

SALA Address July 29<sup>th</sup> 2016 AGSA  
Catherine Truman

*Tadpoling at the bench*

Distinguished guests; John Hill, Jennifer Rankin, Nick Mitzevich and Penny Griggs.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that we meet on Kurna land and pay respect to their spiritual relationship with this country past, present and future.

Thanks everyone for being here tonight, especially my dear friends, family and colleagues who've travelled from far away places to share in the celebrations.

It is such an honour to address you tonight as the featured SALA artist for 2016 but this wonderful achievement has only been possible through the support, love and inspiration from a lot of other people and so firstly a few personal thank you's. And then I'd like to tell you a little story - a story about tadpoling. In fact I've titled my address to you tonight *Tadpoling at the bench*.

Thanks to the SALA committee and to Penny and Kate for their incredible commitment to this ever-growing phenomenon that is SALA and a nod to Paul Greenaway, the instigator, for his vision. To Arts South Australia and Wakefield Press for their support of the SALA publication especially Michael Bollen, Margot Lloyd and Clinton Ellicot. To Melinda Rackham for her intelligent, insightful, writing and to both Melinda and Andre Lawrence, our mentee on the project, for their commitment to getting it thoroughly right. And to Rachel Harris, our designer, for the magic she wove to bring together Melinda's fine words and the many, many luscious images by Grant Hancock into such a magnificent book. We are all really proud of it. I hope you all enjoy it.

I never dreamed that having a book written about you would be quite so intense, quite so wonderful. We had to proof it a few weeks ago, and I must admit I felt very emotional holding the pages in my hands for the first time. I became so absorbed, I forgot I was meant to be proofing and by the end I was so excited I really wanted to rush back to the studio and make some more work. So that's a good sign eh?

A special thanks to my Gray Street family, Jess Dare and the gang for keeping me afloat through thick and thin and to my lifelong partner Sue Lorraine for her patience, sage advice and rock solid love.

And to the people at the coalface of Arts South Australia and the Australia Council, for your professional support and for believing in my practice.

The Art Gallery of South Australia has held such an important place in my growth as an artist. I do feel that it is embedded in my DNA. It is deeply satisfying to present such

a large body of work in this gallery. It's a great honour. Thanks Nick Mitzevich and Lisa Slade for their hutzpah and commitment to showing live and kicking, practising South Australian Artists and Rebecca Evans the curator of European and Australian decorative arts. My exhibition was her first major project in her new position at the Art Gallery of South Australia and she hit the ground running with grace and elegance and it has been a pleasure to work with her. Thanks to all of the install and registry staff too, especially Jess and the crew who had to document well over 300 objects for the show!

So you can see I haven't sustained my long career without the support of many others and I thank them from my heart.

Now to my tadpoling story and I promise it's short and sweet.

I want to tell you about an image that's in the book being launched tonight.

When I was seven my dad took a picture of me tadpoling in National Park. In this picture- a 35mm Kodak slide, the kind with the cardboard mount, I seem completely unaware of the either the camera or my dad for that matter. There I am standing in the creek, brown Bermuda shorts, scrawny little legs covered in mud with a blue plastic strainer in my hand, bent over, absolutely focussed on the water, poised, ready to pounce on some poor unsuspecting taddy. Mum's shade-house was forever croaking as I was growing up.

Every time I look at that photo I relive those moments of complete bliss, of absorption, and curiosity, the thrill of discovery and the deep pleasure of pursuit.

And I'm really pleased that forty-three years later this picture appears in the beginning pages of the book because it still resonates on many levels.

When I create work I touch base with tadpoling. Hunting and gathering is integral with my daily practice of making art. It's full of challenging and difficult and delicious experiences of absolute absorption, deep focus and pursuit. Connecting with the wider world - observing, listening, learning, staying open, interacting, engaging and exchanging is critical to being an artist. It provides context and meaning. I actively seek out contact with others- mostly scientists because they like to go tadpoling too, and I like to think the world is a better place because of the creative exchanges we have.

I've been artist in residence in the School of Medicine and the biomedical laboratories of Flinders University for several years now and learnt first hand that there are rich parallels between art and science. Full-time practise in either field is mostly a day-to-day slog and some days, there is nothing tangible to show for it. But we both agree, it's the slog that's compelling and fruitful and wonderful. Now I can better understand and embrace the chaos and rhythms embedded in my day-to-day creative processes. This

time next year the JamFactory will be presenting a solo exhibition of my art/science project works.

The wonderful South Australian painter Deidre But-Husaim put up a post on Facebook recently - a quote by Chuck Close. He said:

*The advice I like to give young artists, or really anybody who'll listen to me, is not to wait around for inspiration. Inspiration is for amateurs; the rest of us just show up and get to work. If you wait around for the clouds to part and a bolt of lightning to strike you in the brain, you are not going to make an awful lot of work. All the best ideas come out of the process; they come out of the work itself. Things occur to you. If you're sitting around trying to dream up a great art idea, you can sit there a long time before anything happens. But if you just get to work, something will occur to you and something else will occur to you and something else that you reject will push you in another direction. Inspiration is absolutely unnecessary and somehow deceptive. You feel like you need this great idea before you can get down to work, and I find that's almost never the case.*

I couldn't have said it any better. And I learnt that through tadpoling at the bench and working with scientists.

This is wise advice, but it seems that the nitty gritty part of creative practise is not always understood by the consumers of art or the powers that be- those powers that have just been narrowly re-elected for example. Enough said. It is usually romanticised and separated from real life. So it is vital we put voice to the day-to-day creative processes of full-time practice and take advantage of SALA to give us that important voice

In rounding this up, when I think about my dad sneaking up on me to take that photo of me blissfully tadpoling in that muddy creek in National park, I feel incredibly moved that he recognised the substance of the moment and that he cared enough to record it for posterity.

I hope you all get to do a little tadpoling yourselves this SALA.

Please visit my show upstairs and Melinda and I are now going to be happily signing books in the foyer, please come up and say hello!

Thank you and VIVA SALA!