

I am honoured to have been asked to speak here this afternoon among many of my peers and friends.

As you see I am not nervous and will be speaking for a couple of hours.

I will be talking about being an artist in South Australia from a personal perspective and the way my practice may be an example of various possibilities.

When I came to Adelaide in late 1974 I was accepted to South Australian School of Art. Although I had studied art earlier in Iran I found the atmosphere and teaching environment a great opportunity to open up to the possibilities that Australia had to offer me.

It seemed to me then, and I believe it is still the case, that a city the size of Adelaide is an ideal place for an independent and vibrant art institution which could attract students from interstate and overseas.

I feel that through amalgamation with larger institutions and the bureaucratisation of the system, standards and moral have slowly deteriorated.

I think there is an urgent need for changes in priorities and improvement in the system. For example, more flexible teaching opportunities, further involvement of practising artists, lecture programs for visiting artists and residencies for interstate and overseas artists would be a good start. Art education is the basis for a strong art practice.

In the late 1970's, early 80's, there were a number of group studios set up by artists in South Australia. I was involved with Roundspace cooperative, and started my practice there. I quickly found out that although Adelaide was supportive and a good place to live and work in, I needed to seek further opportunities beyond its borders. I think that this is still the case.

Then came the question of survival. I remember speaking on a forum about this issue with the then Premier and Arts Minister, John Bannon. I pointed out the importance, in the short term, of unemployment benefits as a subsidy in the development of the careers of many artists.

In general we can see how artists have become multi skilled to be able to survive. Teaching has been one way but we have created other opportunities to maintain our practice. In my case it was making of Art in public spaces.

Assistance through grants from State Government and Australia Council can facilitate projects which need the extra time and money to complete and the extra step that can create future opportunities. However, we cannot rely on these grants as regular income and as funding declines, these opportunities are less frequent. We need to be persistent in seeking these opportunities especially at the Federal level.

I have been on both sides of the fence regarding funding and believe that recent changes in funding methods in South Australia, especially regarding individual artists, have some teething problems. Hopefully adjustments and changes will be made to deal with the reality of the situation.

Although artists work in isolation in their studios we rely on our colleagues and friends for support, and I have personally enjoyed this support.

These groups and structures at times have become like separate clubs and worked in isolation, but it is good to see in an event like this that Institutions and Galleries have come together to celebrate SALA Week.

It is now 20 years that I have been practising as an artist. Beside showing work here I have exhibited and worked interstate and overseas, and can say confidently that for the size of our community, we have a varied and vibrant visual culture.

In my travels I have been asked for catalogues and books about my work, and until recently I had not much to show. It is vital that we can present our artists through high quality books and publications, which should appear on a regular basis.

It is good to be here in the new wing of the Art Gallery and to see the work of our artists, and I hope that we'll see more contemporary art in this gallery.

I'd like to congratulate the organisers of SALA Week on the excellent work in bringing to attention the work of our visual artists and hope that this will become a regular annual event, to not only promote but also enrich our practice.

Thank you...

Hossein Valamanesh