

MACHINE

MACHINE: What's cooking? public program series
September–October 2021
Contemporary Art Tasmania

Notes #1–#3

What's cooking? was designed to provide a context for discussing topics important to artists now, foster connection and an occasion for artists to **speculate on what could be of value to progress their practice**. Established, mid- and early-career Tasmanian artists participated in each session with the conversation opened up through audience discussion. From this process of enquiry CAT will develop the collective learning program, MACHINE.

Notes from **MACHINE: What's cooking? # 1**

5.30PM 23 September 2021

PROGRAM: Welcome - Kylie Johnson; Introduction - Bill Hart; Presentation - Amanda Davies; Presentation - Mike Singe; Presentation - Loren Kronemyer; Presentation - Joshua Santospirito; Open discussion.

Amanda Davies introduced her self-reflexive painting practice and work in development, focussing on ideas of unease, the body and illness.

What is needed

- Consideration was given to how organizations could provide increased support to artists developing large-scale works over long periods of time. Davies recognised that the creative process can be hindered by the added expectations placed on artists, beyond the making process. Artspace could encourage ambitious projects by increasing support to artists across: art administration (grant writing); networking support; and, teams dedicated to install and production assistance.
- Organisations could further support artists by facilitating skill development programs in arts administration, masterclasses in skill development and assisted residencies.
- Continuing to speculate on residencies, Davies suggested that programs with no expected outcomes may also provide artists with space to 'rest, filter and create'. Opportunities to travel, 'soak up' experiences and to provide space for reflection are valuable to the artistic process, regardless of the quantity of work made.

Mike Singe's practice is informed by the evolving culture and language that has developed in response to the looming environmental disaster. His most recent works span drawing and sculpture.

What is needed

- Singe speculated that beyond financial assistance, the key thing that organisations could assist artists with is time to concentrate on their practice. Artists can usually only dedicate a certain percentage of each week to their art practice, due to other life commitments. Anything that assists in maximising the time available for creative production is helpful.
- Artists have multifaceted practices, operating as both maker and producer. Organisations could support artists by: offering programs to develop practical art-making skills (while conceptual development is important, it currently dominates creative discourse); facilitate networking opportunities by connecting practitioners and service providers; and, reconsider the distribution of limited resources with fewer, and more targeted opportunities for intensive development, rather than micro-development programming.
- Singe suggested that artists and organisations must be brutally honest and clear about the true value that programs are providing. Artists should not apply for things that do not suit their practice. Organisations should consider what the ongoing, tangible value of development programs will be for the specific artists participating. How is it going to help artists, and which artists will it help?

Loren Kronemyer works span objects, interactive and live performance, experimental media art, and large-scale world-building projects aimed at exploring ecological futures and survival skills.

What is needed

- Kronemyer considered the challenge of how artists move forward with large-scale projects in the ongoing Covid landscape, describing her own situation of having multiple projects postponed and the difficulties in trying to stay motivated through Covid-related setbacks.
- Artists would benefit from support with administration. This is important work, but the performance of this should be assisted. There is excitement and support for the final delivery of a project, but not for the administration that allows it to occur. She reasoned that organisations should assist artists to make art, not admin. The role of the artist has become increasingly administration heavy. Less meetings and more emails. Meetings are an uncompensated burden on artists, often with artists the only unpaid people in the room. Meetings take up valuable time and energy that could be better directed toward art.
- Kronemyer described Artist-first Contracting Terms which would allow artists to outline their non-negotiables, including their values (cultural safety values), artist care requirements and logistics (payments in case of cancellation) with all contracts aligning with best practice principles.
- Organisations should be striving to move toward a model that includes an artist wage.
- Trust in the artist is fundamental to building strong artist and organisational relationships - freedom for artists not to be pitching their project every week.

Joshua Santospirito practice includes painting, comics, performance, music, sound and writing and is primarily focused on identity and modern Australia.

What is needed

- Santospirito suggested that comic and graphic novel artists have a lot to offer the contemporary art world and would benefit from more inclusion in contemporary art programs and integration into the broader arts community. In constructing artist development programs organisations could think about how to engage artists who work at the peripheries of contemporary art and work towards fostering new connections between practitioners.
- He spoke about the Comic Art Workshop and his position as director. The Comic Art Workshop is an international group of comic artists, formed to meet a need for critical engagement, feedback and support between artists working in the comic field. The group engages in regular residencies and group workshops and is a reference point for useful development programming.
- Facilitating cross-discipline feedback and critique groups could benefit comic and graphic novel artist. Even simply providing space for these events to occur as artist led occasions would be valuable.

FROM THE DISCUSSION:

The group (presenters and audience) started the discussion by querying if the desire for **more time** was about paid artist time, or if it was about the time administration takes? Are there other mechanisms for organisations to make the artist's time more manageable? There was an acknowledgement that artists are often burdened by increased levels of **administration** around presenting their work in a gallery context. The time an artist spends on administration takes them out of the studio. Is there a way to shift that balance? Administration is part of the professional context but it is labour that is rarely valued or supported with care.

There was conversation on the economy of consuming art. **No more free art.** Would more ticketed occasions or pay per view systems be of benefit to the artist or not? Some consideration was given to the ethics of a Paywall for art system within an artspace context. Audiences often engage with work differently, perhaps in more intense ways if they are required to pay for the experience. There was concern that a pay per view system would adversely impact some audiences and limit who has access to the work. The implementation of a living wage across society was suggested as a broader way of thinking around the issue.

An artist-first contract model would shift the power more equitably towards the artist. Not all organisations clearly state all of the artists responsibilities in contracts. It is important to recognise that there should be no oppositional dynamic between artist and organisation. They are allies. Sessions such as MACHINE: What's Cooking are important in 'doing the work' to grow this trust.

Would work in progress exhibitions and talks be useful? There was an acknowledgement that public progress presentations aren't always helpful. They can provide emotional nourishment during long-term projects but it is often better for this to occur in a **small group context** or in the studio rather than being a public presentation. A group of artists who are heavily invested in each other's work and prepared to rigorously and generously contribute to each other's practice would be the best scenario. Organisation led artist talks are usually formal and provide a 'quick and easy dose' of what the work is, but time and commitment is required for greater engagement. Organisations could do more to support artist groups by fostering solidarity between artists from different areas of practice. It was recognised that it takes time to build trust within groups, but once trust is there, these are valuable spaces for artists. The Comic Art Workshop could act as a model for an ongoing **artist workshop program** and critical feedback sessions as it allows for relationships and investment within each other's work to build over time, in a way that stand-alone artist talks and exhibitions mostly don't. It is also important to facilitate the 'collegial stuff', recognising the value in what happens between artists in a social setting (cafes, studios). In the age of Covid, do we still have the space for this type of engagement?

There was consideration of how different **residency models** can hot-house collegial relationships. Artists gathering for an intensive, collaborative workshop or lab over a few days can also build relationships, trust and investment in the work. Would this type of lab residency be beneficial for emerging artists, who don't necessarily have the same confidence to share their work/ideas? **Artist labs** can be a single day event, or last weeks, with multiple artists thinking collaboratively toward a shared project. Labs can also take the form 'field trips' for artists (from multiple disciplines) and can include people working in areas other than art. The organisation's role in this type of program is to 'keep the artists alive'. The artists are free to participate and collaborate in whichever way they choose, and generate whatever they wish. There is value to **informal gatherings**, and also to formal, structured workshops. Could CAT work in the space between, taking on the role of bringing people together, as a quiet facilitator? Opportunities for artists to have conversation around their work diminishes throughout their career. Recent art school graduates, artist groups and communities have momentum, but this often dissolves with time. Shared studios can be beneficial, but do not suit everyone. Facilitated group sharing and workshopping could fill this gap for mid-career artists, creating space for such conversations to occur.

Notes compiled by Hannah Foley and Kylie Johnson

Notes from **MACHINE: What's cooking? #2** 5.30PM 7 October 2021

PROGRAM: Welcome - Kylie Johnson; Presentation – Pete Mattila; Presentation – Paul Eggins; Presentation – Lucienne Rickard; Presentation - Léuli Eshrāghi; Open discussion.

Industrial blacksmith and artist Pete Mattila, provided examples of his work noting that he often collaborates with practitioners in other fields. Through his work he celebrates complex histories, in art, craft and design as well as in industrial expression.

What is needed

- Teaching and mentoring students and hosting internships at his workshop in nipaluna /Hobart is a significant part of Mattila's practice. In-kind support that offers practical assistance in areas such as accommodation for students or access to a network that can provide in-kind support was identified as areas of need.
- Assistance in developing strategies towards navigating collaborations and advice on the business side of practice would be useful including: administration assistance; web design; information on ticketing events; and, how to access relevant artist specific tax advice.
- The value of studio tours was considered as a potentially useful way of introducing the process of making to other artists and members of the community and to provide a space for collegial learning.

Paul Eggins is interested in how we perceive illegal drugs and their value. His practice spans drawing, painting, sculpture and street art. He also works as an art tradie providing installation assistance.

What is needed

- Eggins spoke about the difficulties in accessing expert perspectives on his work, from artists but also professionals in other fields. Organisations could assist by providing advice on how artists can make connections or provide introductions to art institutions, government organisations, counsellors and health professionals. Knowing what language to use and how to approach institutions and navigate their processes would be of value.
- Help in identifying opportunities to present large-scale work and assistance towards 'pitching' or articulating the value of the work would be of benefit. This includes knowing how to navigate the conservative and risk adverse nature of large institutions.

Lucienne Rickard has spent the last ten years working exclusively in drawing. She works at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) in public drawing. Her recent work, Extinction Studies was a 16-month durational performance drawing project.

What is needed

- Rickard spoke about the importance of artists talking with the public about their work. Working at the TMAG has provided opportunity for conversations with a variety of people. This has been a valuable experience, providing different perspective and prompting her to question how she can push her practice in new ways. Rickard wondered if opening artist studios to the public would provide the same benefits to other artists. Conversely, she reflected on the potential value of studio visits for artists. Organisations could facilitate opportunities for artists to visit other artists' studios as either a small informal groups or as one-on-one meetings.
- Rickard spoke about her experiences in working with institutions like Adrift Lab who have contacts

and resources otherwise inaccessible to artists such as top tier scientists, and how this has been incredibly valuable in progressing her work. Help engaging with institutions like IMAS and setting up relationships with people doing research and PhDs in other fields would be important to many artists interested in interdisciplinary collaboration.

Léuli Eshrāghi is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, curator and researcher living and working between Australia and Canada. They intervene in display territories to centre global Indigenous and Asian diasporic visuality, sensual and spoken languages, and ceremonial-political practices.

What is needed

- Eshrāghi introduced recent projects speaking about ideas of rebirth, reconnecting with ancestors and trans nonbinary representations of sexuality that are not steeped in colonialism and shame. They described living between Mparntwe/Alice Springs and Tiohtià:ke/Montréal and now in nipaluna/ Hobart. As someone who regularly travels Eshrāghi suggested that it would be helpful for art organisations to assist artists navigate cultural protocols and build relationships with respect as they move around different communities.

FROM THE DISCUSSION:

The group (presenters and audience) started the conversation by considering the studio as a place of information exchange. Studios can operate as places of informal critique amongst peers and others. Shared studio environments are a good way for early career artists to learn from more established artists towards sustaining practice and forging relationships. These relationships can lead to new ways of working and create varied opportunities.

The group discussed how people from different areas of inquiry connect. What are the conditions that facilitate diverse connection and where are the spaces for this? CAT could support durational programs that involve curated travel to an event (carpooling), connect artists across generations and with people working in other fields, promote resources sharing, combine art talks with meals and hanging out. This could be as simple as inviting people to occupy the gallery for a day? Meals bring people together, discussing an issue over a meal, creates comfort and allows people to open up. (Salamanca Arts Centre used to put on free dinners and people found this valuable). Organisations could assist by fostering spaces that accommodate different ways of communicating – spaces that don't put people under the spotlight or make them feel pressured – giving more time and space to exchange and conversation. Sometimes the best critique sessions are where people are equally vulnerable – everyone is bringing something to the conversation and are on the same level. This promoted discussion of material versus dematerialised practices and the different needs and frameworks that each require. There was an understanding that for the greatest chance of valuable exchange at group events numbers should be kept low.

The conversation moved to global networking with the group reasoning that in the current Covid, economic and climate crisis conditions this can be a fragile proposition. We need to invest and nurture close knit, local communities and take advantage of what is local instead of looking outwards. On the other hand, some (like Léuli Eshrāghi) have vast communities across countries. There are no safety nets locally for some artists and they are forced to look outwards and seek opportunity elsewhere.

Notes compiled by: Nadia Refaei and Kylie Johnson

Notes from **MACHINE: What's cooking? #3**

5.30PM 28 October 2021

PROGRAM: Welcome - Kylie Johnson; Presentation – Amyris Cauchi, Otis McDermott and Cameron Phillips; Presentation – Grace Gamage; Billie Rankin with Daysi Patel and Pearl Smithies; Presentation – Caleb Nichols-Mansell, Open discussion.

Amyris Cauchi, Otis McDermott and Cameron Phillips are Primal Regression Therapy. Walking the tightrope between art and music, they aim to induce catharsis through drone and dark ambient soundscapes. Primal Regression Therapy opened with a flute, guitar and percussion performance followed by a presentation by Cauchi.

What is needed

- Cauchi spoke about the parallels and differences between traditional forms of art and experimental music, suggesting that the art field is harder to break into than the music scene. Art spaces mostly require lengthy applications and justification for activity. In Cauchi's experience access to live performance venues and events is a much simpler process. She questioned if there could be other frameworks for sound artists to gain presentation opportunities in artspaces?
- Audiences engage with sound work in galleries differently than in bars. Cauchi described how music is often a 'backdrop' to social activity in bars but in galleries live performance is considered in a more focussed way. More music in galleries – Cauchi suggested that sound artists and musicians should have more involvement with art organisations through development and presentation opportunities.

Grace Gamage introduced her art practice through the old Soviet boxing style she teaches and the organic market garden Broom and Brine that she runs with her partner. Through her practice she attempts to adapt to new conditions within capitalism through critique and praxis, and by collaborating with humans and non-humans.

What is needed

- Gamage described the development of Broom and Brine and the extensive research that they share with their clients, the organic market garden community and other interested people, predominantly through their ever-expanding online database. She would like to build the farm by working with different organisations to facilitate the importation of seeds into Tasmania. Consideration was given to the barriers of working with organic material. Support with navigating biosecurity and institutional processes associated with this would be valuable for artists working in this area.
- In discussing future forms of practice, Gamage identified an interest in creating: a performance lecture focussing on the many varieties of spinach; a film on allium diversity directed to Lake Peipus, Europe's largest transboundary lake; and an app to assist small scale farmers in administration of flexible Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms. Gamage considered the difficult terrain of partnering with individuals and institutions to develop these involved works. Assistance with identifying and making connections with individuals and organisations beyond the arts would be of value.

Within their practice Billie Rankin explores affective geographies and place-specific relationships. Working extensively with young people, they employ collaboration and community to foster social practices of attentiveness and care. Billie was joined in conversation by school-aged people Daysi Patel and Pearl Smithies who spoke about what it is like for young people to work in the arts.

What is needed

- Rankin, Patel and Smithies recognised that institutional structures need further development around working with young people reflecting on: the hierarchy of authority and the adult and child power dynamic; needing to be challenged so that young people are afforded more power; bringing young people in as genuine collaborators with autonomy; the frameworks for working with children including the use of appropriate language and topics; and, ensuring that children feel safe in artspace.
- Art made with young people can be exploitative. It is important to think about the value that young people obtain from projects and develop strategies to mitigate this. Smithies suggested that while children should receive payment for their work, the experience of participation is the greatest benefit.
- Patel recognised the value of young people working with adults and the sense of freedom that can come from working together in the arts. This freedom is different between adults and young people, with adults being given more permission for expression and imagination, and young people given more societal or political freedom. She acknowledged that there is a need for more opportunities that are democratic for young participants.

Caleb Nichols-Mansell is a proud Tasmanian Aboriginal man with deep connections to country, family, community, culture, and spirit. Describing himself as a storyteller he spoke of his motivations in founding Blackspace Creative Arts and Cultural Hub in pataway / Burnie, his work as an artist and he touched on his cultural advisor role with DarkLab.

What is needed

- Nichols-Mansell acknowledged that there are not enough artspace dedicated to Tasmanian Aboriginal people. He described the Chosen exhibition, a large community event hosted in 2020 by Nayri Niara in Hobart. It was a week-long event coinciding with the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair. At the conclusion he contacted the artists involved and proposed the idea that became Blackspace Creative Arts. The collective currently represents a broad range of community artists, practices and family groups. Blackspace facilitates skill sharing and collaboration across generations of Aboriginal people. Nichols-Mansell also expressed interested in opportunities for collaboration between different communities, recognising that Aboriginal artists need to be considered as contemporary practitioners.
- In further considering the importance of dedicated Aboriginal artspace, Nichols-Mansell stated that “at the time of invasion, our people were stripped of their power, autonomy, and identity. For two hundred years, we have combatted racism, broken down misconceptions and myths about our culture, country and community as well as fought for a place in this westernised world we find ourselves living in. This space has never existed in the format it currently does, in the past when these spaces have opened up for our mob it has been a back room off the side of a long, lonely corridor. We’ve not taken front and centre and Blackspace is changing this. We are putting our people, our art and our culture in the spotlight whilst also educating and engaging with the broader community.”
- Noting that it currently feels like ‘black is trendy’, he spoke about forms of tokenistic engagement with Aboriginal art and proposed that institutions instead work towards building long-term relationships of value.

The Open discussion scheduled for this program did not occur. In ‘reading the room’ the event convenor considered that on this occasion informal conversation over light refreshments in the CAT courtyard was preferred.

Notes compiled by Nadia Refaei and Kylie Johnson

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