

FEELS LIKE HOME

Opening Speech by Gabi Lane, 14/11/2019

These artists were posed with the question – What does ‘home’ mean when the place around you is in a state of perpetual change? These six artists have responded with work that is both deeply personal and grounded in collective experience.

To feel at home is to know that things are in their place and so are you. These feelings are implicitly informed by the place in which we live or have lived; these are the places that take us to the stories that are inevitably ours, too familiar to belong anywhere other than the places we call home.

Memories are also cued by the physical place in which we live, and when we see these places we are taken back to the person you were when you lived there. When I look at Donovan Christie’s painting ‘Slice of Life’, I’m immediately taken back to an afternoon when I was young at the ‘All You Can Eat Pizza buffet’ at Pizza Hut – I remember my grandfather returning to the table with a ridiculously heaped bowl of soft serve ice cream, while exclaiming that he didn’t know how to turn off the machine. Sure enough, we look over only to see the soft serve machine oozing ice cream all over the counter and floor.

The Pizza Hut of my memories doesn’t exist anymore, and it wasn’t until I saw this painting that I recognised it as another casualty of gentrification and new development. There is a nostalgia in Donovan’s work that is echoed in the work of Peter Serwan, in which each ticky tacky house has the same angled roof, same street, same same. But there is safety and comfort in the familiar, in taking the same route home to be in a good place at the end of a tiring day. It is a reflective kind of nostalgia to be able to look back upon the changing urban landscape and accept the past as it is, taking only from memory that which informs our own individual identity.

When I look at Peter’s work, with their checkerboard of lots and houses, I’m reminded that the city of Adelaide was first built on Kurna land as a uniform grid – a perfect square. Much like the perfect square created by Joe Felber in his *Concept 3-4-7*, a work that has, much like Joe, travelled the world. Having spent much of his life as a nomad, there is a need and desire conveyed in this work to contain and control life, which speaks to a deeper more emotional need for structure.

Many of Joe’s works in this exhibition reflect his nomadic way of life, the travel cases essential for the travelling artist, creating photographic and paper works that were easily moved from city to city. There is a wonderful conversation between these works – which track Joe’s migration to Australia – with the mural installation by Jasmine Crisp. In this Jasmine has painted herself, illuminated in a pink glow of the light in her bedroom, a light she took with her on her recent residencies in Finland and Iceland. It speaks of both homecoming and homesickness.

I would like to highlight a concept from Svetlana Boym's book on *The Future of Nostalgia*, one of the books that reside in the window of Jasmine's mural work. The overarching idea in this book is that nostalgia is what human's share, not what divides us. We are connected by our relationship to our home of the past, present, and future – and in this show it is the artists' who narrate this relationship.

We are surrounded by the sensitive and thoughtful interpretations of what home means to us; the longing to connect, the desire for familiarity, of places that are both near and far. When you entered the gallery you would have encountered the works by Liz Butler, in which tree roots become veins as they work their way through the land and plants and through ourselves. I imagine these roots weaving their way far beyond where we stand now and to the desert where Liz spent much of her life. Liz has often said that while her mind and body is here in the urban, her heart is in the desert. The difficulty here, is in reconciling these parts of oneself and thinking critically about what it means when thinking about one's home.

It is a wonderful privilege then, to have the work of Elizabeth Close installed here with the red sand of her Grandmother's Country. Elizabeth's work embodies a deeper concept of Aboriginal connection to Country, and to quote Elizabeth "how our understanding of home is entwined with our understanding of ourselves and our relationship with Country. We are a part of the landscape and the landscape is a part of us". These pieces reflect Elizabeth's street art style, the dripping black paint becomes a metaphor for how recent our urban landscape is within the scope of Indigenous presence and culture.

In this exhibition, these artists have consolidated the experiences of home between past and present, the perpetual change of our everyday lives encouraging us to look back and forward all at once, and ultimately find joy and belonging. The artists provide us with a snapshot of place that is both physical and emotional, it is both individual and collective. They create connections between memory and experience by this one core theme – Home.

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