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Hannah Quinlivan

By Hannah Quinlivan

In Issue 44, 2018, Canberra-based artist Hannah Quinlivan spoke about her complex methods of making in the expanded field of drawing, and how the concepts of motion and space are central to her practice spanning two, three and four dimensions.



Travelling Light, 2017, in collaboration with Louise Kaszi and Shikara Ringdahi (pictured), installation view, Deakin University Art Gallery, Melbourne, photograph Adam



I've never been the kind of artist who sits idle waiting for inspiration to strike. My art practice is exactly that, a daily practice that is honed through reiteration. I work out my ideas through making, not the other way around. This is why I make.

When preparing to create a new work, I like to visit the space it will be exhibited in and think about the effects I want to elicit in the viewer. The big decisions about an artwork in terms of materials, scale, manner of installation, and the like are then made with this in mind. The affective palette of the final artwork arises through a dialogue between art object, place and the viewers' bodies.

Lately, I have been experimenting with the method of 'rhythmanalysis' to structure my making process, especially for site-specific works. Rhythmanalysis was developed by social theorist Henri Lefebvre as a set of techniques for understanding the production of urban spaces. It is useful when making site-specific spatial drawings, as it helps me to see the world as a tangle of relationships and flows, rather than a set of discrete things to be understood separately. It's about attending to the world in a different way, to observe spaces like a child listens to the sound of a seashell.

lakebed



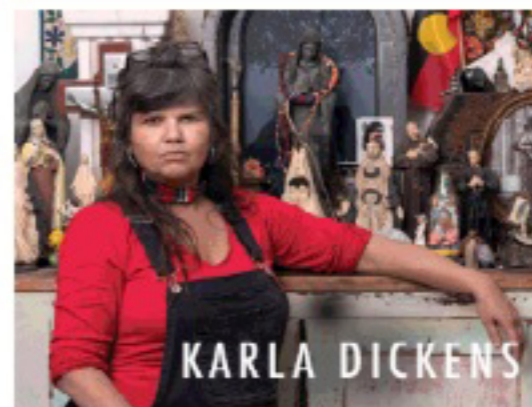
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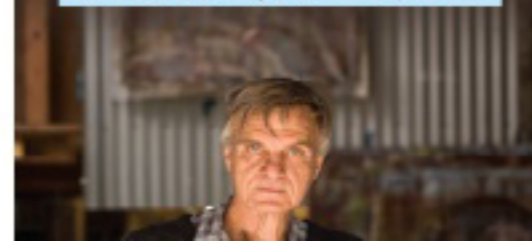


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Working this way, I rely on my body to make decisions as much as the conscious part of my mind. As I work through and with a space, my body becomes not so much a metronome as a pendulum, moving back and forth with a gait that is at first uncertain and irregular but soon becomes harmonised and rhythmic. Each cycle back and forth gains more information, more momentum. Through making, I become attuned to a site's materiality and spatiality, a knowledge that comes up through my feet and is lodged in the muscles, more than just a knowledge that comes in through the eyes and ears to the brain. The physical soreness of my muscles attest to the rhythms of that work, rhythms that are ultimately dictated by, and are a reflection of, the constitution of the site itself.

This method of making was developed under the guidance of German artist Monika Grzymala, who has been mentoring me for several years. Like Monika, who coined the phrase 'spatial drawing' to describe her site-specific constructions, I see myself as working in the expanded field of drawing. Here, I trace my intellectual heritage back to Gertrude Goldschmidt (also known as Gego), a Jewish émigré to Venezuela whose 'drawings without paper' made a radical break from the plane, transforming a series of lattice-like drawings on paper into vast networks of lines in space.

Building on this method of making, I have been thinking beyond the architectural spaces of our cities and making drawings that examine the architecture of our emotions and feelings. We tend to think of emotions as something intensely personal and individual. Yet often our moods and habits are shaped by broader social forces in ways we barely perceive, an unspoken but shared common ground. Here I'm building on the thought of Raymond Williams, and what he called the structure of feeling, that unconsciously shared pattern of impulses, restraints, tones that simmer below the surface in particular times and places.

During 2017, I undertook a series of experiments in Berlin, Colorado and Melbourne that sought to materialise some ideas about how motion has become a key anxiety of our time.

The last of these, *Travelling Light*, examines our paradoxical relationship with mobility. While those with money and visas celebrate the joy of motion and the possibility of travel, the knowledge that today's hypermobility is environmentally destructive travels with us. Our motion is also haunted by the shadow of the forced movement and constrained mobility of those whose cannot remain in their homes but who are unable to cross borders. TV images of refugees in Europe were streaming into my Berlin studio when I embarked upon these works. *Travelling Light* explored the way that these new valences of mobility structure our thoughts and feelings, and the contradictory set of impulses and hesitations it creates in us all.

I created this work in collaboration with two classically-trained vocalists, Shikara Ringdahl and Louise Keast. Working with Shikara and Louise enabled both the literal mobilisation of the artwork – elements of which they carried on their backs – as well as a more metaphorical mobilisation through the movement of their voices. Working in this way was incredibly rewarding, as it allowed me to take the work in the direction I felt it needed to go, rather than being constrained by what I could achieve alone.

This article was originally published in *Artist Profile*, Issue 42, 2018

EXHIBITION

Hannah Quinlivan | Turbulence
13 November – 1 December 2018
Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne

