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Byron Bay Surf Festival
Art Show.

Colleen DaRosa.

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M-Arts Precinct.

+ ART OF THE AFTERLIFE

ONE CHANCE OF ENCOUNTERS MAN

IN THE STUDIO

Lionel Bawden.

Interview by Sharne Wolff.

LISMORE-BASED ARTIST LIONEL BAWDEN IS THE OFFICIAL ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT LISMORE REGIONAL GALLERY BETWEEN JANUARY AND APRIL THIS YEAR. SHARNE WOLFF CAUGHT UP WITH LIONEL IN THE GALLERY'S RESIDENCY STUDIO ...

Sharne. What are you up to for your residency?

Lionel. I'm creating a show entitled *Paperbark*, focussing on the tree as both subject and material, as well creating a kind of self-portrait. For the show I'm thinking about 'tree' as natural phenomenon with a strong energy charge. I've also been thinking about it as processed material — that is, the wood and paper in the work — which is something I've done for a long time. For *Paperbark* I've found that I've been really focussed on 'tree' in relationship to words and the way that paper carries and communicates emotions that are essential to my sense of self. I'm making intimate works that explore personal relationships with a kind of open tenderness. To me, paper is a really valuable and emotive material that can hold a lifespan of emotion. The perfect example is a life's worth of greeting cards — birthdays, friendships, thank yous, love affairs, losses and new connections — a collection of which I am using for one of the key works in the exhibition.

Sharne. Why did you choose the paperbark tree as a subject?

Lionel. I chose the paperbark as my motif because it brings together lots of meeting paths. When I moved to the Northern Rivers, I embraced the Radical Faery community — they became my family here in a new exploration of who I am. It's traditional to take a Faery name as a mark of embodying new ways of being. I took the Faery name Paperbark, though I have left it behind right now. So, the show is taking up the ground that I initially explored in my naming. The paperbark is a vital and living symbol for open experience, rawness, and the ability for trauma and falling-apart to be part of a being which remains strong amidst it all. Outside my studio at Lismore Regional Gallery, and specifically Gallery 3 where the work will be on display, there's a huge paperbark tree visible through the window. I head out to the tree occasionally, look at the shedding layers of skin — the bark — and feel that I'm open to the tree's resilience and strength. That tree is helping make the work.



Sharne. Many people know you for your intriguing 'pencil sculptures' — one of which, *The amorphous ones*, won the 2009 Wynne Prize for landscape at the Art Gallery of NSW. Can we expect to see any of your pencil sculptures in Lismore?

Lionel. During the residency, I'm reflecting on an art career created from trees — wood and paper — so it makes sense to include one of these works because they've been so strongly fused to my sense of self over more than two decades. I'm working on a pencil piece for the show although I'll wait to see how it sits with the other works.

Sharne. I'm interested in the connection between the pencil sculptures and some of your current text-based works. Can you tell us more?

Lionel. There's a satisfying connection between the pencil sculptures and the new text works. The pencil speaks of the possibility of words and now as I make less of the pencil works, words come tumbling out of me. I have a simple paper cut on the studio wall which reads, *ENDLESS WORDS FALL FROM MY FINGERS*. The pencil, akin to either a page or a sheet of paper, speaks of expression. Even if I decide not to include a pencil work in the show it will be inferred historically, as I've previously exhibited my larger pencil sculptures on big stacks of paper.

INSTALLATION VIEW OF *THE KANDINSKY HAS TWO SIDES* AT ARTEREAL GALLERY.

SPRING AWAKENING 2018, COLOURED PENCILS, EPOXY, INCRALAC. 68 X 58 X 5 CM



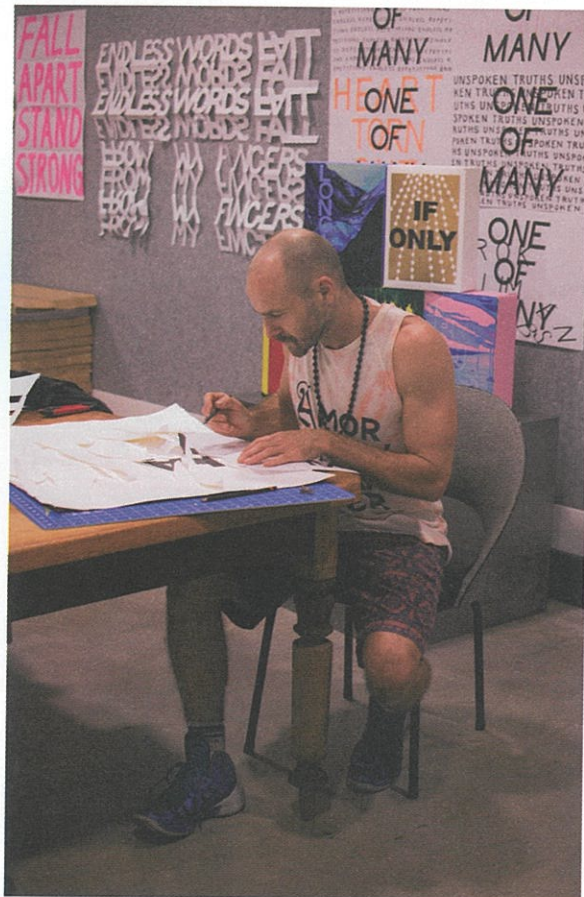
Sharne. What can we expect to see in *Paperbark*?

Lionel. Physically, the work employs sculpture, drawing, painting, printmaking and installation. One of the works, *ONE OF ONE/ ONE OF MANY (shared experiences) 2017-19*, is an oversized paper stack of 'take-aways', a genre of artwork made famous by the incredible Cuban artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres. In my paper stack of offset prints, I've hand-stamped various 'shared experiences' text onto the page. The audience is invited to view the work as a sculpture or installation. If someone feels a connection to the hand-stamped text on the top sheet of the stack, they can take that print home forever. I like the idea that the work will move out into the world in this way. It's an open invitation for connection with my audience through our shared experiences. Although I'm making at least 2000 of these unique prints, only the top text will be visible in each moment. So, the work is also like a poem where these shared experiences sit in relationship to one another and the cascading text is only revealed as the viewer interacts with it.

ONE STOLEN OF KISSES MANY

Sharne. You mentioned that the elements of concealment and display are a constant in your work?

Lionel. My emerging homosexuality at art school in my late teens and early twenties was fundamental to the development of certain modes of inference rather than direct communication. I was often only telling part of the story, revealing just so much. I think when one has become accustomed to secrecy through acts of concealment and display and of metaphor, the same modes remain in our vernacular, even when the secrets have been torn right open. The paperbark is in constant flux, the paper-fine bark is always falling away revealing its interior, and yet so much is left unseen in each moment. We are akin to the tree. Sometimes we deliberately reveal our deeper truths and then at the next moment something, or someone, can tear a huge hole in us and expose a new realm of experience. On the other hand, we can choose to keep some things to ourselves, or to only share them with our lovers.



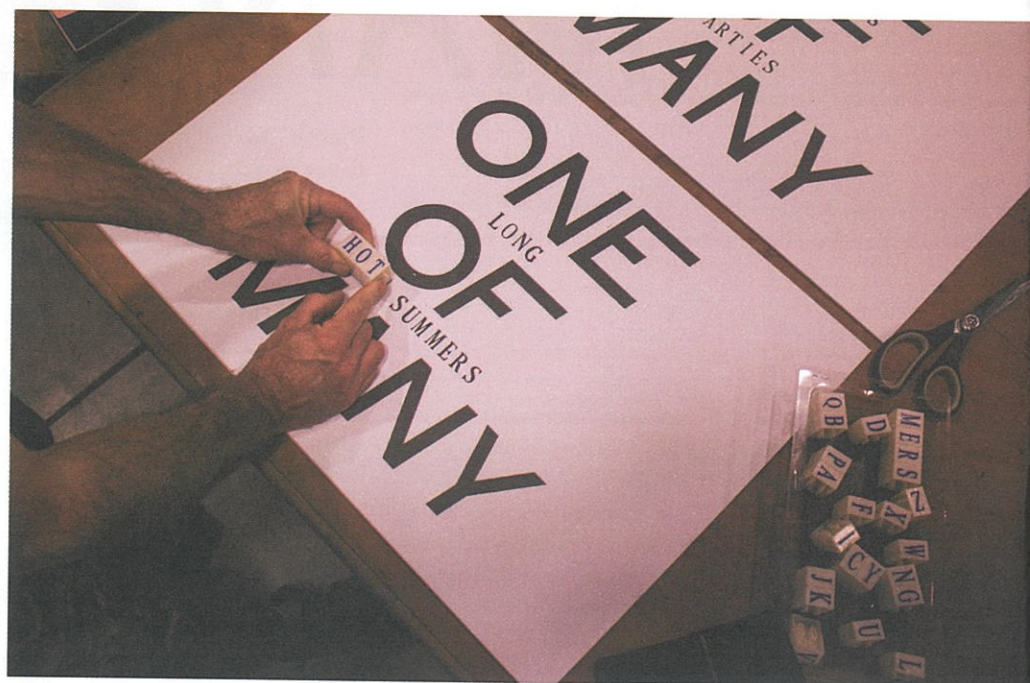
Sharne. You've been residing in Lismore for several years, but haven't exhibited here before now?

Lionel. I've been in Lismore for four years now. Moving north was a definite move to try a different way of being. Of course, it's still a work in progress but so far the move has involved many life changes. The fact that I've not so far shown my work locally — except for Caroline Wales' amazing 2017 Ballinalé — creates a real impetus for me to want to create a rich show which has numerous entry points for the viewer, for a community I really value ...

Sharne. Do you think living in the Northern Rivers has changed your work, or even the way you approach it?

Lionel. Leaving Sydney just over four years ago was a deliberate stepping back from lots of the things that defined city living for me. Things like saying yes to everything and having a full dance card. Here in the Northern Rivers I have rekindled an intimacy to the natural environment, so I've been spending time with the ocean and in the forests and national parks. Another marker of my time here has been spending more time with less people and getting to know a few individuals more deeply. I think human connection and connection to nature are both strong pathways for self-knowledge. In other words, I've slowed down ...

Lionel Bawden's Paperbark exhibition is on view 6 April - 12 May 2019 at Lismore Regional Gallery.



Paradisaea 2 – from the Series Paradisaea, colours from the Birds of Paradise PNG painting by contemporary artist, Svein Koningen.

Svein recently closed his Bruges studio (Belgium) to return to Australia making Casuarina his base with his studio in Tweed Heads.

0490 778 462

www.koningenart.com