



## LU FORSBERG

**Emerging artist Lu Forsberg has explored issues that centre around the use and abuse of land by the people that live on it and with it. Their work interrogates aspects of the Australian landscape tradition, and correspondingly explores changing relationships to the body, self and identity. For *The Partnership Project*, Lu plans to produce work that raises light-hearted enquiries into the history of the Mt Gambier region. “I will continue research into the ancient limestone coral that underlays South Eastern South Australia, from its formation through to its use in architecture and roads. *Partnership* will allow me to create new works that exhume and traverse the Limestone coast working with commercial and industrial business communities, local women artists and environmental groups.”**

My early years of growing up were spent on the outskirts of Mt. Gambier on a small farm where Mum and Dad ran about one hundred and fifty head of beef cattle. There were three children - two boys Mum had had from a previous marriage, and me. When I was about five, my parents’ marriage dissolved, and my Mum moved with my two half-brothers and myself to Mt. Gambier in the older part of town close to the Blue Lake. However, soon after that move, when I was seven, my Mum had a stroke. She was only thirty-seven and at first there was little hope of her recovery and I was told she was going to die. My Dad, meanwhile, had disappeared and we found out later that he’d taken off to Tasmania, but at the time no-one knew where he was. As a result, I was looked after by my grandparents

who were also living in Mt. Gambier. My eldest brother had started to show signs of schizophrenia around the age of seventeen, and my younger brother went to stay with his father in Canberra. I didn’t actually move in with my grandmother – she would come to the house I was staying to look after me for meals and so on. The rest of the time family friends would look after me. As a result of not having my parents around for those early years, I think I’ve become more independent as a person and I’m happy to spend long periods of time by myself.

Against all the medical predictions, Mum made a miraculous recovery and after months of rehabilitation in the stroke ward in Adelaide she moved back in to our

home in Mt. Gambier. Just before my mother had the stroke my step-father became part of the family and he moved in with us to help care for my mum.

I'd been enrolled in ballet classes between the ages of three and seventeen. I was very serious about making a career of ballet – I was very focused even as a child, I completed endless ballet exams, performances, scholarships, eisteddfods and concerts and as a teenager I wanted to make it my profession. I auditioned for the Queensland Dance School of Excellence and was accepted, and I moved to Queensland on my own - independent of any family members to complete my ballet tuition. I moved in with a homestay family for the first two years of, and then moved out into a share house when I was seventeen. My main aim was to secure a full-time position with the Queensland ballet.

During that time of study, I was diagnosed as having compartment syndrome in the anterior compartments of my lower legs. After I came out of surgery on both legs, I considered other goals and opportunities in life that I may have wanted to pursue other than ballet. At the time, I was also coming out as a lesbian and really unsure of my gender. I was expected to play female dance roles and I decided that if I couldn't dance the male parts and if my body wouldn't make a full recovery that ballet wasn't for me. I used to skip maths classes which I hated and would spend this time and almost every lunch time for two years in the art rooms making work and wondering what I would do next. I was in a city where I had no family, and in which my world that had been ballet had disappeared overnight. I ended up failing high school and realised that I wanted more than anything to be an artist.

Having failed school I figured my chance of attending university to study might be slim so I applied to South Bank TAFE (Tertiary and Further Education) to undertake the Diploma of Visual Art for two years, but I failed that too. I'd realised that I'd spent so much time actually engrossed in *making* the art that I'd put no time aside to complete my written assessments. However, I decided I still wanted to go to university. When I applied to QUT, (Queensland University of Technology) my application was successful and I did well enough to receive the Vice Chancellor's Scholarship based on a portfolio of artworks that I had made at TAFE – I received \$7000 for the first year of my undergraduate studies, and this enabled me to spend more time on my studies.

Honours was a difficult year, my practice which was embedded within research into national identity had taken a turn and where I focused on political issues regarding the Australian landscape, the history of Australian art and the resource economy. At the time, I was coming to terms with my gender and trying

to perform as a high-functioning young artist, but internally, a battle about not being who I was meant to be was raging. As a result, I spent a lot of time feeling anxious and deeply depressed. The art I was producing was still rolling out well, and I was exhibiting regularly and running *Cut Thumb*, an experimental Brisbane based ARI, with artist Callum McGrath, but I was lacking the focus to work adequately on my exegesis – I was too preoccupied with my thoughts and commitments. After Honours I went to see one of my QUT lecturers – Dr. Courtney Pedersen - about my confusion about whether I was meant to be making art. I had a string of failures and near-misses behind me, so I couldn't work out why I was focusing so strongly on being an artist in spite of the trail of negative outcomes. When I look back now I realise that that moment was a turning point – Courtney reassured me that this questioning of my capabilities "I'm not meant to do this" was a result of a patriarchal system that conditioned women and people other than cis white males to doubt their ambition, skills and capabilities. I cannot forget a particular male lecturer saying to me on a regular basis "your problem is that you're too ambitious" "The only reason your work was chosen for that exhibition is because the director doesn't know what he's doing".

I returned home to Mt Gambier after Honours was finished and decided to knock on the new Gallery Director of the Riddoch Art Gallery's door and initiated a conversation with Melentie Pandilovski about the possibility of a solo exhibition at the gallery. The pitch was successful and I was given a solo exhibition a month later in early 2017.

This was a complete turn-around for me – I'd gone back home filled with an inner purpose of dedicating myself to making art away from QUT, and I had the promise of the solo show 'in my pocket'. On my way back to Queensland I was encouraged to apply for the Jeremy Hynes Award. It was a five-day drive, and every morning I'd get up to hit the road early, then for a while in every country town that had a McDonalds, would plug into their free wifi and write my 'on-the-road submission'. In the end, my application for the award was accepted and I was proud of myself for the first time in a long time. I'd done this on my own with no help from – it was a big jump from my idea of failure to being the eventual recipient of 2017 Jeremy Hynes Award.

Six months down the track I was helping install my solo exhibition (also part of the award) at the IMA (Institute of Modern Art). I had to be even more ambitious. I decided to apply for funding and go on a research trip to the Galilee Basin to see for myself what was happening with the Adani project and to record the call of the endangered Southern black-throated



finch. In the end I couldn't find the bird – something I could have marked up as another failure – but, instead, I met a really great woman along the way named Deborah Alvoen, a first nations person who worked for as Indigenous Communications Officer for Rio Tinto and for Queensland Parks and Wildlife. I met her at the Claremont Historical Centre, and she kindly drew me a mud map about how to get to the proposed Adani mine site. Deb actually ended up being a fundamental part of the IMA solo show, and travelled down to Brisbane to give a talk while the IMA show was on. That experience brought home to me the facts about how complicated it is for a non-indigenous person to make images and work regarding the Australian landscape and its contemporary politics. As a result of this realisation, I've decided to trace some of my own cultural origins from my father's side back to Sweden, on a trip that will be funded by the NAVA (National Association of the Visual Arts) Freedman Foundation Travelling Scholarship.

Last year, after the Jeremy Hynes Award, I made the decision to start using testosterone gel. In consultation with doctors, I started transitioning slowly from female to a non-binary identity. This decision was a long time coming and has been the right decision for me. I felt very alone during this part of life. I had and still often get terrible gender dysphoria – at this particular time though, I was beginning to feel really uncomfortable in my skin and didn't leave the house much. I went back to see my doctor and began a series of injections every fortnight and then I got put onto another injection sequence that I only have to get every three months – I've been using that for just over a year now.

I didn't tell my family anything until the end of last year – I was concerned that my family would reject me. My Dad and Grandmother were fine with it but my Mum has taken some time to come around to the idea.

I'm currently recovering from Top Surgery, a gender affirming double mastectomy with nipple grafts. This is a common surgery chosen by Transgender, NGC (Non-Gender Conforming) and NB (Non-Binary) people. I'm planning to go to Kakadu in May next year to visit the Ranger Uranium mines and looking forward to the scholarship research Sweden in April.

Although it's apparent that the scarred earth of the landscape transformation might directly relate to my own body's physical transformation, I don't want to address this issue in a didactic way in my practice. Those early years of living in Mt Gambier were pretty instrumental in establishing my interest in and love of the landscape. In lots of regional town many people love the old landscape paintings – they surrounded me as a child. My Dad grew up in Dandenong, and that region, together with the presence of the Heidelberg School in Australian landscape painting, were very much part of my early consciousness, and have

continued to be important to me in a way of unseeing a lies and misguided narratives in the Australian art canon. There are layers to what interest you in terms of what you make work about, and I'm still in the process of both layering and unearthing those references. For the time being my focus is on mining and rehabilitation processes taking place in rural Sweden.

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