



Arts
north
west

LOOKING
BOTH
WAYS



Arts North West is proud to have developed and facilitated these creative roundtables in the *Looking Both Ways* project.

It is not often that artists are supported to undertake a creative activity that requires no physical outcome. We were delighted to see how the curated pairs worked together and really embraced the process. This activity provided much-needed inspiration and ideation development during the difficult time of the pandemic.

Many of the partnerships will continue to grow in the longer term, and we are certainly looking forward to the collaborative exhibition of Angus Nivison and Sophie Masson, which will be held at New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM) in July 2022.

I would like to thank Rachael Parsons and NERAM for hosting the Creative Roundtables, the artists for enthusiastically taking part in this creative event, and to Michèle Jedlicka for her project management. We also acknowledge the support of Create NSW through its Arts Restart funding.

Caroline Downer, OAM
Executive Director/Curator, *Looking Both Ways*
Arts North West

Looking Both Ways was a study of creative inspiration and the meld of text and image. Artist Angus Nivison and writer Sophie Masson led and facilitated two creative roundtables at the New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM) in early 2021, pairing artists and writers from the New England North West to participate in a skill sharing, collaborative experience, to explore and discuss text and image interplay.

Participant outcomes were new work created to be shared and discussed by the group, and many went on to explore further collaborations beyond the project.

Writers:

Nicole Alexander
Brownwyn Clarke
Trish Donald
Gail Galloway
Fiona McDonald
Helena Pastor
Phillipa Trelford
Rob Waters
Nate Weatherall
Suzie Wicks

Artists:

Gabi Briggs
Leah Bullen
Brent Emerson
Jodie Herden
Lizzie Horne
Maree Kelly
Nadia Kliendanze
James O'Hanlon
Liz Powell
Joanne Stead
Mike Terry



FACILITATORS



ANGUS NIVISON

I was just completely amazed at the quality originality of all the participants. I was not expecting such a consistently high standard.

As far as articulating my creative thinking during the collaborative process, the first word would be, slow. For me it has been a reading and then a rereading of *Ghost Squad*. Then a tentative production of a number of small studies, this coupled with conversations with Sophie, has enabled me to feel a little bit more confident to take a wider, less literal view of the broader issues raised in the novel.

The next step will be the commencement of yet more studies and a longer meeting/conversation. Hopefully this in turn would lead to the commencement of major works.



SOPHIE MASSON

For me, it was a real thrill to discover that Angus was inspired by my novel *The Ghost Squad*, and in turn, the studies he created around it, and its themes and ideas inspired me to take the story further and create a song, 'Forever Never', which would be an important artefact for the sequel of the same name.

Then later, seeing the further studies Angus created around the atmosphere of the novel crystallised for me an unexpected plot element/revelation that has already led to a new understanding of the story world and its possibilities, which I would not have reached without our collaboration. The story continues!

COLLABORATIONS



JODIE HERDEN



The *Looking Both Ways* project has had a profound impact on my creative practice. Not only on a creative level but a personal one. Being able to freely express myself without inhibition and beside a fellow First Nations artist was exhilarating to say the least! The collaborative process was the most important part of the process for me, the open discussions and deep connection to culture was always in the fore front of our minds when creating this piece, *Once Upon a Time, Happily never after...*

Stemmed from the need for us to make non-Indigenous people understand the significance of our connection to country. Each individual being, the wind, the sky, the river, the trees, the moon, the stars all have their own story! Our story was made up from a multitude of stories, we hoped to capture just a brief snippet of our stories.

My hope was that the audience could see that, First Nations Peoples story, my story, your story, their story, does not begin or end just when you read the first or last chapter of a book. Therefore, the concept of *Once upon a time, Happily never after...* was born!

& ROB WATERS



BRONWYN CLARKE

My discussions with textile artist Liz Powell at the *Looking Both Ways* program came at a point of low creative energy for me and were inspiring and energising. We share many common interests, particularly as textiles and historic costume are a second creative interest for me in addition to writing. Although we have not produced specific work as part of the project, our discussions generated many ideas, and there is a possibility of collaboration in the future.

The highlight of the workshop for me was taking the time to value and nurture my creativity, and being with other creative people. My creative work has taken place in isolation for so long, overshadowed by non-creative work to earn a living, that my spirit was starved for affirmation and inspiration. The workshops gave me that and more, and I am grateful for the opportunity, the energy, and the ideas.



& LIZ POWELL

My practice often relies on research into various histories so in that respect *Looking Both Ways* was a comfortable fit as my partner was a writer of historically backgrounded fiction. However, I don't normally use historical costuming as the basis for developing work. Wearables I have done in the past have always been in collaboration with people who are more knowledgeable about getting things to fit the human form and have generally been entirely invented. Working with the idea of a historical garment form as a symbol and as the initiating idea is a new way of beginning for me.

I think there were a couple of highlights for me. The first was that 'ca-ching' moment when Bron and I realized that we both had a deep interest in history and also background with 19th Imperial history and the Industrial Revolution, as well as an interest in wearables. The second day when teams presented their ideas in such a great variety of formats and directions of ideas was also very exciting to be part of.

SUZIE WICKS & GABI BRIGGS

I had the pleasure of getting to know Gabi Briggs for the *Looking Both Ways* project. Gabi is whip-smart, a big thinker and highly creative. We got together and couldn't stop talking. Our conversations ranged across topics from the zeitgeist of our times; power, racism, Black Lives Matter, to home-grown tomatoes and the love of dogs. True collaboration assumes many things and often a shared history.

While Gabi and I both have curly hair our life experiences have been vastly different, and real collaboration across such an uneven playing field takes time. We remain in touch, sharing ideas, books and vegies from the garden. If something comes together, it will be a slow boil, and like most slow cooked events, will be richer and more flavoursome for it. I've offered my assistance for Gabi on her many projects into the future. And she has offered the same. The mantra: committed to a process while unattached to an outcome.



MAREE KELLY

I very much enjoyed being part of the *Looking Both Ways* project. For many artists, our creative process is often solitary in nature and, for me, the collaborative experience and networking opportunity were important for professional development in my creative practice. I was greatly inspired by the other artists and writers involved, and it was a fantastic opportunity to meet and discuss ideas with other creatives from within the region.

Process: Inspired by stories of my great grandmother's early life at Cuttabri (near Pilliga) in the early 1900s, I developed new work exploring the idea of echoes from the people of the past within the landscape. I created a series of photographs based on old photos of my great grandmother and the area where she and her family once lived and developed this concept further with a small painting based on the same theme. My great grandmother Linda was born in 1901, and my daughter Darcy, who was my model, was born 100 years later. I loved this connection and the continuation of the family story through art.



& HELENA PASTOR

Being part of *Looking Both Ways* was a wonderful experience for me. I was paired with Gunnedah artist Maree Kelly, and we established a really good connection within minutes. At our first meeting, Maree told me about her fascinating family history on the North West Plains, and we soon agreed that selected stories from this family history would be the focus of our collaborative work together.

I'm planning a two-week research trip through Narrabri and the Pilliga Forest to inform my work with Maree, and I'm excited about where this project is going to take me. What I particularly enjoyed about *Looking Both Ways* (apart from meeting Maree) was the opportunity to hear back from the other artists about their creative processes. Illuminating and inspirational!

NATE WEATHERALL & BRENT EMERSON



NADIA KLIENDANZE

I looked forward to this opportunity to work with a writer and collaborate on a joint project. Initially, it was a little challenging. However, we soon connected and started brainstorming ideas. The collaboration resulted in both artworks and poetry that was completely unexpected and took on a life of its own. My art practice has evolved in a totally different direction and has inspired me to make a lot more work.



& GAIL GALLOWAY

Writing is a solitary process, so to be suddenly presented with a creative partner proved most invigorating. On being paired with artist Nadia Kliendanze, our first conversation soon ignited lots of ideas, so I would describe my approach to the process, more as a combustion than an approach.

Rather quickly we established common ground in conversation and in sharing examples of our practice: Nadia's paintings and prints via her website while I offered *Crow Speak*, my recently published poetry book. Themes of nature and landscape linked us both. For me, it was important to know what fuelled her work, to know the essence, her emotive drivers. So I asked what made her blood boil? Her response –women's inequality, revealed political and ecological issues percolate below the surface for us both. A conversation about women, witches, and herbs ensued as she expressed interest in the book of non-fiction I am completing.

My mind leaped at ways to apply these themes (words and art with a sculptural element) to the domestic objects, ceramics Nadia was also creating at the time. To serve as inspiration for her art. I saw my role as providing some specimens, (herbs to dye for) useful information, coded in poetry. Small gifts of found objects and verse, as recipes or instructions to the artist.

In a short time we had a list of ideas to work through, short-term goals and a method of sharing results back and forth. She was itching to get on with painting and I was loaded with potential that would take me to unexpected new places. Nadia aims to contribute some large paintings to my *Crow Speak* exhibition, with art-based on poems from the book, based at The Makers Shed.

JAMES O' HANLON

I really appreciated that the workshop organisers were very deliberate with who they paired to work together. Knowing that my partner and I had similar creative practices and sensitivities meant that we could hit the ground running and get to work very quickly on a project that we both were very enthusiastic about.

Also, since we were building ideas from a place of commonality it meant that I could approach the project thinking about what is unique about myself as a creator, and how I can bring these strengths to the project. The effective pairing of creatives showed that the workshop organisers had a great understanding of each individual's work practice, and cared about making the workshop a practical and beneficial experience for everyone.



& FIONA McDONALD

Meeting with James O'Hanlon was going to happen sooner or later. We are both artists and writers who have painted murals in the Armidale Library. We have both been recipients of micro grants for writing. We are both interested in illustration. What better introduction to James than to be paired up with him at the *Looking Both Ways* workshop?

We began our brainstorming for the project by looking at James' recent work for a children's book. He also showed me some of his steampunk designs and that was when the thought came to us that we could do a graphic novel. James said he would like to do something a bit like *Dragonology*, and I thought this was a fun idea. The ideas flowed back and forth easily as we began building a world for our jointly inspired protagonist to document in a journal. I felt the work needed an overarching narrative and we discussed more ideas about that. James began sketching his ideas and started nutting out the story. We each agreed to try to work on something between the workshops.

I sent James a fleshed-out plot and an introduction and some sample journal entries. James responded with his character drawings and a completed double page spread. James and I are both keen to continue with our graphic novel and are meeting up to discuss further plans.

TRISH DONALD

I thoroughly enjoyed this experience. It was fascinating to learn about other people's creative practice. The presentations were so interesting, such diverse and rich works and I felt like I was part of something very special. I hope there will be opportunities like this in the future.



& MIKE KELLY



I found the *Looking Both Ways* workshops an excellent example of how valuable even the least imposing structure and lightest caveat of accountability can give shape to ideas that for one reason or another have yet to progress past a sketch in a notebook, a few prompts written on the back of something else, or in any other stage of germination.

Very quickly Trish and I exchanged ideas on place, belonging and commitment and brought a visual fragment existing only in sketch form, forward into something tangible.

For as much as I might think about my visual practice independently, it is incredible how few new thoughts or interpretations arise. In addition to actually creating a project together, I encountered a new language for understanding and speaking on my work from the exchange. Specifically it was a suggestion from my partner Trish to add layers to the piece and represent the development of lived experience in a specific place. This revealed the role and potential of temporality in collage art. A very thrilling idea, yet one so easy to overlook when working in something eventually fixed in two dimensions. I am very grateful to be invited to open up and glean something to influence how I think about collage and my work going forward. Without the structure of an exercise like *Looking Both Ways*, I know myself enough to be confident I would have most likely remained in the same set of predictable and regrettably closed patterns when thinking about my work.

NICOLE ALEXANDER

Due to my work commitments, I sent Leah a selection of previously published poetry. She chose a piece called *Elysian Fields*. The poem was based on a visit to Sydney's North Head cemetery.

The cemetery was established in the 1880s near the Quarantine Station and the souls interred there include sufferers of typhoid, bubonic plague and other diseases. You would think it to be a very sad place however the cemetery was wild and overgrown and has marvelous views overlooking the ocean and the tranquility I felt while walking among the gravestones was quite extraordinary. I could hear elephants trumpeting. The wind carrying the noise from Taronga Park Zoo. I was drawn by both the melancholy and beauty of the place and was conscious of those laying beneath having fought a brave battle and being deserving of their rest.



& LEAH BULLEN

I don't regularly make artwork in direct response to writing, so *Looking Both Ways* was a unique opportunity to challenge the regular habits and methodologies of my studio practice. The outcomes though unexpected, were a welcome expansion to my approaches in the studio. I can see these works as a starting point for new work and further development.

PHILLIPA TRELFORD, JOANNE STEAD, & LIZZIE HORNE

PHILLIPA TRELFORD

This project has been a great 'kick-start' for refreshing my writing practice through conversations and collaboration with other creative professionals. Drafting poetry in response to artworks in various forms has been integral to my recent practice and I was greatly inspired by the exchange of ideas flowing into words and imagery while crafting new work alongside two wonderful artists. So much skill and talent was evident in the room when each group gave workshop presentations about their collaborations.



JOANNE STEAD

I loved being involved with this project. It was fantastic to meet so many creatives working across different mediums and genres, and to have the opportunity to be inspired by the way that they worked together, the topics that they explored and how they approached the collaboration. I found so much value to take away from that.

Within my trio, I really loved the opportunity to meet Lizzie and Phillipa and to get a glimpse into their styles and work. It was fascinating that having not known of each other before (Lizzie and Phillipa knew each other, but I didn't know them) we found so much in common in our work, the topics concerning us and how the reporting of these topics was affecting us. We had a lot of fun together, and I thank them for being so open and joyful in what they shared over the month's collaboration - it made it such a wonderful project.

I responded to one of Phillipa's short poems, after she wrote three based on our conversations on the first day. I found a lot of imagery embedded in the poem and the painting I created reflected that imagery, and the imagery that developed in my mind as I read the poem. I also created a painting for Lizzie to respond to, and in creating the painting I tried to capture a number of aspects of the issue, creating a layered meaning to give Lizzie more scope for interpretation.



& LIZZIE HORNE

Looking Both Ways was the perfect pandemic antidote for me, bringing me into contact with other creatives and re-activating the creative problem-solving side of my brain in a social context with an imperative to act! As part of a trio rather than a pair, the challenge was to both provide a visual stimulus for one person to take up, and to respond to another person's work in writing.

Group discussions around shared interests and concerns sent me back to a body of work on paper that I had prepared for exhibition in 2020 and which I had had the intention of expanding into sculpture, but had not yet tackled. The enthusiasm of my group was such that I dove head-long into the project in order to try to meet their expectations, and in the process made the vital next leap into my sculptural project.

In the first week I gave Phillipa a mock-up of my intended sculpture based on a cut-out and re-configuration of an old etching, both to give her time to respond before the final workshop, and to give myself a guide as to how to proceed. Having given Phillipa her visual stimulus, I probably didn't need to do any more, but for me the whole point was to get going, and because I now knew what to do next, I was able to progress the sculpture based on the mock-up beyond a point that I would normally expect in such a short time frame. Wonderful! This has in fact led to the possibility of a mentorship with a renowned sculptor to take this much, much further.

As for the written piece responding to Jo's honeyeater painting, I took my cues directly from her bird with headphones and sky filled with music to a piece with a strong beat based on the idea that as a society we pick up the vibe around us. Rap, which is not my normal written genre, came seemingly all by itself, a perfect vehicle for the rhythm and the social concerns that the group had voiced and which were in line with my own concerns and exploration. It was pure pleasure to perform this poem to an attentive and receptive audience of creatives who totally got it!





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