

**Museum & Gallery Services Queensland
Seminar: Artist-in-residence/Artist interventions in museums
University of Queensland Art Museum
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It was fitting that the Museum & Gallery Services Queensland (M&GSQ) seminar on Artistic interventions in public and private spaces was held at Brisbane's University of Queensland Art Museum in August 2009. In recent years the UQAM's programs have taken on a new flavour of innovation and experimentation under the directorship of Nick Mitzevich, and an artist residency with a distinct twist is about to be trialled under their auspices. Brook Andrew has been appointed as an artist in residence by the UQAM, in an initiative with three partners – the Tasmanian private art foundation "Detached", the Sherman Foundation in Sydney and the University of Queensland. Andrew will complete a six month residency at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, with the resulting artworks to be shown in exhibitions at three institutions across Australia throughout 2009/2010.

M&GSQ provided four keynote speakers in two sessions, neatly compartmentalised into an afternoon. These looked at the joint topics of Artist-in-Residence and Artist Interventions in Museums. "The seminar aimed to explore the creative and visionary ways that galleries, museums and educational institutions work with artists through artist-in-residence programs and artist interventions in museums." While the Brook Andrew story is yet to be told, the subject was explored in four different presentations by artists Fiona Hall and Janet Lawrence, academic Dr Jennifer Barrett and artist/arts administrator Yenda Carson.

These four provided highly diverse presentations on the subject, illustrating why the visual arts can be difficult to define and quantify, but with the benefits to artists, the host institution, and, in some cases, to the broader community, defined and conveyed. Each of the residencies described worked in different ways, had varied ambitions, results, and artistic outcomes and were described as worthwhile and compelling experiences – for the artists and other partners. While the artists found their experiences in various institutions highly rewarding, the question that this seminar also canvassed was the benefit of the opportunity for the host institution/s and the wider community.

The arts are increasingly touted as a centre of innovative thought with the ability to shed light and add new working methods in areas as diverse as sustainability and science. As a result it makes sense to explore and publicise the often intangible benefits of creativity in solving problems outside our own unique niche, or, as Yenda Carson suggested, to embark on an examination of "how we value the arts", and further promote "the benefits of working with artists". One of Fiona Hall's residency experiences was at the Queensland Brain Institute and it would be interesting to hear from them what impact the

three month artist residency had on their working methods, psyche or perceptions.

The results of work with artists are visible in the working process, sculpture for public places, publications and events. Yet the tangible nature of these impacts is rarely defined or publicized in the greater community. In this sense Dr Jennifer Barrett's research has put data and observations on the record, given its interest in dealing with the reciprocal nature of the benefits and conflicts of collaboration.

The structure of the seminar was useful, in that it juxtaposed the practical descriptions and results of residencies as undertaken by an artist with a more reflective and studies-based presentation. In the first session Fiona Hall's presentation was followed by Yenda Carson and in the second Dr Jennifer Barrett's paper was followed by artist Janet Laurence.

With a fairly peripatetic life, and a self described "Resident Itinerant", Hall is uniquely placed to debate the stimulation available to an artist during, and after a residency. The particular projects she discussed were a long term Asialink residency at Lunuganga in Sri Lanka (over eleven years), a two month residency with ongoing relationships at the Queensland Brain Institute, and her three months in New Zealand at Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts, which has deepened her interest in the culture and history of our near neighbour.

Her work is well known and visually varied, but at its heart it explores, in the most general terms, the relationship between art and humanity. She describes the residency experience as having the ability to "take you out of your comfort zone. While most artists are trying to do that every day, a residency provides a nice exotic spin on that in a new institution which you would otherwise not experience."

In response to a question about her impact on the QBI, she suggested that scientists are driven by abstract thought, which shares the creative terrain of the artist, and that mutual respect and curiosity was developed on both sides throughout the residency. "I felt privileged to have the key to the institution."

The other residencies described by Hall were at University of Auckland and coincided with a few other exhibition and artistic opportunities being explored by Hall in New Zealand at that time. She described it as a "wonderful experience, with access to biological material from extinct native birds, and where she soaked up the culture and the history" of our near neighbour. And finally she spoke with evident feeling about her eleven years of travel, under the auspices of an Asialink residency, to Sri Lanka, a place which she says, as a result, "exists in her psyche". Given the circumstances of civil war, without the residency she was unlikely to have travelled to Sri Lanka, "an island of exotic riches which were historically carried across the oceans to Europe".

Yenda Carson, who as both an artist and an arts administrator, is well placed to explore residencies, described a different type of experience:

community partnerships built via residencies, often in schools, where meanings and cultural truths were developed in a relationship with other cultural facilities. The art's capacity for innovation was seen by Carson as an intrinsic part of the reason for these partnerships, and the skills transfers as an especially rewarding aspect of their nature, and she suggested that relationships between artists and the host institution were ongoing most often when the artist was drawn from the community.

Dr Jennifer Barrett described the value of the arts, beginning with quotes from Robyn Archer, who has noted previously the ability of the arts to extend thinking, and the reciprocal benefits of collaboration. Drawing on her research with Jacqueline Millner, *Australian Artists and Museums*, Barrett explored the oppositional aspects of artists working in museums, suggesting, "Artists value the fragment, whereas museums value the whole. Art is about transformation of matter, while museums are about preservation."

Interestingly she also referred to a comment from artist Peter Cripps, where he noted his experience of non-art museums being more open and generous in terms of residencies than art museums. She described a range of strategies employed by artists in museums, with interesting examples, as:-

- Artists challenging the museum's institutional authority
- Artists examining the construction of history
- The artist as curator
- Artists working with museum architects and interior designers
- Artists highlighting the use of taxonomic modes of display and categorization in the museum.
- Artists engaging with the aesthetics of collections
- Artists developing a new interface with the public through performance.

In conclusion she noted the potential that artists have in terms of enhancing the museum, as showcasing the process/es of art production, functioning as a circuit-breaker for museum staff, and in linking to new communities in varied ways. She suggested, "For when an artist enters the museum, they not only work with collections, but with ways of thinking. They generate new knowledge with the potential to expand the reach and intensify the effect of the museum."

These conclusions also emerged in the discussion which followed with Janet Laurence's experiences under the heading, "Fugitive in Light". Laurence is another residency specialist, and described her work at the Museum of Sydney and also at Sydney's Homebush Bay, Taronga Park Zoo and the Australian Museum. She observed that artists are valuable given their ability to work with the collection with a new mindset. From her own experience, and her observations of others, she suggested that science and the natural world remain compelling material for artists and allow complex scientific issues to be playfully communicated to the public.

She gave insights into her own experience in negotiating conflict, suggesting that if a challenge to museum authority was integral to the art, she had learnt to turn it to the advantage of the museum, be strategic, and, if in danger of being beaten, suggesting that, "It's ok – it's only art!" Her

point was that artists may get away with a lot by hiding their meaning in poetry and by cleverly utilising both expectations and role changes. In many ways this was a useful summation of some of the seminar messages.

The tangible and intangible values of art to the community - in schools, to host institutions - is worthy of further exploration but both Carson's and Barrett's presentations put their pertinent research on the record to date. Value of these residencies to artists was emphasized by the lively artistic results presented by Hall and Laurence. Further promotion of these benefits, to the community at large, is essential and the discussion of these issues, put on the agenda by the Museum & Gallery Services Queensland, is a significant part of a broader debate to be had in coming years.

Louise Martin-Chew
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Fiona Hall, "Resident Itinerant"
Yenda Carson, "Artists in Schools Residencies"
Dr Jennifer Barrett, "Australian Artists and Museums"
Janet Laurence, "Fugitive in Light"