

in the pacific rim: international artist residencies

Ian Were speaks to several artists about their residency experiences, and highlights the increasing value of international studio programs.

'Cultural exchange and international artist residencies help keep the Peace ...'¹

In today's world, Clayton Campbell's words of almost a decade ago seem misplaced—but are they? Campbell is the director of Santa Monica's 18th Street Arts Complex, where the Australia Council has run a studio for Australian artists for 12 years. At the time of this statement, he also said that artist exchanges 'promote the internationalisation of artistic life that is the dominant paradigm for contemporary art ... one only threatened by the stupidity of governments enmeshed in militaristic pursuits'.²

You can imagine then, when I spoke with Campbell earlier this year, there was more than frustration with the Bush administration in his voice. Given his involvement with the global network of residential art centres known as 'Res Artis', and their recent conference in Sydney and Melbourne,³ what does he think now? Well, a lot:

'It is not a comfort to be prescient about world events when they go badly. But they have, and I remain even more convinced that artist/creative communities are going to be the conservators of beauty, knowledge and inquisitiveness in an increasingly brutal time. It is absolutely crucial to keep open these bridges of communication, as other avenues are shut down, manipulated ...'

Of the Res Artis meeting, he said:

'I was struck by the vivacity of the creative communities of Australia and Asia ... [and] by the parallels between Australia and the US ... populations struggling with issues of post-colonialism, immigration, fear ... In this tension there exist vital arts scenes and peace movements ... which are stimulated by this kind of cultural tension.'⁴

Times were less tense in 1993, when performance artist Barbara Campbell became the first Australia Council resident at 18th Street. Since then, 35 artists have shared the experience, all with differing stories. Among them have been jeweller Pierre Cavalan, weaver Virginia Kaiser and others, including photographers and video, film and performance artists.

The twentieth artist to be awarded the LA studio was furniture designer and maker John Smith, accompanied by his partner, the ceramicist Penny Smith. In 2000, the Smiths got around LA and further afield in leathers and on motorcycles. For John, the benefit

of such placements—and many artists have responded similarly—is to be immersed in another culture from which you can look back at your own with fresh eyes, and 'to see one's career path more critically'.⁵

What were the results of their residency? Well, for one thing the Smiths curated *Convergence*, an exhibition of Tasmanian and American furniture makers, to be exhibited in San Diego, San Francisco and Chicago in 2005. In LA, John developed ideas through drawings and scale models and, back in Hobart, with the support of an Australian Research Council grant, he and Penny developed and exhibited work that linked furniture and architecture. 'It's often the unexpected things that take on a significance,' he said. 'LA for me was orchestrated around absorbing architectural stimuli, especially Frank Gehry's work.' But, he also says:

'... it was riding through the Mohave desert in mid-summer that expanded my appreciation of landscape ... I hadn't anticipated the power of this experience, it was architecture of a different kind.'

For ceramicist Fiona Fell, her 1998 LA experience not only consolidated a commitment to figuration, but also involved serious networking, including a two-week stint with well-known ceramic sculptor Sergei Isupov in Kentucky. She also made work for two exhibitions—one at the prestigious John Natsoulas Gallery near San Francisco, and the other with five local ceramic sculptors in Santa Monica, titled *Something Sexy on Pico* (referring

1. John Smith with his Suzuki Savage and Penny's Virago on the road to Monument Valley, Arizona, 2000.

2. *Flip Top*, John Smith's house model for a weekender made at the LA studio, 1:50 scale model in Alucabond and card, 2000. All photos: John and Penny Smith.

3. One of the women Bartholomew interviewed in Harajuku, 2004. Photo: Julie Bartholomew.

4. Fiona Fell with Airstream, Los Angeles, 1998.

5. John Smith, *Stilt and Tilt—Breakout Cabinets*, 2004, blackwood, stainless steel, aluminium and Huon pine.

to the famous LA boulevard). Reflecting the complex's influence of filmmakers, performance artists and writers, Fell said she 'worked on a performance piece with long-term 18th Street resident, Denis Uyehara, integrating the process of clay and personal narratives'.⁶

The longest-running Australia Council residency is its Tokyo studio and, since painter Elizabeth Coates was there in 1987, over 60 artists have taken up residencies for three or four months. They represent artists in almost every media, including interior designer Wayne Berkowitz—who went to Tokyo in 1992 and stayed until recently—and installation artist Kate McMillan,⁷ as well as jeweller Eugenie Keefer Bell, ceramicists Toni Warburton and Andrea Barker, and fibre artist Paul O'Connor, with jeweller Nicholas Bastin about to depart for Japan.

Ceramicist Julie Bartholomew was at the studio in 2004. She talks glowingly about the 'opportunity to be immersed in a dynamic consumer culture unlike any other', noting that the studio's location in Takadanobaba 'is fantastic'. She echoes fellow artists:

'... one is bombarded with incessant visual and audio advertising, yet just around the corner stands the retreat of a Shinto shrine. These disparate characteristics of Japanese culture ... influenced my work ...'⁸

While taking classes in traditional paper folding, such as *mizuhiki* and *origami*, Bartholomew searched the department stores and found a sophisticated variety of food packaging. 'I used this research to develop a series of folded paper prototypes,' she said. Back in Australia, these forms are gradually being transformed into durable, utilitarian ceramic objects, while retaining the soft folds of the original. Bartholomew went on to explain that her most rewarding meeting was with the acclaimed ceramic artist, Kimiyo Mishima, in her Osaka studio. 'She is an elderly and small-framed woman who builds huge public works in clay that simulate paper folded advertising.'⁹

Bartholomew also began documenting the impact of Tokyo's visual media environment on the changing identity and body image of Japanese women. 'I spent time interviewing and photographing young women in Harajuku ... They dare to challenge ... [using] fashion and media culture to subvert a strong conformist culture.'¹⁰

Over the last 15 years, our place in the Asia-Pacific region has changed considerably, as have our artists' relationships with their Asian counterparts. Since the lone residencies in 1989 of Donal Fitzpatrick at the Hanoi Institute of Fine Arts and Joan Grounds at Silpakorn University in Bangkok, we have seen an exponential increase in artists' residencies in the region.

Asialink's promo booklet, *35,000 Days in Asia*,¹¹ indicates the amount of time that artists in all media—visual and performing arts, arts management and literature—have spent in 13 Asian countries. It reports that by the end of 2004, 330 placements hosted by over 200 organisations will have occurred, including the first in Cambodia. This is an extraordinary program, with some profound results.

For jeweller Yuri Kawanabe and new media artist Peter Callas, their four-month residency at Sanskriti Kendra, New Delhi in 2001–2002 proved both insightful and demanding. Planned as a collaborative venture, this was the first time they had worked closely together,

and they created an experimental installation made with materials and technologies accessible in Delhi.

Kawanabe's residency was an opportunity to develop ideas in non-jewellery object making using non-metallic materials; a starting point for developing art work on a more sculptural scale. Her encounters in India with vibrant ceremonial decorations were interpreted into anodised aluminium jewellery. Titled *Garland*, the new works were shown in Tokyo in late 2002, and part of the series was subsequently seen in *Sydney Style* at the Sydney Opera House in 2004, and in *2004: Australian Culture Now* at the National Gallery of Victoria.

The large, digital photographic works that Callas generated during and after the residency were exhibited at Sydney's Stills Gallery in late 2002. Titled *Vinculum*, works from the series were also shown at Bombay's National Gallery of Modern Art in 2002 and at Melbourne's Arc One Gallery in 2004. By happy coincidence, O. P. Jain, the founder and head of Sanskriti Kendra, was in Australia for the Res Artis conference, and attended the Melbourne show.¹²

So, have these artists and their exchanges helped keep the peace? I like to believe so. As Michael Snelling subtly puts it:

'It is often less tangible outcomes that are the most profound, the knowledge of culture, art and artists that are exchanged ... the two-way requests for an opinion on this or that ... these are indicators of the slow accretion of trust and understanding ...'¹³

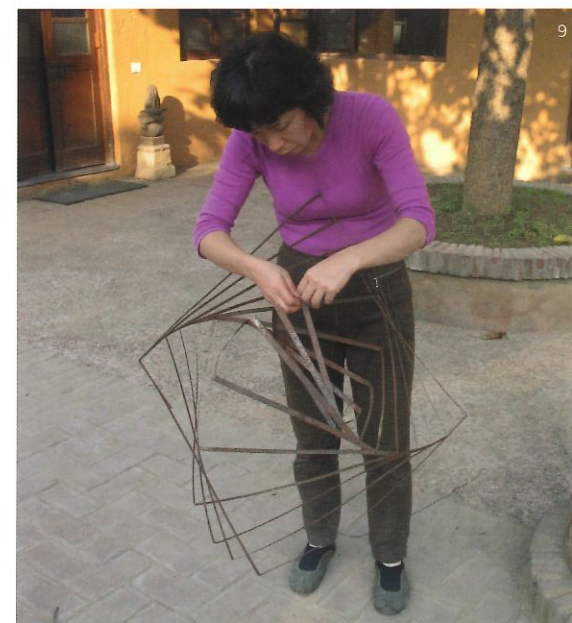
Carrillo Gantner sums it up, making the plea that:

'Right now we all need to be ... proactive in our dealings with Asia ... Artists make the best ambassadors. Their work is all about building a common language. They touch the heart and mind.'¹⁴

Ian Were is Senior Editor at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane.

Endnotes

1. Clayton Campbell, 'LA lore: 18th Street Arts Complex', *Object Magazine*, No. 3/96, September, 1996, p. 27–28.
2. *ibid.*
3. Res Artis: International Association of Residential Arts Centres, 9th General Meeting, 'Knowledge + Dialogue + Exchange: Remapping Cultural Globalisms from the South', was convened and held at Artspace, Sydney and Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, 10–16 August 2004. Clayton Campbell is President of Res Artis.
4. Clayton Campbell, e-mail to the author, 14 September 2004.
5. John and Penny Smith, e-mails to the author, September 2004.
6. Fiona Fell, e-mail to the author, 14 September 2004.
7. See *Object*, No. 40, September 2002, 'Super future city' (on Wayne Berkowitz), p. 60, and 'Tokyo postcards' (on Kate McMillan), p. 61.
8. Julie Bartholomew, e-mail to the author, 14 September 2004.
9. *ibid.*
10. *ibid.*
11. *35,000 Days in Asia: The Asialink Arts Residency Program*, The Asialink Centre, University of Melbourne, 2004.
12. Peter Callas and Yuri Kawanabe, e-mails to the author, September 2004.
13. Michael Snelling, in *35,000 Days in Asia*, 2004, op. cit., p. 27. Snelling is referring to his 1999 residency at Fukuoka Art Museum.
14. Carrillo Gantner, Chairman, Asialink, in *35,000 Days in Asia*, 2004, op. cit., p. 10.



6. Kimiyo Mishima, ceramic sculptor, Osaka, 2004. Photo: Julie Bartholomew.

7. Yuri Kawanabe, *Layered Lace* (detail), 2002, neckpiece, anodised aluminium, silver, brass, rubber grommets. Photo: Karel Hubnik.

8. Yuri Kawanabe, floor bench, Sanskriti Kendra, Delhi, 2002. This image formed part of their exhibition at Sanskriti. Photo: Peter Callas.

9. Yuri Kawanabe, Sanskriti Kendra, Delhi, 2002. Photo: Peter Callas.