

Arts

The ballade of Bee

di Naima Morelli

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Melbourne, Bee

A couple of days ago I was walking with a friend through Swanston Street, Melbourne. Every time we passed that street there was always something entertaining going on. That day there was a guy break dancing in a Pikachu costume. The day before there was a singer playing ukulele while hula-hoping at the same time. The week before that there was a Japan X fan playing an amazing solo on his thunder shaped guitar. Of course, there were also more conventional artists working there. Portraitists, bracelets makers, plain folk singers, and one quiet hippie making sounds with his Tibetan meditation bowls - the board said: "Please come closer and enjoy the peaceful vibrations". Well, maybe conventional was not exactly the word for the busking crowd of Melbourne. My friend, delighted with the peaceful vibrations, nodded: "I'm sure all these buskers have a pretty interesting life. Not the kind of life that you want for yourself though"

Actually I came to know one of these artists. Her name is Bee, she's a girl from Taiwan with a round face and she does cheerful watercolours right on Swanston Street. The first time that I saw her was in front of the , she was drawing on the pavement with a huge brush that looked like a mop. That mop had a sponge at the end which Bee used to suck water out from a bucket. She was drawing figures like a mouse, a cow, a tiger with the tip of her brush. The pavement was dry and dusty and the traces of water formed the images. The performance was part of the celebrations for the Chinese New Year, and that technique was reminiscent of the Chinese traditional ink paintings. That day the girl wore a nice colourful dress and boots, the same dress that she wore when I interviewed her and in all the pictures on her webpage, like a sort of uniform. That day she looked really concentrated on this job. She told me later, it was difficult to remember how all these animals look: "With this technique I usually make portraits of people or funny stuff like a pig with wings, not really something formal. And you need muscle too, because the brush for painting is very big and heavy.". Actually this technique belonged to her friend, the street performer Splash Baron. He couldn't join that event so Bee did it for him.

Splash Baron was the one that encouraged Bee to leave Taiwan and join him in Melbourne. At the time Bee just graduated from the National Taiwan University of Arts and she didn't know what to do next. She didn't feel free to be an artist in Taiwan: "In Taiwan people are very conservative. Even if it's about art, they are always looking for a higher education. You've got to study at a public university and if study at a private university people don't consider you. If you have a degree from abroad you're more recognized and more people support you. Actually, I didn't like this mentality, and also going to the galleries often I didn't feel touched by the artworks. They were all theory and not inspiring for people. I feel that if I study for a master degree I will face the same problems. I was not sure I really wanted to do conceptual art or whatever."

Sill uncertain about what to do, Bee went to the exhibition of a photographer friend, who was showing her works on India and Egypt. The photographer went on a Working Holyday Visa to Australia so she could earn enough money to go travelling to these countries and take pictures. The friend suggested Bee to apply for the Visa herself and to go busking in Melbourne. She also had a friend who she could recommend to Bee, a busker called Splash Baron. Bee talked to him and after that talk she finally decided she wanted to try.

Bee started busking in August. It rained very hard and it was cold and no one wanted portraits. At the beginning she busked until late at night, till about 10pm. Once it was a Friday night and a group of half-drunken people came and stepped on her works on purpose and kicked her donation box. She was very sad. It was her dream and these people just treated it like shit, so she just cried and cried on the street. But she didn't give up, and the next day she was on the street with her watercolours again.

After a while her joyful portraits became requested more and more, and she met a lot of interesting folks: "When I'm doing my watercolours I don't want to just use a skill or just paint the person who is in front of me. I want to paint a feeling that they inspire in me. I want to describe these people with colours and create a connection with them. I'm interested in the stories of the people who come to me"

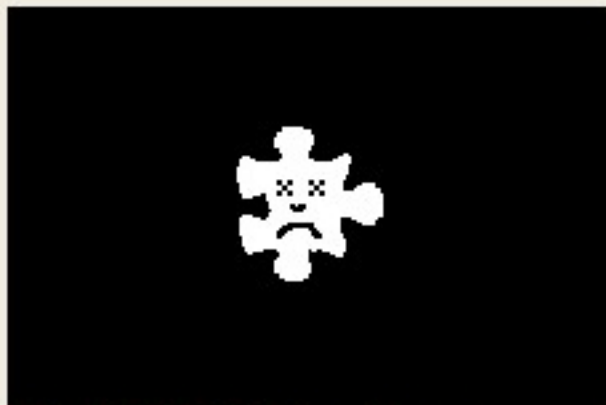
I asked her to tell me some of these stories: "Once one girl come to me asking me to paint her family. In the picture she gave there was her husband, her son and herself. The husband had a very serious face and she asked me: "Can you make him smile?". I drawn him smiling and she was very thankful. She explained to me that her husband died a short time before. That shocked me, but I was happy that my art could make her feel better." Another time she was painting a guy that declared himself as an artist. Then he asked her if he could paint her, but naked. At that point she wasn't so sure he really had artistic purposes, Bee told me giggling.

Bee puts all the portraits she makes on her webpage that she has called after her favourites things in life: "Love, Art, Travel" . She explained to me that love is something she learnt much better in Melbourne, also because of Splash Baron, that taught her a lot. Before coming to Australia she wrote down a list of dreams shed like to live, which now most have came true. She was sure that if someone truly believes in something with all one's heart, that dream will come true, sooner or later. Or at least, that is what happened to her.

When I met her for the interview in a coffee shop in the City she was typing on the laptop her memories as a twenty-six year old. How she struggled, how she learnt and how she became the person she is now. She's proud to be finally independent and to get to make a living out of her dream. After Melbourne she would like to travel Europe with the money she earned as a busker and then apply for a residency, starting with a more ambitious artistic project with some galleries. If you would like to say hi to her or get a portrait before the end of her visa, you can just go find her on Swanston Street. She's the dreaming girl with a colourful dress drawing between the Pikachu break dancer and the ukulele hula-hopper.

Tags:Arts Australia Bee Melbourne National Gallery Of Victoria Swanston Street

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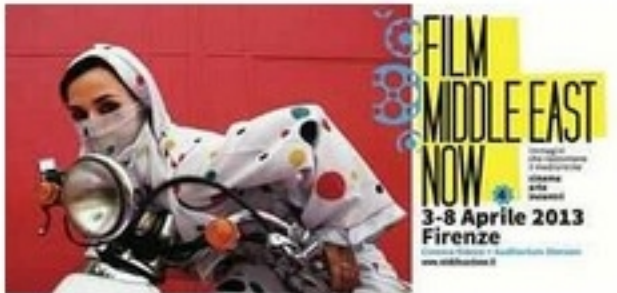


PATTY SMITH, I am Person
di Giorgio Gaber

Press Review

BBC Panorama, COME SI APPLICA LA SHARIA NEL REGNO BRITANNICO, di Jane Corbin, 06.04.2013

Deutsche Welle, LA GERMANIA TROPPO LASSISTA SUL TRAFFICO DI ESSERI UMANI? di Ranya Breuer, 06.04.2013



WebAppuntamenti

ROBERTA LANZINO, RAGAZZA
presentazione della graphic novel, sceneggiatura di Celeste Costantino, disegni di Marina Comandini
a Roma, Tuba Bazar, via del Pigneto, 19 aprile h.19.00

MARCIA PER LA TERRA NEL LAZIO
in occasione della Giornata Mondiale della Terra ONU, domenica 21 aprile, da Monte Cavo al Colosseo

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