

Conversation with Brett Jones, Coordinator of West Space

October 1997

Sandra Bridie: I'd like to ask you where you want to start with this, because it seems like you don't want to start at the beginning, a historical view of when West Space started up, so maybe I'll ask those questions when they arise in the interview. What are the issues you feel need to be dealt with in the running of an artist run space today?

Brett Jones: These things come at perhaps an opportune time because of the other things I'm involved with - writing articles and political issues to do with funding and other institutions, bigger institutions. So to summarize where we're at which is what you are asking, it is also really a bit of a crucial period, because we've been going for almost four and a half years and it just seems that from what we've done, and from the recognition that we've built, that we need to be looking at where we're going next in terms of what we're providing and doing that.

So you see the space in terms of its service to the artistic community, or the kind of people who would visit an artist run space, is that different to the artistic community?

Well certainly our main concern is the artists coming through, because we see them as our peers and they are paying for a service.

So the people who exhibit here more than the viewers?

Well no, the viewers are a part of that group in a sense, because a lot of our audiences are artists, and quite possibly people who have shown here, or will. We have quite a few shows coming through a year including A4 art and also people contributing to our publications and talks programs, so certainly there's that audience which is a community sense of audience, in terms of an art community sense of audience, but there's also our arts professionals, and the broader community come through and the broader public, and we'd like to think that, to all those groups that we present, through the artists showing, things in the best possible light, and in a professional considered way.

So there's always been with the artists run space seeing itself as the radical model, the idea of institutionalising yourself has always been seen as heralding the death of a space. I don't quite know what this institutionalizing means, I suppose fixing an aesthetic or fixing a form. You sound as though that's not a negative thing; the idea of creating a sense of a space that has more functions than just exhibiting art, and using an institutional model to achieve this.

Well there are different institutional models and there are different understandings of institution. I suppose in the sense that an artists space conforms or is perceived to have a certain aesthetic position or recognised aesthetic programs. That might have a sense of institutional rhetoric or position in terms of modernist convention or whatever. But then an institution is also an organisation that receives substantial amounts of government funding and has that status as cultural institution, a legitimate, government supported cultural institution. But in terms of the art institution as a big all encompassing framework, we're quite happy within that yes, and we've always seen that that has benefits as long as they're considered and as much as possible controlled. So there's almost this dialogue with the institution that both can benefit from, so its sort of a symbiotic relationship, a whilst there is an argument of normalization and co-option by the institution, I think we're firmly independent in our ways of doing things and thinking, and its not co-option, its more a discussion or a negotiation with the institution, and certainly we've benefited from it in many ways. But I think the institution has too, and certainly the ideas that artist run spaces in general develop, and the energy and the new approaches have really benefited the institution of art in many ways, I just think perhaps, they're are not being recognised or utilised as much as they could be.

And so, is this your beef, a bit, that artist run spaces are not included in that idea of institutions within the art world, or a legitimate - we're using the word 'sector' now, not seen as a fully formed entity within that?

There's a couple of points there, and firstly, on a more general level artists have always had a role in shaping the system, although it hasn't always been directly accredited, but certainly new ideas and innovative approaches have often come from artists. In recent years that's been formalised or more located with artists spaces, so there's been organisational frameworks set up by artists for artists that have really been tapped into by bigger organisations and institutions. And as I was saying, that's been a healthy thing. But the second point is that we're now at a stage, particularly organisations such as West Space who have been running for more than four years, where there needs to be more support and recognition of the value of such spaces and activities and the energy that artists put in, not simply

because they've been running for that period of time, but because there's an incredible resource there that's in direct contact and in a sense is the profession itself, is the area, is the practice, that these other bigger structures are set up to support, and it's already happening on a smaller scale with artists spaces, so it doesn't take a genius to see that they are readily accessible and they're off and running. And that's happened to a certain extent by commercial galleries picking up artists from artist spaces, but that's a fairly market driven superficial response.

So do you think that the powers that be actually want to have a vague idea about what artists want and don't actually want to know, or don't actually want a reliable mediator, or don't want to get closer to communicating clearly, and that's why they bypass the institutions or the spaces that artists actually set up. Do you think that they really in fact don't want to know, but they need to be seen to be making the gestures?

I think that does happen in some quarters, but they are perhaps the more cynical or conservative quarters anyhow. But even within the big institutions, whether it be the National Gallery or the government funding bodies, there are particular individuals who are very supportive and very aware and that's perhaps the way, we've approached it isn't finding who are the real supporters on an individual level, rather than saying this institution on a whole supports us, because that's not the way things operate anyway.

Or by saying, this institute on a whole is hostile to us.

That's right, it works both ways. I think perhaps the sector that's had the least positive involvement has been the commercial gallery sector, and that's often for market reason, but I also think there's a bankruptcy of innovative approaches to running those organisations, there's a big problem. But that doesn't concern the way we do things at all.

I was wondering, because I know that commercial galleries do utilise the taste setting of certain artist run spaces, like First Floor for example, or when Store 5 was in existence there were links made with Anna Schwartz and Tolarno. Maybe there's a different kind of art being shown here at West Space. Those other spaces I just mentioned showed a specific type of work. Perhaps you have a more unwieldy aesthetic or house style here.

The idea of packaging an aesthetic or a range of approaches, would be very useful to the individuals involved, and in some sense it has been to the organisations you've cited, but it can also be very limiting.

In the way the space is perceived?

Yeah, but also for the broader benefit for artists, it no doubt might have immediate and longer term gain for those artists, but I wonder if those artists are happy being tagged a 'Store 5 artist', or a 'Roar artist'. And also taste and style is such a slippery changing area, that in my opinion, if you set up an organization that attempts to do that, not that you do - there's other powers that be that place those perceptions on you as well, you can actively negate them -but if you do locate yourself like that or others do, I think ultimately you're going to be shorter term in nature, or project based, and perhaps that's where those models are being learned from. There have been spaces, more recently operating now, that recognise that in saying that they are a project or a loosely defined sense of how long they will be running is a good thing, it's got energy and vibrancy.

So the space becomes like a time based aesthetic work.

But here we always think that there are some other more industry or professional/social issues that artists are grappling with, and whilst that's one way of doing it in a linear conventional career developmental approach that those spaces seem to be plugged into, I think there are ways to do it that recognise the other difficulties of making art, like paid work, and juggling other personal and professional responsibilities, that simply getting on a path that is set up to trying to give you commercial or recognition success can have a whole lot of other dangers and problems attached to it, not to say that that's wrong or anything, but in my opinion the reality of artists exhibiting or practicing in the Australian economy today is that, if you're going to be hell bent on getting that sort of success, it only can happen to a small, very small number.

It's more necessary to set up a meaningful practice than a lucrative one, because the lucrative one - I think in the eighties some people did believe would be possible to achieve, but I don't think it's possible anymore, you'd have to be delusive or freakishly lucky to be able to achieve that. It's not realistic. That's why I think these spaces are necessary, they have come out of necessity.

I think they've gone beyond that now though, the economic necessity issue certainly played a part in the early nineties, up till a few years ago, but they've become totally normalised and part of the art mainstream, so that their presence isn't economic anymore, its the sense of community, the sense of place, the engagement of ideas and sustained work, which doesn't happen in a lot of other places for artists.

I think maybe there was also a sense that the artists needed to be championed, if an artist needed a commercial gallery then they needed to be championed by someone. Maybe you set up a space because you figure you can champion yourself, or each person can promote themselves in the way they want to.

And I think some of those earlier models, like Art Projects, did that quite consciously, but I think they've evolved to the point of being much more responsive to some of the pragmatic qualities realities of art practice and survival, for artists.

With West Space, who are you talking about when you say 'we', is this your vision, or is it a vision of a group of people who manage the space. You call yourself the 'co-ordinator', are there other co-ordinators, or are you the only co-ordinator and the other people have other designations?

I do tend to speak for West Space because I am the only co-ordinator and I run it on a daily basis, and I'm in contact with all these issues and its my job in a sense - even though I'm not paid - it is my job, so when I say 'we' I speak for the organisation, I don't necessarily speak for the committee members, but I certainly speak for the organisation, and I suppose I refer to Sarah Stubbs, who co-founded West Space as my assistant co-ordinator because obviously there's the most dialogue about various issues between Sarah and myself.

I am wondering what levels of authority there are here?

There may be divergences in certain opinions but at the same time we have got fairly defined roles at West Space.

So Sarah wouldn't speak on her own for West Space, for instance, as you are here?

If there was a need for us to speak together, Sarah is quite happy to do that, but if anyone is to represent the space, it is myself. Perhaps that structure is a little more defines, its not so much hierarchical because I speak to people about issues and I'm always canvassing options and getting feedback, but its more to do with what I think is efficiency and effectiveness to have one voice.

Where the choice making can finish.

And a decision is made, that is is unequivocal. I think that has benefited West Space, but necessary to projecting a positive and recognisable image, I'm not talking about the aesthetics of work, I'm talking more about the pragmatics of how the organisation runs, and that things are set up, that the structure is set up, that are adhered to and done properly so things don't go wrong, so there aren't fuck ups and people don't get hard done by.

Do you think artist run spaces today see organisational processes as compatible to artistic processes rather than incompatible. Here in the office at West Space you have comprehensive instructions for people minding the gallery, and I think you are quite happy to assume a certain kind of authority as a space rather than a more anarchic, anything goes approach to running the space.

Like I say, I think our development and our current position has had a lot to do with that approach, whilst that's not to denigrate or undervalue other models, our aspirations have always been to provide as much as possible for artists to come in ____ (couldn't catch this word SB) and we see the only way to do that is to gain as broad a recognition and acceptance as possible so that we can then when its pragmatic, attract funding and gain support. But also we see it as necessary to do things in the best possible way, so that things are clear and that people get the best possible value for their money. I mean, we are providing a service that artists pay for, after all.

Some artist run spaces have been run in an 'arty' fashion, which is that the artist who is using the space needs to intuit how they are to work in there because no guidelines are set.

I suppose design school teaches you that systems and structures are very useful. I've certainly benefited from having both art and design training, and I just couldn't see any other way of running it, particularly when my life is so busy, incredibly occupied. If I was to let things float or drift things would get out of hand, I don't think I'd get as much done.

West Space was set up in 1993. Can you see definite phases in the development of the space, because your position now seems quite an evolved one, and seen quite a lot of possibilities that would only come from having reached a certain stage beyond just exhibiting, finding a venue, all the primary survival aspects of the space?

It's been a constant evolution but the two main phases are demarcated by space really. We were initially in a building that was much smaller, which allowed us to do much fewer things and moving allowed us to expand and take on a whole lot of other projects activities.

How did you get this space?

We were conscious that we had enough recognition and support in the other space that West Space was ready to expand after doing things in a fairly low key and low admin way for over a year so we looked out for other spaces in the area, we obviously wanted to stay in Footscray.

Well this is a pretty prime location.

Yeah, we're local, so we all know the area and spoke to people, and property owners, and found a suitable building. It certainly is a bit of a local land mark, but it was more by coincidence and luck that it happened to be there at the time.

In terms of community, and I guess you might be asked this quite a lot, how would you say being in Footscray makes the practice different to maybe being on the other side of the city, and how much do you engage with the local community?

Well I suppose, again, we can only do so much with our resources, although we'd like to promote it to a broader community more, our main point of access is through local papers and being on the street, so passing traffic.

But you are not specifically serving the art community of Footscray?

We are in the sense that we are here, and it gives people confidence that there is a contemporary art space in the Western region and particularly Footscray, and there has been a lot of positive feedback that way, so that's a cultural issue and one of cultural confidence in your own area, which has perhaps been a little lacking in Footscray in the past. That also gives us the unique position, given that we are the only contemporary art space to have some say - well we'd like to think so - about the visual arts in the area. And we are the focus for that, in a way. More generally, the location in Footscray does have important part in suggesting that the artworld is too defined by convention, and what I call socio-economics and that horrible word that we call 'class' which still does have a presence in the arts in Australia, so it's been constantly an issue of getting certain groups over here, and whilst artists aren't problematic at all, artists are probably the first people to come over here, and it's been demonstrated recently with house sales and things, but in terms of the cultural elite, (the people with money who perhaps don't need to come over to the Western suburbs too often) getting them over, particularly if they haven't been over here in their life, because we do try to tap into all audiences, has been an ongoing thing. We get people over here once and they'll definitely come back, so it's just that first time. It just depends - with other artists spaces, whether that's an objective, and it is an objective with us. Other art spaces that might not matter, an artists audience might be the main audience. We've always maintained, and I don't know whether you might want to call it a utopian position or some sort of socialist position, that art does have some value for everyone, whether people realise that or not, but it can have some value, it doesn't have to be political value by any means, it can have purely aesthetic value of course, and its just a matter of inspiring confidence so that people can come in, even people from established money backgrounds.

So how would you do that? Would you give them some sense of involvement?

If we had the resources we could do it in many ways, but the ways we've tried to do it to date have been, for instance, talks with VCE students.

So they are from all over Melbourne are they?

No targeted specifically at the schools from the Western region, they were successful.

Could you describe what these talks were?

A certain number of our shows in the second semester of this year, artists spoke to schools that we put out information to and arranged for them to come on specific dates. We addressed their study criteria so the talk was up around the VCE art study guide, and we attempted as best as possible to address the things that VCE students are concerned with, so it wasn't a regular floor talk.

It was a single artist talking?

A single artist and then another committee member supported, so three. We did a few of those.

How successful would you say they were?

Moderately successful, it was the first time we'd done it, and the committee member who helped me out, Rob McFairlane was from a teaching background and we anticipated some of the difficulties of getting students over, but I guess the biggest thing that came out of it was the fact that most of the students were from private schools in the area, so it did in a way say a lot about the position of art in State schools. It did demonstrate that art has a certain socio-economic position in society which again is something that we are working to address.

Would a way of addressing that be, so if grammar schools come to your space, maybe you would need to go out to High schools. Would that be the next stepping stone to see if maybe you would have receptive students.

We have canvassed that option, and we have had a committee member do talks in schools, but again it just depends on the role of art in the school. A lot of it comes down to art teachers, if they are motivated then they are willing to take on what amounts to extra curricula activity and more time for them, which indeed they may not get paid for, then things can happen. But from what I can understand, particularly at State level teachers are overburdened, and even perhaps demoralised, so art's going to be one of those things that is not going to fit in.

I suppose with our space DEtalk DEthat was the idea of getting primary students in there, so they are actually functioning in there in the gallery at that early age so that they have that idea of art being lively, being peopled.

I think that would be the ideal approach if you could organise projects that are participation based, collaborative sorts of things. Again that requires a lot of energy and resources and time.

Like the 'artists in schools program'.

There was an artists in schools program, I don't know if its running anymore. But that's one way of addressing the issue of broader audiences.

Also your forums, do they seem to bring in people from elsewhere, or is it the same people who come to the forums who come to West Spaces exhibitions?

We do have fairly broad audiences coming through the gallery anyway, we get a lot of local people coming through who aren't from arts backgrounds and also people from disabled groups and so forth who come through as well.

At least the gallery is wheel chair accessible.

Yes, it is accessible, and familiar faces come through because of their colourful character, there's a couple of people who like to come in because its a quiet space and have psychological difficulties, but really just enjoy coming to see what's happening, a couple of these people like coming because there's a sense of change happening they know there's another group of shows coming on every three weeks and its almost like a yardstick for their lives moving on, so its a positive thing.

With the forums there are other audiences that go beyond the regular exhibition audiences as well. They include those audiences but also expands upon them, which is what we hope to do.

So bringing in speakers from area that may not necessarily volunteer to come to a place like West Space may give them...a bit more involvement with the organisation. Well that's what we hope and that's why we always are keen to bring people to West Space who haven't had a lot to do with us, or we haven't had much to do with them even. That sort of forging of new relationships is important. Also things like publications is a major way of distributing information.

How broadly is 'Dialogue' distributed, and has the print run increased over time?

Well 'Dialogue' has a print run of five hundred at the moment, and it started off years ago as a photocopy publication. We've had seven photocopy issues and we've had six A5 journal sized printed issues. But the beauty of 'Dialogue' is not only to those people reading it immediately, who bought it, or received it as a subscriber, but we've also got quite a few libraries who receive it. And that's available in other galleries such as CCP, Gertrude Street.

And its available in places like the CCP -

Dialogue is actually distributed to about twenty three outlets in Australia and about fourteen in its Melbourne, including bookshops and galleries, so it's very accessible. And the State Galleries, its available in most of the state galleries around Australia.

So through placing your publication in those venues, what degree of communication do you receive back?

Readers definitely. The interesting thing has been that people who have read Dialogue didn't even know that it was being published by a gallery, that's been really positive, the fact that it does stand on its own, we've always tried to position it that way. That's why its not reviewing shows, or profiling artists or anything like that because its to do with the issues and ideas that artists are dealing with and they shouldn't necessarily be by a particular organization or space. There are requirements for that, but we feel that other art magazines do that adequately.

I would say that Dialogue - you were implying that you don't think that West Space has a house style or a clear aesthetic - but there is a definite aesthetic in dialogue, and an aesthetic of thought too I think that operates that's quite clear, and that's where you and Sarah I think come into the authoring of a style here, maybe?

I suppose if there's anything in that, I think its mainly our interest in design and publishing.

And that's where this can come to the fore too.

I suppose Dialogue is a little bit of a pet project in a way, although the gallery is also our project, there are more people involved and it has some bigger, or more things coming through that aren't always so controllable, but with Dialogue perhaps there is a little bit more will to attract not so much certain contributors, I think that's more to do with people responding to past issues and the current topics, but I suppose in a more general sense just molding the feel of Dialogue and the way that it is trying to tap into the things that artists are talking about, and also is presented in a considered, yet energetic and vibrant way. That's definitely a conscious thing that we are working towards.

I was wondering(I don't think that this applies to Dialogue so much) but I was wondering if sometimes the West Space forums are informed by a sort of "What cheeses me off" sort of sensibility? For instance in the audience development talks it seemed to me that you had a very particular thing that you could have spoken about if you had been giving one of the forums. It seemed as if, with the 'Audience Development' forums this year, they were in response to some specific issues that you were dealing with. And you were hoping that maybe one of the speakers at the forums would introduce the same issues. It seemed like you could have given one of the papers and said quite a lot.

I think that might happen in the publication.

I was wondering what the venue was for you to actually put your point of view forward.

I suppose that's got to do with that broader notion that West Space can make a difference to the overall structure of the art system, and that if there is an issue that I feel is particularly prominent or pertinent at a point in time, forums, publications, even project based exhibitions are a good way to present that. I suppose its investing my own ideas in what I do. I think that that's the only way that West Space, as an organization has any potential to make a difference if people get behind those ideas, those thoughts and get them out there, make something of them, get people talking about them. Otherwise they end up becoming personal grumbles to your friends and I think they've got to become much more than that for things to be really addressed in positive and productive ways within the art system.

So do you think that your preoccupation's at the time inform the choice forums and Dialogue always, that you are always responding to a current issue, or do you think they come from a more stable ideological position. My perception is that your ideas shift and can be satisfied or answered by creating a forum or public event for discussion and then you move onto the next issue.

I certainly think that's part of the strength of artists spaces in general, but particularly at West Space we recognize that things are constantly changing and shifting and the argument of one day is the tedium or bore of another. Its important to look at things while they are happening, but I suppose this is perhaps the problem with some of the bigger institutions is that they can't implement things as quickly as as efficiently and as effectively as what artists spaces can do. Perhaps not so much so exhibitions because of the need to program, but like you say with talks and publications and other projects that aren't necessarily exhibition based, you can get things out there quite quickly with a lower level of cost and resource to what bigger institutions would have to go through. I suppose the artists spaces have been central to delivering that energy and that vitality to the art system because of these things. So to address the question specifically, if you are involved in the system as intricately as I am I feel indebted to trying to bring these things up rather than pushing them aside saying that 'someone else can deal with it' or 'I'm not equipped to deal with it' or 'its too big for me', or whatever think take on the bigger

issues to really get people talking about them on all levels, not just artists, because we talk about things quite some things changing for the better. Ultimately the systems function very well, and that's what I'm always thinking about - how it can function better.

Do you see things in terms of problems that need to be solved, or are you quite happy with certain things?

I suppose I do, in a way. Again the design background comes into this, where you have a design problem where you go about solving it or presenting an option or a process to do that and certainly you work in an area long enough, you tend to become quite sensitive to the things that are perhaps in the need of change or need to be bettered.

Would you see this as an idiosyncrasy of yours that perhaps doesn't apply to other spaces?

With West Space?

Yeah.

Sometimes I think so. I think the space that obviously the space that is as much for artists as they should be. **they see themselves as in relationship to larger institutions, and they have to define themselves quite clearly in their intentions to get what they want.**

Yes, they deal directly with a bureaucracy in terms of their closest to us in terms of philosophical position would be Platform.

And I think ongoing funding. We don't have that sort of accountability to one administration structure like Platform do, but certainly when we need to be vocal, we're quite vocal about the problems with those structures that are meant to be supporting artists organizations - and artists of course, you can't really separate them.

See, I wonder whether artist run spaces, or whether artists in general think that is presuming too much because the artist has always been seen in a kind of handicapped position, which is in a charitable position, someone who has to have things done for them, you are presuming quite a lot about how artistic culture should be regarded.

That sort of myth about the artist being fairly powerless to exercise any control or change over their circumstance is something that I totally reject. That's proven on a pragmatic level with things like the ability of artists to get whole range of work, professional work even outside their art practice so artists are incredibly resourceful and Multi skilled. To suggest that artists need to be cared for or looked after by bigger structures, I find insulting.

But they also need to be regarded as being worthy of inclusion in ...

But I think that's a bigger problem than just the artist, I think its an issue of societies recognition of the visual arts specifically and perhaps the arts more generally.

Are you talking about Australian society?

Yes, I'm talking about Australian society. The patronizing or paternalistic approach that perhaps used to be more prevalent in the last decade or earlier isn't at all relevant now, yet for economic reasons its absolutely crucial that the government and the private sector, firstly recognize that the arts aren't adequately supported, yet artists do a hell of a lot to support themselves, so its not because they are not trying.

They are not really using up any one else's money.

Yeah ,well artists are tax payers anyway and artist contribute in many ways to society, so there's no case for an argument to suggest that artists are somehow parasites - that's another deeply right wing and conservative attitude as well, but the point is that government and the private sector need to be informed and educated about the importance of artists, and in the instance that we're talking about, artists spaces, so there needs to be more of a direct support system to artists through artists organizations so it isn't always being filtered through bigger bureaucracy, and it gets back to the point about energy and vitality that artists provide in their activities in their spaces and organizations, which is an incredible resource that can easily be tapped into which isn't being very well utilized. Artists spaces can only do so much because of those reasons of time and money and so forth, But if there was to be that bit more support it would be better for the industry, and let's face it the government call it the industry, and it needs outcomes all round.

Do you think - because there seems to be quite a lot of interest in artist run spaces at the moment and whether its a misguided or misdirected perception of what they are, but at the moment its almost like the term is being bandied around all over the place. Its like an

independent music scene, those sort of home grown associations. I was wondering whether all this interest to you seems tokenistic or that its a more part of movement towards artist run spaces being genuinely included within an idea of an art world. The coverage in publications, even that tokenistic gesture from the VACB was acknowledging that a number of these places exist and that their opinion is worth a tiny bit.

That's the big problem that it is only worth a tiny bit, whereas it is, in real terms, worth a whole lot more.

But do you think that that's a step, even?

If funding bodies are set up to nurture and promote new practices and new ways of doing things for artists (which is what they claim to be doing) then they should be on the ball much quicker. Its in their face and they helped to initiate all of this years ago - I'm talking about the Australia council's ARI category that they category that they came up with themselves category that they came up with themselves, so in a sense they were on the ball back then, so there's been a regression since then. They got it all happening, or they helped support it as it was happening so they were in touch. then in the last couple of years, they've detached themselves from it all out of what they might call necessity - economic necessity through their own funding cuts that have been handed down through government and their own internal restructuring.

So their hasn't been a progressive relationship between the spaces and the funding institutions.

No I don't think there has been. I thought at one stage they were coming on board, but it just seems that they've thought that artists spaces should only do so much for so long - that's it they are projects, it's project mentality. You fund an artists space for a year and then if they are not there next year, that's fine. That implies that they shouldn't be there for the period of time some of us have been running for.

When you set up West Space, did you see it in terms of a time frame at all?

No. We were quite adamant that we wanted to contest the notion that artists spaces were short term and project based.

So you had a sense of going some distance with it.

Yeah. We definitely had a sense that if it was going to make any difference to the art system then we had to be there for awhile and work hard at it.

I wonder if the word 'provisional the opposite to that, is it? Would you see other spaces as just dealing with the situation as it arises, going into non existence out of lack of momentum. Do you see the other spaces as less fixed?

There are advantages in being more fluid and project based, there's no doubt about it. That's part of the health of the art system at the moment, that some of those spaces do set up for that reason, and that seems to be the case with the younger artists coming out of art school, who have been, I suppose, quite influenced by what we have been doing, the fact that we've set up spaces for this period of time, and we can give them support in that way. So there is, as you say, a community that they can enter into, and it makes it a bit easier for them. But at the same time I think they are aware that this isn't going to happen forever and its a time to experiment, play with ideas, and it serves a really good ground for that. then there's other spaces like ourselves who have been doing it for a bit longer and realize that if artists spaces are really going to hold their own in the longer term .

And you think its essential that they stay in there.

Yeah, our position is that we are looking for what we can do next and where we are going. We don't just drift along, we are always asking ourselves, 'What can we do to better our services to artists?'

Obviously that mainly centres around the situation of income and finances. But also creatively, this is the thing with artists spaces, they are incredibly inventive and creative in the way they present things and the way they develop their ideas, so we're always keen to get new projects happening, whether it be publishing of forums, its important to have other projects that give different levels of interest in the organization.

You've got the forums and 'Dialogue' would the next step for West Space be a Multi purpose venue?

Not so much with the function of the gallery space, more to do with information, access and communication. Audiences have a lot to do with this. Which is why, like you've suggested, I put them on, because there is a bit of a crisis of audiences in the visual arts at the moment, so it certainly is about ways of getting information and ideas across beyond the gallery space, and publishing whether it be on the internet, or through magazines and other printed matter is a really useful way of extending those discussions. We've got other projects going too, we've got an exchange project for the Next Wave

Festival going next year that involves artist from all over the world and that's another thing we want to facilitate is links with other artists and in fact other artists spaces. We've got contacts with an artists spaces in Hong Kong.

That seems like it could be quite a rich area to investigate.

Particularly with government policy, they are pushing those sorts of things anyway, so our how is to get some support from the government to create some of these things. there's a whole range of other activities we'd like to engage in; we'd like to initiate projects off side, we feel like we've got the infrastructure and the knowledge to organize projects outside of West Space.

How much time have you got Brett!

Well I've only got so much, but I'm always keen to find people who can help out. And we've got a committee, we've got volunteers to help out. you can find inspired people who are willing to take these projects on as well. It would be nice to have someone to come in to run a project, to use our infrastructure and they run the project off side or whatever, and it fits in well with everyone.

Is there anything else you'd like to say before we finish?

The next year or two will be very crucial to the direction of where artists spaces are going, in terms of the wider changes or non-changes that are happening in the art system. Unless government is willing to support some of these things, things aren't going improve