

**Transcript of SALA Festival 2017 Keynote Address**  
**Friday 28 July, Art Gallery of South Australia**  
**Christopher Orchard**  
**The Uncertainty of the Poet**

I'm thrilled to be, of course, represented by a book and I can't tell you that how, when one begins a drawing, a painting, a piece of glass or whatever, there's a ... there's a kind of interregnum between a formation of the idea and the materiality of the work ... it's an interregnum, it's ... it's a dance of death, it's a kind of ... 'shall we do this or not? Shall we do this or not?'

And I remember when I got told about the book and Michael Bollen and Margot Lloyd, and Leslie Wilson and the staff of Wakefield press who are absolutely ... they're magicians ... sat across the table and said, 'what do you want to do?' and I said 'oh, I think, oh, let's see ... let's see what happens' ... and I said 'what I'd really enjoy is if you curated the book'. Which was a really interesting shift, and I said 'by the way, I'd like to present an idea' ... that seemed to be accepted ... 'what about five writers?' That'd be alright, that'd be good, you know, so we get five voices, and we get some cross-generational work going on and so forth.

So, Dr Margot Osborne, who's extraordinarily generous and sharp, aren't you Margot?, oh sorry, but she is brilliant, is wonderful ... and she just began to herd me like a bag of cats ... 'do this, do that, dah dah dah'. But the interesting thing was that I discovered that I remembered that a wonderful man by the name of Dr Allen Reid, who'd done an enormous research project on my work and he gathered this amazing compendium of work. It was bound and red, all leather, with gold type on the spine and so forth, saying *this is the work of Christopher Orchard*. So at least from 1972 to 2006, there was this, there was this *exhaustive* bible of stuff associated with my practice and my career and so forth. So I was able to hand that [over], and I remember delivering crates of stuff to Margot, and she'd said, 'you've got a lot here, let's have a look at this' and so forth.

Meanwhile, I'd had this fevered idea that maybe a cross-generational view would be interesting and I'm sorry to describe it that way guys, but Julia Robinson and Roy Ananda just kinda like WOW! They stood out to me, and they're gorgeously articulate and brilliantly talented artists in their own right, and I thought, 'I wonder how they see my work?' ... 'I wonder *if* they see it?' (laughs). Interesting ... and they *did* and they brought insights to my work that I found absolutely enthralling and I'm gonna work on it ... I'm going to work on it. These kids assessed me ... they're kids ... they're just kids ... (laughs) ... kids.

Peter Goldsworthy of course, he's sprang out of the loins of ... where are you Peter?, he's out there somewhere ... and he wrote poetry that I just *adore* the line of ... something like *smiting the white*. The paper. That arc of the covenant. The charcoal. That strike of the work. The beginning ... and so Peter ... Peter just nailed it. Absolutely nailed it.

And then Rod Taylor. A curmudgeon. He's a wonderful man. He and I have argued our way through decades, of knowledge and practice and so forth. He taught me a lot. And he brought a great wisdom and perspicacity to the text of the book.

So ... the book ... a work of craft ... that began like a drawing, a kind of ... you never read where you begin and your mind is blank as the paper. And then you begin. And the first mark goes down. The first word. The first sentence. The first syllable. And it begins to craft itself ... and I always believed that was possible. So then we moved to the point where my work becomes a kind of symbol for me.

But the important thing is for you lot ... because we are all in this together ... we're all in the same hospital ... we're all getting the same back rubs and we're all servicing the same views ... that is ... 'is God going to take it away tomorrow? Am I still going to be able to make this stuff? Have I still got something to say to the world and will I keep saying it?'

And you know the affirmation of SALA is just that kind of thing that ... it's become so potent now, from SALA week ... and God bless Paul Greenaway for starting it and everyone who's carried it forward, Kate Moskwa and Penny Griggs; the extraordinary women who carry it forward ... isn't it interesting that women carry it forward?, but that's another story. That the vision of it has become now, really, it's increasingly high and it's focused and to me, it's a bit like ... it's a bit like a magnifying glass that harnesses the sun and it focuses on one spot, and the spot begins to burn and it then moves and it moves and it moves. This is what SALA's doing now, across 6000 artist's careers, people who make everything from ... and I keep saying this ... leather belts, to fully blown whatever ... you know ... archetypal works ... and everyone's celebrated and it's equal, it's uncurated and it's gorgeous.

I think that's enough, I don't know ... I can talk for hours (laughs), but I need to remind you of one thing. I was in the class the other day ... I teach a little bit of life drawing at Adelaide central school of art ... and my life drawing students were standing at their easels and there's a model ... they're drawing with their ... with a pencil ... just a pencil ... just the humblest of instruments ... graphite brought from the ground, brought from the earth, wrapped in a piece a bit of wood and there it is, and they're making marks, and they're just performing miracles. And the important thing was, it's a reminder to me, I'll never get used to it ... I'll *never* get used to it. There's a blank sheet of paper. There's a source. And there's the artist ... making marks on that surface.

My world is drawing. But the important thing is, that the world gets proven, it gets *proven*. As a student of mine said one day, in a big workshop and I built this enormously complex set and it was a 10 day drawing exercise ... 9 til 5. Day 8 ... one of the students said 'who put that coffee mug there?' and everyone turned around to look at the student and said, 'it's been there since day 1'. You see ... that's what art does ... it makes the invisible, visible.