

2015 SALA launch Address - Giles Bettison

Good evening everyone... tonight... I would like to acknowledge the Kaurna people whose land our ancestors occupied and on whose land we are standing now.

It is an amazing honour to be the featured artist for the 2015 SALA monograph. I never imagined that there would be a book about my work, it's amazing and a bit overwhelming. Part of the price you have to pay for that honour is that I get to give this address tonight, I never thought anyone would let me loose on a crowd like this. I need to thank some people.

I firstly want to thank Suzanne Charbonnet, my wife, for supporting and putting up with me, my kids for keeping me grounded and for excellent comic relief during this whole process...

Thank you to the Art Gallery of SA for hosting us all and thank you to Minister Jack Snelling for his kind words.

I would like to thank Margot Osborne for proposing the idea and nominating me for the Monograph and going on to write the scintillating text. I want to thank SALA and Penny Griggs. The whole SALA festival is huge effort by dedicated people to celebrate art and engagement, it's brilliant and seems to be getting better!

On behalf of Margot Osborne and myself I want to thank Michael Bollen, Wakefield Press and everyone there. Also Liz Nicholson who did the design work and Caitlin Eyre for assisting and fact checking. Also I'd like to thank Arts SA and particularly Belinda Powles for all the support I've recieved from them.

I'd like to thank Brian Parkes, Margaret Hancock and the JamFactory for mounting a great exhibition of my work and also Aptos Cruz in Stirling for the exhibition of retrospective work that they have there at the moment, go see them both.

I'd like to thank Rose Kentish and the Vale Cru for partnering with SALA to provide beautiful wines for us all tonight and at other SALA events this year.

I also want to thank Wendy Hannam and Loui Fitzgerald who have helped me make a lot of my work over the years.

Being recognised in South Australia and Adelaide like this is a very humbling experience. I hope that Margot's and my contribution to this great series of documents will be both a useful addition to our South Australian cultural history as well as to artists and crafters alike all over the world. The opportunity to chronicle my work in the monograph is of inestimable value to me and I hope to the rest of the art and glass appreciating public.

I want to share with you ways that I think about the glass things I make and how I think about art. The things that keep me going and what I see as important things about art and what it does.

One of the things that I think art is for is to engage people. Art is a tool to help us to see ourselves and our world. More than ever, in these busy times people look without seeing which is sad and dangerous. There is so much to see and know around us, we need to recognise it for our health and the health of others, our souls if you like.

Art helps us to know our world and engage with it. It gives us a different perspective to our own. It is people making representations of things and telling stories, something we have done for millennia. It shows we are seeing and thinking, that we are engaged. We notice art because it is a different point of view than our own, it can take us outside ourselves and be a point of contact with others. We can see the difference between what we see and the perception of other people. It is also a perception of time. When you really see art you become part of a discussion about different ways of seeing things. When we are engaged and connected like this we are better able to care and to take care. With art the conversation begins and the dialogue goes on, if you let it...

In our high tech and hyper connected world people are more disconnected and disengaged than ever. Increasingly people are overloaded by the speed and intensity of the barrage of information being slung at us, most of it arbitrary and irrelevant at best. The so called social media is actually anti social media. People are interacting with screens more and more and interacting with actual people and things and their environment less and less. I have been to parks, restaurants and art galleries where most of the people there are on their devices, not interacting with each other, it's tragic, it's like they're blind.

The more disconnected and disengaged we are, the easier it becomes to make decisions that don't take the care of other people into consideration, we become isolated. It becomes easier it is to make decisions that are informed by fear and misunderstanding which do not have broad positive outcomes. I've experienced how destructive people working this way can

be. I think we have all seen it and are aware of it.

It seems to me that there is a trend for people to isolate themselves from other people and from their environment. We need to engage and to commit to each other and to turn this trend around.

There are a whole bunch of things that happen when you are engaged by art. When you listened to a piece of music that moves you, you get tingles down your spine your hair stands up. Your brain and body are being activated and it is usually a very good experience. I experience this when I attended great music concerts. At the beginning of the show we are just people trying to get to our seats or to a good position close to the band, but at the end of the show when we have all shared this expanding musical experience together and as we are all leaving, I feel a kind of connection to everyone, I imagine that my fellow concert goer feels this also. We have all shared the same experience and had similar uplifting feelings and everything feels right, we're connected.

I have similar experiences with visual art. It can happen in nature, in crowds, in many ways in many different situations, but art specifically is the gift of people trying to elicit this connection and engagement a discussion with other people, one of our survival tools I believe. When we are moved by art it is exercising our engagement muscle. The more we have these experiences and recognise them the better we are able to attain and maintain this condition.

When we are in this state we are empathetic, we are more likely to make smart and caring choices. Art is good for the environment.

One of the important things about art and artists, this art gallery and all other galleries is that they are places where discussions and engagement can happen. There is all the potential to engage and to be present and to give back. We need to engage and we need to make careful and compassionate choices.

SALA was and is visionary. It gives a huge cross section of artists across South Australia a valuable opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the broader public, a very important thing. I hope there are all kinds of discussions started and carried on as a result. We are all here to celebrate this kind of positive dialogue.

So....

On that note please look and please think, please care and please speak. Enjoy this event and as many other SALA events as you can.

This part of tonight's entertainment is over, Thank You.