PORTRAIT OF A NATION

UNMADE EDGES - DISTINCTIVE PLACES

HALL

Community Event
17th November 2013
Gold Creek Station Hall

Kevin Adrian Miller
Tony and Margaret Morris 2013
24.0 x 27.0 cm
Digital photo
Participants in the 2013 Portrait of a Nation: Unmade Edges - Distinctive Places project in Hall would like to acknowledge the support and generosity of the following:

- Centenary of Canberra
- Belconnen Arts Centre
- Gold Creek Station
- Hall Progress Association
- Friends of the Hall School Museum
- Hall Men’s Shed
- Hall Rural Fire Brigade

In particular we would like to thank:

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Portrait of a Nation: Unmade Edges - Distinctive Places is a site-specific project across six locations in the Australian Capital Territory: Tharwa, Hall, Uriarra, Oaks Estate, Pialligo and Stromlo. Fourteen artists were commissioned to create a series of art projects including installations, exhibitions, art workshops and storytelling, which respond to the place naming and history in each ‘village’.

In response to local narratives

Artists Kevin Miller, Heike Qualitz, John Reid, Amands Stuart, Marzena Wasikowska and Carolyn Young were each commissioned to make fine artwork in response to local narratives about Hall as a named village on the edge of the nation’s capital. The artists were selected on account of their experience of working with small communities through The Australian National University School of Art Environment Studio Field Studies program.

To begin the project, Ann McMahon from Belconnen Arts Centre, John Reid and Carolyn Young met with Bob Richardson, Helen White and Trudy Mansfield from Hall, and together drafted a list of Hall community groups and art project ideas. From this list, the artists indicated which group or art idea they’d like to find out more about. A meeting was then held between the artists and members of the Hall community. The community members were each invited to speak about their community group or art idea. The artists spoke briefly about their art practice and interests in the Unmade Edges - Distinctive Places project. The idea behind the meeting was to allow a process of ‘match-making’ to begin, whereby one of the community members would become the artist’s key informant.

During September, October and early November each artist engaged with their key informant(s) to make a fine artwork in response to local narratives about Hall.

From mid-October to mid-November seven Neighbourhood Events are scheduled to take place in Hall, and in the case of John Reid’s performance artwork, several 30-minute performances. Each artist will install or perform in a ‘Host’ venue determined by the artist and their key informant. Proposed locations include the key informant’s home, Hall School Museum, Gold Creek Station and Hall Creek. During these two weeks, it is proposed that the Host for the artwork will invite friends or neighbours or other members of their organization to a Neighbourhood Event. Desirably this would be a domestic scale social event such as a dinner party, a morning tea or garden barbeque. The purpose of the Neighbourhood Events is for the artworks to function as catalysts for small group conversations about cultural heritage and hopefully extend the narratives that inspired the artworks or bring to mind associated memories. During this period the Hosts and their guests could record relevant comments and information.

The concluding Exhibition and Storytelling Event scheduled for the 17th of November 2013 will be a half-day of storytelling where all the artworks are displayed for viewing at Gold Creek Station, Hall. The public event brings together: the artists; the informants, their neighbours and friends; and the community at large. A facilitated program of storytelling is proposed: original narratives would be re-told; the artists would reveal the creative processes utilised for the visual interpretations of the narratives; and an account would be given of the artworks’ impact having been exhibited in the domestic/neighbourly setting. This catalogue documents each artist’s response to local narratives about Hall as experienced during the Portrait of a Nation: Unmade Edges - Distinctive Places in Hall project.

Carolyn Young
10 November 2013
My contribution to the Hall component of Unmade Edges - Distinctive Places was to photograph community groups in Hall that arguably are significantly influenced by place - Friends of the Hall School Museum; Men’s Shed and the Hall Rural Fire Brigade. I also photographed the Kinlyside and Hollingsworth family reunion in Hall on the 3rd of November.

Since the group is an entity with an underlying premise that ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’, I am interested in why and how people unite to share a set of common activities and work together for individual achievements as well as a greater good.

My process of individual and group interaction; of documentation and subsequent evaluation of the imagery leads to photographs that attempt to express this individual / communal dynamic. The group’s dynamic, unity, inclusiveness and affection in addition to intragroup dynamics demonstrate Hall to be a healthy, cohesive community. An interesting aspect of photographing these groups in the context of the Unmade Edges - Distinctive Places Project was that each group has a different ratio of local to broader-Canberra resident membership. The School House Museum group is made up of local or ex-Hall residents. The Men’s Shed is half / half. The Hall Rural Fire Brigade is made up mostly of incomers from Canberra and the region around Hall. There is also an overlap of membership of the groups among Hall residents.

I was keen to photograph the individuals in each group, democratically, without reference to any hierarchical arrangement. Consequently, individuals were photographed standing in a long line requiring 4 or 5 photographs to accommodate the portrayal of each individual.

The work will take the form of a photograph album, which will be deposited in the School House Museum as a document and snapshot of an aspect of the Hall community in Canberra’s centenary year. I admired the woodwork detail on the boxes made by Mal, from the Men’s Shed, and in discussion with Graham, the group’s coordinator, I commissioned him to make the cover for the photo album.
Sometimes I ride through Hall and in the past I have often thought that it was a bit like riding through sleepy hollow. This brought with it an attraction - to be near the city but also apart. However, just passing through means that you don't really know what is going on or what it is really like.

In Hall township there are approximately 100 houses and in the greater Hall area possibly three times that amount. Originally my task was to photograph 100 houses with people arranged neatly in front as if this helped somehow to understand the place. Maybe you could see it in peoples’ faces - what it is like to live here. But each house is actually like a separate universe with different aspects of the home and the surrounding area contributing to this sense of place.

Therefore I’m not photographing the houses but trying to photograph each invisible universe or at least capture it somehow. Some of the people of Hall have been generous enough to open their homes to allow a glimpse into the invisible aspects of their universes and also allow this to be shared with their neighbours and the public.

As the observer and documenter of this small exercise I am surprised by some of the objects shared and how significant a role they play in each home. The houses are living museums of stories which are embedded in the objects it contains. Some of these mark the death of a friend, the birth of children, mark the passage of children growing up, allow connection to the greater history of Hall and contain connections between generations.

Residents will be required to discuss the invisible aspects with each other prior to the final conversation and gathering. I wonder how well they know each other’s stories and universes.
My artwork was inspired by conversations with Craig Starr, John Starr and Tony Morris. Craig is the current farmer of Gold Creek Station in Hall, having taken over from his father John in 2007. Tony is a descendent of the Southwell family, a pioneering farming family of Hall. All three men share a history in sheep farming and a common Southwell ancestor. All three men have demonstrated a duty of care to the natural environment. The still life photograph features artefacts from Gold Creek Station, the Hall Men’s Shed, the Starr and the Southwell family archives, as well as native and pasture plants from Hall Common and Gold Creek Station.
Craig Starr and Tony Morris immediately after work installation at Gold Creek Station, Hall
(Photographs: Carolyn Young)
The background layer for each of the four elements in *Frame of reference* is formed by an image of Hall taken from space - nestled amongst its surrounding hills and in proximity of the encroaching suburban developments. Like a compass, each image points at one of the cardinal directions. An aerial view of Hall’s distinct and contained layout suggests to me the shape of an insect nestled on a leaf, an outline the bypassing highway forms, prompting reflections on the interrelationships between the small and often overlooked elements within complex systems. The historic and rural qualities of Hall are an important asset to the nearby capital and in return, the urban proximity assures Hall’s prosperity. Like insects in their myriad of forms, their role in the wellbeing of the biosphere they inhabit is indicative of and influences systemic changes. Discovering recurring patterns, visually and conceptually, informs my working processes as an artist and contributed to the layers within this work. The objects I photographed from the Hall Museum collection were chosen for their intrigue. The narratives and nostalgic values they hold are intrinsic to the enthusiasm motivating the collection and appreciation of such objects. Materials chosen to reflect those qualities frame this work.
Northern Japanese flytrap
The Japanese flytrap, identified as a favourite object by honorary Hall School Museum curator Phil Robson, exemplifies ingenious analogue mechanisms dealing with the at times pesky side of rural living.

Eastern golden sun moth
Synerman plana - the golden sun moth, is native to the region and thrives in native grasslands and grassy woodlands containing wallaby grass and is now a critically endangered species.

Southern smoke signals
These letters, dating back to pioneering days, remind of communication at times of material scarcity. They are aesthetically fascinating objects, as well as ultimate containers of narrative and portals into the past.

Western leaf beetle
Chrysomelidae, leaf beetles, live in symbiotic relationships with the trees they inhabit, but can be harmful to the plant’s health with a population increase - a delicate balance between benefit and detriment.

Heike Qualitz
*Frame of reference: Northern Japanese flytrap 2013 (detail) 24.0 x 24.0 cm, Digital image*
Statement

The performance acknowledges the biodiversity of a small patch of bush on the banks of Halls Creek near the Hall Equestrian Park. The artwork signals the intrinsic importance and the transience of all life.

Performance Artwork Proposal

A 30-minute performance artwork will be presented to members of the Hall community on several occasions between 21 October and 16 November 2013. Just after dark at 8.00 pm, on each occasion, six viewers of the artwork will assemble under the lamppost at Equestrian Park, Hall ACT to be guided to a nearby site overlooking Halls Creek. Small canvas camping chairs will be on location for seating in the bush setting. After the performance the viewers will be guided back to Equestrian Park.
Large Format Photograph
Proposal A framed large format photograph suitable for domestic display will be produced for circulation in as many homes of Hall residents as possible during the period of 9-16 November. It is intended that the photograph be used as a talking point with family/friends and then passed on for other residents to do likewise. A record is kept of the main points of discussion (particularly about the leading question in the accompanying statement) for recounting at the exhibition and storytelling event on the 17th November at Gold Creek Station.

Statement The photograph documents the relatively dynamic and unstable course of Halls Creek in the middle part of its catchment. The severe erosion is (presumably) symptomatic of a disturbed catchment. How might this section of the Creek look in 2030?

Documentation of large format photo-shoot
Halls Creek, Hall ACT
(Photograph: John Reid)
Charlie Cover is a Yass resident who has been deeply devoted to Australian sheep dogs for much of his life. President of the National Sheep Dog Trial Association, he competes regularly around the state and is particularly involved at the National Championships, held annually at the Hall Showground. I had the great pleasure of visiting Charlie to absorb some of his reflections and was struck by his profound love and commitment to the cultivated art of working with canines.

My own sculptural practice explores the complex tensions that arise when domestic and wild animal and human communities co-habit terrain. Recent Post-Graduate studies at the ANU focused upon the difficult relations between rural communities of southeastern Australia and wild dogs or dingoes, which compete with humans for domestic stock. An early body of work, Mongrel Country (Nil Tenure) resulted from field research into this emotive issue, during which I bore witness to the gruesome ‘dog trees’ – remote trees bearing the bodies of shot canines. The dimensions of actual deceased wild dogs informed this installation, whose materials included tannin soaked farmer’s pyjamas. Mongrel Country bound the farmer symbolically to the dog and re-inserted a ‘ghost pack’ of the lesser known wild dogs, into the human imagination. The opportunity to install some of my sculptural wild dogs at Charlie’s property was a gift. His years of experience and understanding of the working dogs he breeds, trains and cares for represented for me, a symbolic home of some fine aspirations that humans hold in their relationships with canines. Bloodlines brings the recalcitrant spirit of the wild to the home of the cultivated dog. In doing so, it allows for some rich dialogue between the more extreme aspects of human animal relations.

Amanda Stuart
Mongrel Country 2013
Installation view (detail), Brenda May Gallery, Sydney
Dimensions variable
Mild steel, farmer’s pyjamas, fence wire, bondcrete, tannins, wool blankets, bronze
(Photograph: Rosie Hulak)
Amanda Stuart
Bloodlines 2013
Installation detail images
Charlie Cover’s property, Yass. (Photograph: Amanda Stuart)