



LISA GARLAND

A highly acclaimed photographer, Lisa is from a long line of fisher-folk from Tasmania's northern coastlines; her keen, candid eye and her familiarity with her subject matter grants her work poetic intimacy through the small details of ordinary lives. For *Partnershiping* Lisa aims to focus on a crucial turning point for Tasmanian aquaculture. "Now we see the arrival of fish farming from Southern Fish farms and the relocation of seals, wild fishing is on the decline on the North West coast. My family now fish for Southern Calamari (squid), that's sent to the fish markets in Sydney. This is what remains: it is sustainable and it enables my family to continue life on the ocean (for now)." Lisa's imagery is a paean to the fragile, powerful and haunting land, sea-scapes and denizens of Tasmania's North West coast.

My father comes from a family of twelve – one of his relatives arrived on the first fleet in Launceston. My mother came from a family of three girls – part of a farming family that lived in a township called Milabeena, outside of Wynyard on the North-West coast of Tasmania. Mum and Dad met at a dance at the township of Myalla, near Milabeena. In those days Mum's parents didn't have a car, so she would have travelled to the dance on a horse and cart. Social events were held at the local hall, and Dad lived in the town and went to the dance with a bunch of mates. He was a footballer – the kind of guy my mother's friends used to plan ways of avoiding. They'd avoid even riding their bikes in front of his family home, famous for a range of raucous unruly local legends.

Nevertheless, they met, fell in love and married, and settled in Wynyard. My grandfather had bought my Mum a house. Dad was a miner, but he had a fall underground where he broke his neck and was unable to work from then on. I was about four at the time. I have an older brother and sister. My Mum worked at housecleaning every day to keep the household going. She worked at cleaning the same houses in Wynyard every day until recently – she turned 86 this year.

Dad was out of work and would try to do what he could to make ends meet, keep busy and fund his gambling habits. One of these alternative forms of income involved an illegal activity called whitebait poaching, a seasonal netting process where nets were

cast to catch the 'tiddlies'. Our freezer was always full of packets of the sweet tasting little fish. When he'd get caught, he'd usually keep his fines down by going to jail for short periods.

Everyone in the area knew about Dad, so my coping mechanism at Wynyard High was to maintain an aloofness. I loved school and didn't miss a day from grade 3 to grade 10. I liked the routine of it and I had a great bunch of friends. I also had a great art teacher – Michelle Round, who I felt kept a close watch on me. At home I always drew – I drew anything – I drew on anything – patterns, things that came to mind, mark-making on all kinds of scraps of paper – envelopes, the phone book, the margins of any reading materials.

By coincidence, Michelle moved to Hellyer College, a senior college in Burnie, to take up her role as the photography teacher at the same time I moved there. She was a brilliant teacher – a woman who saw value in everyone – who encouraged us towards developing an inner moral compass and a professionalism. It was a totally formal experience – 'Ms. Round' encouraged me towards photography, and I was unaware that I had any particular strengths with the subject until she encouraged me to apply for art college. I was the first in my extended family to attend university. My parents had never really pushed a career pathway – my Dad was illiterate – most of my father's siblings had been expected to start contributing to the family income by Grade 3 through chopping wood, working on 'couta boats and other forms of work. Mum did it tough too, but both of them would always make sure they'd pick up anyone hitching a ride, and there was no-one in the area who would have to have an Orphan's Christmas on their own – our home and my grandmother's home – were always open and welcoming to others. Mum had come from a well-to-do family, but she had a special spot for the take-it-as-it-comes attitudes of my father's side of the family. No-one was ever judged or was spoken down to because of the way they were dressed or their different ways. It makes a good mix. Still does.

I was living with a friend's family in Ulverstone for my final year of senior college, and they helped me with my university application. I was accepted at the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart and began my degree – I supported myself through Austudy and with some very important food post-packs sent in the mail by my amazing mother. She always did everything she could to help get me by, and food packs with some personal messages from home really worked. During my first year I boarded with a family at Austin's Ferry where I traveled in by bus every day to Hobart. Once I'd gotten on my feet I answered an ad on the art school wall and moved in closer to the city with a group of students. Art School years were some of the best years of my life. It was the first time I was making my own

decisions – I had a growing sense of independence. I was aware of how good it was at the time – walking up those steps in the morning I'd catch myself thinking "this is just the BEST". I felt I could breathe - it was exhilarating meeting people who shared the same passions I did.

As the study progressed my confidence kicked in, my skills base developed and I loved the freedom of being able to choose a pathway for myself. When I look back there's some regrets from time to time that I decided to follow up those three years of studying art with a Diploma in Education rather than pursue Honours, but I was saddled with the responsibility of having to make a living – the responsibilities of work-and-income loomed large.

During my one year of Diploma of Education the art making was stopped in its tracks. I did two bouts of 'prac' – the second one, at a public all-boys school, was really enjoyable, and I could see the joy in education. My prac teacher was daunting and brutally honest; he would sit in the back of my classes and write pages of notes, but his frank advice helped me greatly.

But when I returned to the North West coast after training to be a teacher at the age of 22 I went straight into employment with a local newspaper. The job was really positive for my technical ability – it was during the days of film where we printed in the dark room. The newspaper work was challenging, but in the end I decided I needed a change. One lunchtime I walked around the corner, looked at the sign *Multicap* had posted asking for help setting up an art studio – the Serpentine Studio – for people with disabilities, and applied. They said 'yes' immediately. I resigned from the *Advocate*.

That job enabled me to move back towards working in a range of media – painting, drawing, sculpture - with some of the most entertaining and fun 'clients'. We began applying for grants on behalf of *Multicap* to bring a range of leading Tasmanian artists up to the North West coast to lead workshops.

Although I loved it, the hours were high and the pay was low. After five years my application to teach photography and art at a local Catholic private school was accepted, I spent seven years working at Marist Regional College and then a further seven at Hellyer College, the college I attended as a student years before. After that I moved to a position of Learning Area Leader of the Arts at Don College in Devonport, a college for grades 11 – 12, where I still work.

When I returned to teaching I was able to devote more time to my own practice again. The excitement of making images again returned in full force, but the subject matter had turned around. The time that had



passed had made me realise that I'd been 'taking my family for granted'— my work opened a way to see them through fresh eyes. When I came back I could also see value in so many of the things I'd taken for granted – the incidental things – the people that make a community. Also, the work in the *Advocate* driving the country roads, and the work in the disability sector had opened paths into ways of seeing that changed the way I shot material.

Now I live in Preservation Bay, just before Penguin, with my partner who's a woodwork teacher and my son, who is 12. My partner is a doer - interested in constructing things that last. We live only metres from the ocean, in a wooden dwelling bursting with the stuff of our lives – books, objects, tools, toys, dogs. We cherish activities like fishing, jumping off jetties, bushwalking – all the things that my town had used to form me – space, quietness, the sea – they're all part of his life too now. And I keep on making visions of this.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

Space, open space and time to consider and accept my space void of metropolitan interruptions. I spend my life near the ocean (twenty metres in fact). I always have (my childhood was doors away from a fishing jetty), I cannot imagine living without the sound of the ocean. It mirrors my pulse and my life rhythm. It keeps me in order. I did spend time living in a city and I felt muddled and at a loss; something was missing. This was when I was in my late teens, early twenties, hence too young to thoroughly process this feeling and find meaning in 'my home'. My mood and drive tends to be dictated by the weather. An Easterly brings a foreboding, heavy feeling, it becomes a time to reflect, worry and assess. A Westerly represents a cold change, a turn in your mood and time to work. A Northerly is directly off the ocean, this can bring a multitude of feelings depending on the temperature, a warm wind, and so on. A Northerly brings breakthroughs and contentment. A Southern breeze, in my case, is off the land, an aging wind. I can write all this and know it but in reality I just go with the flow, I don't stop and process. It is innate. But due to my father, uncles and brother being commercial fishermen, the weather has always been mentioned, discussed and it has dictated life and how it rolls. It's funny really, what I have become in regards to my thoughts and lifestyle and where I live.

When life is busy and we are void of the impact of the land, the ocean and the elements, social trends and man-made issues impact on life and, I would imagine, the practice of an artist. My work is in response to the North West/West Coast of Tasmania and coastal living.

What might make it difficult?

The absence of a vibrant art community and happenings make it difficult. Living here, I am not able to be driven by viewing the work of my peers or the excitement in viewing new exciting work. This makes it hard and, at times, I feel I am missing out. Obviously the internet and publications become part of my motivation and art knowledge base. But it is still such a gift to see and witness the real thing. A visit to MONA is always magical and makes me just stop.

And where do the other challenges lie?

Being surrounded by folk that mean well but do not understand my practice and what I am driven by. It is not necessarily a challenge but it is just how it is. Artist conversations are few and am I mostly left to my own devices. Obtaining equipment and enlarger maintenance have had their moments, particularly when things go wrong close to an exhibition deadline and I have no-one to rely on in regards to expertise. It's frustration to the point of tears at times; small things such as when prints that are destroyed by framers or maybe it's just when people don't understand the making process. I mean it takes months - not just hours. Some of these grievances and happenings have stayed with me for years. I've learned the hard way and know that I have to be organised and self-sufficient.

But are these challenges worthwhile?

Totally. Nothing surprises me and if it does, hopefully I am organised and have the gear to problem-solve. I make sure I have the right fuses for my enlarger, extra lamps, multiple rolls of paper, fresh chemicals, an extra development tank, an extra enlarger. The list goes on.

And what kind of benefits are there?

Enormous benefits - the people are salt of the earth. I know where to go to get a fresh possum skin, bones, a fresh water lobster claw, I like this quirky stuff and I like people. Especially people that live off the land and have stories to tell. I am incredibly lucky.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

My local community (Penguin) has a small artistic community but the West Coast where I have a shack where I spend holidays and weekends is totally void of an artistic community. Our culture is the Sea Pod, a caravan next to the Arthur River that does great coffee and Fish Curry on the weekends. This is super exciting stuff and I am one of the first on her doorstep. Hopefully this doesn't bring an influx of hipsters. We like the beaches littered with driftwood, bull kelp and the footprints of dogs and locals enjoying the wild beauty of the untamed. Keeping it simple works for me and my practice - I simply document the find. Nothing is a façade or moulded; it is what it is, in its purest form.



Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

I never thought I would come home and live on the North West Coast of Tasmania, certainly not the West Coast. Without meaning to, I have just found myself in this space - returning home because of important family, buying land because it seemed like a cheap block and then years on, here you are building a dwelling, raising children, surrounding yourself with animals and not ever imagining living anywhere else.

How does it feel now?

It feels content and just right. I really don't need anything (apart from a good reliable car to do the occasional overnight Hobart run to see some mighty fine Art!)

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

There's a Print Prize and another Art Prize titled 'Tidal'. I would imagine that these would be the only occasions national artists would visit our shores or have any awareness of the North West Coast of Tasmania. Hobart is a different story. MONA has totally put Hobart on the map, but Hobart (I have felt) has always had a healthy art scene through Contemporary Art Tasmania, Despard Gallery and Bett Gallery etc.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

I would imagine so. I can live near the ocean, on its doorstep, very comfortably, in a home I own with a garden, two dogs, and chickens, an ocean in front, a farm behind me. I have a shack on the West Coast. A coast line that is wild and untamed. My home is 'cheaper' in regards to a passive lifestyle and space. However, I am lucky I have work. I would imagine that finding work that compliments your passion and interests would be hard to come by in a regional area. It also comes at a cultural cost. I am used to not being able to see good movies, eat great food, and see great theatre and art. But, I don't know any different really and I have evolved within this landscape; it's in my blood in a sense.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

It is. I know it is important to go to Hobart and Melbourne – it's important in regards to my drive and passion. I know I live in a great place that suits my personality and needs. I know this because I spent time living in Hobart and in Scotland. I know all this through comparison and just how I felt, I would neither be content nor productive artistically if I did not travel. I wouldn't know that my home has value and is totally okay and right for me.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

I think they are incredibly important; it is important to get out of your own backyard; to be open to new ideas and visions; to grow. It's also important for our youth

and for our general wellbeing – important to share visions, stories and help great ideas become a reality. I read in the recent MOFO catalogue that during his visit to Launceston David Walsh realised the importance and value in bringing MOFO to Launceston. This vision and generosity shows empathy, and the fact that he understands the importance of culture and what it can bring to day-to-day lives. Such a lovely thing to do.

I think and believe people genuinely know that they are considered and listened to and, as a response, that they will give back. We need to share and consider all. Be one.

Do you think place still matters...or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc)?

I have a large family and luckily we all meet regularly. We discuss problems, rejoice in births, marriages etc. We help out with each other's children, grievances and general day-to-day problems. We are a tribe in a sense. This grounds me in regard to the statement above.

Luckily my phone rings regularly with news of family, coastal dramas and the hum of a close community. At this stage it is bigger than Facebook, google and Netflix. That said, I do regularly ring Telstra with internet concerns or if I drop my phone it is like my life has ended. Hmmm.

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