



## James C. Sourris Artist Interview Series

**Interviewee: Sebastian Di Mauro**

**Interviewer: John Stafford**

**Date: 15 October 2014**

**Sebastian Di Mauro:** I've come to terms with a lot of stuff that I would of never come to terms with about my family and my background. Those issues that I had with being Italian Australian. In my earlier part of my career I totally didn't at all engage with my family background. So for me to go back and look at that was a pretty major part of my life to reflect on it.

When I did that first show which was Pane e Zucchero which means bread and sugar, that was a major turning point for my work. Although I'd started looking at things you know in relation to my Italian background earlier than that, it was tentative, very tentative and then I came braver about it.

I actually began my career as a painter and I was painting images which were pretty loaded, for me they were extremely loaded but when I put them out in the public realm people didn't see it, they just saw them as abstract paintings. And so nobody really understood what I was going on about. So I got quite concerned about it, and I thought well how am I gonna... you know how am I going to get some of these ideas across because I felt really strongly about them. So that's how it began I started using materials to convey some of the issues that I was looking at in my work. So sugar of course... because I lived in North Queensland, it was completely imbedded in our lives. Completely, even to my Mothers despair of you know, having clothes on the clothesline and all the ash floating down and making all the clothes black. Olive oil we lived with it you know. It was part of our lives forever. Very important, my mother would not use anything but olive oil. Then astro turf was very much about my Grandparents. They left Italy and were seeking greener fields, brighter futures for themselves and their children. So slowly I built a repertoire of different materials that for me meant something. The history of the material and the dialogue of the material was the important part of making the work.

Lots of the materials that I was investigating in the objects that I was making, or installations that I was doing then became part of the artist books. One of the first ones I made was all loaded with images, no... and images made out of materials like snakes skins and... muslin and images that I found in a newspaper, it had sulphur in it, it had ash in it. And so the next book that I made which was the carpet underlay books and they were huge, and the word silenzio was used which was silence in Italian. I was so tentative, even at that stage about making artworks relating to my Italian background. So you know, it was one of first stages of me actually starting to use the language.

The language thing is really important because my Grandparents couldn't speak English. So for me I could speak their language which was Sicilian actually, not Italian and I could speak English, so I was... you know bilingual which was fantastic. And what was happening with me as I grew older and my Grandparents passed; was this whole idea of language and the

fact that I was losing the language of my Grandparents, and that was a major realisation for me. It was so important to kind of investigate to connect it again to my Italian background, I really felt... really that it was really important to do that.

Another way of working that I hadn't done before was object making, so Floccus came out of that. It moved me from being really interested in installation and into to object making and profoundly focused on objects. You know I mean I do installation and I really like installation, but I didn't realise I liked the object as much as I do. A lot of the work that I did for Floccus were very much this aspect of looking at interconnections and I guess interconnections between humans and nature. And you know a lot of the forms have come out of that and I've been really interested in that organic connection. I collect these things from the garden or on walks that I do, and pick up seed pods and their the bases for the work that I make. But the forms themselves will be maybe abstracted, often times I'll look at a particular form and how it relates to the human body or how it relates to an animal, often times I combine these forms together in one shape to make the form itself. So this interconnection was what I was really trying to investigate in those works.

It's interesting looking back at the work and think about things that I have done and achieved, and the processors that I've gone through to get to the stages that I've gotten to. The story that I've written has been so important for me, that I've come to terms with a lot of stuff that I would of never of come to terms with, about my family and my background. And I guess for me, and I often say this to my students, that you know what is important to you as a person, what is it about you that makes you you, and that makes me, me.

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