

Lockdown Libraries: Caroline Rannersberger

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Sequestered in our homes, many of us have turned to books for entertainment, education, diversion and inspiration. In our new series Lockdown Libraries, Art Guide finds out what artists have on their bookshelves. Tracey Clement spoke to Caroline Rannersberger about reading in these troubled times.



Caroline Rannersberger reading in her studio.

Caroline Rannersberger was preparing for her solo show *Prelude to Arcadia*, currently open online or by appointment at Bett Gallery in Hobart, when Covid-19 started affecting life in Australia, but she still found time to read. “My reading habits during the pandemic have not changed much,” she says. “My daily routine hasn’t really changed a great deal either.” As someone living on Bruny Island in Tasmania, a certain amount of isolation is just normal.

But, Rannersberger says, “Inevitably, my thoughts and habits have been influenced by the impact of the pandemic.” And this, naturally, has affected her reading too. “Book choices are either consciously or unconsciously influenced by the pandemic,” she points out, “and these books in turn are an influence on the reader.”

The artist, who was born in Australia and raised in Austria, says she divides her reading between pleasure and work. For pleasure Rannersberger reads mostly fiction, while the books she picks up to inform her art practice include art theory, philosophy, German literature and the sciences.

“In terms of pleasure, I tend to read more female writers,” Rannersberger says. “I particularly enjoy books with a narrative I can loosely identify with or have some understanding of. I recently read Ann Patchett’s *The Dutch House*, which explores fractured family dynamics against the backdrop of a beautiful house. This work conjured memories of my own childhood home in Austria. Similarly, Vicki Laveau-Harvie’s novel, *The Erratics*, which centres around two sisters’ vexed relationship with their parents, led me to consider my own sisters and our parental relationships.”



Caroline Rannersberger in her studio.

And while Bruny Island may be small and isolated, it is something of a literary hotspot. Author Richard Flanagan lives there, and Rannersberger enjoys his books as well as those of other authors who’ve visited through the Bruny Island Foundation for the Arts, an initiative she helped found. These include Jennifer Mills, whose recent post-apocalyptic novel *Dyschronia*, Rannersberger says, “is a privilege to read.”

In preparation for her current solo show, Rannersberger turned to the philosophy books on her shelves. “My exhibition at Bett Gallery is concerned with notions of force and sensation, and I frequently revisited *A Thousand Plateaus*, one of Deleuze’s seminal texts, while making these works,” she says. “The exhibition contains a series of small paintings which are a phenomenological, geo-philosophical response to my surrounds and my experience during the pandemic.”



Caroline Rannersberger, *Movement of Disappearance* triptych 2010 – 2020, watercolour and acrylic on paper in perspex box, 172 x 235cm.

The artist's home library also includes philosophical works by Kant, Goethe, Lessing, Hoffmann, Schiller, and Kleist, among others. "These works remain a reflection of the times, underscoring the fluid relationship between literature, philosophy and visual arts. I am particularly drawn to the drama of the late 18th century, notably Sturm und Drang [a proto Romantic movement which translates to storm and stress], during which time free expression was given to extreme emotion," she says. "Many aspects of Sturm und Drang resonate with contemporary concerns, both in terms of the environment and climate change, and in terms of the pandemic currently faced by humankind."

As for many of us, reading helps Rannersberger both contextualise her work and make sense of the world. "Sturm und Drang as a leitmotif came to mind over the last couple of months in isolation. Humankind is responding with a range of emotions and experiences: Sturm und Drang; a mix of tumultuous emotion and unrequited longing," she says. "The tragic comedies being played out on the world stage by political leaders could fit nicely into an 18th century novella."