

1 1<sup>ST</sup> DRAFT TRANSCRIPT

3 **RECORDING:** NCCA Artist talks

4 INTERVIEWEES: Annee Miron, Michelle Culpitt, and Brittany Jones

5 MINUTES TRANSCRIBED: 24min: 38sec

6 REF: NCCA Artist talks

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10 *Note 2 I indicates the speaker is the interviewer, Maurice O'Riordan*

11 *A indicates the speaker is participant, Annee Miron*

12 *M indicates the speaker is participant, Michelle Culpitt*

13 *B indicates the speaker is participant, Brittany Jones*

15 *TRANSCRIPT:*

16 *0:00:00*

17 I [To gallery visitors] You're wandering around and you can zone in and out as  
18 you wish. And Michelle is thankfully recording. We did forget to mention at  
19 the opening last night of course that we are in Larakia country which  
20 stretches, takes in Darwin and stretches over to the Cox Peninsular so it's  
21 quite a big area of freshwater and saltwater country. Please have a seat if you  
22 wish, we won't mind if you get up half-way through and we are going to try  
23 and keep it fairly compact because Michelle's phone only has so much battery  
24 life. How about we start with Annee who has produced this amazing  
25 sculptural installation from cardboard over the week of gallery installation,  
26 but had done some planning before then and has worked with cardboard for a  
27 number of years. So what people may not know about this work, which is  
28 called *Time borrowed*, is I guess the sourcing of the cardboard and how that  
29 relates to your concepts behind the work. So can you just talk a bit about your  
30 approach to working with cardboard and in particular how that is expressed in  
31 this work.

32 A Yes, so I started working with cardboard initially just as a support material to  
33 set up things in my studio to look at, and gathered up cardboard in the streets

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34 to do that but then I had some residencies in Paris and Rome, and they both  
35 relate a bit, but I decided to use cardboard as the main material because it's so  
36 easy to find and you don't have to worry about disposing of it when you're  
37 done and I could do some experiments with it in the studio. But the first  
38 cardboard I picked up on had somebody's imprint on it because somebody had  
39 been in it sleeping so that's when I was in Paris, and I sort of connected with  
40 cardboard.

41 I So you stole someone's bed?

42 A No, I put it back.

43 M You *borrowed* someone's bed.

44 A I went, 'Oh no, that's somebody's bed', yeah. So, I made sure I checked each  
45 carton I picked up then that it wasn't already in use. Stealing it from under the  
46 homeless – no, I wasn't doing that.

47 I How do you know? Art's more important.

48 A No. And then I went to Rome and I was going into the undergrounds,  
49 basically roaming a lot ... being like an underground space here too but I got  
50 really interested in the clay amphora in Rome, the vessels of trade from more  
51 than 2000 years ago. They're from their colonies in North Africa, they're the  
52 big round ones that you might see still in the garden walls. And then they were  
53 a long narrow form which is the North African form. And they're all, there's a  
54 big hill in Rome which is the eighth hill of Rome and it's made of the vessels  
55 from around 2000 years ago, they used to bring the food, like olives and oils  
56 and ... and things into Rome, decant it on the side of the river, break the  
57 vessels and then stack them. And that has created the hundred by hundred by  
58 sixty metre hill in Rome but now trees grow out of them. There's an  
59 archaeological team from Spain who've been working there for over 20 years  
60 because each one is marked with where it was from, where it was going to and  
61 what it was carrying and how much, and so I see the cardboard boxes, then I  
62 made the connection, they're like the contemporary amphora of today because  
63 they tell us a lot about our relationships to the world and also what we  
64 consume as a society too, because everything pretty much at some stage

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65 comes in a cardboard box. So that's where I've bought some cartons from  
66 Melbourne but I also collected cartons from Darwin to tell us something about  
67 Darwin, they were fridge boxes and air conditioner boxes, and yeah. So it's ...

68 I Has weaving always been a central part of your work even before working  
69 with cardboard or is that a sort of synchronous development?

70 A It's a little bit synchronous. I've done weaving in the past but I really from  
71 when I was an undergraduate I always wanted to develop works but didn't use  
72 a lot of glues and screws and really macho kind of construction techniques  
73 and I was always looking for the material to support itself as much as it could  
74 and ways to do that. And I guess 20 years later I've come to weaving and  
75 knotting as construction techniques and they're very age-old but they're  
76 actually a way to build things.

77 I During the week you also mentioned because Annee works as an occupational  
78 therapist as well, that was your first profession, and is still is your profession  
79 as well.

80 A Yeah.

81 I But in a sense your first taste of weaving as a technique came through with the  
82 course work for occupational therapy.

83 A Yeah.

84 I But is that just a broad coincidence, it didn't spark a desire then to develop  
85 into weaving?

86 A Yeah, I studied occupational therapy quite a while ago and in the time when  
87 we still did basket weaving as part of the undergraduate course, and so I  
88 actually got to learn some of those skills in weaving and so that probably  
89 made it a very approachable skill, and I knew in the back of my mind that it  
90 was a way to build something that takes different forms. So I guess that  
91 information was there but I don't make a direct link really but it certainly  
92 opened that door for me to use it as a technique as I already had some skill in  
93 it.

94 I And you definitely, I mean, you see yourself as a sculptor not a weaver as  
95 such?

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96 A Yeah, I'm much more from that fine art perspective I guess in my approach to  
97 what I build, and yeah, it's just that I've gone back to those old craft  
98 techniques like weaving and knotting and I've just done a residency in  
99 partnership with craft ACT as well so that part is coming out in my work.

100 I Can you talk a bit about that residency?

101 A Yeah, and that's probably influenced this work a little bit too. Everything  
102 comes through when you make something I guess. So that residency was in  
103 partnership with Craft ACT, the National Parks in the ACT, and the National  
104 Botanic Gardens and it was looking at the environmental protection of the  
105 Alpine bogs and ferns, so I spent a month living out bush and then two weeks  
106 at the National Botanic Gardens working with the rangers and the research  
107 scientists and people there. So part of this, you've got the underground from  
108 Rome, the cartons from Paris, and you've got the yabbie burrows from the  
109 bogs and ferns inside. So this is to me like the surface of the earth kind of  
110 thing and then when you go under you're actually under the ground.

111 I Where did you say the yabbie's from?

112 A The yabbie burrows are there [points to sculpture]. They're from the Alpine  
113 bogs. There's yabbie burrows.

114 I They have yabbies there?

115 A Yeah, and freshwater crayfish also burrow into the bogs. The ranger put his  
116 arm down trying to reach the bottom of the burrow and didn't make it.

117 I We are trying to keep it nice short and sweet, and so I'll just move over to  
118 Michelle, who has produced a body of photographs under the name of *The*  
119 *Nightcliff series*, which coincidentally enough, the works were taken in  
120 Nightcliff, and you live in the area. Do you see that as quite autobiographical  
121 in that sense?

122 M Well, yes. It's charting a ... It's meant to have a narrative and it's charting a  
123 journey that I take almost every morning pre-dawn along the Nightcliff  
124 foreshore and started doing this after moving up from Alice Springs to Darwin  
125 last July, but then I went away for a few months and I came back when it was  
126 really, really hot in the build up and this time of day, around 5am, is around

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127 the best time to be doing exercise or out walking when the temperature drops,  
128 that drop of temperature just before the sun comes up when it's really cool and  
129 when the sky is really, navy blue, really dark, and the street lights are still on,  
130 and, yeah, it is kind of a walking meditation and a way of moving back to  
131 Darwin and considering where I am, what am I doing, walking down there  
132 every morning, and it's interesting that they have come across quite ... that  
133 they are very dark. Dark images, and obviously they're dark because it's the  
134 available light but I don't think it's a romantic sort of darkness, and while I  
135 was putting this body together I was doing a painting course with Sarah Pirrie  
136 out at Charles Darwin Uni and she was showing me a lot of work by Clarice  
137 Beckett and Louise Hearman, and Clarice Beckett was an Australian painter in  
138 the ...

139 I Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century?

140 M Yeah, and she was sort of recently rediscovered and this was the time of  
141 morning that she went walking around the streets of Sydney, and her paintings  
142 are of this pre-dawn time as well. And then Louise Hearman, her dark surreal  
143 landscapes and well, so that's what sort of brought together, as well as  
144 walking along Nightcliff.

145 I Can you comment on two aspects of the work: one is, there is quite a strong  
146 and deliberate connection to cinema. And also I guess when you think of both  
147 yours and Annee's works in the overall context of the burrow, I guess it seems  
148 to me that you've taken the darker side of what burrows could imply  
149 psychologically as an interior space. Could you just elaborate on the cinematic  
150 and the kind of dark psychology bit, in two sentences, thank you.

151 M Dark psychology of cinema. I do ... one of my favourite film directors is  
152 David Lynch and films like *Blue Velvet* and what's behind the white picket  
153 fence, what's behind the curtains, what's behind the veil of darkness, and  
154 they're also that idea of that you, and it is that idea of the burrow, and that you  
155 head into that dark space that's transformative and which is also what  
156 photography is about transforming light or dark into an image. And, yeah,  
157 cinema I suppose it's the implication of the narrative. I studied in media arts,

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158 studied film and cinema, I can relate to a lot of the work that's on in there [in  
159 the Screen Room, showing *Unco* compilation of Australian video work] ...  
160 And I like the way that you can go and watch some of those works in there  
161 and maybe see some of those video works, and I'll keep saying some of those  
162 characters in there maybe inhabit these dark places. And looking at a lot of,  
163 been watching Chris Marker's films again recently and the way he took still  
164 photographs and made films like *La Jetee*, the title of that one [points to one  
165 of her photographs]. What was the second question?

166 I I guess you've kind of answered them already. Just the sense of burrow as a  
167 dark psychology – not that Annee's work is light but it's just a different mood  
168 entirely I think to your interpretation of the burrow with these photographs.

169 M You do get, well, it can be a dark place and people do get caught in their  
170 burrow. I think I was getting out of my Alice Spring's burrow.

171 I On that, because Michelle has come back to her practice from initial studies in  
172 formal art training and then doing other stuff and coming ... kind of always  
173 keeping an interest in practice but now in the last few years, kind of  
174 optimising opportunities to develop and show work. But, I mean, it's not  
175 necessarily about being in Darwin that has helped to relaunch your practice?  
176 It's not so much about, I guess, Darwin as a place feeding that?

177 M I think it must be because I did make work when I was in Alice Springs but  
178 was very busy with my day job and study but ... and that's why I say like  
179 taking these pre-dawn photos, it is obviously the environment and the  
180 landscape is inspiring because I've done the body of work over at Tactile Arts  
181 and then this body of work which sort of is juxtaposed with the other one  
182 which is all about being out in the sun and responding to nature that way,  
183 whereas this is sort of a darker side of that. But it is all about how I'm  
184 framing nature, how I'm framing being here in Darwin, how I'm responding  
185 to place and then I suppose these, I don't know in terms of showing work, I  
186 suppose, I've got more opportunities in Darwin to do that, I'm not sure.

187 I Actually as part of Michelle's original proposal there's also an aspect of  
188 developing bichromate prints and what was the other one, the photogravure.

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189 M Photogravure.

190 I Which you still have been doing.

191 M Yes.

192 I And in a way I can see the need not to include those in this context. Will we  
193 be seeing those at some point do you think?

194 M Yeah, I'm doing the gum bichromate which is early 1860s way of making  
195 colour photographs where you mix pigments with gum, gum Arabic, and you  
196 add a bichromate to make it light sensitive and with the colour separation you  
197 build up the pigments colour by colour. I'm doing a series of those that will  
198 be at the NT Library in August, it will open 5 August. And I've got old  
199 photos that were taken by Captain Sweet who was one of the first people to  
200 take photographs in Darwin and he took very sort of romantic, lush wet-plate  
201 photographs of the environment of the jungle. And I will juxtapose  
202 contemporary photos but using a historic photographic process from the same  
203 period that he was working, of the jungle behind Tactile Arts, and other  
204 environments.

205 I We look forward to that. Thanks, Michelle. And we're just moving now to  
206 Brittany Jones who is a Darwin-based artist, originally from Florida but spent  
207 a lot of time in and now calls Melbourne kind of home and Darwin as well.  
208 But I guess looking at Michelle's work, they are shots taken of a local  
209 landscape with a particular view to the burrow metaphor, but for me there's  
210 also that tension, the nature/culture sort of tension which is also a strong part  
211 of Brittany's work, and for this body of work there's a totally kind of new  
212 direction for you. We had a wood turner actually come in this morning so he  
213 was praising you for your work with wood. Can you just sort of tell us a bit  
214 about the processes and challenges in grappling with a new medium.

215 B Yep. So my background is fine arts and I'm currently working as a graphic  
216 designer but, yeah, I come from a painting background and do a lot of print  
217 making and photography as well, and as far as wood burning, I don't know  
218 how it is here but in the States it's a really common craft activity for kids. So  
219 I did it as a kid, obviously not on this level, and then left it to, I don't know

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220 20-odd years. And then when I picked it up again really two or three years  
221 ago, it was part of a project for a graphic design course I was doing and then,  
222 yeah, really fell in love with it again, and wanted to incorporate it into the  
223 knowledge and background that I have now in graphic design. But I've only  
224 ever worked with milled wood until this project and then when I'm moving  
225 up from Melbourne I was just immediately blown away by the nature and  
226 foliage in Darwin that I've just never seen anything like it, and the geometry  
227 that's in nature, which is everywhere but it was just so apparent in the foliage  
228 up here from the way pandanus leaves, you can actually see the structure, and  
229 there's certain palm trees that have corkscrew spirals around them, and you  
230 can actually see how it all fits together. So that really got me wanting to see if  
231 I could work with just raw wood. And I had an idea in my head of the kind of  
232 wood I wanted and it was all going to be very structured and I had it all  
233 planned out and just the way things worked it was almost impossible to get  
234 the kind of wood that I wanted so you just sort of take what you can get, and  
235 that actually really informed the way that all the pieces turned out because  
236 I've had to adjust my ideas for each piece of wood that came to me. As far as  
237 challenges, yeah, I've learned how to plane wood and sand properly and I'd  
238 never worked with metal either so that was definitely one of the challenges.  
239 You know humidity and tarnishing and all those sorts of things that never,  
240 yeah. The whole thing was very much an experiment I think. And some  
241 things worked very well and some I had to adjust my way of working to make  
242 it work. But I've really just always loved the textures in wood and the  
243 patterns in wood.

244 I Thanks, Brittany. The other thing was that actually that same guy was very  
245 impressed with I think the wood burning or poker-work, and I think with the  
246 sort of refinement. Is that ... I kind of explained to him that in your painting  
247 practice you must have a very steady hand ... because Brittany has a portrait  
248 painting practice or background with a nod to realism, so was that just your  
249 very steady hand or ...?

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250 B It's also you can buy really cheap wood burners and give a sort of certain look  
251 but with this exhibition, I splashed out and got a nice wood burner and. So  
252 there's different nibs that you can get that can give you ... some of them are  
253 almost like a knife and they really actually sort of cut into the wood so it's ...  
254 but you do have to have a steady hand as well but, yeah, I've always been  
255 very detail oriented not just in my artwork but I think in life in general I tend  
256 to focus on the minute. So, yeah, I have the patience to sit there and go  
257 steadily enough to give the straight lines.

258 I Also this body of work represented Brittany's first solo show. So I guess does  
259 it give you kind of good food for ... do you think you'll focus on working  
260 with wood and metal in the way that you sort of developed through this, or  
261 continue that, or ...?

262 B Yeah, like I'd been doing wood working, wood burning for a couple of years  
263 now and it's certainly something I want to continue and I've already sort of  
264 got ideas for the next exhibition in my head and I've collected pieces of wood  
265 that are more what I had imagined initially, so, yeah, it's definitely something  
266 that I want to continue but also with that continue my painting practice as  
267 well because that's my first love, that's what I've done my whole life really.  
268 And continue to work as a graphic designer as well, that's my day job. But  
269 it's been really interesting for me approaching this with the design knowledge  
270 that I have now that I was never interested in design as a kid, I was always, 'I  
271 want to work with my hands'. But in terms of making money, it sort of  
272 changes what you love. And so it was really nice to make these illustrations,  
273 these patterns in the program Illustrator, on a computer, and then bring it into  
274 the physical world and, you know. real time and combine the digital with my  
275 need to make handmade things that you can actually touch and feel. That was  
276 part of the pattern that I wanted to do it with all the different layers as well.  
277 It's actually a really tactile experience and I want the viewer to want to touch  
278 the pieces and so the wood burning really is one layer; it sort of creates a  
279 groove or a crevice and then you've got the smooth wood and then with the  
280 two different kinds of acrylic, either matte or gloss, they've both very

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281 different textures, and you've got the metal on top of that because I really  
282 wanted there to be a multilayered ... that you could actually feel the patterns.

283 I Thanks again, Brittany. And Brittany is on the look-out for subjects for her  
284 next Archibald entries so if anyone has suggestions.

285 B Thank you.

286 I But otherwise we might wrap it up there so thanks for the listeners and the  
287 other people who've made it here and wandered off and thanks mainly to the  
288 artists and it's great, I guess when we're talking about this digital influence  
289 with your very handmade work, Brittany, it did remind me of this  
290 collaborative work as well with Annee and Michelle, where the digital and  
291 handmade is a strong kind of underlying process as well. So thanks again.  
292 (Applause)

293 *End of Recording at 00:24:38*

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