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Anchors from the Periphery.

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Anchors from the Periphery.

For a long time I have been dealing in poetic constructs in my work, images borne through a lively imagination, through reverie and dreams. Almost as a counterpoint to these constructs, I have developed the need for a grounding element in my work practice. I see the role of this grounding element operating like an anchor, cast out from a ship in harbour. These anchors come from the periphery of consciousness. This is fertile ground, where possibilities, questions and answers simultaneously appear and they provide me with an essential range of options in the creative process. When my imagination deals with something felt, that could be either fleeting or deep, troubling, perplexing or exultant, it often blossoms into a steady stream of images. These images are usually surprising to me, but I endeavour to capture them with a fine net, and get them down in some sort of notational form. I am a steady keeper of journals. Some of these notes go on to be translated into a more solid form, a painting, a walk, a piece of writing or a video work, and in virtually all of these instances, the original poetic response is intermixed with a more analytic response. The intuition is tempered with a voice of reason. My 'anchors' on the other hand, are not tampered with and usually evade this moderating filter. They remain as intuitive leaps.

After the death of my only son eighteen months ago, I have been actively searching for shapes, colours and reasons for this loss. I have been continually thankful during this time that I am a visual artist and have had equipment to help give shape to unshapable events.

I have long been interested in the proximity of the self to the work that I create.



Bamboo, Dynamite and Fortune Cookie, 1995/96

The painting process offers many opportunities to cast out into open space and then to drop 'anchors'. Throughout the late 1990s I made a series of paintings that explored an open pictorial space through a poetic reverie. Amongst other things, I imagined China. The works

were built up through a series of thin layers into which I embedded various poetic images and their accompanying anchor. *Bamboo, Dynamite and Fortune Cookie*, from 1995/96 is one such painting. I worked on this painting over a period of about twelve months. The essential idea remained the same throughout, but there was a particular degree of activation I was after, and this resulted in constant alterations of colour, scale, surface and occasionally, in the combination of components. The central motif of a bundle of dynamite remained the same (although this also changed in colour and luminosity), but the accompanying components of bamboo and a loose stick of dynamite changed in colour, number and position many times. These alterations became absorbed into the body of the painting and operated like phantom limbs to the final resolution. They were no longer there, but they created an 'itch' or need to find a counterpoint in the work. The painting needed one more component to activate all the others and an 'itchy space' in the bottom right hand corner of the painting was where it was going to appear. This small flat space of cleared earth was like the bottom of the harbour, ready to receive an anchor. And then, quite unexpectedly, it came to me: the anchor was a Chinese fortune cookie! I can't really say where this came from, and I don't really want to try, but I am happy to just let these anchors keep coming from the distant periphery. In this instance, the unexpected nature of the object opened up new possibilities in a reading of the painting and this is an essential ingredient in the work I make. After I have 'released' it, I want to be surprised by it in its new life away from the studio.

More recently, my practice shifted from the studio to the field. I presented a performance work called *In arenosis ad fluvium cygornum*. (In sandy soil on the Swan River) at the National Revue of Live Art in Midland, Perth. I walked around an empty area of urban wasteland, describing what I saw and thought about during the six hours of the walk. I was also walking for more personal reasons: I was looking for my son, or at least, for signs of him, or even, for signs from the world for why he disappeared. Since he has gone, I look more closely at the world around me. I have been looking very closely at plants, and more particularly, flowers. During this walk, I looked at weeds and rubbish and I looked back into the past at what other activity had taken place in the area. This looking, whilst out in the open, brought into play my peripheral vision. It is a big open space here in Western Australia, and one must peel back the eyes to take it all in. I became increasingly interested in what was creeping into my peripheral vision. It may have been a different shape, a flash of light, a hole in the ground or something glinting or moving, even an irregular angle or something in the sky. But every time something like this grabbed my attention, I immediately felt grounded. I had now found a more temporal anchor that I could cast out whilst walking. By acknowledging these peripheral observations, my browsing of the earth connected me to the present and its more localised visual information. These extra half shapes, fragments of vision, dissolved focal points or marginal stimuli all allowed my questioning and searching to assume a more comprehensive form. Often, there would be a momentary sense of displacement and subsequent interruption of motion. I would stand still and let the world fall into place around me. This suspension of time and movement allowed a soothing reverie to unfold, I would release my loss – anxiety and I would be more comfortable on the earth.

The walk was also like a painting. I traversed the ground, constantly aware of different combinations of colour, scale and space. I walked from shadow to light and back again. In the eyes of the audience, I was able to disappear, either through the cover of darkness or distance. There were equivalents of 'phantom limbs' and 'itchy sites'. I was trying to find something that wasn't there anymore and somehow restore a forgotten balance. Key components were continually being repositioned (with myself as the most active part), but by the end of the walk, I don't think the 'picture' was completed in the same manner as *Bamboo Dynamite and Fortune*

Cookie. The process of searching, dreaming and then allowing anchors to settle around the area of activity seemed sufficient to get my bearings. I do know that I will continue to draw upon these anchors from the periphery in whatever I do.

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