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## No One Ever Leaves For Good: Australian Artists Making It Internationally

May 7, 2015 By Naima Morelli

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It's a known fact that Australian contemporary art doesn't receive the recognition it deserves.

Australian artists are aware of the international art scene through publications and the Internet, and yet it's difficult for them to make an impact on a global level. While some artists are not willing to give up on what Australia has to offer, others are lured by the idea of a move overseas.

What frustrates artists in the first place is the fact that the international art world often ignores the Australian art scene. Go and ask art people what they think of Australian art in New York, London or Rome and you'll find that some associate it solely with Aboriginal art. Others might have heard of the MONA, but they don't know about the rest of the country.

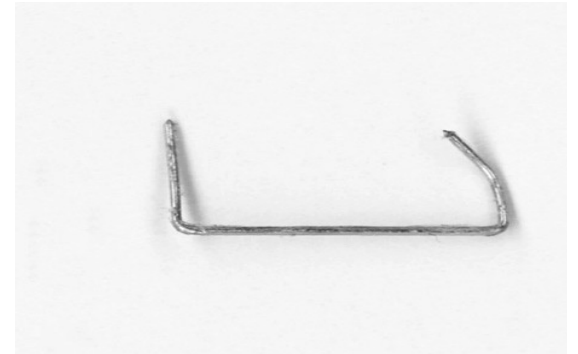
"The quality of Aussie art is really high and better than a lot of things I have seen overseas. But nothing really has been done to put Australian art over there," says artist Georgina Lee.

Georgina is based in Melbourne, but she makes sure to keep up with the international scene by travelling regularly and attending art fairs and shows as much as she can.

She observes that in major publications, like Artforum, there is hardly anything featured about Australia: "When they talk about Asia-Pacific, Australia is not really in the picture. All the spotlights are on China, India and South-east Asian art."



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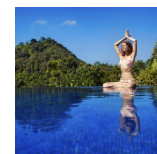
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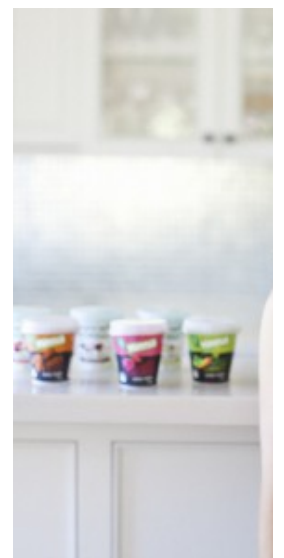
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Curator Kim Brockett agrees, adding that when you do read about Australian artists, the opening line often states: "Australia is so far away" or "Australia might not be the art capital, in the way NY or London are". The result of this lack of media attention is that the lively Australian art scene is hardly included as part of the global conversation.

One of the reasons for this disconnection is down to the obvious geographical distance. Shipping costs for artwork remain high. Australian artists, especially young and emerging, often can't afford to travel to overseas shows for extended periods of time. The travel costs are also one of the reasons why Australian galleries very seldom participate in international art fairs, which again is no help towards the country's visibility.

In this context, Kim Brockett acknowledges the importance of a virtual presence for Australian artists: "The internet has really helped things to happen. All the work that comes from Australia is found online. Nowadays you must have your work there."

A sustainable way for artist Ramona Angelico to travel is by undertaking artist residencies, which often cover not only accommodation, but also travel fees. She explains that the main reason an artist might look overseas is the fact that, after having been on the scene for a while, one ends up knowing everyone. Indeed with Melbourne and Sydney as the two polar centres, Australia has a tiny art scene. "It's like in TV, where you always see the same actors on every Australian tv show. So once they are done they have to leave. You can do exhibitions in all the artist run spaces in Australia and then you have to go. It's difficult to sustain."

What is true for the scene also goes for the market, which in Australia is fairly small. This is not necessarily an issue for emerging artists, but if you are already established, with work in all the main Australian collections, you may find that you need a new pool.

Dionisia Salas is one of the artists that successfully took the leap. She now lives in Berlin and is an assistant to a painter. Moving abroad was not such a difficult transition for her as she had previously participated in a year-long exchange program in Paris.

In her opinion, being Australian has been a great advantage in the international art world, not only for the connection to this unique country, but also because of the ease of access to Asian art. After studying in Canberra, she shared a studio in Fitzroy Melbourne for three years, and then started exhibiting in artist-run spaces.

Since moving to Berlin in 2002, she has found the arts environment in Europe very competitive, and the local artists very business savvy: "They know how to promote themselves and what they want. They want to make it internationally in the world and have a career out of it. They are looking for galleries to represent them and take them to international art fairs. They have this whole set of priorities of what they need in order to get recognition."

Despite exhibiting her paintings in Berlin and Barcelona, Dionisia is still strongly tied to Australia. She regularly participates in shows in Melbourne and Canberra, two cities that she still feels very connected to. She's not an exceptional case. It's true that there are Aussie artists who leave and let themselves being assimilated into the new culture to the point that no one knows they are Australian. More often than not though, Australian nationals are reluctant to completely let go of their bonds with their native country.

It's undeniable that the Australian economy is fairing well compared to Europe and America. While funding has recently seen some cuts, the opportunities are definitely more readily available than most other countries. Also, the same close-knit arts community that may feel limiting to some artists, can represent a great platform for others.

The artistic duo Tarryn Gill and Pilar Mata Dupont, famous for their musical performances, rely on collaborative projects with the local community for their work. In this sense, being based in Perth has proved a huge advantage for them: "We have such a big network here. We have been doing this for so long, and we know all the dancers, designers, costume makers. It's always difficult doing projects in a new city because you have to make a new network from scratch."

Even if the transportation of the work and long distances are still a struggle, they find it encouraging to still be recognized as international artists while still living in Perth: "It's the support of your local

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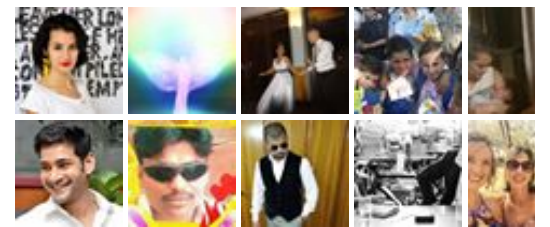
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community that helps you to stay motivated.”

Having interned at the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and Art Stage Singapore, curator Kim Brockett has a wider perspective of the international art world: “There are artists that can just spend their whole lives in Australia and gradually build their career and not have to really feel the urge to go away from Australia. A lot of my friends these days are doing residencies in Asia and in Europe and the US and a lot of them come back as well. You always return, no one really leaves for good.”

Kim is originally from Malaysia but moved to Melbourne for her curatorial studies: “For me Melbourne is quite amazing, in terms of how much energy there is towards the arts. It’s funny because on one hand you go from ‘so much more could be done’, but for me a lot has already been done!”

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