

Margaret Olley Art Trust Collection Room Residency

Artist in Residence Written Reflection

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2024

Have you ever felt a time when you didn't belong? The outsider looking in at the amazing wonder and mastery when surrounded by fine art and the obvious feeling of disconnect between your expression and voice as an artist and an art lover?

Where colours form narratives and texture takes on emotive expression.

I found myself on the periphery of feeling this way with my work as a professional photographer, seeming like an uninvited guest at an opulent banquet, during my four-week Artist Residency in the Margaret Olley Trust Collection Room within the Rockhampton Museum of Art.

And yet somehow, this intense feeling comforted me.

It was this sense of disconnect as it gnawed at my creative thinking, that forced me to ask – “*Where was my place in the creative realm?*” “*What do I want my art to say, express, feel?*” Constantly leaving me to ponder during those four weeks, whether my art can or will ever truly belong in such a revered and storied institution as a Museum or a Gallery.

And the answer is – Yes.

The juxtaposition of still-life fine artists such as Richard Dunlop, Jill Langmore, Harley Griffiths, and Dudley Drew on the North, East, and South facing walls of the Collection Room, were mirrored with various artworks donated to the Museum from the Queensland Centre of Photography, (regarded as one of the leading photographic institutions in Australia before its closure in 2014), on the Collection Room West Wall.

As I grappled with my artistic inner turmoil: a hauntingly deep feeling that my photographic expressions and practice, although nice to look at and somewhat, poignant particularly the portrait pieces, may lack the perceived depth or gravitas; when compared to these artists who echoed vibrancy, vision, and timeless masterpieces, I can say felt inspired.

I don't have a brush and I do not paint. Yet my camera is not an extension of me, it is a permanent attachment of how I express my world, ideas, and thoughts. Just as the elbow bends at the arm, with the shutter on my camera, I am making a silent plea to bend light, craft stories and expand societal thoughts and thinking in a single or series of image captures.

Whether that is the change to the way my clients see themselves compared to their own inner voices and thoughts; or if a viewer takes twenty seconds longer to stand in front of my photograph and ask the question ‘Why’ (a notable gallery in America tested the average time a person will spend looking at a piece of art in their gallery and it was recorded as being 20 seconds).

And the spaces and places I create in my photography matter as much if not more when there is a deep emotional connection between the person, the space, and their story. Or the place/space and its connection to the creative narrative I am crafting in the photograph.

There is an unspoken hierarchy of artistic mediums, and photography is often viewed as a lesser, not as important classification when talked about as art. A mere reproduction rather than a creation, and quite frankly, this really annoys me. As it casts a long shadow for photographers like me, to not be seen in many artistic domains like galleries and museums. But this was not the case during my Residency.

The layout of the selected artworks in the Margaret Olley Trust Collection Room had a lifechanging effect not just on me but also on visitors during the term of my Residency. Visitors of all ages came to explore what was on display and converse with me about the narratives they believed the art conveyed.

Because I also had my photography work on display at the time, their warmth and detailed depth of what they saw in my images fuelled my gumption to push further and explore boundaries of what else my photography can convey. To ask – *‘How can I infuse more emotion and depth with intentional purpose and what other techniques can I explore to not only extend my art but also my artistic photography skills and knowledge?’*

Artist Residencies allow the artist to explore and expand beyond the constraints of daily working lives. The stimulation I received from the artwork I was surrounded by, the knowledge I found in the Museum Library which I accessed daily, the practices I tried in the Programs Room to create and the exciting exploratory intense conversations I had with visitors, and the Museum staff, for me, fostered a sense of community for four weeks that changed me beyond measure. In a word, the experience was– transformative.

There was a power and a presence during my four-week term Artist in Residency at the Rockhampton Museum of Art that began with – *‘I don’t belong here...’* – to – *‘I am this beautiful world of art too. Watch me carve my creative intention in this space and every other one I step into now and forever.’*

I would like to extend my massive appreciation and thank you to the Curatorial Team and the Education and Learning Team for their work before, during, and after my Residency term. Your dedication to your work and making me feel welcomed and supported during my time, did not go amiss.

And to any person reading this, if you have considered applying for an Artist Residency with the Rockhampton Museum of Art but feel like you too don’t belong

as an artist, let me say this to you: you do, you can and you will be forever changed during your time spent in Residency.

Apply and keep applying until you too are successful. It will be the best first creative decision of many more incredible decisions, that you will make as an artist.