



big
trouble

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Blood Sport

with Tarryn Gill

by Naima Morelli

IT IS A MATTER OF FACT THAT SPORT in Australia is something serious. It's so serious that the Stadium of Queensland decided to screen Tarryn Gill and Pilar Mata Dupont's awarded video *Gymnasium* – featuring blithe athletes exhibiting in different disciplines – at the opening of a football match. “It's quite funny, because our video is about sport, but it's quite subversive,” says Tarryn Gill, chuckling. “We used the fascist propaganda aesthetic to make fun of the cult of the heroic Australian athlete. We find it ironic and hilarious that they screened it at a football stadium to a normal football crowd.”

For the past twelve years Tarryn Gill has challenged the boundaries of visual art together with her partner-in-art, Pilar Mata Dupont. Their work investigates nationalism, sport, history, cultural propaganda and gender stereotypes. Their range of media spans from installation to choreography and music theatre. The aesthetic of the duo, which is immediately recognizable, is nurtured by Australian popular culture, Hollywood glamour and social realism. I met Tarryn Gill at her headquarters in Perth, WA, asking her how the collaboration with Pilar Mata Dupont started.

T.G. We started working together at Uni. Our graduation project was collaborative and after that we just started working together. In 2006 we were dedicating ourselves to art full-time.



Photo of the artists by Kim Tran - <http://www.tarrynandpilar.com/>



You have a very specific aesthetic. Did you and Pilar build it consciously together?

T.G. We built it together over the years. Pilar and I have complementary backgrounds. She is a music and theatre performer, I'm a dancer and we are both interested in theatre and music theatre. So I guess we got along at Uni because of this shared interests. We were always very excited about the same kitschy and theatrical things...

Your work is complex and includes different skills, like the creation of a concept, costume design, photography etc. How do you divide the tasks?

T.G. It depends on the project, and we decide according on how much time we individually have to give. I'm usually the one doing props and costumes because I like to do things with my hands. I'm also a dancer so I often work to choreographies. In general we take turns, there are no clear roles.

Usually what is your approach to a project? Working in two is different from working as a solo artist. You need to have a lot of communication since the beginning.

T.G. We start with a concept for a show or for a particular exhibition. And then we just debate about what medium will best convey the message that we get across. Do we want to show photographs? Do we think the concept would be best captured in film?

From 2004 to 2008 you worked at Heart of Gold Projects. How was this project born?

T.G. The way Heart of Gold Projects began is actually through a project called *Heart of Gold*, that we worked in with Thea Constantino. In 2004 we decided we wanted to produce this music theatre show and Thea began to work on the script and Pilar and I were set designers. The two of us started the project as a mean of developing visual research for the show, and then it just come to his own life. The first project was designed to be fictional propaganda for Australia. We started with photography, then performance and then we moving into video from there.

You founded Hold Your Horses together with Thea Costantino, Tarryn Gill and Pilar Mata Dupont. Your objective is to initiate new projects which contribute to the vibrancy of Australian creative culture while facilitating collaboration between artists from a range of disciplines. How is it going so far?

T.G. Initially we formed Hold Your Horses to produce *Heart of Gold*, the music theatre show. That was a huge undertaking for us, it's something that none of us has ever done before. It took us a lot of time to get to the

point where we were ready to show the work, and also to convince the funding body that three artists were capable to produce a music theatre show. Since then we have made visual artworks, but again all of them have involved performers. We made *The Soloist* video at the Freemantle Art Centre, and last year we made a photographic exhibition ... All of the projects by Hold Your Horses require a great number of collaborators. For *The Soloist* we worked with forty different locations, we did a lot of photographs and so we needed the support of the arts academy.

Perth is one of the most isolated cities in the world. Do you think that is difficult for an artist to live and work here?

T.G. I think it's probably easier, because we have such a big network here. We have been doing art for so long, so in Perth we know all the dancers, designers, costume makers. The problem is if you have to do a project in a new city. The only thing with Perth is that art in general is not seen as very integrated with the society and it's not really supported by the general public.

How has living in Perth influenced your work?

T.G. I don't know if the influence is in the content of my work or the way my work is made. I feel the influence of being in Australia, certainly. I think living in Perth means having the support of the community that helps you to stay motivated. The community is quite close and everyone is very supportive.

Whereabouts in the city does the community gather?

T.G. I'd say it's Northbridge, where PICA (The Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts) is. Also the Blue Room Theatre, the State Theatre, the small galleries and the artists run spaces are in that area. That's the centre for me. Fremantle is another centre.

In your experience is it easy for an artist to build an international reputation starting from Perth?

T.G. Internationally I think it's hard, no matters where you live in Australia. The hardest thing is transportation of your work, because in Perth it's far from everywhere else, so it's expensive. That's a negative aspect. And also it's a long way to fly anywhere. I did little bit of travelling in the last few years and I really feel that extra distance.

Is there something that Perth could do to improve the art environment?

T.G. There always could be more funding for the arts and it would be good if there would be more artist run spaces right in the city. I personally feel supported by the art community here, I don't feel the need to search for more opportunities elsewhere.



