



James C. Sourris Artist Interview Series 2015-2016
Item 30602/1: Anne Wallace Digital Story

Interviewee: Anne Wallace (AW)

Interviewer: Sean Sennett (SS)

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SS: Anne, first of all, thank you for having us in your house today.

AW: You're welcome.

SS: It's a real thrill to be here to talk to you about your work. Were you interested in painting from the very beginning, and drawing?

AW: I guess I must have just been interested in pictures... Being drawn to the visual. My mum had a copy of a Dylan Thomas collection of his short stories called Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog. And when I read that, I just thought, this was absolutely amazing and I wanted to be like Dylan Thomas, you know. It was kind of crazy in a way, because I think I started to put a lot of pressure on myself to somehow become an artist and make a lot of work by the time I was 20.

Yes. I was fortunate to have an extremely good teacher, a very inspiring person. She treated us not like students, but like just other people. And she took us to art openings and things like that. So it sort of gave me a glimpse into what art could mean in terms of actually living a life involved with it.

SS: You seem to have a real sort of bias towards everything Anglo when you were growing up. Is that right?

AW: Absolutely, yes. I was extremely... I was an extreme Anglophile. I guess my parents were as well. Well they lived in England briefly when they were first married. I didn't know, yes, I was steeped in English culture.

SS: There's a real Queensland feel to a lot of your work. Were you trying to merge the two together?

AW: I think in a way, yes. My childhood... On weekends we would visit one or other of my grandmothers. One of them lived in Greenslopes, the other Holland Park.

But I grew up in Kenmore. My grandmother's house, my dad's mum, she was living in a house that they'd built themselves in I think the early 30s. Whereas my mother's mother lived in a much more modern house built in the late 40s. Those different types of environments made their way into my work.

SS: You then went to study at the Slade?

AW: Like most other art students, I was entering prizes and entering competitions and things like that. And I was really fortunate to get this thing called the Samstag, the Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship. That was an unbelievable opportunity. That was... They would fund a year's study overseas at an art school of your choice.

I chose probably one of the most... One of the oldest and most sort of famous art schools in London. But it was also... I liked the idea of it because they were also trying to be quite challenging about what painting is so that the painting course wasn't... It wasn't like being in a life room with a life model or anything like that. It was lots of people not painting, in fact. I did meet some incredible students there.

SS: Coming back to Brisbane, how did that feel, moving back here after being in the UK?

AW: It was just weird. I remember I had a lot of photographs of the students whom I'd known at the Slade and I printed them all out and I sort of stuck them on the wall. Sort of so I could replicate the feeling of being in this, because those people... I still kind of consider them to be my peers, even though unfortunately I haven't really seen them for 20 years.

But they're the ones who, I guess, I think of when I think of myself and how... And the seriousness with which a lot of them approached their work. And that's kind of a benchmark.

SS: What drew you to mid-century America?

AW: Apart from the fact that it's just aesthetically a beautiful time, and the images in Raymond Chandler's books, for example. They're so... It's... He's such a visual writer, you know. I can just see the things that he's... You know, the street scapes and the rooms and the clothes that the people are wearing.

My mother and my father, when I was a kid we looked at a lot of their slides from when that... Before they had us kids. You know, they travelled a bit in the UK. And everything just looked fantastic. You know, the clothes that people were wearing, and the look of the cars and that. I think that, coupled with the fact that she was to me living this... What seemed a fantastic life.

When I was a teenager, you know, I felt almost this sort of weird sense of being post-historical. Like I was coming late to the party.

SS: So how did things like your interest in a band like The Smiths impact on your work?

AW: The Smiths were a revelation which came a bit later. It just somehow rang true with me and my experience of life. Music is of great importance to me. I just... I think I can see images when I'm listening to music.

SS: Are you looking for ways as an artist to reinvent yourself? Do you see yourself as a classicist that's, you know, breaking the form and trying to do something new each time?

AW: I definitely don't want to do the same painting over and over. That's something I've really tried hard not to do

I would like to think that each individual picture I do is hopefully recognisable as my work, but... I mean, obviously it is, but it's different... A different image, different thing, a different feeling. You know, I don't want to actually get bored by my own stuff.

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