist who lives and works in Western Sydney. He holds a Master of Fine Arts from the College of Fine Arts, UNSW. Since 2007, Polo has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions around Sydney as well as in Melbourne, Brisbane and London. Recent exhibitions include *Future Figurative (New Personas)*, Gallery 9, Sydney; *Uncertain Pastures*, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2013; *Time & Vision: New Work from Australian Artists*, Bargehouse, OXO Tower Wharf, London, 2012; *GESTURES AND MISTAKES*, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, 2012; *Disappointed With Everything (It Happens)*, GrantPirrie, Sydney, 2011; and; *DISAPPOINTED WITH MANY PEOPLE & THINGS*, ACME Project Space, London, UK, 2011.

*There's So Many Fings
I Love About Western Sydney, 2013*
Digital image of the artist's
father holding paper collage
in his Smithfield garden
Image courtesy of the artist

JODIE WHALEN [pp.58-59] is an artist who explores the routine, rituals and experiences of the every day in her performance-centred practice. Recent group shows include *The Social* at Campbelltown Arts Centre, *Onside* at Casula Powerhouse and *Workout* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Whalen holds an MFA from the College of Fine Arts. She lives and works in Sydney.

I'm Worth My Weight In Gold.
2011, SD video still, 16:9

JD REFORMA [pp 60-63] is a Sydney-based artist, writer and curator, and a current Master of Fine Arts Research candidate at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales. His work encompasses sculpture, performance, installation, photography and video, and has been widely exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in artist-run spaces including Firstdraft Gallery, Gaffa, Alaska Projects, The Paper Mill and 55 Sydenham Road. 2013 has seen his work exhibited at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, MOP Projects and Mosman Art Gallery, with upcoming projects at Kudos Gallery and Campbelltown Arts Centre. He is currently a Co-Director of Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney.

Marathon, 2013
Performance documentation
Photography: Hugh Marchant
Image courtesy of the artist

ALEX WISSER [p 64] is a photo-media based artist living and working between Kandos NSW and Sydney. Alex has been a finalist at Fisher's Ghost and has received highly commended at Bowness Photography Prize and Marrickville Contemporary Art Prize. Alex also co-directs the Sydney based ARI INDEX. and is a co-founder of Cementa, a bi-annual festival of contemporary art in Kandos NSW.

Clockwise from top left:
Linda Brescia / Nika Norman
Irene Capra / Mary Tamras
All images courtesy of the artist

2. VIEWS & ARTIST PAGES.



•|
Evergreen Me and Bronwyn
date unknown

|•
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
Christmas Concert, 1983

My old song & tap
Puttin on the Ritz
date unknown

Troupe shot for
Gaol Bass Hill Eisteddfod,
date unknown

All images courtesy the artist and
Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney





A man in a blue long-sleeved shirt is holding a blue rectangular sign with white text. The sign is decorated with small orange dots. The background is a lush garden with various plants, including tall yellow orchids and green foliage. A house is visible in the distance.

THERE'S SO
MANY THINGS
I LOVE ABOUT
WESTERN SYDNEY



MARATHON

The summer holidays had afforded him the leanness of a swimmer and the musculature of a runner. Though without the buoyancy or endurance for either sport, he was better suited to his reflection. Anyway, he preferred the spectacle of exercise to its health benefits. *He was determinedly original and had a vague and modest idea of himself as a legendary figure.*

He attended an inner-city school; on account of his contributions to their choir his fees were waived. For this, his parents insisted upon driving him to choral service every Sunday, even when this coincided with the annual City2Surf. He entertained his drivers' gratitude as it morphed to frustration, dozed in the backseat through streets clogged with worshippers. They flashed like fluorescent roadblocks, each fuelling his hope that their exertion would diminish his. *Oh, how bonny and lush were the banks of the Lucinda River!*

At lunchtime each day, senior students were surrendered to the authority of the city. Ties relaxed their silky restraints upon boys and men alike. From a bench in Hyde Park, he observed the pavements blossom: Lurex and Lycra petals barely concealing the toned, tanned stems of hundreds of runners substituting lunch for lunges and little else. On some days he sat on leafy bleachers near the pool at Mrs. Macquarie's Point and watched them sprint fully to the blocks. For all their perspiring wetness he wondered why they should swim at all, or at least discard the ritual of undressing? *He had an inexplicable contempt for men who did not hurl themselves into pools.*

Each contender had the practiced pace, the glazed air of those accustomed to seeing where they were going without ever looking. His gaze, though, was fixed beyond running view, at a point where rail lines converged before they trickled south. *It occurred to him that by taking a dogleg to the southwest he could reach his home by water.*

On a train he felt the current weaken, felt rich as he swam through a hundred good views. He was a seasoned commuter and could swim many laps and never tire. One length took him past the Birrong Pools, where he practiced as a child: Tadpole, Frog, Dolphin, but never Shark. A brown, aluminium outdoor-tunnel had linked the heated pools to the change room then. Now only its concrete footprint remained, which appeared somehow shorter, even as he recalled the long chill of running wetly through it. *In the space of an hour, more or less, he had covered a distance that made his return impossible.*

ADAPTED WITH EXTRACTS FROM 'THE SWIMMER' BY JOHN CHEEVER,
FIRST PUBLISHED JULY 18, 1964 IN THE NEW YORKER.





3. REVIEWS & ESSAYS.

BY SUSAN GIBB

FRAMING THE AUSTRALIAN UGLINESS: A REFLECTION ON THE WORK OF KENZEE PATTERSON.

In 1960 the architect Robin Boyd published his seminal work *The Australian Ugliness* – a sharp piece of social criticism on the stylistic cowardice of the Australian suburb. The object of his protestation was a decorative tendency he termed ‘Featurism’. This he defined as “the subordination of the essential whole and the accentuation of selected separate features.” For Boyd, Featurism found expression in coffee tables masquerading as boomerangs; in peaked gables, columns and wooden scrolls attached to the façades of houses; in brick veneer and plastic flowers. Where good design married form and function, Featurism flinched away from such utility in favour of shallow surface appearance. This attempt to beautify was the Australian aesthetic and it was ugly, a comforting illusion used to temper a coast-clinging population’s revulsion at the country’s hot uninhabitable centre and its strangling bush.

For the artist Kenzee Patterson, the Australian suburb has long provided fertile ground from which to draw inspiration. Across his practice, he has repositioned as art the most banal of objects and images from his suburban surrounds, through techniques of appropriation and material transformation. This can be seen in *The Southern Cross* (2008), an accurate star map of this constellation and its surrounding stars created with car window stickers purchased from Autobarn Blacktown; *Tennis Ball/Toe Ball* (2010), a cast replication of a tennis ball adorned tow bar; *White Piece of Shit* (2009), a pile of sun-bleached dog poo hand-modelled in porcelain with a double entendre name; and *White guy* (2011), a totemic sculpture made from a repurposed telegraph pole, made itself from a repurposed Eucalyptus tree. As with Boyd, for Patterson these symbols of the suburbs are markers of place and identity redolent with meaning. However, where Boyd saw them as signs of moral flaw and aesthetic failing, Patterson approaches them with an equal share of critique and nostalgia, investing them with a weight in order to map his own subjective engagement with geographical contexts.

For Patterson, the issue of place and identity is a complicated one. Born in Australia in 1984, with familial connections extending from here to the Netherlands, Sri Lanka and Britain – details not readily evident or discussed by the artist – through his work, Patterson raises questions about how one defines and lays claim to their own ‘belonging’. The layers of Australia’s history between Aboriginal people, colonisation and migration are all

frequently acknowledged. So too are how these ideas play out on a more compacted, local and personal level, particularly between Western Sydney, where Patterson spent his youth, and the place he has called home for the majority of the last decade, the inner-Sydney suburb of Redfern. Across all of his work Patterson uses his own body as a measure. Sometimes this is quite literal, with, for example, the height of *White guy* matching his own. At other times it is implied through the choice of an object or image coming directly from Patterson’s own observation, experience or memory. His position as an artist is also considered. What does this mean and what social role does it play? Through these lines of enquiry, Patterson’s work operates as complex dual portraits, both of himself and the places through which he moves.

These ideas were most directly and comprehensively explored by Patterson in two of his most recent solo exhibitions, *Prospect Hill* at Blacktown Arts Centre in 2010 and *The Camden Valley Way* at Darren Knight Gallery in 2011. In each, Patterson took the Western Sydney sites referred to in the titles as extended places of study, considering how the areas have been represented, changed and developed over time as a result of their shifting inhabitants and fortunes through spatial installations of diverse objects and images that provided vernacular indicators of each place. In *Prospect Hill*, Patterson exhibited watercolour paintings of geological samples collected by the late mineral collector Albert Chapman; aerial photographs of the hill taken over an 80-year period that revealed changes to the land not only visually, but through their credited copyright owners, which shifted from the government owned Land and Property Management Authority in 1930 (2010) to the private Boral Ltd in 2009 (2010); colour photographs of contemporary suburbs that cleverly framed connections to the past, such as in *Crow* (2010) where the bird’s presence in the image provided a tangible link to the history of local Bidjigal resistance fighter Pemulway, who was likened to a crow for his ability to escape capture; and installation elements such as feature walls painted in Watty brand colours – *Gray Mood* (2010) and *Cumberland* (2010) – deemed in harmony with the landscape by the Lakewood design guidelines of recent McMansion developments. Similarly, in the exhibition *The Camden Valley Way*, Patterson used sculptures to signpost recognisable aspects of the area that the road of the same name traverses. This included a set of spinning

tyres modelled after roadside markers identifying the entrance to individual properties and named after the failed theme park, *El Caballo Blanco* (2011), alongside aluminium-cast polystyrene packaging from a flatscreen TV, titled after the area’s major shopping centre located at the end of the road’s run, *Macarthur Square* (2011).

The ubiquitous suburban shopping centre recently returned as a subject, with Patterson engaging an architectural draughtsman to sketch *Northpoint, Eastpoint, Southpoint* and *Westpoint* (all 2012) – major shopping centres in the North, East, South and Western suburbs of Sydney – from images composed on Google Street View. Beyond their names, each shopping centre appears almost identical in design, ironically suggesting that the cardinal points now lead to the same destination – consumerism – with indicators of location subsumed by a totalising image of a homogenising global language of capitalism.

Such conceptual considerations of how ‘place’ is represented have been carried into Patterson’s most recent series of works, comprising a string of eight square grilles reminiscent of security shields applied to domestic windows. True to Boyd’s Featurism, within the frame of each grille Patterson has placed a beautifying sprig of nature – *Red and Green Kangaroo Paw, Pink Heath, Cooktown Orchid, Blue Gum, Sturt’s Desert Rose, Royal Bluebell, Sturt’s Desert Pea* and *Waratah* (all 2013) – sketched out in bent and welded steel. Like the utilitarian structure to which they refer, Patterson has maintained their function, paying careful attention to the floral design so that no stray hand can pass through. In this way, both physically and conceptually, Patterson’s grilles denote boundaries between the human environment and nature, between public and private property, between Australia’s states and territories (through the use of their floral emblems), and the line that defines pictorial representation – what falls within and outside of an image’s frame.

Within the current socio-political climate of Australia, Patterson’s grilles are rich in metaphorical resonance, raising associations with ongoing debates about border control, nativeness, invasiveness and nation – what is allowed in and what is not, and how these decisions are framed. These debates became acute during the decade-long Prime Ministership of John Howard from 1996–2007, a period defined by Australia’s longest economic expansion, the intoxicating effects of prosperity and the subsequent rise of the middle class, the denial of a public apology to the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal peoples, the increased attention to border security and immigration amidst the fear of ‘terror’, and a resurgence of nationalist symbols and the ambiguous but potent phrase “unAustralian”. For many this period, typified by this phrase, represented a rediscovery of an “authentic” Australian identity. For others it was a reinforcement of a true, embodied Australian ugliness.

In Lesley Head and Pat Muir’s paper for the *Geographical Review*, ‘Nativeness, Invasiveness, and Nation in Australian Plants’, they refer to the long ecological history of Earth and the continuous movement of species around it, using this to argue that “notions that something does not ‘belong’ are ecologically imprecise and not helpful for management.” In relation to plants, Head and Muir argue that ideas of nation eschew their ecological requirements, with many plants existing in numerous locations regardless of political borders, and that “nativeness must be considered with reference to time as well as space.” In regards to Australia, they particularly note the dates of colonisation in 1788 and Federation in 1901 as key points in time from which nativeness has been ascribed, while alluding to the ongoing environmental change that would have undoubtedly occurred in the thousands of years preceding these, influenced both by Aboriginal peoples and the Earth’s own ecological forces. Their argument casts a critical

reflection on the question, what informs thresholds between humans and nature, and each other? Most poignantly they argue “the complexities of discussing indigenesness and belonging in relation to plants are exacerbated in former colonies where settler human populations are still coming to terms with their own belonging, particularly in relation to the indigenous prior inhabitants.”

Returning to *The Australian Ugliness*, one of its most curious aspects is Boyd’s departure from Australia almost midway through. In this section his ideas drift off into a metaphysical outer space of harmonic patterns, musical scales and mathematical ratios. In a similar manner, Patterson’s practice does not follow a linear trajectory. He often detours, making works that are more minimalist and conceptual in their appearance. This can be seen in his cube made of spirit levels, *Type 70* (2010), in another cube made from steel resting on two pairs of steel cap boots, *AS/NZS 2210.3* (2010), and most recently in which uses steel structures for architectural frames as their support. Within these works, material properties are brought into sharp relief – volume, form and the elemental conditions that they exist under. As with Boyd, these remoter explorations by Patterson demonstrate that for him art and design mean more than simply the fabrication of useful things – it is the thing that most unequivocally measures humanity’s relationship to nature and calibrates its position in space.

Patterson’s relationship with the tenets of modernism is however not entirely reverential, with an identifiable awareness of its tensions and failings. In *Not only biologically sound and environmentally safe, but also socially and aesthetically acceptable* (2012), a work presented in the shopfront window space of Slot Gallery in Redfern, Patterson recreated an off the shelf Eagle Eye pest bird deterrent. A shiny pyramidal structure that spins on its axis, the work shot refracted rays of light from its geometric surface into the traffic clogged Regent Street. Placed across the road from the small business Eddie’s Bakery, the work spoke elegantly to their less desirable homemade bird deterrent – a string of disused CDs hung clumsily with Christmas lights in an attempt to ward off local pigeons eager for a bite of bread. On the work, Patterson stated that: “The ‘pest bird deterrent’ borrows its form, materiality and dynamism from the visual language of Bauhaus and Minimalism. It is marketed as a tool for the protection of crops, thereby ensuring food security for the earth’s human population. But can an art object really save the world?” It was an evocative question that purposefully withheld results.

Back in 2008, when a few doors up Patterson transformed the glass pane of Locksmith Project Space into a celestial map of the Milky Way with *The Southern Cross*, he pinned inside on the back wall a smaller accompanying work, the enigmatic *The Coal Sack* (2008). Created by the artist accidentally inhaling then spitting back-up coal dust onto a piece of card, so that his saliva adhered the black pigment in an amorphous shape, *The Coal Sack* referred not only to its making but to the dark celestial nebula of the same name. Identifiable in the sky behind the Southern Cross, the Coalsack Nebula is important in Australian Aboriginal astronomy, with its dense gases forming the head of the Emu in the Sky. With eyes towards the sky, Elizabeth Grosz’s proposes in her paper ‘Chaos, Territory, Art. Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth’ that “art is the opening up of the universe to becoming other... Art is the most direct intensification of the resonance, and dissonance, between bodies and the cosmos”. Considering this in regards to Patterson’s work, art might not be able to save the world or to solve its ‘ugliness’, but through framing a moment can capture something of ourselves and provide an opportunity to articulate difference. ■



- | The Southern Cross, 2008
Self-adhesive vinyl
on plate glass, 2m x 1.9 m
An accurate star map
of the Southern Cross and
surrounding stars and
constellations is formed using
car window stickers purchased
from autobarn Blacktown

Pink Heath and Kangaroo Paw,
2013, hot-dip galvanised steel
35 x 40 cm

White guy, 2011
CCA-treated spotted gum,
retro reflectors, galvanised
clouds and cap
179 cm x 21 cm diameter

Photos: Alex Reznick
All images courtesy the artist and
Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney



BY GISELLE STANBOROUGH

C-TOWN MACCAS RUN: A USER'S GUIDE.

Statistics are notoriously memetic. Known for their fecundity, 'facts and figures' do not prove themselves worthy memes in the arena of copying fidelity. All those numbers and ratios just make our cultural biases and generalisations seem so authoritative, so real. I spent many hours trawling the web for a reputable source that backed up my oft-touted fact that Campbelltown boasts the most McDonald's restaurants per capita in Sydney. I can tell you, if I had a dollar for every time I rambled on ratios about Campbelltown and Maccas while devouring a sixpack of chikki nuggiez I could afford to feed the entire population of the developing world with Hunger Buster Meals.



McDonald's Ltd itself of course could not confirm anything officially, but to give a general idea of what I'm going on about, look at a population density map of Sydney and you'll see the number of residents taper out as you head southwest past Liverpool, yet the number of Maccas stays pretty constant. This essentially means that there are a lot of Maccas in the City of Campbelltown satisfying the dietary desires of not that many people.

As a successful franchise model, McDonald's has a vested interest in uniformity. I am interested in examining this myth of consistent corporate identity and controlled experience and hence set out to critique, dare I say 'review' all the Maccas in C-town with the assistance of a very talented food blogger by the name of Alana Dimou. As the signature delicacy, the Big Mac was selected as the food item forming the basis of comparison. Standards of service, hygiene, décor, even clientele were considered. Hopefully the following guide, replete with a wealth of candid culinary observation, will be of some use satiating famished travellers on the trek out to Campbelltown Arts Centre.



MACCAS I: QUEEN STREET.

This is the Maccas most easily visited en route to CAC. At the time of our investigation, the décor was strikingly excessive. The walls were liberally decorated with cardboard Americana-themed decals – Statue of Liberty, Hollywood sign, Wild West – yet the highlight was a glittered fake flower arrangement perched on the rubbish disposal. So far I believe this object is unique to this particular McDonald's. There was a wait to order, which was apologised for and promptly forgiven on my part. The service was friendly but the young girl behind the counter had an extremely off-putting habit of darting the bulb of her tongue piercing in and out of her pursed mouth. This was not an appetising sight. She asked me 'take away or dine in?' instead of the more pedestrian 'eat in' which added a delicate touch of class to counteract her grotesque oral compulsion. The toilets were clean with imitation wood laminate finish. Ambient music played; I believe it was the Twilight soundtrack. The burger was stacked slightly asymmetrically and the three pickles were piled on top of each other, instead of placed sporadically across the meat patty for an ideal distribution of flavour.

OVERALL: 6/10



MACCAS II: CAMPBELLTOWN MALL FOOD COURT

This Maccas is blessed with a beautifully serene outdoor dining area (serene as long as you miss the lunch hour stampede), complete with majestic ghost gums that appear to have been plucked from an Albert

Namatjira painting by some time travelling art history aficionado with a passion for al fresco fast food. Another noteworthy feature was the theming of the space, which was again designed to coincide with the "Tastes of America" campaign. The front counter was bordered with black and white photocopies of American currency, covered in transparent contact. This decoration had a much more crafted, interpersonal feel than the mass-produced Uncle Sam cut-outs that seem to be a marketing staple of 'Tastes of America' Maccas displays. The effect of the hand-made decoration was made even more pronounced by the peeling edges of the contact, no doubt from fiddling clients waiting for their feed. My attention was caught by a lady with tendrillous sky blue acrylic nails curled over a McChicken. No doubt many an ostentatious acrylic nail had been neurotically picking that contact on the counter, as I then did. I felt a poignant connection to my fellow consumers, and gave bonus points for this unusual ornamental tactility. However, I had to take these points away because they didn't pop the relief bulb on my diet coke lid to indicate that it was in fact diet, and because even though the pickles were separated, they were unevenly distributed. I got the inside word that the men's bathroom had signage like a magazine graphic design. Big, bold, and trendy. For obvious reasons my review is skewed towards the experience of the women's bathrooms.

OVERALL: 7/10



MACCAS III: MACARTHUR SQUARE FOOD COURT

If you don't really care about ambiance, this is the place to get the perfect Big Mac. Each strata of burger was impeccably stacked and perfectly aligned. Perhaps one of the kids out the back is studying to be a structural engineer? I was shocked by the absolute neatness of presentation. The pickles were ideally distributed to cover maximum patty surface area. The amount of sauce was observably generous, which I understand is not to the taste of every burger fan but I wholeheartedly approved. Furthermore, instead of having the traditional matte red lightbox of promotional Maccas branding, Macarthur Square had reflective red backdrop in the signage above the service area. Looked good. I didn't penalise Macarthur Square very much for the uncomfortably generic experience of the food court seating. It was not really exclusive Maccas domain and we were fortunate enough to find a place with a large window allowing in plenty of natural light, which is not necessarily a stock-standard architectural feature of suburban food courts these days.

OVERALL: 9/10



MACCAs IV: WOODBINE.

I heard on the grapevine that Woodbine was known to local youths as the 'nice' McDonald's. It's not hard to see why. While similar in layout to Queen Street Maccas, Woodbine is larger, with the toilets decked out in gleaming steel rather than plastic woodgrain. The toilets were definitely dirtier, though in all fairness our visit to Woodbine was later in the day. We got four free waters and won an Angus Burger from the peel-off Monopoly promotion attached to the surface of the cup. I'm pretty sure it's McDonald's policy to remove all evidence of any previous promotional campaigns and encourage the ever-fracturing experience of an exclusive present (no seriously, if I examined too deeply the notion of a time continuum where past choices partner with future consequences I think I would be significantly less inclined to indulge in such a calorically dense tour of C-town. Even if it is "for art's sake"). But they got points for having a more environmentally sustainable outlook with regards to their containers and because, like, we won an Angus Burger. There was an outdoor area where the sound of cicadas overwhelmed the background music, and the tables were dappled with birdshit. Nature ay? So pleasant. Why even go on a picnic when you can just relax in the outdoors of Woodbine Maccas? An anonymous colleague on this journey had his anthropological curiosity piqued by a heavily made-up female customer whom he referred to as "Texas edition Barbie" and suggested was in keeping with the Americana theme. And before you get on your socio-political high horse, I know it's offensive. I know it's crass, but he is from Western Sydney after all... just kidding. Two highlights of Woodbine were the life-size Ronald McDonald statue, so wistfully reminiscent of happy times and happy meals, plus the notice board with something about "Art Ways". Points were awarded for this easy and accessible Maccas-style community engagement strategy.

OVERALL: 8/10

MACCAs V: ROSE MEADOW

According to insider local consensus, we went from the top of the food chain at Woodbine to the bottom in Rose Meadow. While definitely ramshackle, with the large "M" faded to white and a completely uninhabited lightbox, this Maccas had an unmistakable charm precisely because it had no pretensions to live up to the manicured image of the corporation. This impression was succinctly illustrated by a makeshift barrier created by an old cardboard box cable-tied to a fence near the play area. The play area itself deserves special attention as many of the features

bear a stronger semblance to conventional childcare décor than to the generic bulbous cylindrical slippery dips that typically attempt to promote an emotional connection to the Hamburgler. The larger than life image of a toybox was clearly painted by hand. The staff were very friendly but I was offered no tray and the table tops were very dirty. There was insufficient lettuce on my Big Mac; you gotta have some veggies in there, otherwise it's just not healthy. Rose Meadow had a McCafé, but sitting beside the Easter sweets in the display shelving were St Patricks Day cupcakes, which through some quick addition we figured were at least two weeks old at the time of visitation. They lost points big time for this. The toilets were very clean, maybe cleaner than the table tops, and this Maccas had that lovely performative security where the CCTV feedback displays an image of yourself approaching the counter. The staff said goodbye as we left, which struck me as unusually courteous and I appreciated that.

OVERALL: 6/10



MACCAs VI: EAGLE VALE.

While Eagle Vale Maccas does have a McCafé, its range of prepared food was clearly lacking; single food items were aligned with empty white rectangular plates across the front of the transparent casing. It seemed as though there were more Easter decorations than actual edible items on display. When we ordered there was a toddler sitting on the serving counter next to us – probably not very hygienic but certainly adorable. There was no ambient music but a radio drama was playing: a man's voice paced through the words dramatically: "I'm sorry I let you down", to which a woman gave a soft and assuring reply: "you never, ever, let me down". I was reminded of the Depeche Mode song and considered whether I was in fact, let down by Eagle Vale McCafé. We ate outside, accompanied by a faint smell of cigarettes from 11 lipstick stamped butts in a small brown ceramic ashtray on the table. Two women and a baby huddled together at a table in a corner about two metres away. The woman facing the baby was smoking, which no doubt contributed to that so recognisable aroma and in a weird unhealthy alignment of various death-inducing Achilles heels, contributed to my enjoyment of the Big Mac. The cheese was well angled, poking out from under the bun like the tongue of the petulant toddler dangling his legs off the serving counter inside. Points were deducted from Eagle Vale because of the repulsive state of the ladies' rest room. When flushing, there was considerable backsplash and some toilet water even ricocheted out of the bowl, splattering onto my calf. Gross.

OVERALL: 5/10



MACCAs VII: MINTO

We arrived at Minto Maccas during the after-school rush so the queues at the counter consisted almost entirely of noisy, odoriferous teens in identical sweat encrusted polyester uniforms. The surrounding car park possessed all the attributes of an economically depressed neighbourhood. A scabby, emaciated and (I infer from what appeared to be very deliberately aimed and fist-sized bruises on her eye and chin) recently beaten woman squatted just to the right of the entrance, drinking Cougar from a can. I am not sure she was part of the Minto Maccas clientele. Most of the tables were occupied by perspiring juveniles indulging in their after-school high-sugar high-trans-fat fix and the only seats left for us were uncomfortably close to a bin. The box in which I received my Big Mac appeared unusually grease-laden, almost pellucid from the oils the burger seemed to have excreted as if it were a living organism. The patty was overly darkened and dry. The possibility of overcooking a Big Mac had not occurred to me before this. A man in a wheelchair, still with a white hospital bracelet on his wrist, approached me mid-mouthful in order to ask for advice regarding his iPhone 4 and inquire whether I had accepted the latest iTunes update. He was friendly and polite but I was made uneasy by a large concave scar in the middle of his throat. It was really very crowded and noisy and by the time we had decided to move on I had started raging at the difficulty Maccas staff seem to have in spreading out pickles evenly over the meat patty's surface area. Alana told me to calm down; it's just the Big Macs talking, and the day isn't over yet.

OVERALL: 4/10

MACCAs VIII: NARELLEN

Narellen Maccas was gratifyingly tranquil compared to Minto. Visible from the entrance was the Children's Party Room, where the walls were clad with colourful drawings composed of the adventurous but unskilled markings of miniature hands. We received the Big Mac on a tray with placemat rather than in a take-away bag and sat outside. There was no music but the silence was broken by a melody created by a rhythmic rumble from the highway in the distance. It was very calming; I like a quiet mealtime. The restroom was clean but I had to wait a while even though there were very few McDonald's patrons at the time of my visit. This was because there were only two toilets and one had been blocked off with a handwritten sign stating that the cubical was closed as the toilet was out of order, signed by the management. The Big Mac itself was fairly average, with lots of sauce but not much lettuce, and one undersized pickle, but the

bun appeared to be especially soft and fresh. As we drove away I noted some strange bumps between the car park spaces, presumably to prevent automotive shenanigans by Wild Western youths after dark. The image of obstreperous kids scorching tyre tracks into the gravel in conspicuously souped-up steam machines seems opposed to the hushed stillness of Narellen Maccas during a 5pm lull, but I can't think of any other reason for the bumps to be there.

OVERALL: 6.5/10

MACCAs IX: NARELLEN TOWN CENTRE

Narellen Town Centre is one of those sprawling suburban malls that can best be described as 'not Westfield', and possesses an architectural layout that spreads out instead of up. This made navigation a more arduous task than it would seem because I have to actually walk to Maccas, instead of drooping over a series of ascending black rubber hand-rails attached to the escalators on my way up to a hypothetical Level 5 food court (though it would be totally unreasonable to dock points just because a solid day of eating Big Macs had left me borderline comatose and I resented having to walk around instead of lying down, and weeping and cradling my much abused little tummy). By the time we got there, most shops were closed and the slamming sound of security gates echoed around us. This Maccas, like the one at Campbelltown Mall Food Court, is decorated with photocopied American dollar notes and, like Campbelltown's, the contact had been noticeably picked at. Narellan Town Centre got points for having the best musical accompaniment so far. Carly Rae Jepsen's "Call Me Maybe" was followed by a Britney number. Hell yeah, DJ bring that back. The food court was filled with vacant lurid lime green chairs. The Big Mac slumped to the side. There was a gaping tear across the corner of the cheese, which stubbornly refused to melt. Narellan Town Centre Maccas was very generous with lettuce and sauce.

OVERALL: 7/10



MACCAs X: MOUNT ANNAN.

What's this? All day Hotcakes?! What a treat. Have some points Mount Annan. The McCafé was well stocked, with many selections of baked treats in fastidiously aligned receding rows. However, there were Queen's Birthday-themed cupcakes already on display, when the holiday itself was not until the following week. Given the experience at Rose Meadow where St. Patrick's cupcakes were displayed along with the Easter ones, these prematurely displayed cupcakes tweaked my suspicion. And so I giveth

points and the points I taketh away. I was informed that the McCafé coffee ‘tastes like burnt water with an aftertaste of cardboard’, though I couldn’t officially tally that in this review as I didn’t taste it myself and didn’t sample the coffees at the other McCafés so I have no benchmark for comparison. The Big Mac is superb. Stacked with the precise eye of a dedicated patty-flipping aesthete, the sauce oozed out the side as if this burger were plucked right out of the commercial. Nice amount of lettuce, cheese well melted. This Maccas was bustling, with a large LCD screen behind the counter displaying a rotation of three-digit order numbers as customers came up to collect their meals, rather than waiting passively just to the left of the queue at the counter. Mt Annan is clearly very popular and I found the overwhelming background noise aggravating. I counted at least four different tones of repetitive beeps. The oppressive sound environment and incessant bleepings made it difficult to focus on my delicious burger. I have to say I am a fan of Mt Annan and would recommend it without hesitation as a solid example of a well-run Maccas, but it was let down by the bathrooms: grimy grey dominated the colour scheme. The walls were marked with filthy spatters that increased proportionally as my gaze drifted towards the floor. I had been informed on the down-low that the floor of the men’s toilet was far too slippery, making it a reasonable inference that using the men’s toilets in Mt Annan Maccas is a pants soiling hazard. Urinater beware.

OVERALL: 8.5



MACCAs XI: MASTERS HOME IMPROVEMENT CENTRE, GREGORY HILLS

This Maccas is in the Masters Home Improvement Centre. Like, IN the Centre. Next to outdoor heating supplies. It reeked of MDF and concrete mix. Architecturally, Masters Home Improvement Maccas has a Chinese box configuration; as you walk within the larger structure of the centre, then through to the canopied indoor section, and finally to the familiar yet miniaturised front of the Maccas, complete with a teeny weeny children’s playground and a Lilliputian McCafé section. So bizarre. We ate in silence, just trying to comprehend it all. It seemed like there was an epic scent battle being fought all around us as the Bunnings smell clashed with the Maccas smell: plaster versus fryer. They played Jamiroquai in the background, the first go-to option for upbeat and inoffensive easy listening. The Big Mac itself was well composed but the bun did look unusually dark and I believe the top beef patty was overcooked, having a kind of blackened scorched appearance on the topside. To be honest, this Maccas was nowhere near ‘the best’, but it certainly was my favourite. We exited via an array of glistening

Photography: Alana Dimou.
alanabread.com/mcdonalds-of-campbelltown
All images courtesy and copyright the artist

ride-on mowers and faux patina garden features that were offered for sale at a discount rate.

OVERALL: 7/10



MACCAs XII: GREGORY HILLS

Gregory Hills McDonald’s is literally about 50 metres from the McDonald’s in the Home Centre. It must be very new. Nothing was even remotely damaged or chipped, and the store lacked the kind of encrusted build-up of scum on the floor and walls, the kind of grit that is invisible until it is suddenly removed and the absence of any perceivable speck dirt became slightly off-putting. Kind of aseptic. Though I was very grateful for this exceptional sanitisation in the context of the lavatory. The bowl was so white it was almost luminous, so shiny I swear I could have used it as a mirror. The decorations appeared newer too. By the counter there was a large decal where extensive typographic illustration formed the shape of an apple tree while simultaneously informing the line of waiting readers/soon-to-be-diners about the seminal dates in the history of McDonald’s corporate development up to the internationally recognised icon of belly bulging bliss that we know and love today. This kind of typography heavy ‘feature walling’ strikes me as particularly derivative and probably created by a reductive influence from fast food rivals Burger Fuel and Mad Mex, both of which display typographic illustration as an inherent part of their visual branding strategies. I don’t know for sure, I’m just extrapolating. I counted a total of 16 LCD screens scattered throughout the McDonald’s. There was at least one on every wall and no area of vision where a screen was out of sight. Though to be fair, not all of them were turned on. The ones that were switched on broadcasted *The View*. I believe the duration of our visit to this Maccas was extended as a direct result of this television programming. In regards to the burger itself, it was nothing to write home about (they have their own Maccas in the Eastern suburbs anyway) but the bun was warm and soft, definitely the hero of this dish. Gregory Hills Maccas seemed to have a kind of creepy self-reflectivity, not only because of the American Dream meta-Maccas narrative brandished across an entire wall in pictorial text, but because everywhere there seemed to be subtle retro decorative embellishments harking back to another, thinner, time. The tray tables had trapezium-framed 90s style “M” logos embossed in a pattern across the surface, which was peculiar because the experience of emergent nostalgia clashed so disruptively with the pristine newness of the tray itself. For all of this trendy attention to detail, the Wi-Fi was very slow. Minus points for inept Internet.

OVERALL: 7/10

BY PEDRO DE ALMEIDA

IT’S WHAT WE MAKE IT.

David Williamson’s bullying *The Removalists*, Peter Skrzynecki’s compassionate *Immigrant Chronicle*, a bundle of willow charcoal sticks and a sketch book: this is what I received in 1995 in exchange for a \$50 book voucher at a now long-gone art supplies and book shop on Campbelltown’s Dumaresq Street, opposite the local twin-screen cinema playing *Clueless* for the eighteenth consecutive week. This represented my first and to date only art prize success, a token of encouragement courtesy of the University of Western Sydney’s fine arts department – another unfortunate relic of the past – for a fifteen-year-old’s self-portrait in green and black pastel on butcher’s paper I had dumped in the classroom rubbish bin in a perfectionist’s frustration, salvaged by my art teacher and entered into a drawing competition without my knowledge. To my shame, like Alicia Silverstone’s character Cher, my ungracious, adolescent reaction was, like, ‘whatever’.

So it’s with redemptive pleasure that I read Katherine Knight’s *Passion Purpose Meaning: Arts Activism in Western Sydney* (Halstead Press, 2013) to remind me of the serious accomplishments of my elders, including the late artist and teacher Joan Brassil, who arrived in Campbelltown in the late 1950s as a widow with two sons, one of which, Greg Brassil, became that high school art teacher of mine. Indeed, as Knight’s book generously elucidates, Western Sydney is nothing if not a crucible for relationships between strong-willed individuals and the broader communities they come from or otherwise wish to serve. If this sounds parochial, so be it: today’s limitless horizons projected by the internet and an internationalist’s sophistication only goes as far as it goes – after all bets have been placed, those outside of the ring are just not in the fight that really counts. So what’s at stake in looking back?

Activism is another word for the actions of a community that demands attention and a seat at the table, one that will tell you it’s shit when it’s just OK and embrace the good when it’s great. Forget the geographic borders of Local Government Areas and demographic spreads, the Western Sydney Knight brings to light in her thoroughly researched book is one that necessarily overcomes its own boundaries. If at times Knight’s prose can read like bullet points with truncated case studies for readers thirsty for more juice, she makes up for it in a wealth of primary research including excerpts of oral histories by some of the

key players, including Barbara Romalis and John Kirkman, who did so much to engender both perceptual and bricks and mortar change, having played defining leadership roles in establishing the famed Wedderburn artists’ community and Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre respectively. There’s inference to the darkness, too, in Knight’s reference to the Bidwill riots of 1981 and Anita Cobby’s unimaginable fate a few years later, both of which, to the immense credit of the guts and grace of the artists and creative producers of the region, have entered audience’s aesthetic and ethical purviews via *The Riot Act* (2009) and *Anita & Beyond* (2003). One thing you understand ‘out West’ is that self-definition trumps prejudice. Look, listen and learn from the region’s long history of visionary warriors: Claire St Claire, Margo Lewers, Graeme Dunstan and John Marsden, just to name a few, who did so much for local artists. As the poster says, Mt Druitt – It’s what we make it. ■

BY VAUGHAN O'CONNOR

LOCALS ONLY: FUNPARK 2013 COMMUNITY PERFORMANCE PROJECT.

Mt Druitt's residents are familiar with ruins. The ruined 'Slip and Slide' of Old Mt Druitt, the vanished Wonderland and the derelict traces of a rural history mock the aspirations of an area that facing the strains of contemporary Australia.

In Mt Druitt, like in much of Western Sydney, commercial interests have intervened where government bodies have stalled. The failing of local, state and federal bodies to address cultural and infrastructure deficits has created fecund gaps for recreational and retail interests. The result, over the past 30 years, is what Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas terms 'junkspace': the "residue mankind leaves on the planet" as a result of modernisation, an architectural proliferation characterised by its "superficial variety and fundamental monotony". In Mt Druitt that means RSL clubs, shopping centres and, of course, the fun parks for which it is best known. Mushrooming outwards from nodes such as train-stations, these regulated commercial zones form the primary cultural infrastructure for the majority of residents.

Within this context, Funpark is a particularly insightful community art project. Activating a semi-abandoned shopping complex in Bidwill with a mix of experimental performance, installation and community-engaged arts, Funpark navigates the territory around the local connection to vanished and unrealised spaces. Additionally, Funpark acknowledges the multiplicity of narratives latent in derelict architecture and spaces. Embodying illicit forms of urban play, the residue of previous function and speculative future purposes, ruins offer a respite from unrelentingly banal and regulated suburban space.

Funpark engages both site and region across multiple points, acknowledging the complexity of the communities and local identities of Mt Druitt and Bidwill. Producer Karen Therese and Director Boris

Bagatini combine their personal connections to the area, local partnerships and community-engaged performances to provide a multifaceted exploration of local identity.

The project itself is a sprawling collaboration between local government (Blacktown Arts Centre), community groups (Urban Neighbours of Hope, Headspace, Bidwill Community Centre, W.A.S.H House), arts organisations (National Association of Visual Arts, ArtsRadar, Vitalstatistix, Playwriting Australia) and local residents. Being still a project in development, it's fraught with the risks of any ambitious multi-stakeholder project in a temporary space. With potential occupancy of the space, the fragility of community relations and mutability of local-government support potentially affecting project outcomes, the threat of this project becoming another unrealised space shadows its development.

Embracing this precariousness, it seems appropriate that several engineers of Serial Space's *Time Machine Festival of 2012* are performers in Funpark. Pia van Gelder & Alex White's Noiseball transforms the playground game of 'handball' by enveloping players in experimental sound performance. Meanwhile, the performance Mt Druitt Press Conference uses local students to stage a mock press conference. With its use of performance to re-imagine an area whose local identity is strongly defined by negative media coverage, this is a potent example of performance rewriting narratives of place.

Crucially, Funpark demonstrates a powerful role of producers,



performers and artists; authors of alternative futures for disused spaces. The growing popularity of pop-up spaces has seen an increase in public and community art projects laying claim to dormant and overlooked sites. Perhaps projects like Funpark illustrate urbanist Aaron Betsky's declaration that "we live in the just-in-time, flextime world, in which fixed structures are a hindrance...Buildings have become monuments, which is to say memorials to past ways of living and thinking. They have become the tomb of architecture." Funpark's transitory nature serves as an answer to Betsky's call for architecture that behaves like a set, rather than a tomb enshrining redundant ideas.

As old architecture is increasingly adapted to suit more contemporary modes of being, a project like Funpark seems entirely appropriate. Gyprock and temporary barricades become set-pieces on the merry-go-round of site history, variously demolished or erected like a theatrical backdrops. In this context Funpark's focus on performance seems highly appropriate, reveling in a space marked by previous function but yielding to reinvention and the multiplicity of future narratives.

A touchstone for discussing arts projects driven by place and context is Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*. For Marker, place is a constellation of images, experiences and memories. The transient, energetic and capricious nature of Funpark follows the assertion of Marker's enigmatic narrator that "poetry is born of insecurity"³. Much like Serial Space, the allure of Funpark is its precarious, ambitious nature. This precariousness mirrors the logic of many of the cultural spaces in Western Sydney: temporary,

contradictory and intriguing. Funpark lends another narrative to a site in Bidwill which houses variously a disused shopping centre, car park, church hall and a pub.

Unlike the dull public artworks and parochial murals of Western Sydney, Funpark does not preserve obsolete ideas about urban life and culture. It is the kind of project that acknowledges the limitations of community and public art projects. For an area like Bidwill, enshrined in the failed promises of modernist housing projects, it is not a project that pledges revolution or utopia. Funpark may not change the world, but it does not promise to. ■

BY MARLA GUPPY

EDGE CITY ART: CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN FIRST GENERATION SUBURBIA.

During the 1980s, the new suburbs of outer Western Sydney began a highly place-specific process of cultural production. Pre-dating the contemporary practice of 'branding' new residential areas, this occurred in an environment where a commercially assisted production of cultural identity was largely absent. Two historical factors contextualised this new cultural output: the growth of new suburban areas, specifically public housing, in the preceding decade and the development of cultural policy designed to enable cultural production in new, low-income suburbs.

The synergy between these urban planning outcomes and the policies and products of the Australia Council's Community Arts Board, also a product of 1970s policy environment, is critical. The development of funded programs enabling artists to work 'in community' with new residential populations enabled a focus both on the nature of settlement and its cultural outputs.

It is important to understand the obvious but often overlooked reality that in the 1970s and 1980s, many new residents in Western Sydney came from *elsewhere* in the metro area. This was a time of transition from inner Sydney to Western Sydney, a migration that is now largely replaced by population movement *within the region*. People who had known intimately the urban landscapes of Redfern, Waterloo and Leichhardt found themselves in the new suburban landscapes of Tregear, Cartwright and Macquarie Fields. The move and the process of settlement represented a process of dispossession and acclimatisation to an unrecognisable cultural landscape.

During this time, increasing criticism of areas such as Mt Druitt and Green Valley in Sydney, Logan and Inala in Brisbane, Elizabeth in Adelaide and Broadmeadows in Melbourne resulted in cultural projects aimed at providing residents with the opportunity to recontextualise or re-enact the suburban landscape. Garage Graphix, a community arts workshop in Emerton, Mt Druitt, was set up in the late seventies with Australia Council and state arts funding. An initiative of Blacktown Council and locally based community artists, it was located in the garage of opera singer Peter Dawson's family's farmhouse, Rutherglen, now deep in suburbia.

By the end of 1986, 'the Garage' had been operating for over seven years and was an established part of the community infrastructure of Mt Druitt.

The community arts project *Mt Druitt: 365 Days – A Community Calendar Project*, produced at the end of that year, gives an insight into the issues and imagery that formed part of a process of self-definition. A series of 12 calendar pages depict images and values produced by community groups and local residents with assistance from community artists.

The notion that Mt Druitt offered lifestyle opportunities that might actually be attractive to residents is proposed in the January page, *Mt Druitt – a bit of the country and a bit of the city*, designed by a resident of Hebersham. The expression of positive values in itself contested the very negative perceptions of the area in the period that followed the so-called 'Bidwill riots'. As Powell points out in her book 'Out West – Perceptions of Sydney's Western Suburbs', it was not until the early 90s that research indicating levels of satisfaction with Western Sydney found their way into metropolitan media. In its absence the positive imagery produced by community arts projects had a particular significance.

Local commentaries extended to relationships with the then Housing Commission and increasingly, criticism of planning itself emerged as a subject. The December page *Mt Druitt wasn't planned for people but people are changing that!* expressed a common theme. In the absence of sustainable social infrastructure – youth centres, community centres, parks – the act of identifying and articulating that absence became a subject of much cultural work. So too was the belief that social change would only be effected by community action.

As the new demographics of Western Sydney emerged, particular discourses began to emerge. In the cover image of *Mt Druitt 365 Days*, the reality of women's lives in an area that had one of the largest groupings of single mothers in Australia's social history found purchase in an image of women in the suburban landscape pushing a stroller through the essentially masculine territories of the sports fields. In the background, boys grouped as if for a team photo relinquish their position as the subject. Here the notion of suburbia as the terrain of the nuclear family began to fray as new household structures gained critical mass.

The suburbanisation of Aboriginal communities also gathered momentum during this time with suburbs such as Bidwill and Bonnyrigg having at times larger Indigenous populations than rural areas. This was

a time when Indigenous people began to make sense of both the notion of a suburban identity but also of spatial relationships to other Indigenous groups that were themselves being reorganised by the development of the system of lands councils. The development of a visual language relevant to the suburban context, referring less to western desert imagery, is evident during this time in the work of artists such as Alice Hinton Bateup and Garry Jones. It was this new language that began to describe the subjects of significance: not just deaths in custody and the stolen generation but also the displacement evident in the journey from the country or the inner city to the suburbs.

Although the visual arts are foregrounded here, similar foci were evident in community theatre, where groups like Death Defying Theatre produced performance pieces with residents on housing estates, in essence re-enacting the dramas of everyday suburban life, an engaging process as performer or spectator.

THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY – PATTERNS OF ASPIRATION AND INSURGENCY

The so-called Bidwill riots of 1981, while overblown by the media, had important implications for the area. The influx of public money and an emerging realisation that planning could be better are the most widely understood. But for us to understand the emerging cultural identities of Western Sydney it is important also to understand that in the time after the riots, patterns of both insurgency and aspiration became much more defined in the outer suburbs. Dissident urban agendas were forming and "new identities and practices that disturb established histories" were becoming recognisable.

By contrast, in other localities (suburbs that by the end of the millennium were described as 'aspirational') the pleasures of suburban life were being articulated with a new confidence. *The House and Garden Project*, developed in 1990, used cultural mapping techniques to document gardens, homemade garden ornaments, pets, houses and families enjoying domestic environments as elements in a fabric design.

The notion that suburbia might be culturally dense, socially satisfying, even amusing emerged. The belief that social relationships could drive cultural identity even in the absence of appropriate planning and infrastructure was expressed. As areas like Mt Druitt began to shift, spatial as well as social expressions of aspiration began to gain definition. With smaller land releases like Hebersham, first homebuyers began to define their aspirations within the context of Western Sydney.

Also important was the consolidation of new 'diversities'. The arbitrary spatial arrangement of 'ethnicity' had by the late 90s resulted in distinctive local environments. While the proximity to Villawood Migrant Hostel had a clear influence on the movement of newly arrived Vietnamese refugees in the 70s to suburban hubs like Cabramatta, the dispersal of land packages owned by Landcom shaped the cultural industries hub of Bonnyrigg. Diverse religious organisations obtained land packages and built an impressive range of temples, wats, churches and mosques, a number of which are clustered along Bonnyrigg Park. While the intention here was to service religious diversity within the suburban environment of Fairfield, the impact of the buildings on the urban landscape, the calendar of festivals and events, and the sense of inclusiveness that organisations such as the Lao Wat promote resulted in an increasingly well-visited cultural destination.

This new texturing within the outer suburbs is critical to any understanding of the cultural identity of the area. The population moves across Western Sydney, rather than from the inner city out to

the west, indicated a new and deeper commitment to the region by residents. In particular the movement into home ownership by young people who had grown up in areas like Mt Druitt is critical, for here is the beginning of the aspirational suburb with its new forms of cultural production and participation. In an attempt to avoid the planning crises that scarred Mt Druitt, the then-rural area of Glenmore Park was developed as a residential suburb in the early 90s. Community facilities were in place, a school and town centre were allocated sites, and a cultural plan was part of the initial planning processes.

Parallel to this, spatial mapping of insurgent communities became more precise. While Western Sydney as a whole might have been seen from outside as a *region* that challenged notions of effective suburban life, from within the suburbs, streets and localities were disaggregated. And within this disaggregation the business of producing solutions, itself an important output of cultural production, gathered momentum.

The extraordinary diversity of Western Sydney challenges any perception of it as a unified region with a cohesive narrative. Shaped in many ways by hardship and difference, it is defined by a multiplicity of cultural production. In this article we looked at the cultural production of 'first generation' suburbia in outer Western Sydney. Contemporary cultural agendas are now intraregional, powerfully self-descriptive and diverse in both media and commentary. In some areas, cultural process and creative industries are well-supported and integrated into urban life. In other localities culture is raw and continually disassembling. People, households and communities are in transition and it is an area restless with social and environmental change. The experience of Western Sydney is that of the outer edge of the global city continually producing a cultural discourse that seeks its own histories and experiences. ■

This article is taken from a paper *Cultural Identity in Post-Suburbia* presented to the Post Suburbia – The City in Transformation Conference, University of Western Sydney 2006

●/
Jan Mackay
House and Garden
Screen-printed Fabric (detail),
Garage Graphix & PRPTC 1989
Collection: Marla Guppy

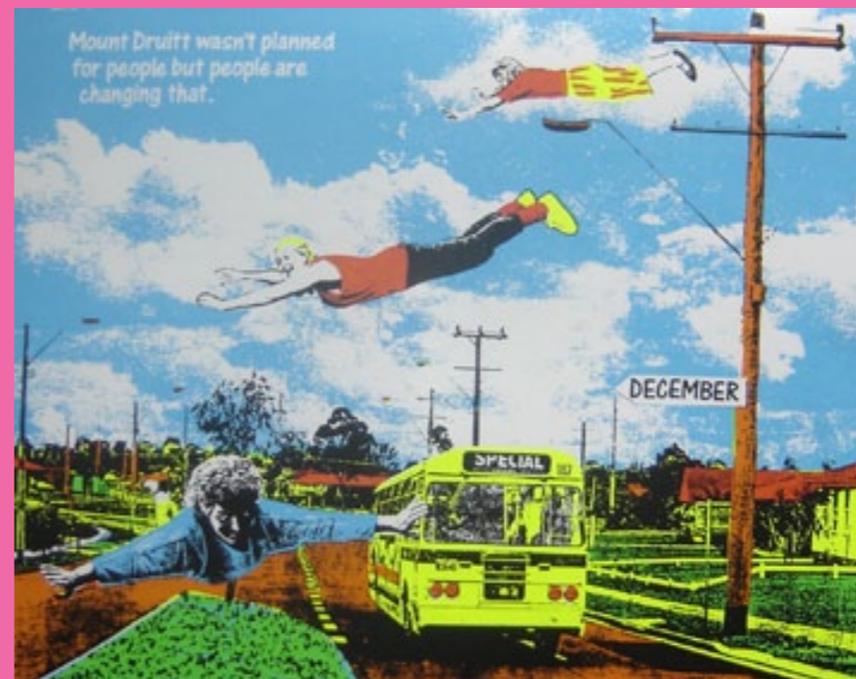
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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
Jan Mackay
House and Garden
Screen-printed Fabric (detail),
Garage Graphix & PRPTC 1989
Collection: Marla Guppy

The Lao Wat at Bonnyrigg, 2003
Photo: Marla Guppy

Billboard for the 'Bidwill riots'.
Collection: Marla Guppy

Joanna and Janine Lord,
Garage Graphix
Mt Druitt; 365 Days,
December page detail, 1986
Collection: Marla Guppy

Death Defying Theatre performing
at the now demolished Villawood
housing estate in the late 1980s



Mount Druitt wasn't planned for people but people are changing that.

The Daily
Telegraph

**1000
KIDS IN
WILD
BATTLE**

TELE BINGO



