Zhen's artist talk

Wednesday, 15th September 2010

Dai Zhen Chew
3.15-4.15pm, Building G, Room 1. 04

NOTE TAKER: Sarah Mander

Presentation of Master's Research

Legend :
Z – Zhen
A – Aundience question

Z : My work is about the process of drawing and my perceptions while I draw and what I learn from them. Will now show a brief part of my work.

This is a work I did in Frankston at Cube 37, drawing what was outside. I was in a windowed space, drawing what was outside. It was over two weeks, so as people came and went, and cars passed I would just change the drawing, it changed over time.

There was also Faculty Gallery Work. That was done also over two weeks, and was a work that I did on the wall and then ran out to see what was in the hallway, so it was continuously changing as well. So when class started and there would be a whole lot of people.

This was done in my studio. This represents my mood while I draw. Depending on my mood I will draw very differently. In this stage I'm quite calm and not very stressed, but as it goes on I get a bit more stressed and it becomes a bit wilder.

These are progression shots on how the studio turned out. It got a bit wilder and bigger. It kind of took over the whole studio. I started doing these works, where the drawings became the space and I would draw it into the original drawings.

Another aspect of my work is the work that I did at the Chinese Museum, it was about my transition in understanding from a Chinese understanding to more of a Western one. This also took two weeks and started out with a very Chinese style of drawing and then came to incorporate Chinese and Western styles and eventually it turned out as a very Westernised style, with a bit of a twist. The music playing is what I was listening to as I was drawing

This is some of my art-play works. These are where I collaborate with kids. I'm drawing the space again, but the kids take over after a while.

This is the most recent one done with the kids. Mostly done by the kids. They did most of it themselves. It's kind of a short snapshot of what I've been doing. The work that I would like to discuss, is my most recent work which is done on my laptop. This is done on-site, people do watch me, and of course it's better. This one was done over two hours. The sounds are recorded from the actual day.

Here's another one. So you can see the difference between different days that I draw. This one was over about half an hour, so it's much faster drawing.

So, I want to talk a bit about why I draw. The reason why I draw is… I will first explain that in 2007 or 2006, I was diagnosed with severe dyslexia, which has issues while I'm writing my masters, but it helps with some of my work. I have a slow processing speed, and trouble processing things into my long term memory. What does this have to do with my drawing? I tend to daydream a lot. I can go through a whole day and only remember a few minutes of the day, but when I draw it intensifies and helps me remember what I saw, what I heard, my emotions.

For me, the process of drawing is the process of remembering and experiencing the world. A few weeks ago … came in and said "I draw, therefore I am". When I discussed it with her later, she said that she draws what she is and it's a record of her existence. When I draw, it helps me remember. It goes into your memory, and your memory is part of who you are. And while you draw, you tend to learn a lot of things, and that also impacts on your memory. When you learn it adds to what already exists in your memory and how you understand the world. An example of this is in the work in the faculty gallery. These chairs have little balls near the bottom of them. And I thought they were wheels. Then I thought why do I think they are wheels – because they are small and round? It wasn't until then, I mentioned it to someone. They went and pushed it, and they weren't actually wheels. So when I draw, I notice things that I normally wouldn't, it helps me question and understand the world, and how it effects my perception, and how my drawing effects how I understand the world.

That brings me to this work, where I'm looking at, the record of that experience of that moment in time, but it also blurs into my memory, The drawing and the experience.

The project which makes the cafe a gallery space and other people are watching. Or another project where I draw someone drawing me drawing them drawing me drawing them drawing me. I would like to do that if I can find a pace.

Or doing a drawing where I have a screen above me. Maybe Federation Square. So I'll be sitting and it would be playing live as I'm drawing.

A: Good idea

Z: At the moment I don't have a supervisor. So any comments?

A: A couple of years ago, Carriage Works had a process of drawing and a band playing, so they had an audience and the band, and they were all reacting and influencing each other. Like a collaboration with sound. They had an artist with a screen like this so you could see what they were doing.

A: So it would come up on the screen, just like yours.

Z: I would do it over 8 hours, yes So it would be to the point where I don't know where everything is yet. But when I do, I can get people in to interact with the work, so I can draw them

A: I think it's a good idea and I like your drawing style. And the cafe work. You could combine your two ideas, with two people interacting with your drawing. So on a wall, you could draw someone drawing on your wall and have that projected on a screen.

Z: I'd draw them reacting to my work.

A: Inviting people to interact and to become a part of the artwork. An interesting experiment.

A: Can I ask why you don't have a supervisor?

Z: I was with Marianne Cootz, She was head of drawing. I took six months off, to rest and to work and when I came back I was with Nick …, but he left. So I'm kind of in between supervisors. I'm waiting for Ken Smith, but not until next year, but I kind of want to concentrate on my writing. I've done lots of drawing.

A: Have you thought much about your writing? Your influences?

Z: I keep changing my mind, but I want to keep it as a diary of my moods, a progression of my moods and how it effects my drawing and particular artists. I was to look at Foucault and the social hierarchy of knowledge. Because depending on who you're with, your knowledge base will be different, and what you think will be different, hence my drawing will be different.

A: I think you need to be careful about your theorization with Foucault. You're in danger of overstating what individuals do. It should incorporate technique. Paper media, and the nature of drawing to the idea of sight and animation. I would look at someone more like Bergman, the spectre of the image and the spectre of the live

image. To bring it back to the technique and the knowledge that is learnt through doing. It appears that what you've presented that its directed by your output and I think you need to keep it within that frame. There's plenty of theory within that in itself that it should be ok

Z: Should I ignore Foucault all together?

A: No. There's a place for a contextualization of that history, but don't displace what you're doing in terms of the research, because this is the research that you're doing, not Foucault. There are probably more closer readings to what you're doing, over that of Foucault. It's about keeping it in the territory. You can put Foucault in the introduction, but he need not be throughout the whole thing.

Z: I think that's where I've started.

A: How longs have you been without a supervisor?

Z: A month.

A: You can't wait until next year. You should be banging on the door.

Z: In terms of your annual report, make sure all of that is documented. So if in the future when you need an extension, this is ammunition.

A: Your work is very temporal, like that of William Kentridge. He draws and then he erases and then he draws.

Z: This is some of my other bits and pieces, I collect all the dust. I look at him a lot, for his process and how he does he animations

A: You've obviously used the tablets a lot in your work. Why use the tablet technology as your form of medium? I like the drawings they are like little fragments of life. They are a bit more approachable. What's the difference? Both are done in real time.

Z: Because with these works, you couldn't see the work in real time and part of the work is time. Partly because of my memory, time is so variable for me. So I wanted to see how I drew in real time. I couldn't do that with stop motion.

They are different. These are recorded as I draw, and the exact time I'm drawing it at. It's like a form of research, you realise I'm drawing slower or faster than I thought I was. Oh, that was when that happened. Or something. The tablet lets me record in real time so I can look back and reflect on my own work

A: When we viewed it was sped up, so it wasn't in your actuality

Z: That's what I've been thinking about, how to show it. In my time or sped up

A: It could be my own horror or fear, which is the loss of tactility. The paper and the charcoal. There's a romantic notion in that for you. I can see that, how you collect the dust from your works. How has that changed by moving it into the digital realm?

Z: I've done what I can to keep the tactility. I've changed the paper on the screen, and the nibs, so it feels like you're still drawing on paper. But of course it's different. You can see the difference between this and what I've done with charcoal. A bit part of it is about the trace, and what it left on my memory.

A: It's the body, if you look at the scale, it's a sense of the physical presence of the artist in the work. Do you still get that performative notion that seems to be somewhere within your technique? That seems to be a sad loss.

Z: To me, working at this size, I draw like this in books too. I have trouble drawing small. I either draw at this size, or massive. I find this almost intimate and much more private way of expressing and looking at how I understand and how I draw. It's just a different type of drawing that are still interconnected.

A: I understand. If you can only remember a small portion in your day, and you're looking at something in a time lapse. So in this way you can see every single stroke that you're made. But I understand the textural loss, in terms of layering. Which is why I suggested the two together. You draw them on the template, drawing on your work.

A: Could you go in between? So you've lost the performative, but then at Fed Square, so you direct 200 people.

Z: Also with these works, what's important to me, is that I don't just draw what I see, but what I hear and feel with all my senses. Even looking back at what I draw, I can remember what I ate. What I heard. Even destroying the drawings, I'd still be able to keep those memories.

A: Are you looking at artists and theorists that look at memory and capturing the moment?

Z: I haven't started much research just yet. I decided to do as much practical as I could and start writing later. Memory is a huge part in my work. I did the blind train works, and record sounds on the train and then had a blindfold and drew from my memory

A: I met a psychologist, apparently they have some research that says these problems need not be a problem anymore. There can be a lot of creativity in it.

Z: I've schooled myself in how to work around things.

A: I have several problems with some of these things. I can't read as fast as I would like. I get very nervous when I read. I start getting stressed.

Z: I was only recently diagnosed. I just went out and got tested. I was doing my teaching degree, and I couldn't understand why I was having so much trouble. You should get a certificate. Read and Write Gold reads out what the text says. I got assessed at Deakin. The DLU recommended them.

A: Did the software solve your problem?

Z: It helped a lot. I only need to read it once now. My problem is the memory and the slow processing speed.

A: But if you audibly receive it…

Z: I can understand it a lot easier, and a lot quicker.

A: I sort of force myself to remember every bit, and I can't do this, and this makes me stressed. Even sometimes when its simple. I don't feel like I forget the lines. It's just about text. If its pictures, and imagery, it doesn't make me stressed.

Z: It will read any digital format. I use this quite often. I dictate a lot of my work.

<u>BOOKS</u>

Henri Bergson – Matter and Memory

Kerburski – time and memory after Bergson

Atlas and Emotions – G.B. Bruni/o (Italian name) (Cinema, moving image and memory – the idea of the artist through her experiences)

<u>POSSIBLE SUPERVISORS</u>

Tom Nicholson as possible supervisor (drawing)

Melissa Miles in department of theory

John Gregory in theory as well.