

**Reciprocity: Where art meets the
community; action research in response
to artistic encounters and relationships.**

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Graduate Diploma of Education, (Visual Arts), (Monash University)**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts
(Research)
Creative Industries Faculty
Queensland University of Technology**

2009

Key Words

Hit, graf, piece, bomb, tag, taggers, urban terrorist, community, flooding, mural, public art, Artforce, street art, writer, reciprocity, action, response, encounter, artistic, journey, engage.

ABSTRACT

This practice-led research project examines some of the factors and issues facing artists working in the public domain who wish to engage with the community as audience. Using the methodology of action research, the three major creative projects in this study use art as a socio-political tool with the aim of providing an effective vehicle for broadening awareness, understanding forms of social protest and increasing tolerance for diversity. The three projects: *Floodline November 7, 2004*, *Look in, Look out*, and *The Urban Terrorist Project*, dealt with issues of marginalisation of communities, audiences and graffiti artists respectively. The artist/researcher is outlined as both creator and collaborator in the work. Processes included ephemeral elements, such as temporary installation and performance, as well as interactive elements that encouraged direct audience involvement as part of the work. In addition to the roles of creator and collaborator, both of which included audience as well as artist, the presence of an outside entity was evident. Whether local, legal authorities or prevailing attitudes, outside entities had an unavoidable impact on the processes and outcomes of the work. Each project elicited a range of responses from their respective audiences; however, the overarching concept of reciprocity was seen to be the crucial factor in conception, artistic methods and outcomes.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my current Principal supervisor Dr. Victoria Garnons-Williams and Associate supervisor Dr. Courtney Pederson. Thankyou also goes to my previous supervision team comprising of Jill Barker and Martin Kelly from QUT Creative Industries faculty. Thanks also to my previous Associate supervisor Professor Dr. Steffen Lehman from the QUT Built Environment faculty and supportive technical staff within the Creative industries Faculty.

Thank you to Brisbane City Council, Jugglers Art Space, Peter Breen, Randal Breen, Samuel Isles & Nic Plowman. A big thank-you to my wife Dr. Fiona Filardo, thanks Fi for your patience and understanding and finally to my sons Klai Balun & Asher Nalon who were also conceived, created and given life to amidst the undertaking of this Masters Degree. Thanks boys for a new perspective on life.

“The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made”

Signature : _____

Date : _____

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Visualizing the research:

The paradigm of Praxis (O'Brien, 1998, p.7) used in this research project lies within the practice of the Visual Arts and is about the art of acting upon the situations one faces in order to change them. The paradigm of Practice deals with the paramount disciplines and activities that are affected by the ethical and political lives of people. (O'Brien, 1998, p.8) The research in this study consists of enquiry, investigation, practice and speculation, honing in on contemporary public art and related issues like notions of site-specificity, community art, invisible art, and immaterial art. It is my attempt as an artist to comment socially, theoretically and artistically, whilst being able to interact with my immediate environment constantly on an everyday basis.

The aim and objectives for my research topic are to critically reflect on and isolate the research proposition by introducing and conceptualising the research topic, in this case in three main facets: reciprocity, action research and artistic encounters and relationships. As Gray (1996, p.3) points out in the case of a practice-led researcher, the research is initiated in the practice, and this is where the questions, problems and challenges are identified and formed by the needs of the practice. Therefore, this is achieved by focusing in on the background and key concepts of the research and the rationale for the research. The research strategy is carried out through the practice by using the methodologies that are familiar to the practitioner.

The aim of the study has been to seek and understand through observation and practice that which is both lived and living experience. The practice-led model of 'action research' has been chosen as this research model will allow for the considerable amount of relevant research where I can engage with the work beyond myself. Action research is learning by doing, a research method that allows the artist to demonstrate and apply knowledge through practice.

Responding to a site by reflecting on the community connected to it has been the main emphasis in my practice. Within the present study, my projects are an investigation into the inclusions of art and design within the public domain. My goal was to create appropriate, meaningful works that had direct relationships to the local environment, history and culture of the community. Part of this research included conceptualising, creating, making and installing my own public artworks. In addition, specific site visits (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.169) were made to other public works in order to document and review the works and to research the visual and historical documents that were available for each piece. This research study is a continuation of practice that has been established over the past five years, which has been based on ideas of where humans and art fit in together within suburban and urban surroundings.

The purpose in the current study is to establish investigational research into my own practice, focussing mainly on how it is negotiated through many facets of Brisbane's public art and how it fits into the community. My two main projects for

this study were *Floodline Nov 7 2004* and *The Urban Terrorist Project*. The *Floodline* project was an installation dealing with how I have interacted as an artist both in taking and recipricating back to my community, created, realised and installed within the community in which I reside. The other was created in response to the wider community of Brisbane and the way in which Brisbane responds to graffiti.

Conceptualizing Public Art: where art meets the community

Dr. Judith Winternitz has reiterated the importance of all forms of art as a representation of civilization and life. In many ways art manifests itself most obviously and most characteristically in material culture & in the objects and physical constructs of everyday life. (Winternitz, 1990, p.vii) In many cases there can also be the desire to constantly manipulate/change our environments through current technologies and constructs. (Mildura Arts Centre, 2003, p.14)

Transiton to public art as material culture

According to Department of Arts, SA, "Art can extend the individual's awareness and promote community expression through public debate. Works can either be in 2-dimensional forms, such as paintings, murals or photographs, or they may be depicted in 3-dimensional forms, in particular by being incorporated into architectural forms, sculpture, open spaces, installation & earthen works. Such artworks refer to perceptions of sight and may also refer to the other senses like

sound, touch and smell.” (Department for the Arts and Cultural Development Arts Division South Australia, Brocher Pack, Art for Public Places)

Helen Armstrong (Lehmann, 2005, p.30) places public art within the changing face of Brisbane's urban life. She refers to public art as being joyfully accepted or simply as another aesthetic and pleasurable aspect of Brisbane's urban landscape. However each individual project may excite a variety of responses depending on the viewer, whether they are from the general public or are a connoisseur of Art.

The Publics Interactions

Within Brisbane one of the key artists associated with public art is Sebastian di Mauro who is responsible for creating one of Brisbanes most talked about public art commissions. It is located on Eagle St in Brisbane's CBD and is titled '*Chat*'. This artwork depicts two giant hands cast out of aluminium, they are deep in conversation, one pointing towards the heavens and the other lying on the ground as if pointing towards inner earth. (Grimish, p.22) These hands have evoked individual responses and taken on new unintended identities by the general public such as "the groping hands on Eagle" (Houghton, p.30) or now unofficially renamed as "the Hopoate". (Brown, p.8) This name refers to the NRL rugby player John Hopoate who intentionally as a tackling tactic used his index figure to penetrate an opposing players rectum during a NRL game.

'*Confluence*' by artist Daniel Templeman marks the entrance to the recently completed Brisbane Magistrates court. It is a flowing sculpture that depicts a giant stenographers ribbon and is fabricated out of steel. It is enjoyed and used by many in the community especially by skateboarders that have been captured on CCTV interacting with it by riding it and using it as a launch pad. (Houghton, p.30) " Saturday afternoon observers view skateboarders' interactions with '*Confluence*' , as a sculptural piece of organic performance art. An outsider's artistic "up yours" to the weekly legal establishment..." (www.springhillvoice.com/may2007.html,13/7/07)

Another artist that has uplifted city impressions is Christopher Trotter, he has used recycled materials to create "*Kangaroo on George St*". This comprises of found mechanical metal objects welded together to create a kangaroo and is placed on the footpath, it has become a tourist attraction and is much appreciated by visitors to the city that have their photo's taken with the sculpture. (Brown, p.7)

Public art can become an independent factor within a community, as it can sometimes be forced upon the community without liason or discussion. A piece may be installed within a community that has nothing at all to do with that community or place. In a sense it is juxtaposed and somehow detached from

that community and totally one sided. It then becomes laid on as opposed to reciprocal ie. it's not given, felt, by each to or towards each, where there is a mutual understanding and act of giving.

Some important artists that have created art for and with the community in different ways are Rick Lowe, Mel Chin and Pepon Osorio. Houston based artist/activist Rick Lowe in response to the gentrification of one of Houston's poorest neighbourhoods known as the Northern Third Ward in 1993 developed *Project Row Houses*. It was a collaborative project involving resident artists and experts within and outside the Third Ward coming together to envision the future of the neighbourhood. (<http://www.projectrowhouses.org/cdc.htm>, 9/6/2005)

The project has been established on the site of 22 abandoned shotgun houses located in Holman Street. The project now incorporates various programs from public art, Afterschool Summer program for youth, Teen education and young mothers residential program. His primary focus has been on community development, neighbourhood planning, historical preservation, real estate development and providing affordable housing. (http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/professional/loeb_fellowship/alumni/class_2002/lowe.html, 9/1/2005)

American artist Mel Chin also works with communities but in a different way, he collaborates with community residents, government agencies and the scientific

community to re-create fertile grounds. In his project *Revival Field*, Pig's Eye Landfill, 1993 he has revived a polluted field by growing and harvesting special plants that thrive on heavy metals in the soil. He was successful in transferring this project from the science realm to the arts realm simply because he believes art is exempt from strict rules and regulations. He describes himself as the 'sniper artist' "because his activities are covert, but carried out with a purpose and with discipline". (Weintraub, p.47) He has an important rescue mission that is to help heal the environment through his work. "My goal for art is to create a condition where one can see the possibility of change. Art is not static, it is catalytic. Art is not just a language, it is useful, it makes things function. It has a critical relationship in society. Artists are essential parts of society, not members of an elite....." (Weintraub, p.50)

Puerto Rican artist Pepon Osorio created installations concerned with stereo types and realities of communities while expanding the viewers understanding of personal histories of the site. He saw art as a tool for social transformation and development. Osorio as a community artist, his mission was to speak about local issues to audiences made up of both the community observed through the artwork and the larger public. He would source his material by meeting with community members, social service organisations, students, school support groups and local residence. He was interested in not only speaking to a community but more importantly involving the community in the process of creating art. He came to the realization that to gain the communities interest he

had to accept the communities concerns and make them his own.(Connors, pp. 76-83) “My work is socially relevant because that is the need I see in the community. Our community doesn’t like the idea of art for art’s sake and they expect art to talk to them and be part of their lives.” (Connors p.76)

Over the years there have been many asrtists that have collaborated with different communities. And the most common way of collaborating between artist and community in the public domain has been to jointly create murals. A well known example is the Chicago Collaborative Community Murals that took place between 1967-2003. (http://www.focusbalancecreate.com/thesis/maah_roth.htm 5/9/05)

Here in Australia Community Art as we know it is rooted in the social and political struggles of the 1960’s and 70’s around the issues of the Vietnam War, feminism and Aboriginal land rights. (Kirby, p.19) However it also has a historical development that precedes these movements that date back in Australia to the 1850’s through the struggling workers or working classes that wanted social change and were able to accomplish this through unionist movements. (Kirby, p. 20)

Around the 60’s and 70’s a key term ‘artworkers’ as oposed to ‘artists’ had begun to emerge as a descriptor of the art that was produced due to influences

associated with the production, marketing and consumption of culture. (Kirby, p. 19) Through these as well as the involvement of artists in protest groups that art had been allowed to touch a wider audience through the direct access and participation of the general public. (Kirby, p.19) Thus, through the Whitlam government and due to more knowledge and understanding of the arts through these practices in 1973 this led to the official formation of the Community Arts Committee of the Australian Council for the Arts. (Kirby, p.19) 'Community arts' has always been around and it includes a wide range of creative and cultural activities such as painting, sculpture, craft, music, theatre and dance. (Kirby, p. 20)

Contrary to Winternitz, who wrote of material objects of culture, Michael North writes about how sculptors have tried to find new and different ways to make a sculptural object more "invisible, immaterial, or remote". (North, 1992, p.9) He goes on to explain that where sculpture did have some material presence, it often took on unexpected forms. Rosaline Krauss describes public art, and agrees that "Rather surprising things have to come to be called sculpture: narrow corridors with TV monitors at the ends; large photographs documenting country hikes; mirrors placed at strange angles in ordinary rooms; temporary lines cut into the floor of the desert." (North, 1992, p.9) One of the significant developments of my practice during the study, was the inclusion of immaterial, invisible and remote elements.

Summary of the research projects

Within this thesis I discuss my concepts, processes and the outcomes of two major projects. A minor project, an exhibition at Shepparton in regional Victoria, titled *Transitions: 3500- 4106* provides an introduction to my previous practice, and the transitions in approach and methods of the work in this study. My first major project was a site specific public artwork within my suburb of Rocklea, *The Rocklea Project: Floodline Nov 7 2004*. My second major project took place at Jugglers Artspace in Fortitude Valley in the form of an exhibition that included a selection of artworks entitled *Look In Look Out. The Urban Terrorist Project* was a collaborative performance piece that was a separate entity/artwork on the night of my exhibition opening at Jugglers Artspace and led to a video artwork.

CHAPTER 2. OUTLINE OF THE METHODOLOGY: ACTION RESEARCH

Action Research in relation to MA Projects

The research in this study arises from personal enquiry into practice, which lies within the Qualitative research paradigm in the Creative Industries. It is Austins notion of performativity of where the performing of the practice becomes the thing done. (Haseman, 2006, p.6) As outlined in the literature, performance involves experiencing, exploring, gathering, documenting information and generating data/evidence. 'Action research' is a relevant form of 'Practice as Research' that allows the researcher the opportunity to live amongst the subject matter whilst making a social impact on the environment. Action Research is situational and intervening (Gray & Malins. 2004. p.74), therefore the researcher is able to engage with the work beyond himself/herself. Action Research is used to explore the themes, practices, and contexts of artistic inquiry, emphasizing the imaginative role in creating, criticizing, and constructing knowledge that is not only new but also has the capacity to transform human understanding. As an example of how methodology relates to a specific project, this chapter will focus on the first project, *Floodline Nov 7 2004*.

Floodline Nov 7 2004 as Action Research

In the *Floodline* project, I followed the action research model by developing and creating the artwork as an explicit and intentional method used for specific

research purposes. I gathered information on previous artistic enquiries regarding local flooding, as well as obtained statistical information on related flooding matters within Rocklea. I generated interest from council and local residents. I presented an installation in Kookaburra Park as a response to a particular flood and I have analysed my work within this thesis as I have communicated the research findings.

Action Research helps form a diagnosis for problem solving that has a direct link to a specific real world context. As such, Action Research is different from other models of research because it requires an amount of social-action as an integral part of the research process itself. Participatory action research as creative practice can actively involve, inform and inspire others. (Gray & Malins, 2004. p.75) However, the primary motivation for such knowledge is to communicate and continually develop knowledge through the creation of art itself. This is research through the practice as a reflective learner, as well as for one's own practice. (Stapleton, 2004, p.1 & 2) It can be an attempt to try and embody certain research concepts and provide visual evidence as to demonstrate the research findings.

The form of Action research that I chose was research through art and design, that is designed to link new knowledge with existing knowledge. Action research as artistic context as shown in the Rocklea project, has added to continual development of knowledge through the creation of the art itself. As an example of

how methodology relates to a specific project, this chapter will focus on the first project, *Floodline Nov 7 2004*. The tools required were my methods and techniques used in the conceptual development and making of art work. I have done this by trying to get actively involved in my community and by pointing out a common thread that holds us together: the effects of the flood and its political issues.

To document the process, a range of methods were used such as a timeline (Marshall, & Rossman, 1999, p.176), reflective journal, photography, video, audio, and so on. Information gathered by these methods was used to analyse and evaluate the project, as well as to create further artworks and for exhibition.

From the implementation of the methods some important questions arose concerning public art creators who use safe, conventional approaches rather than ambitious ones when creating and completing artworks. The artist may be rebuked with public outrage if the work is not to the public's satisfaction (Serra, 2000, p.147-150) Should the artist merely decorate a site or push the imaginative controversial boundaries? Is the artist creating a permanent aesthetic work or an ephemeral piece? How much can the artist who creates a minimalist contemplative space communicate the area's ecology, Indigenous significance, early European activity and contemporary history?

Strengths and Advantages of Action Research

There are many advantages & strengths (Denscombe, 1998, p.237) in using Action Research, as it can lead to a means of generating new data through real world experiential activity. By researching and learning through doing, I am able to develop a deeper understanding of the community, the historical action of council and the local residents of Rocklea. As the practitioner researcher I am able to develop an informed perspective on issues relating to the practice of making and creating. The project was seen as an exciting feature in the park, enabling people to come together as a community living and reliving the experience, as the flood itself did the year before. The artwork was informative, sharing factual information of how high the water level was in the area. People had the opportunity to own the situation by sharing stories about what happened at the time of the flood. The project had good potential to be visually stimulating and intriguing to passers by. The *Floodline* project put a social message forward: why are the council doing nothing to help people? There was the potential of the project being a voice that could make a difference. (Gray & Malins, 2004. p.104-120)

Weaknesses and Disadvantages of Action Research

While there are strengths and advantages (Denscombe, 1998, p.237) there may also be weaknesses and disadvantages in the use of Action research. First of all Council may reject the proposal as it may seem to be demeaning towards them.

The residents may think it's a waste of time and resources, better spent on fixing the problem of flooding instead. There may well be misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the original concept, and the residents may say "all I see is just a whole lot of little red laser lights". Of course, this would be discouraging to me as an artist, but action research involves risks. Being open to criticisms of indulgence and over-subjectivity becomes a critical factor in deminishing these disadvantages.

However, since the major objective of Action Research is to create discussion/discourse and contribute to new knowledge whilst being aware of the strengths and limitations of the research, I believe action research allowed me to form understandings of effective strategies and methods that can promote and impact on social justice issues. (Hughes, <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/w/Hughes.pdf>)

Setting the context for the research here in Queensland

My first major project in Queensland tied together my journey from the previous place of inhabitation to the next in Brisbane. It was completed in 2005, a year after relocating to Rocklea.



Figure 1

Transitions: 3500 – 4106

Transitions: 3500 – 4106 was about the physical and mental journey from one place to another. Past memories and new experiences over five years have inspired this work. The time frame began in 2000 when I left Melbourne and relocated to North West country Victoria at Mildura, then progresses to where I currently live in Rocklea, Brisbane, Qld.



Figure 2

Mildura was a very inspiring and influential place for me, as it gave birth to many paintings, sculptures, installations and collaborations. It was a place that I referred to as a 'mini-suburbia' where I created two exhibitions. The first was *Found Suburbia*, with paintings, works on paper, installation and sculpture portraying my observations and feelings of Mildura. "The show is a description of the things I have heard, the things I see and the things I find myself doing in Mildura".(Filardo, 2002, p.2).

My work there was a compilation of multi layered works that referenced the trappings of suburban life from manicured lawns and picket fences, to 3-4 bedroom houses and hills hoists that characterise our shared suburban existence both in regional as well as city centres. (Captain, <http://www.swanhill.vic.gov.au/gallery/news.html>, 2/02/2002).

The second exhibition, *Urbanistica*, was a dynamic successful show that was partly funded through a professional development grant funded by Regional Arts Victoria. The works in the show pushed public sentiment boundaries by portraying the negative signs of Mildura, such as violence, murder, teenage pregnancy and environmental destruction. This also relates to the human form and the way in which this form fits into the environment.(Filardo, 2003, p9) The body of work evoked many reactions and emotions, both positive and negative. Much of that work explored the current critique on the dialectics of space especially the 'edge zone' of the ubiquitous suburbia.(Naylor & Filardo, 2003) It took a while to gather information and do the required research on issues but in the end I was pleased with the outcome. The project was an exciting dynamic exhibition of visual artworks viewed by the local community and visitors to the region.(Australian Government, http://www.dcita.gov.au/aRTICLE/0,,0_1-2_1-4_112740_00.html 2/02/2002) The body of work consisted of about 27 pieces, which varied in size, shape and medium, incorporating the landscape and people of the Mildura region. The exhibition was held on 31 October – December 7 2003, at

the Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, Victoria and toured to Intrude2 Contemporary Art gallery in Melbourne from 17-28 February 2004.

Transitions: 3500 – 4106, referenced the memories of my previous works as elements from them are resurrected and depicted in a new way.(Filardo, 2005) The work is about leaving the country town, moving and relocating to Rocklea in South Brisbane.



Figure 3

With *Transitions*, I responded to my journey and created work that I believed reflected the concept of distance travelled. I interpreted and extended the site of art from the physical place to the journey itself. It is an interpretation of the site, being in my car travelling the distance, experiencing the road, the different surfaces, the sounds of the engine, music, conversations, weather, and extreme heat, drowsiness, stopping and starting for petrol, food and to relieve our selves as well as our two dogs.

In referencing the sense of such a journey, I decided to use something that was quite long. Also in order to keep the context of previous work, I wanted to make use of simple line. I used a coiled roll of continuous fencing wire purchased from a local hardware, which I stretched and straightened while unwinding. The wire was then covered with clothing and depicted associated representations from the journey such as the suitcase that was carried in the car, and the post codes from every town that we travelled through.



Figure 4

I wanted to make it bendable, pliable, and flexible as a symbolic reference to the emotions of the move. The final continual piece was about seventy five metres in length, totally covered and not exposed, with a tube like encasing stitched up to hide the wire. The tube was constructed out of old clothing and old curtains from

the previous residential address in Mildura. The use of the postcodes, starting with Mildura (3500) and including everything in between, presented the viewer with another representation of the journey. Heading down towards Melbourne to meet up with family and then travelling north and eventually breaking down in Shepparton (again), the collective postcodes traced each step. In Shepparton, we caught up with friends and we stayed a few days while the car was being repaired. Included within the text of the installation piece were personal stories of hardship, mishaps, and friends' names from the journey. The text was stencilled onto the fabric using a plastic alphabetical letter stencil as well as black, yellow and white spray paint. The finished artwork was eventually set up in Shepparton Regional Art Gallery and portrayed as a soft, subtle and passive reflective journey on the dimly lit walls of the gallery. Accompanying the text were also floodline depth markers, like the indicators normally seen in an area prone to flooding. This is a familiar icon throughout the suburb of Rocklea and surrounding suburbs in Brisbane and was used to associate my new place of residence within the installation.

Shepparton Regional Art Gallery Exhibition

The whole piece was designed to be contained within an old suitcase that I had received as a wedding gift in 1995 from a relative. I packed my bags, and took the finished artwork and boarded the plane for Melbourne. The piece even travelled in the luggage compartment as a normal piece of luggage on the plane. The suitcase received no special treatment from airport personnel. The complete

work was able to be packed, unpacked, exhibited and repacked totally within one suitcase not weighing more than twenty kilos.

After reaching my destination I was picked up by relatives who asked where all the artworks were. I replied with “this is it!” they replied with an “ok then!” and gave me a car to use for the 2.5 hour journey to Shepparton. At this point on the drive I continued to think of how differently I could have approached this piece. Not knowing how the gallery and general viewers would respond to my work, I was very nervous, but I quietly persisted with creating the installation.

The suitcase was exhibited and placed on a white plinth at one end of the gallery space. From here the internal part (the covered wire) began to gently fall out of the case and land onto the floor. Then like an organic wormlike object the work began to climb the walls whilst starting to form various shapes and forms that had been taken from past exhibitions. This one continuous work travelled, floated and scaled the walls around the room until reaching the suitcase again, metaphorically ready for the next journey.

This piece relates to my MA research study topic as there were crucial elements within this and past pieces, such as the use of the linear line as a form of representation, the sense of the immaterial by the ease of transporting the work in the suitcase, by representing and relating to the sense of community and by being open to public critique and scrutiny.

CHAPTER 3. THE ROCKLEA PROJECT: FLOODLINE NOV 7 2004

Introduction

From enquiring, observing, practicing, inhabiting and speculating, (all attributes of an Action Research Methodology), I saw a great 'gap' in people's knowledge regarding the environment of Rocklea: the place, its people and the lack of art work found, shown and exhibited there. I perceived an unfair stigmatic recognition that was made by the local authorities, the general public, and the perceptions and opinions regarding the lack of importance placed on the residents, especially in times of great need.

Erin O'Brien, a writer completing her PhD in Political Science at the University of Queensland pointed out the facts about how we start to label people by their assumed status in our society. In her article she talks about the ongoing feud between the Gold Coast Mayor Ron Clark & Ipswich Mayor Paul Pisasale. The feud is over which city is best and is done by tearing down one another's place. It is about one-upmanship and a tribal inclination to verbally attack other suburbs. "No matter where you live, someone somewhere will judge you for it" (O'Brien, 2008, http://www.news.com.au/courier_mail/story/0,23739,23080226-27197,00.html, accessed 18/03/2008)

Imbued with an overwhelming superiority complex, the city officials and general public latch on to any negative aspect of another community and denigrate it, forgetting about the shortcomings of their own humble abode. Rocklea is remembered for the floods of 1974, when pretty much the whole suburb was submerged.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Through immersion and positioning myself into my locale and into my Social space, (Naylor & Filardo, 2003) I saw a need to establish a sense of place and recognition, where public artworks can become familiar features in the environment and which may help generate a sense of ownership. I felt Rocklea could become a friendlier place through the communications offered by works of art. Residents and building owners can find works of art can add value to their properties as tenants and prospective buyers may prefer spaces which may offer historical meaning and aesthetic value.

Research and Development of the concepts for *Flood line*, Nov 7 2004

Originally, there were 3 different proposals that directly interacted with the environment of Rocklea as the subject matter. A decision was made to focus on only one. This work proposal was a site-specific artwork that addressed an incident that affected many residents and families as well as myself in the Brisbane suburb of Rocklea on Nov 7 2004.



Figure 7

It had rained constantly and heavily for a number of hours and according to the Brisbane City Council records, it was described as a mass build up of water that was measured at a rate of 60mm/hr and greater. Approximately 25 homes had become inundated with water, approximately 50+ homes were affected by yard flooding within the Stable Swamp Creek catchment (Kookaburra Park), Rocklea. Rain gauges to the east of Stable Swamp creek recorded 99mm, 105mm and 150mm, the gauge to the west recorded 197mm.(Griffiths, 2005)

On this day in 2004 many people were flooded out of their homes. The larger context is a complex one, involving Brisbane City Council, the weather, the residents and an overwhelmed creek caused by inappropriate Council works, rezoning and urban planning decisions further up stream.

The proposed artwork was to take place on the anniversary or near the time of Nov 7, 2005. It depicted the flood line of 2004 at Kookaburra Park (Stable Swamp Creek). The proposition was to install a number of small coloured laser lights throughout the park. Each line of light would be at different allocated points around the park. They were to be mounted onto trees using adhesive tape so as not to harm the tree in any way. An ambitious concept was to gain permission by Council and residents so I could attach/mount the laser pointers onto houses where appropriate, with the beams of light weaving through out the trees and houses in and around the perimeter of the park. These lights were to create a beautiful web like structured pattern amongst the trees and viewed from the side the lasers were to depict the actual flood level. Another aspiration was to recreate personal stories of the victims as an audio recording, but this never eventuated due to time constraints and ethical clearances.

Thinking back to having just moved into the area in October 2004 from another Brisbane suburb, I reflected on November 7 2004, thinking of rising waters, the panic and of how we felt a new fear never experienced before. My wife and I were secretly questioning in our minds and too fearful to verbalise to each other

the possibility that our house could be next and inundated/flooded with water. Why did we buy a house here? I remember my neighbours (from my street), Fiona (my wife) and I standing outside our home in our street, seeing water rapidly flowing by in the gutters, the gush getting higher and wider, eventually covering the road. The water was adding to the flooding at the bottom of the gentle slope at the end of our street. It was distressing seeing other neighbours in trouble, wading through water with their belongings held high above their heads. The event helped form relationships within my local community; it broke down boundaries. Neighbours that had never spoken to each other before communicated for the first time. Asking questions, introducing themselves to each other and willing to lend a hand if it was required, it began to feel like everyone was pulling together in this potential crisis and within this sudden turmoil I felt a real sense of community spirit.

I needed to process the day, and I wanted to respond to it in an aesthetic action, as I thought that it would be a great opportunity to give something back to my new community of Rocklea. Given that Rocklea residents had few local opportunities to encounter art in the neighbourhood, I was very uncertain of how they would react to this project. Did the locals want to be constantly reminded of the bad things that could happen to them, their homes and their belongings? Or could this project help identify and recognise the need to make a change within the local council?



Figure 8

The chosen site for my project was Kookaburra Park, along the water pipeline that has graffiti on it. This was really a central spot in Rocklea and easy to locate near the old bridge. I thought of many conceptual possibilities, thinking back to Noah and his Ark. I could depict a great flood by installing a semi submerged rundown boat/ship into the middle of the park as a reminder or I could place a series of flood indicators/markers throughout the park with people's stories/recounts of what had happened on the flooding days as far back as the 1974 floods. I wanted to tie the flooding theme in with the original settlement and conveyancing of the park itself.

I was aware of how others have portrayed the idea of water levels in the past. Artist Paul D. Johnson completed an artwork in the Rocklea area that directly relates to flooding issues as well. He used a series of telegraph poles that had metal objects placed horizontally depicting the water level. Richard Tipping's work, *Watermark (Flood)-2000* at Brisbane Power House, New Farm is another example of a work dealing with this subject, using text to portray the flood of 1974; bold red text that is only visible from the half way mark of the word. The bottom half is cut off, depicting the water level at that point, where the ground meets the red letters.

Project Description



Figure 9

In line with contemporary notions of practice, I wanted to use new technology. Lasers came to mind because of the link to surveyors/builders contemporary methods in finding level ground. I also used clear poly pipe/hose that is commonly used for water features, water pumps and irrigation. I searched through Brisbane for the lasers, the cheap lasers that kids use, the ones on key

rings, and I needed a lot of them. Finally I found them at the Rocklea markets on a Sunday (bric-a-brac day). It was ironic that I found the lasers in the same suburb as the project was based.

I was faced with the problem of displaying an actual laser light. Through mist and fog it looks fantastic but if it does not penetrate anything dense, then the laser line light can't be seen at all. In my search for something solid but transparent, I found long clear Perspex rods. I placed laser lights at either end of the rods creating a beautiful thin red line that was carried all the way through. These were suspended from the same heights as the water level mark within the trees of Kookaburra Park.

I made a small scaled down maquette of the site, taking into account the undulating landscape and topography (Brough, 2006, p.3) and I envisaged how it would look from many different directions and angles by using red cotton thread woven through the model trees. The contrast of colours became really interesting; the reds became very bright and vibrant against the greens.

I had received permission from Brisbane City Council to have this exhibition in the park. A council rep came over and we drove down to the site. We discussed the proposal and he said he would get back to me with an answer at a later date. Two weeks later, the project was cleared. I designed a minimalist invitation for the event and printed hundreds from my computer at home. For distribution,

I got onto my pushbike and physically dropped them into the local residents' mailboxes over a couple of hours. The houses chosen were all within the close proximity of Kookaburra Park. On the day of the 'Floodline' event, as strangers walked on by I spent about ten hours attaching the lasers to the clear rods, and the rods to the trees. I used duct tape to attach the lasers to the rods, which were suspended by wire and string as to easily remove these and cause no harm or impact upon the trees. The artworks were placed alongside the footpath allowing for easy access for visitors. One of my neighbours, John Paulson came down to help and I appreciated his interest in the project. As the sun was going down the artwork began to take shape. Lines became visible amongst the chosen trees. The artwork made visible the approximate height of the water levels of the day in Nov 2004, so they were about 12 feet above the ground level.

People began to arrive, and it was at this point that I had forgotten whom I had invited. It became surreal as I began seeing people from work, friends and strangers in my local park, totally out of normal circumstance and context. There was a great crowd brewing and people started to venture off the path and get close to the works. Walking through mud, children were playing and running amongst the work. It was very satisfying to see people interact with the work. People began asking questions and engaging with the work, finding themselves imagining what it was like on Nov 7 2004. When the viewers had had enough they were all invited to a gathering at my house. This was great as it bought different groups of friends and locals together.

It was conducive towards creating dialogue, as questions and thoughts were raised regarding the artwork. The lasers remained on all night, so potentially others would have seen them after the event was over. The next day the artwork was dismantled and packed away.

Outcomes

About a week later the project had been published in the local newspaper under the heading of “Art imitates life with depiction of 2004 flood.” This was written up well and the story linked in directly with an article on page 1 of the same publication regarding flooding issues. However the photo that the Southern News newspaper used did not really relate well to the story. I had submitted my own pictures that directly described the art project but they were never used. (Filardo, 2006, p.3) As a follow up I invited the local community to come and speak to me, by designing and printing a flyer that was dropped off into the letterboxes of my surrounding community.

Since the project local residents have positively mentioned the project in conversation. To have an artwork created and installed in this park to the best of my knowledge was a first as well as to have an artist come in and respond to that environment.

CHAPTER 4. LOOK IN, LOOK OUT AND THE URBAN TERRORIST PROJECTS

Look in look out

Research and development

Graffiti, public art that fosters discomfort & dialogue

Apart from visually encountering graffiti throughout Australia and other countries around the world, graffiti has become an interest in my practice. I am interested in whether or not it is an accepted, legitimate art form. There have been many debates over this subject by law enforcement agencies, councils, sociologists, youth workers, researchers, art practitioners, galleries & art critics. Debates about graffiti are global, although there has never been a global stance, declaration or definitive answer to the question of graffiti's relationship to accepted legitimate art.

In the urban environment, graffiti is an ephemeral art. Graffiti may be transitory, quickly increased or superseded. There is little erasure. There can also be a kind of conversation between the artists, each struggling to be heard above the other, arguing, poking fun, and making fiery, cynical comments. (Robinson, 1990, p.96)

In Australia, incidents of graffiti are usually considered to be vandalism and tend to be spoken about within a negative context. To many people, graffiti is not

considered an art form, nor do they believe it should be granted legitimate social or political commentary; for such, it is basically visual pollution and public disobedience. An author in the local newspaper here in Brisbane describes graffitiists as “mindless, talent-less vandals and social inadequates who inflict their childishness onto others. It is considered as associated with lawlessness, thuggery, crime and the degradation of the city.” (The Sunday Mail, 2006, p.61)

My personal introduction into the graffiti sub-culture was in Melbourne in 1988 through a close friend and huge fan of Tolkien nicknamed the *Hobbit*. He was known for his stocky stature, was slightly overweight, had biggish feet, was always in long shorts and had a gentle reclusive nature. He was extremely intelligent at high school, but he lived for his passion of tagging; he had no job, and no other interests or motivation. The Hobbit tagged everywhere we went and he would always fall behind. I would turn around and see him writing on a wall or on anything and then he would run to catch up. I remember on many occasions, big thick textas, his tools, falling from his back pack onto the ground. His favourite specific site was on moving train carriages and mainly outside. I believe he enjoyed the thrill and adrenalin he received from tagging. Perhaps he also enjoyed the semi-heroic reputation he was building as a person that was a little crazy and not afraid to try anything. About two weeks after his 21st birthday, he was travelling on a train city-bound, in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne during the day, hanging off the train whilst writing his tags on the outside of the moving train. He was killed instantly when his head collided with an external

pole. There are many graffiti artists like the Hobbit that have paid the price with their lives or freedom in order to pursue their practices. It was this practice of leaving a mark on a surface either permanently or temporarily that has intrigued me for many years that I have utilised within my own practice.

Living on the edge

Graffiti is generally a dangerous activity, not only because practitioners are constantly evading and escaping the law but for personal safety reasons as well. (Robinson, 1990, p.96) Occupational Health and safety (OHS) rules don't apply in the Graffiti scene and unnecessary risks are taken frequently. Working in darkness and surrounded by dangerous machinery, such as live third rails in the U.S, the Graffiti artist may scale in between two trains or may choose to balance on the cross ties of elevated tracks high above the street. Graffiti is also mainly classed as an illegal activity therefore artists/writers must be ready at any moment to dash down the tracks to safety if the police/rival gang conduct a raid. (Cooper & Chalfant, 1989, p.29)

Brisbane city and the increase of graffiti

In Queensland, Graffiti is becoming more prevalent throughout the city, spreading into outer suburbs and regional areas. "It can make you feel dirty", Brisbane Lord Mayor Campbell Newman suggests, and makes a comparison

between Brisbane and the Bronx district of New York of the 1970s. (The Sunday Mail, 2006, p.4) Graffiti artists have been targeted in outer Brisbane suburbs by police and councils. In Ipswich some Graffiti artists aged 19, 21 and 22 have been charged with various crimes like wilful damage. (<http://www.police.qld.gov.au/News+and+Alerts/Media+Releases/2007/01/Graffiti> +ar accessed 12/06/2007)

It is Brisbane policy to reduce visible vandalism or graffiti. Brisbane City Council declared graffiti to be vandalism and they believe that removal of the images as quickly as possible is the best prevention, as it will reduce the recognition that graffitiists crave. Councillor Dowling said that "It's about showing their mark or their tag, and if you take that from them, then their game is over."(Barrett, 2007, p.12)

Brisbane City Council has implemented a Graffiti Management Strategy to prevent graffiti, remove graffiti and supply free graffiti removal kits. (http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/BCC:STANDARD::pc=PC_281, accessed 4/06/2007) Clean up crews in Brisbane have been getting quicker, and council regulations have changed to reflect stricter enforcement. As with many councils round the world, Brisbane has pushed for the victims to undertake the clean ups themselves or face penalties or fines. The clean up problem in the Brisbane area has become very expensive for council and currently the victims of graffiti in the wider Brisbane area have 24 hours to remove graffiti or face fines.

One Melbourne *Herald Sun* reader says misguided municipal councilors and social workers who encourage graffiti as an art form are to blame and they should be made accountable. The reader supports the idea that they should be made to clean the walls, bus shelters, business and trains. In addition they could even offer their own houses to the graffiti vandals to deface. The reader points out that rarely is graffiti welcome in the public domain, on private property, and rarely does it have artistic merit. The reader goes on to describe graffiti as vandalism by another name; it's aggressive, selfish, anti-social activity and illegal. (Sunday Herald Sun, 2007, p.32). For example, local shopkeeper Mr Ryan of Brodies Mealmakers suggests that the problem is getting worse; the graffiti vandals may believe that they are causing no harm as they express themselves but they are not fully aware of the frustrations and financial costs that are involved in fixing the problem. He says that he must always have a tin of paint and brush at hand just in case the vandals strike, waging an around the clock war.(Burke, 2006, p.4)

There have been repeated graffiti attacks in Kenmore, a suburb of Brisbane. Rentals West owners are now forced to pay \$200 a week on cleaning up graffiti. They considered painting a protective coating over the wall, or painting a mural to solve the problem. (Westside News, 2006, p.7) According to a street poll in Brisbane's *Courier Mail*, people were posed with the question "Should people be fined for displaying graffiti on their property?" All five people interviewed said no, and that it was not fair for the victim involved. (Courier Mail, 2007, p.15)

Under current laws in Brisbane, a maximum five-year jail term can be handed down for a graffiti offence, with seven years if it involves obscene or indecent language, as well as community service orders of up to 240 hours and financial repayment of up to \$10,000. The Lord Mayor believed that this still was not enough to identify, deter, or solve the problem, so recently Campbell Newman broadened the laws to include a maximum one-year term for possession of graffiti instruments such as spray cans. (Pavey, 2006, p.4) These punishments seem to be extremely harsh for the crime; sometimes graffiti offenders are receiving harsher punishment than people committing more serious crimes.

Barry McGee talks about the American dream for the graffiti artist; it is about the desire for independence and adventure, escaping from any kind of control or definition. It's about not being identified, acting illegally, standing outside of every category of art and intervention on the streets.(McGee, 2002, p.3) He calls it an "unauthorized public declaration", to capture the moment and not waste time on going through the right channels so the energy doesn't fade. Going about things in the correct way by attending meetings and discussions for completing a public work according to McGee detracts from creativity. McGee understands the illegality problem but states "that is what makes the act a free one". (McGee, 2002, p.2)

However some also believe that graffiti is being more tolerated and that there is a growing public acceptance of it. In parts of New Zealand graffiti is now being taken more seriously; it is starting to be more accepted as an art form with

galleries exhibiting graffiti covered canvasses and shop fronts and corporate buildings commissioning graffiti artists to paint their establishments. Graffiti has had a make over and been seen within a new positive context. With artists like Elliot O'Donnell, who makes a living from his art, Auckland has become the country's graffiti capital. O'Donnell and business partners have created the countries first graffiti magazine, 'Disrupt'. (Schmidt, 2004, p.2 & 3).

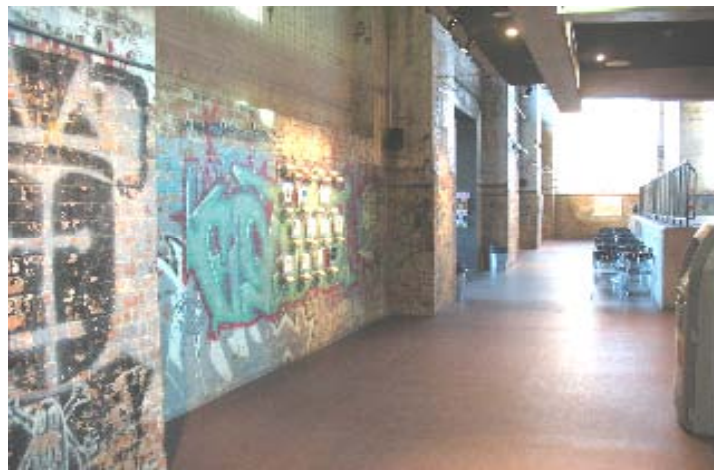


Figure 10

Brisbane City Council has developed a project that was designed to combat graffiti called Artforce. It was meant to rehabilitate graffiti artists. It is where artists are not paid, but new skills are meant to be obtained. Artists are also required to have the ability to negotiate with the community. The project is based around Traffic Signal Boxes (TSB) at every intersection, and every one of these is painted with an artwork by an artist. Each design is submitted to council, is sighted and then approved/disapproved by council officials. These boxes have now become part of the everyday aesthetic of Brisbane's cityscape. Council's

reasoning behind the project is that the boxes would sooner or later be vandalised with graffiti, so they are getting in first by doing the work themselves. The council argue that the blankness and the positioning of them attract graffiti. The boxes are at shoulder height, neutral grey and they stand out on the footpaths at the majority of intersections throughout Brisbane. In the past they have been described as being the Council's most graffiti-strewn asset. (Mathers, Dec 2005/Jan 2006, p.18) However, there is evidence that this council initiative has failed. On many occasions throughout Brisbane I have witnessed and seen instances where these painted TSB's have been vandalised and covered with tags or graffiti murals even after they have been painted by 'sanctioned legitimate artists'. This initiative is not always going to work as a deterrent against graffiti attacks, these TSB's have again become targets for graf artists or vandals, it is still happening.

The Jugglers' Story



Figure 11

Jugglers is a group linked with other community organisations located in a space which is a two storey inner city building that houses artists' studios, gallery spaces, a tunnel, and a huge courtyard that is totally covered with legal graffiti. It is a place working on the fringes of society within the Brisbane community that allows young vandals/graphic artists to express their creativity within a legal context. It is the brainchild of Randal Breen, Peter Breen and Phil Lock in response to helping fringe dwellers within the strict Brisbane laws that are applied to offenders. These laws passed by the Brisbane City Council are some of the strictest in the country.



Figure 12

Jugglers' job is to educate, inform and help nurture young teenagers/adults from Brisbane suburbs. "We want to be a supportive network to young people, specifically in that culture of graffiti probably shunned by mainstream society".(Langford, 2004, BAM.9) Jugglers' art space is a proactive space with the purpose of nurturing young people as young artists that are valuable & important citizens within our

community.(www.manifestomagazine.com/content/milieu_artofgraffiti.html, accessed 23/01/2005).

To stop vandalism Queensland Rail has recently employed members from the Jugglers team to paint some Murals at various train stations in Brisbane. QR is working with local artists to come up with designs for the train stations. "Basically, QR has started a new project called QR Positive pARTnership, which means We're linking with community organisations and individuals to create beautiful artworks at the stations." (Foremon, <http://www.abc.net.au/Brisbane/stories/s1766383.htm>, accessed 4/06/2007)

What is gRaFfic?

Located at 103 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley gRaFfic is an innovative and exciting project that works with youth who are marginalised by their activities across a range of activities to see them as mentors to their peers in the arts, design, business and social responsibility. Jugglers have been one of the major players in Brisbane with its innovative approaches to harnessing the energy and skill within the Graf subculture. They are sometimes funded by Government, the corporate sector and by private contributions and donations. That covers the costs of materials and wages for a social worker to work with the young people. The main focus is placed upon working with young people who are involved with graffiti as social protest creating art in public space that can be secretive, defiant, poetic, and prophetic within our post modern culture.

(<http://cafejugglers.available-now.com/graffic.html>, accessed 4/04/2006) I have been involved with this art space since relocating to Brisbane; I have met many artists including graffiti artists. It is a place that is accepting of all kinds of people, regardless of where they have come from. I feel very connected to Jugglers so I wanted to work together with the space and people running it. As a consequence, I decided to have my exhibition there.

Project Description

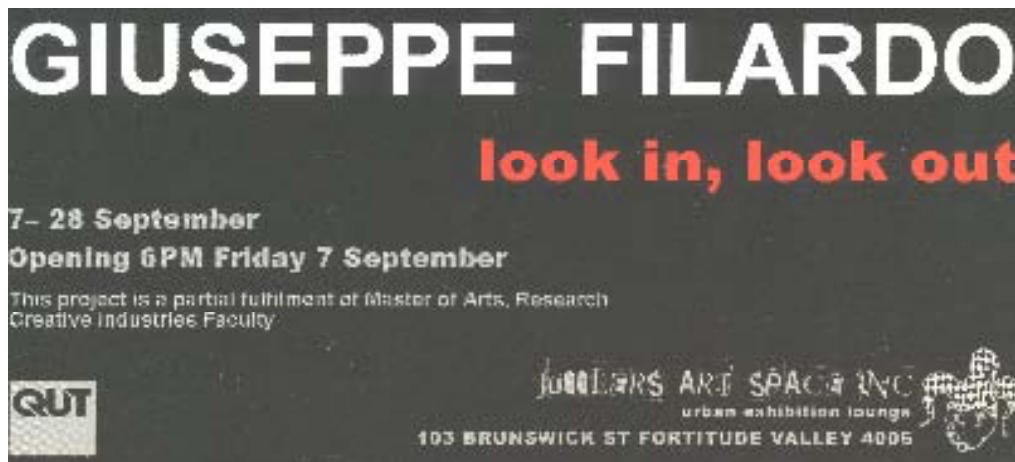


Figure 13

The exhibition at Jugglers was a culmination of all of the works and themes that I had represented in my artworks, bringing together different elements, forms, mediums, technologies and materials. Each piece in the exhibition had a persona of its own, although connected themes travelled through the exhibition. What follows is a description of the individual pieces.



Figure 14

The P.A.A.F, T- Shirt



Figure 15

As a celebration and collectable memento of the exhibition I had T-Shirts for sale. On each one was the symbol of the P.A.A.F (Public Art Aesthetic Foundation). I designed the logo to reflect the themes of *look in, look out*.



Figure 16

The design was created as a humorous response to the official processes in which public art must be created here in Brisbane that can have a compromising affect on the art being created.



Figure 17

The original full colour P.A.A.F.T logo

The design is based on the Queensland Police logo that has been modified and changed. The text in the banner at the bottom of the original was also changed from 'With honour we serve' to 'To Disallow, Dispirit and Disinfect'. I wanted to portray or represent what the law enforcement agencies were implementing with respect to graffiti. The 'Queensland Police' text in the circle is replaced by the Public Art Aesthetic Foundation. This circle surrounds a white tick of approval on blue circle that has been adapted from the Heart Foundation's Tick of Approval. I added in a five pointed star in the background, as well as added my own foliage and jewels in the crown. The shirts were on sale as a memento of the show for \$20 on the night, and continued to sell after the exhibition.



Figure 18

Public Art Aesthetic Foundation – to Disallow, Dispirit & Disinfect Machine.

A mechanical self-controlling apparatus was designed as one of the pieces for the exhibition. It appears as a robust police car Transformer constructed in a particular pose designed to be in an intrusive and intimidating stance. The sculpture is triggered by movement, with four sensor surveillance cameras at the top of each corner of the sculpture are tracking and watching every move around it.



Figure 19

The piece greeted the exhibition parishioners to the space in an uncomfortable way with a bright flood light pointed towards the entry, blinding people as they entered the space. The machine's left arm pointed a floodlight as an arm might do with an interrogating torch. The sculpture stood 8ft high and 4 ft wide, designed to look like a police car that had transformed into a robot. I included the T-shirt logo as well as police like decals that were hand cut out of a roll of vinyl. The robot's windows were sprayed with an acrylic metallic grey and then given a clear coating. The final sculpture was put together like a jigsaw, with a pre conceived idea in my head of what it should look like but evolving to suit the found objects.



Figure 20

Exploding Street furniture

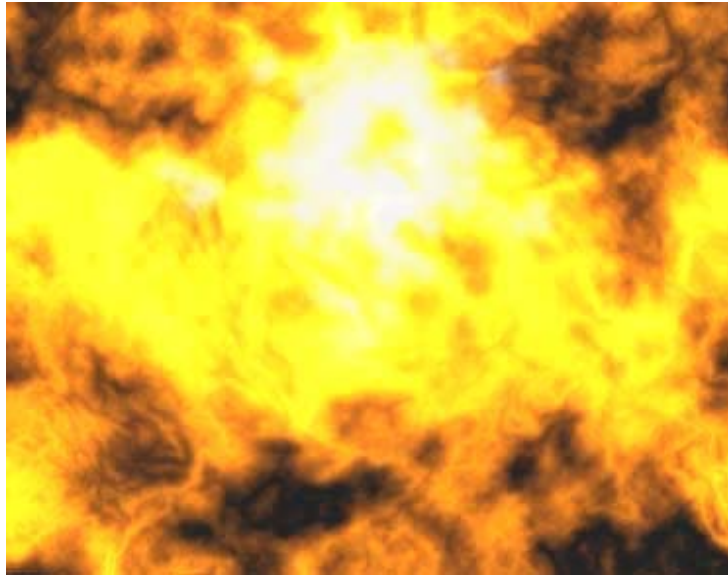


Figure 21

This bin came from the school I worked at, which was discarded after it was one of many bins that had been blown up and set a light by someone or a group after school hours. I wanted to tie this theme in with the traffic light boxes found all over Brisbane, which was a project created to curb graffiti in Brisbane. In the street furniture piece, I wanted to mesh the two themes of tacky public art and vandalism.



Figure 22

A sense of an explosion within the piece was created via the use of an orange emergency strobe light, which ticked away with every flash of light. Depicted over the bin is childlike artwork. Reusing the original holes and gashes from the explosion of the original box I covered them with clear Perspex that had pop art type explosions painted on to give the sense of a silent explosion. Every Traffic light box has a yellow plate with its registration details on it and council contact number for faults, so I designed my own registration plate, using the same design but with slight alterations. The rest of the bin I kept the rawness of the burnt charred metals from the initial and real explosion.

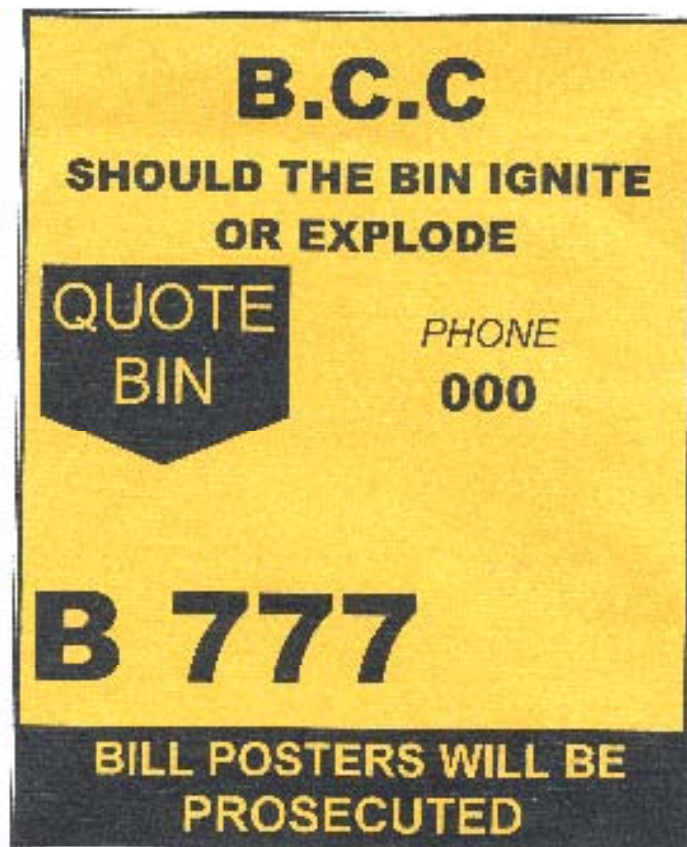


Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25

Public Art Comment Bank: What do you think?



Figure 26



Figure 27

This piece represented the landscape of Brisbane CBD by the use of a stark outline representing city buildings and the river. There was also subtle text that was stencilled on such as “our city, my city, your city, and what a waste of money”. I wanted to encourage people’s opinions on the public art of Brisbane by writing at the top and bottom of the piece, asking people to feel free to write about their thoughts on the light-box. I then hung three textas at the bottom and on the night of the exhibition, many people responded by writing on the work. People even started to draw under the piece onto the stark white gallery wall and onto the ground. By the end of the show the picture was absolutely full of text and drawings.

Yes, another Council stuff up

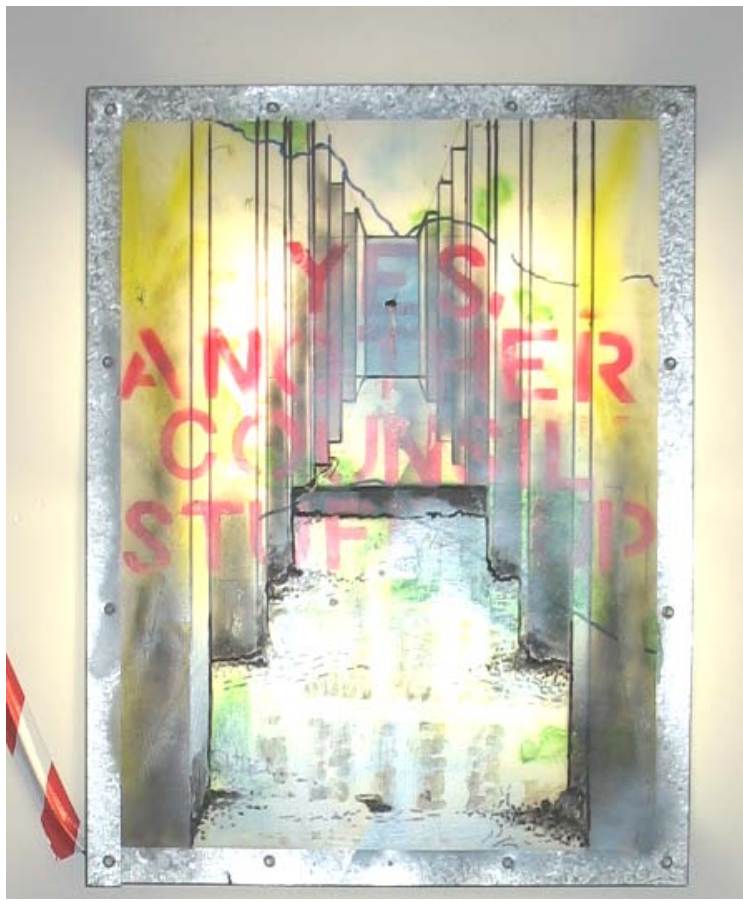


Figure 28



Figure 29

This artwork refers to Brisbane water problems, dealing with the flow and direction of water in the area where I live and ties in with the *floodline* project. The image, painted and stencilled on a light-box, depicts one of the main sources for the problem, the bridge and overpass over the creek at Beaudesert Rd.



Figure 30

Beneath the “*Council Stuff Up*” image was the original maquette for the park project on a plinth. Behind it was a small fish tank filled with water to a thin red horizontal line on the glass. This red line depicted the flood level of 2004. It also was at the level of the water level for the maquette in front of it.



Figure 31

The Rocklea Project: Floodline Nov 7 2004- Documentary Film (10:31min)



Figure 32

The film projection of the flood project documentary was a culmination of images that had important significance to the project. It included mini short films as well as still shots from past floods. The sound of the trickling water was recorded at the creek and was played on a loop throughout the film. I believe this reinforced the water theme in the film. The film was edited in an old style to portray a historical event and was played on a loop over and over within the gallery. The footage was sourced from local residents as well as my own still photographs and moving images. This film demonstrated the issues and methods used in creating the piece. It included the site and social history of that place, how it has affected locals and how I have perceived the project. This was displayed as a passive piece, a more contemplative film about the role of the artist relating to his community and environmental surroundings. Here the water sound is the constant element flowing through the film. It holds it all together and keeps the picture afloat.



Figure 33

As a practitioner I feel that apart from creating a well honed finished artwork, it is just as important for me to create a dialogue with the viewer. As the artist I believe in the opportunity in educating and informing the viewer of a certain situation, creating awareness but by not giving a solution to a problem, leaving the subject matter open to interpretation so the viewer themselves are able to interpret and take away particular interesting ideas and notions with them. For me making art is about pushing boundaries, and about playing a role in a specific debate or circumstance.

Graffiti, fostering discomfort & dialogue

Inspired by graffiti, this piece is a light box that depicts a suburban Brisbane railway station. I have used one point perspective to convey distance on the platform. This work ties in with the act of graffiti at train stations and on train lines. It is about how uncomfortable graffiti can make you feel. Is it a form of art? Or is it plainly a form of vandalism? Graffiti sits in an obscure place.



Figure 34

The Urban Terrorist Project:

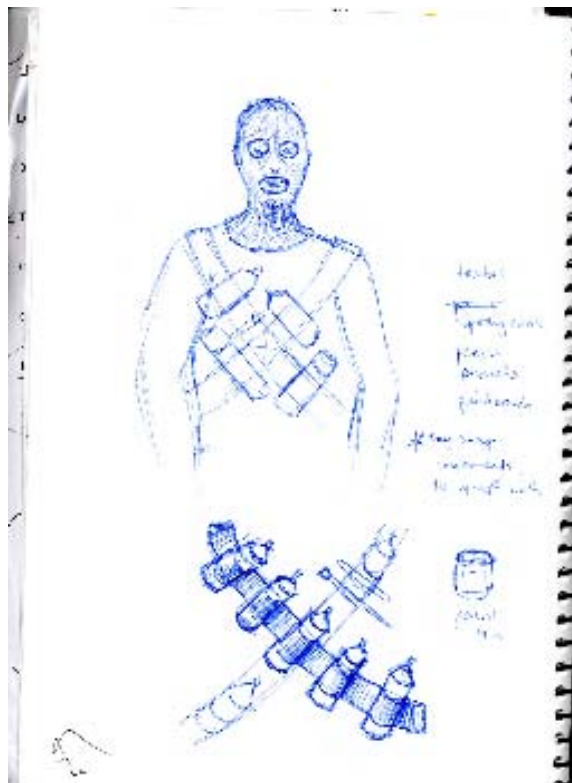


Figure 35



Figure 36

Research and Development

This work is made in response to the negative terminology that was used on the Channel 9 network television program 'A Current Affair' towards the end of 2005. As soon as the term was used I became outraged. In an instant people watching the program around the country may have received intentional negative thoughts regarding graffiti. The term used to describe our youth was 'Urban Terrorists'.

Since 9/11 the world has never been the same and the word 'terrorist' has become one of the most consistent words used in our everyday vocabularies all around the world. It describes fundamentalist people that will do anything they can, even sacrifice themselves or loved ones for a cause that in turn may kill others in the process. The word describes the constant threat of terror and fear, which connotes the lack of understanding on our behalf. The term terrorist has become one of the most outrageous outlaw titles that could ever be used to describe someone that has committed unspeakable crimes against humanity. Even so, we are listening to politicians, councils, enforcement officers, mothers/fathers & TV presenters describing our youth of today as terrorists. In response, I had created an artwork that was not intended to promote or glorify the act of graffiti; it was simply a real response to our times, perspectives and perceptions.

The work is a site-specific public artwork that was created for Jugglers Art Space at 103 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley in Brisbane. This is an appropriate space

because of the nature of the space and being one of only a few of its kind as a legal graffiti space in Brisbane.



Figure 37

The first version of the concept was conceived a while ago but my ideas had evolved over time and over feelings of fear. Originally the work was to depict three terrorist figures (these were going to be manikins) committing the crime of graffiti/vandalism on the rooftop awning at the front of the premises. The figures were to be seen clearly during the day and well lit during the evening spraying the words 'Urban Terrorists' on the front wall, they were to be dressed in black, and covered from head to toe in their urban street uniforms of overalls and balaclavas. Over their urban camouflaged uniforms they would be wearing a specially made vest that holds equipment used to commit these crimes. It was going to be a vest resembling that of a suicide bomber but instead of explosives there were to be spray cans held within it. The actual signage was going to be created by myself and painted in collaboration with some appropriate gRafFic project artists connected to the programs offered at the space. However with signage in Brisbane there are certain constraints with size and money.

This piece was collaboration between Jugglers Art Space, and artists Randal Breen, Samuel Isles and I. In my original concept we had agreed to create similar work on top of the awning at the front. Unfortunately some Graff artists had been given permission some time ago to create a piece over the awning. So I needed a new canvas and because it was to be a public artwork I needed it to be seen easily in the street (Brunswick Street). I decided to use the front space in the window, just like advertising a product in a shop window.

Project Description

It was a risky artwork for me, Jugglers Art space & for Brisbane especially in these times. At the time, Peter Breen said that “it will either put Jugglers on the map or close us down completely”. Reflecting back on this project so far neither has happened. It had been spoken about and praised by peers and passers by but surprisingly it failed to attract council attention.

Urban Terrorist

A couple of nights before the opening I drew a terrorist figure on the front window wearing black clothing and sprayed him onto the inside of the front window. As I was tracing my model Sam (gallery manager), pedestrians and passers by in their cars were honking horns and cheering me on. This was the first positive sign I received that people were actually interested in what was happening on the window. The final figure was of a dark disturbing figure wearing a balaclava,

wearing explosives strapped across his chest, joyfully waving with his arm raised greeting the passers by.

The whole concept behind the work felt like a secret cohort mission that had been in the planning for a long time. I wanted to put myself in their shoes (an illegal graffiti artist), doing something on the edge, and rebelling against the powers that be. I was very anxious and nervous as were Sam and Randal at the opening and performance piece. Constant questions were racing around in our minds of how people were going to perceive, react and respond to this performance piece.

I wanted the public to experience first hand the quick planned execution of a graffiti artist, the enamel stench and hype of the project. On the night, the general public were there for another monthly exhibition opening, but it was going to be more than that. It was great! I started the piece off with a pre-recorded fictitious dialogue between a passer by in her car and the Queensland police. The theme of the dialogue began innocently by describing three people in black on the roof but towards the end of the conversation it turned and took on a more sinister feel; the figures were described as terrorists. It was about the perceived act of terrorism.

As the recording finished Sam, Randal and I quickly stormed through the gallery space yelling and taunting the people to get out of the #@**....way. There were

screams from the audience; the adrenalin was pumping, with spray cans strapped to our bodies and a can in each hand. It felt like we were doing something wrong, it felt bad. When we reached the front wall within the gallery at the window we went crazy, allowing ourselves to completely feel free to spray whatever we wanted. There was nothing preconceived about this, it was totally random and I felt that it was quite a hard thing to do while a crowd watched. Feeling very conscious about what I was writing at the time, I wanted to use offensive language but I didn't want to offend at the same time. Within five minutes the wall was completely full.



Figure 38

We then progressed out onto the foot path closer to the road, with a crowd cheering. Suddenly one of the three guys collapsed onto the floor and the other two traced around him on the footpath (it is still there to this day). While one of us was laying on the ground an intoxicated member from the crowd (my neighbour, John) became involved trying to give CPR to the person lying down on the ground, he thought it was me. After the tracing on the ground was completed I sprayed onto the front window the words Urban Terrorist in big bright red lettering, and the outline from the person on the ground joined up with the Urban Terrorist text on the window, as if labelling an item in a museum or leaving an impression of a crime scene on the ground, perhaps a murder.



Figure 39

When this was over the crowd cheered and we ran away through the gallery again just as quickly as our entry. I had some great responses and input from people, as well as people driving by in their cars that later came in to the gallery, they just didn't know what was going on, all they could see were three guys in balaclavas spraying the walls, windows, footpath and a large crowd.



Figure 40

Going out to source the materials for the event felt a little uncomfortable, it felt like I was preparing for something more sinister, like a bank robbery or act of terrorism. I bought three pairs of disposable overalls and three balaclavas. Walkie talkies, safety tape and spray cans: we were set.

New work: Urban Terrorist video

The video work was sourced from three cameras that recorded on the night of the performance, which was approximately fifteen minutes of action and edited together, leaving a lot of original footage out. I wanted to capture the whole project in less than 10 minutes. This was achieved by being very selective as to what was important enough to show without losing its original context. I also

wanted to portray security CCTV footage of the terrorists preparing to terrorise.

The camera footage & views become more like pictures taken from surveillance cameras. The surveillance part is inspired by Cida de Arogon's work displayed on the Goodwill Bridge in September 2004 entitled *Surveillance*, where she describes the fear of being always watched, controlled, and monitored. (Lehmann, 2004)

The Urban Terrorist Project - Documentary Film 7:47 min



Figure 41



Figure 42



Figure 43

The Jugglers Art Space Exhibition included the *Urban Terrorist Project* performance piece. The difficulty with this was trying to capture the essence of the performance from the night and displaying the important parts that were vital

in communicating the message. I believe the essence of the performance was captured and successfully demonstrated onto the big screen. I received positive comments like it was great and refreshing to see such an ugly piece of work instead of the mundane 'nice' work we currently view as public art in our city.



Figure 44

The Police Call

The following transcript was recorded and was played before the performance as a dialogue & conversation between a passer by and the Queensland Police.

Dialling

Police - "Hello Queensland Police"

Caller - "Yeh... Hi... Um... I'm driving up Brunswick St, in Fortitude Valley, and I've just seen three guys in black on some ones roof".

Police - "Oh, ok whereabouts?"

Caller- "Um.. I'm about half way up the road of Brunswick St".

Police – “Yes, but where?”

Caller – “Well there are a whole lot of people at I think it was called ah... Juggler’s”. “I think it’s an art gallery place”.

Police – “Ok, can you describe the men?”

Caller – “Yeah... there all in black, I couldn’t see their faces, cause I think they might have been wearing balaclavas, and it also looked like they had these canisters over their chests and backs”.

Police – “Did they look like terrorists?”

Caller – “Well.... Yeah... maybe”.

Police – “Right we’ll get a unit on it, the Anti Terrorism Unit will be there right away, thankyou for your call”.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

The relationship of the essential features within the MA projects

For this conclusion I have taken a meta-analytical approach to give an outline of the essential features that have become the driving force behind my work.

In each project beyond *Transitions:3500-4106* I had found myself reflecting more on the ephemeral personal interactions within my varied environments and communities, which were the Rocklea community and neighbourhood, the gallery community at Jugglers Art Space in Fortitude Valley and the graffiti community that crossed over between the mainstream of art and crime. The ephemeral for me represented the concentration on an aspect of a specific impermanent time and place, and of how I had interacted with that environment at that time.

As part of the Action Research methodology, the nature of the scope of public understanding and response was evaluated. This was done by discussing the work with viewers directly on the night of the event and listening to the positive, negative and perplexed reactions regarding the work. As an extension to the *Floodline Nov 7 2004* project I advertised a follow up discussion to the local residents about the project by making myself available at certain times to discuss the work with the general public.

In *Floodline Nov 7 2004* the general response from the viewer was positive. While positive, the responses from the Rocklea community varied; most enjoyed

the event and work, and found it refreshing, however others were horribly reminded of the dangers of residing within this area. This is also considered to be positive as one of the main goals of the project was to recall the history of the flooding in the area.

In *The Urban Terrorist Project* the public's initial response was that of confusion. Contrary to the *Floodline* work, which was a passive approach, this project was more aggressive and forced upon the gallery and public community. However the response during and after the performance was extremely positive and exciting as it had been embraced as a piece that pushed certain boundaries. Within both projects there may have been public complaints as the work provoked a sense of disaffection against conceptions and authority.

Within *Floodline Nov 7 2004*, the ephemeral interactions were short transitory lived ones. For example at the actual time of the flooding on November 7 2004 it all happened within hours, and then within hours the waters receded, lasting only a day. In response to that event, the art work reflected this ephemeral aspect, taking hours to set up and lasting only a day before being dismantled and taken away. It also left no traces on the environment, as if nothing apart from the memories were left behind. *Look in, look out*, was the bringing together of many artworks in an exhibition at Jugglers Art Space, but the *Urban Terrorist Project* was ephemeral in the sense that it was a one-off fleeting performance, and that the damage done or vandalism through graffiti to the actual wall and window has

completely been erased without a trace except for the footpath that still has remnants of the event.

In all three projects, there was the element of risk of offending and wanting to intentionally confront at the same time. Although they did not eventuate, there was a fear of rejection from the community, the public, the visual arts fraternity and the law enforcement agencies that would lead to consequences, backlash or reprisal. Within the artwork, there was the linear element or use of line that through development has become a major way of representation for me over the past 8 years. Lastly, an underlying link was a sense of dealing with a third party beyond the collaborators, like council processors and working with or responding to my own community.

Another underlying relationship came from interacting with outside entities such as the space, collaborators, government agencies or the audience. The main two influences like threads within all the works were the distinct roles of the artist as both *creator and collaborator*. The creator is a representation of myself as the artist and creator of the artwork. The collaborator is a representation not only of myself but also anyone that I have worked with in the creation of making the artwork. In addition, a third role or entity was involved, the outside entity is a representation of the outsider or third parties that I have had to consider and deal with in order to complete the finished artwork, such as the local Brisbane City

Council, residents of the Rocklea community, Jugglers Art Space, and graffiti artists.

RECIPROCITY as an integral part of practice

This exegesis has contributed to self understanding and in informing the public about what interests me as an artist through action research. It is about becoming more engaged with my world at the same time as engaging others, which led to an understanding of reciprocity as an integral part of my practice.

Reciprocity is the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit. Reciprocity in my pieces refers to the sharing or giving with others without expecting anything in return except for dialogue and the sharing of ideas. It came from a sense of satisfaction that I felt about the social closeness that the giving fostered. It was about my relationship at that specific time as an artist between my art practice, my environment, my community and the local governing bodies.

This study has been about my experiences in interacting along side of and within my community and sub-cultures within Brisbane. The three major projects that I had reflected on all varied and the outcomes were different, however there were also commonalities/similarities between them, with the concept of reciprocity as the major catalyst driving the work.

Aesthetic Outcomes: connection between methods & ideas ?

By displaying parts of the three projects all at once in the H block Gallery at QUT I was able to let people interact with works by moving around them in the gallery space and by the physical interactive sensibilities such as *the Public Art Comment Bank*. It was important to me to give the viewer the experience and sensation of defacing an artwork in a gallery environment to help the audience better understand how a graffiti artist feels when defacing others property. This act was like a representation or metaphor for the graf artist or vandal who can either deface or enhance a surface by adding to something that does not belong to him/her.

With the *Urban Terrorist Project*, I wanted to give the viewer an insight into the graffiti sub culture that they may have never had any association with before. Through this study I was able to nurture more of an understanding of the processes, problems, and fears involved in planning, performing and executing a graffiti piece. Because there was emphasis on spontaneity, the aesthetic outcomes of the *Urban Terrorist Project* became untidy and unattractive. There was too much scrawl, and the writing had become confusing and unreadable. The red writing on the front window was not the desired affect as it blended too much with the background where it became a little lost and possibly lost some of the impact it should have had. Perhaps with more time the red writing could have been painted more boldly and we could have avoided the use of the same

colour in the back ground. The act of rapidity of the event represented and enhanced the spontaneous sensation of movement, crime, art and uneasiness in graffiti art.

My final exhibition at QUT H block was an opportunity to display all of the works in one area for examination. This included the minor project of *Transitions: 3500-4106* that had set the original context for this research study. This particular work was included by suspending the work in a corner of the gallery space, as the cornerstone piece of the exhibition. It was about it being a part of the creative processes here in Brisbane.



Figure 45

A major outcome is that a new work has been created at the very end of the study. The documentation of the *Urban Terrorist Project* has taken on new

meaning and has now got a life of its own. It most likely will be a transition into my future practice where ephemeral actions translate into more permanent works. I think within all of my works presented in the final exhibition there was an unpredictable and uncomfortable aspect that the viewer might feel uneasy about. For example, through the feeling of the lack of finish in the artworks, the level of understanding and skill by the pedestrian and audience, the work became equivocal in nature; the intention behind the works became unclear in meaning or intention. Further more, reference was made to the enigmatic puzzling and mysterious question of what is accepted as art or not art. Through active practice, I wanted to challenge and make people think and ask questions about society, who we are, and of how we fit in or out of it.

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