

THE CURRENCY OF SPACE

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Small acts of resistance can create change is a statement that I can relate to, both within my individual practice as an artist, and through the collective lense of my directorship at Adelaide ARI Fontanelle. I am currently undertaking my Phd titled, 'Committed but not attached: Expanding the boundaries of painting through collaborative and negotiated explorations of the emotional and the political'. My research is concerned with critiquing the value and position of hierarchy across individual and collective practice.

The current political and economic climate that we are living in presents us with an uncertain future, in particular, when we ask ourselves how our arts sector is valued, perceived, and funded, but even more crucial, how does it self generate? I have been actively involved in independent artist run initiatives, galleries and organisations for over 15 years, which was influenced significantly by living in Rotterdam in the Netherlands in the early 2000's, where I lived and worked in a residency, Sticting Kunst & Complex. Here, I experienced a very different understanding of being an artist, I experienced a tangible lifestyle and cultural value as an artist, supported by affordable housing, and independent infrastructure that had been set up and maintained by communities across several generations. These ranged from experimental sound collectives, artists run studios, galleries, right through to curatorial projects that focused on diversity and multiculturalism and affordability of housing. Rotterdam as a city seemed to embrace the effect artists could have on the life of the suburbs, and new areas of development, well before the more recent art/gentrification boom we've seen playing out in Australia. On a practical level the experience was wild, in terms of how I lived and also how I was perceived and encased in the communities that I belonged to. Upon my return from Europe I noticed a huge advantage in Adelaide was its available space - so much available space and empty infrastructures to start something. So it was a natural progression for me to set up a studio in the Port, and then FELTspace in the CBD with Rayleen Forester, Annika Evans, Monte Masi, and Logan Macdonald in 2007.

There is an *act of resistance* in independence, in not relying on institutions to provide everything we engage with as artists. The awareness of this is not just a coincidence, the corporatisation of the arts and the constant pressure to practice what we do with entrepreneurialism, has become more and more pervasive. Identifying creativity in business and marketing is increasingly acknowledged as a vital component in successful, economic creative development, but often, even our political champions who do support the arts are focused on big scale solutions (lets build a MONA in Adelaide) to compete with large scale public developments, great halls, and stadiums. This is where small acts of residence can create change.

Our approach at Fontanelle (Ben Leslie, Mary-Jean and myself) has been to develop as a model that identifies the currency of space. We are progressively identifying what we have accomplished through the activation of our space, as a quantifiable volume of 'goodwill' that we have given to the government development we are indirectly part of through our subsidized lease. Their term for this process is 'Place making'. We are now claiming the influence we have had in Bowden, a rapidly changing industrial suburb of Adelaide, that is now a hot spot of 'edgy' living and eco apartments. We have developed our own autonomous vision and studio/gallery culture, but we have also presented social offerings, activity and community excitement within the area. This has earned us the capability to negotiate for an even greater subsidy of space for our next location as we position ourselves beyond a mere 'pop up' vehicle.

With the funding uncertainty that many arts organisations are about to face, Fontanelle actively claims itself as a site of resistance by existing outside of the expected pathway, with no intention of becoming a funded organisation. Due to our subsidized lease, we don't need regular core funding to operate, and our genuine ethos of being 'artist run' means Fontanelle runs on us as a human resource. The administrative and grant compliance workload compared to the amount of funding given, often starts to effect the ratio of 'artist' in 'artist run'. Therefore, Fontanelle is in a unique position to be able to consciously open up new ways of thinking about how individual artists who engage with collective practice can maintain and pursue a professional practice, without having to choose between being a productive studio artist or an institutional employee. The scope (experiment) of Fontanelle as a project allows us to test out a professional research standard of how to optimize projects, find other funding, source additional forms of income and invent our own conditions of success.

The independent ARI sector can also provide a vital perspective and space concerned with debating the role of governance and influence of our major institutions, and the effect they have on the industry as a whole. Especially when it comes to how we define a range of professional roles within the ARI sector, for example the role of the curator is often defined and identified by top heavy institutional norms. In my experience, within the artist run paradigm, many artists are curating, self curating and developing spatial awareness extended from their own practices, often negotiating and organising group projects and exhibitions, which can naturally lead to the questioning of the hierarchical and authoritative set definition of these roles. Fontanelle and other ARI's allow for a space to test out the range of these roles, discovering how they can be action-based. Research and theories are tested in motion, rather than being limited to a job description attached to an institutional role or pay bracket.

Smalls act of residence that exist in artist run culture can create long lasting change. Artists belong to communities and increasingly we need to work collectively – I have noticed a shift in the embraced resourcefulness of collective practice particularly in the last five years. A major benefit of artist run initiatives and collectives is that they work best when they involve healthy working cultures. With volunteering, its important to be on the same page, and for me, relationships are a vital part of how Fontanelle works, we all have flexibility in supporting each other and each others' practices. Collectives work best when it's very human and very real. A real way to challenge the economic-rationalist-build-big solutions thinking paradigm, is by engendering the future of grass roots activity - we have new volunteers who plan to start their own ARI, so ideally grassroots infrastructure can keep inventing and self propagating.

When I observed Ben (co-director of Fontanelle) installing his recent exhibition at Fontanelle 'House of Vulture' for his end of master's examination, he obsessively worked to get it perfect, hours and hours of work and planning to present his vision. These are the moments we have that present a flash of insight outside of ourselves, where we see someone else close to us working... wow, we really do work hard for something we are artistically committed too, when realistically, there is no guarantee of a sale. All this commitment needs a studio, needs a space to show in, a space to experiment in, and is a huge force to harness. Maybe artist's spaces will thrive, slow down or continue to steadily maintain. ARI's serve as an active archive, that feed us in the short term, but as true sites of resistance, we need to ensure the confidence of the long term.

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