

Interview with Hanna Hoyne

artsACT spoke with Hanna Hoyne, one of two artists participating in the ACT Creative-in-Residence Project as part of the Creative Recovery and Resilience Program. Hanna (MA 2004; PhD 2009) is a Canberra-based visual artist and researcher, working in public space design. Her works explore how we position ourselves in our contested cosmos; how we navigate between our aspirations and limitations and our relationship to knowledge-systems in a time when human survival on our planet is uncertain.

Why and how did you become an artist?

I was born in Germany. My parents were both painters – my mum from Salzburg and my dad from London. We moved to Australia when I was 13 years old. I still feel very connected to Germany and my European family. My parents taught me the value of art, travelling to other places and non-violence in different spiritual traditions. My grandfather was hugely inspiring to me. He was an intellectual and a traveller, he used to invite the whole family to photo-slide evenings where he would tell his stories about the places and people he had visited.

I studied Visual Art in Canberra, Melbourne, France and South Korea, and also had sojourns and fieldtrips in Japan, India, Malaysia and Singapore. During my PhD studies I started teaching in sculpture, but especially art and politics, which has really deeply changed my worldview. With my work I feel a responsibility to give back to society. I constantly think about what did I do to contribute?

What is your mission as an artist?

I really feel the deep ethical challenges of art practice that is compromised in our capitalist, globalised world. On the one hand the excess of creating objects on a planet that is suffocating in human stuff production – on the other, beauty and joy that artists create for others is so essential to our wellbeing because humans are more than just the chase for income. Art is the peoples' voice.

Part of my mission as an artist is to work against the capitalist monopoly on public space, where really critical artworks are housed behind the elite glass doors of our museums, somehow neutralised and hidden from the everyday space in public. The best example of this in Canberra is the beautiful and contentious *Aboriginal Memorial* (1988) at the NGA curated by Djon Mundine for the bicentenary. Comprising 200 painted hollow log coffins– it is a war cemetery, a forest of souls representing all the lives lost in defending this land from invasion. To me, this work should have its own plaza built on the forecourt of New Parliament house or stand centrally on ANZAC Parade. My inner German roots demand that Australians take ownership of their history – what we can do now is to honour the Aboriginal wars and the Stolen Generations.

What has the Creative Recovery and Resilience program (CRRP) meant for you and your arts practice?

This program came at a critical point in my career, during the profound challenges of the last two years – personally, the climate crisis and the changing of world orders. What I love about this program is its long-term vision to capacity build artists, to bring their expertise to the table in government. Artists are typically disadvantaged economically, and this program scaffolds bridge building to maximise our artists' capacity to better contribute. It combines tacit leadership training and mentorship, while enabling informed listening and professional connection.

What is it like to be an artist in Canberra?

So, my focus now is on what I can contribute to public art and art in the public space, coupled with how the built environment relates to nature. Regarding our capital city Canberra: I think we should

pitch our expectations high! We have all the resources to be an eco-showcase and model city, ready for climate disaster. Canberra currently has stiflingly boring new architecture and green washing is rampant. Artists, architects and landscape architects TOGETHER should work on the drawing plan from the start.

In Australian cities we are set up to expect more space than we need and that we can actually look after well. Instead, treat each pocket of space with respect and inject beauty and intelligence into it. That way, together we will create a beautiful city. New Acton is the best practice example, where art is interwoven with public space living and commerce.

What exciting artistic project is currently keeping you busy?

I have been painting murals with artists Aeode and Byrd; been mentored by Redbox Design Group am just about to install a play sculpture for their new Coombs play space. I am kind of devastated and fixated by the ugly, ruined spaces in Canberra. In my residency, I have been invited into the EPSDD (Environment, Planning & Sustainable Design Directorate) and the SLA (Suburban Land Agency) to understand how Canberra is being built and how people in government are really trying to improve and make a difference. During this year I am also interviewing one of our wonderful senior artists, John Reid, who started the ANU School of Art & Design Environment Studio and the multi-awarded Field Studies Program that takes artists onto Country to connect with Traditional Owners.

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