

James C. Sourris Artist Interview Series

Luke Roberts

Well, the show is called *AlphaStation/Alphaville* and that was the project title as it started out 2 and half years ago. Well, Alpha was where I was born in 1952. I am the oldest of 10 children. So this was a real blossoming for me, including you know to include my family. I've always included them in various ways and some of the earlier photographs reflect that.

My mother to this day is very much catholic. My father less so but he has nonetheless gone religiously to church with her every week. We use to go almost every day to church in the pre-Vatican Council times, it was a huge part of our life and especially when I went to boarding school, a huge part of our daily life. And also it was a religion that I loved actually and I was very much priest material and it was one of my career options.

I, by the time I got to Art school, I was having a religious crisis because I had been brought up strictly catholic in the old style Catholicism in a time where people were searching for why would people be gay and this is this idea that it's your choice so people make a choice to be gay or you're not born gay. And you're brought up with this sort of very narrowing concept limitation which is endemic within western culture and the catholic church leads the way.

I therefore felt, you know, no place for me that was of any honest, honourable position within the Catholic Church, and so checked out.

But that's the simple version of the story; it was a very painful process. I, as an artist, have been trying to, you know I'm a social activist in so many ways, I've been trying to find ways to negotiate these different eras... my own experience. And so right from the beginning I have, I suppose, dared to do things that other people haven't done. And they haven't necessarily been seen as being relevant at the time but these days the gap is less wide to how it used to be so I don't feel so marginalized and isolated like I used to.

So Alpha, coming from there was a great way of experiencing certain social conditions and situations. So establishing a relationship with Alpha, after all that has taken place over the decades, has in recent times been a lot easier for me because I've actually found some answers to certain big questions. I'm not saying that they are the only answers and that they

are all the conclusions but in many ways I found what I've been looking for. I have a greater sense of self-esteem and self-confidence which I wasn't given growing up as a gay catholic Queenslander.

So I now feel that a lot of what I've been protesting about or indicating as sort of not well within our social and religious life has been acknowledged in a general sense. There has been so much change take place with Alpha, going out west, they were great journeys, really fantastic, and helped me enormously.

We, these days, do talk – we being my parents and myself – just about anything. You know my mother knows I'm an atheist these days, you know I'm sure she says extra rounds of the Rosary for me, she's quite worried for my mortal soul, you know I don't believe I have a soul now.

So you know but we can have that kind of relationship without it being fraught. We actually have a great relationship these days and I've got them in this exhibition and to sum it up, you know, our parents have a certain role in our lives, I don't blame them for anything. I did once, to be honest, but now I just realise that it's a very different kind of engagement with the world and I think this project actually fast-tracked a lot of that.