

On the road with jah: Paradise Regained: A return to Australia and New Zealand for a healing

Because of the passing of my sister and a previous agreement to meet Peter Sellars, director of the Adelaide Festival deposed but still connecting with his El Nino performance (John Adams, composer and film by Peter Sellars), I decided to recharge my spirit with those vibrations I have always felt down under from the oldest and the newest lands that stir my soul, and so I left 24 February for a two-week trip to Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Auckland to help me heal, to restore my spirit, and to renew old friendships. Through e-mail, my friend Pamela Zeplin made it all happen for me in Adelaide with housing, food, 3 gigs (2 at art schools and 1 at Elastic, the substitute event for Artists' Week at the Festival). And then Brisbane, because I had never been there and my friend Anne Kirker, curator of international art, invited me and Melbourne, because I wanted to visit with my artist friend, Lauren Berkowitz, and see the Len Lye show at Monash University. Then on to Auckland for 3 days to be with my friend, Carole Sheppard, artist and Deputy Director of Elam School of Art at the University of Auckland. Not bad for two weeks at the end of an Australasian summer, with balmy winds and warm sunshine, with scheduled days and free time too. It was to be an adventure, and a re-acquaintance with two of my favorite places.

Alas, no Sydney in the itinerary except for the airport, which seemed freshly organized, better administered and in fact, a change because of the Olympics, I am sure.

ADELAIDE

We flew over the equator with a full moon bathing the silver-gray clouds beneath. It was a good omen, and when I arrived in the Sydney airport, it was humid, muggy in fact, and cloudy. So my visit to Sydney would be airport views, and so it was. Upon arrival in Adelaide via Virgin Blue, offshoot of Virgin airlines of Richard Branson and the best organized airline I have ever taken in my life, Pamela, Professor at the University of South Australia, was there, whisked me into town, and I walked around Hindley Street in Adelaide having a great time indeed. I did notice the blending of so many cultures in restaurants, shops of all kinds, and even a T-shirt with the headlines from California newspapers and an American flag, an homage to 9/11. A small town atmosphere with gentrification seeping into every pore, Adelaide still was so inviting but did not have the buzz of the preceding Festivas I had attended, for some reason.

I found myself living across from the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, a true institution in Adelaide, and a brilliant show of Wang Gongxin (from Beijing) was being exhibited during the festival, so I immediately partook of the Festival upon reaching to my temporary abode. And it was quite a show of video in which a "contemplative situation" uses the formal qualities of an art object embodied within a time-based medium. It is very much like individual portraiture but quite different, and the rooms were filled with his large-screen projections and it was good, it was very, very good.

I also took a walk in the warm sunshine near the greenbelt around the city which is home to the Fringe Festival, cricket games, and park experiences for the public. The homes seemed to be bungalows of various sorts, some retrofitted, others restored and renewed, others relatively newly built over an old design, but charming, always with verandas and wonderful horticulture. A chocolate factory of the most famous chocolates in South Australia attracted my attention as well, being a chocoholic—so what else do you need but contemporary art, a park and chocolates. I was home! I also found out that President Clinton had preceded me by one day, and that the Queen had arrived in Adelaide, and she was to create a maddening rush hour the next morning on her way to Barossa Valley, to taste the wines.

The next day I was slated to attend "Elastic" the substitute event for Artists' Week, a three-day confab of artists on issues such as discussion of Media on the Street, with artists such as Deborah Kelly (Necessity is the mother of Intervention) with guerilla type of art practice using low tech or artists using bus shelters, radio programs and newspapers, or even civil disobedience to withstand the Australian Prime Minister's terrible policy about refugees, or as James Dodd demonstrated by using stickers on the streets and posters. A team from Indonesia, Taring Padi, which definitely does political art against the regime with woodcuts and posters and murals that wow the eye! Presentations by artists exhibiting in and around the Adelaide Festival program included local artists, René Boutin from New Caledonia, a collaborative from Adelaide, and Pat HOFFIE from Queensland who works with Philippine artists in fully developed labor projects.

The afternoon session called "Scrambling Space" involved artists working with new media and digital technologies, creating diverse conceptual and physical spaces such as a presentation by Rebecca Cummins, now at University of Washington after 16 years in Australia as an artist and lecturer at Sydney College of Arts, who created a kind of outdoor shower which creates rainbows (and she does a series of portable camera obscuras in the spirit of the 19th century cameras, a choreographer who even has worked

with Robert Wilson; Justine Cooper who survived the World Trade Center tragedy as a downtown New York artist, who uses medical technologies in creating conceptual works of space, time and identity; and Christian Bumbarra Thompson, a Bidjara/Pitjara Aboriginal from southwest Queensland who has created a series of sweaters with aboriginal themes and very, very long sleeves which can extend on the floor for many feet.

The remarkable thing about Elastic is that it replaced Artists' Week which was canceled by Peter Sellars as one of the first changes in his concept of the Adelaide Festival. As a response, 8 women got together and made "Elastic" happen—in other words, they found the Symphony rehearsal hall and asked for it as a venue for the event, they also received technical assistance for slides and video and computers, and they did their publicity, etc. with the help of a very large committee. It was truly miraculous to be so comfortable, to have no glitches technically, and to see a program evolve as indicated, thanks to the gutsy efforts of 8 young women, and we even got honoraria (a small token) just to have partaken in the event. I also did a Radio Adelaide interview with Margaret Dodd.

Culture Jamming, the program in which I participated, involved art for social change, art activism such as reacting to the refugee crisis in Australia, artists reacting to 9/11 (my take), and art dealing with post-colonialism (such as in New Caledonia). I spoke how artists were affected by the tragedy in New York, how some are working in Santa Fe as guests in large studios, how others have reacted with shrine-building, sharing their projects with the people, and getting my facts mostly from my reading, my own experience on 9/11 in New York City, and Artswire, a service on the Internet edited by Judy Malloy for the New York Foundation for the Arts. What was most moving was Serafina Malorano, who has spent much of her life working to raise awareness of cultural and social justice through the arts. As a member of VISAS (Volunteers in Support of Asylum Seekers) who has gone into the Woomera camp where the Prime Minister John Howard has put all those refugees from Indonesia and Afghanistan who wanted to come to Australia for asylum and then were put into concentration camps instead. She had us all in tears, telling us about the women and children she had visited. (<http://www.v-i-s-a-s.va.com.au>)

Following this, there was the dedication of Art Alley, outdoor walls utilized by artists for a period of 6 months each to enhance the environment and make the West side of Adelaide art-conscious since so many artists live in this area. At that time, Stephanie Britton, editor of *ArtLink*, one of the best periodicals in Australia and published in Adelaide, attended and we caught up with each other,

having known each other from 1982 on. We also attended openings at the Experimental Art Foundation, Persimmon Gallery where arts and crafts are shown, but the Tea Ceremony was being highlighted with teapots from the imagination of many artists and an installation by Helen Fuller, a local artist, that brought about much nostalgia about how tea entered into the lives of her family throughout the generations. I also caught up with Ross Wolfe, my friend and the reason I went to Australia in 1982 in the first place, David Kerr, former head of the Experimental Art Foundation and now a curator at the Art Gallery of South Australia who has inserted much of aboriginal art into the exhibits in the Art Gallery. It was good to meet old friends. I also saw Fiona Clark, a remarkable photographer, object maker and artist from Adelaide, who is renowned. We also attended an opening at Nexus, which is a multi-disciplinary, member-based arts organization incorporating a Gallery and a Cabaret. They sponsor a community cultural development program, dynamic visual and performing arts programs, forums, workshops and special collaborative projects. The exhibition I really liked was Dress Codes: resonances from the past that reside in contemporary dress by Annabelle Collet, a textile artist, who explores the influences that history and culture have on contemporary dress, by using old patterns and swatches, etc. It is brilliant and I hope to bring it to the States. And then we were invited to attend Medea, a remarkable, stunning portrayal of the Greek tragedy by poet Euripides as portrayed by a Japanese company which was stunning with its powerful, intense and dynamic physicality—all for free. A brilliant Vietnamese dinner topped the day, packed full but wonderful.

The next day Maori women, aboriginal women and visual artists who work with these weavers such as basket weavers, visual artists, and fibre artists held a symposium on Yarning: The Meaning of Weaving for indigenous and non-indigenous communities in Australia, New Zealand the Philippines. This was a prologue to an amazing exhibition of Aboriginal and Maori women artists at Tandanya, the National Aboriginal Cultural Institute in Adelaide, a most amazing exhibition which relayed so many spiritual and autobiographical vibrations that its intensity pervaded my very soul.

I gave a talk about artist books at the Central School of Art, where my friend Dianne Longley, longtime bookmaker, invited me. The questions were stimulating and the interest was of a very high caliber. After an all-day session talking about the Visual arts industry in Australia and the future of Artists Week and the relationship of visual arts and festivals, there was a wonderful reception with the best wines from Nepenthe Wines to end a rewarding and instructive three days of Elastic.

Perhaps the most stirring event was the opening day of the Festival with a Dawn Ritual in which international, national and South Australian indigenous groups in each of Adelaide's four outer squares converged to burn "spirit fires". I joined with the Nexus group in the evening where we gathered at one of the outer city squares to prepare for a four-pronged procession to Victoria Square, where indigenous members (10 aboriginal nations) greeted and mingled with the public, and where we all converged with a remarkable stage with the statue of Queen Victoria wrapped in natural colored cotton calico. 10 aboriginal nations were greeted and then each danced and as a remarkable touch (ala Peter Sellars) the Zuni Indians of New Mexico danced, then a group of Zulus from South Africa arrived and danced, then a group of Tibetan monks performed, and then a Maori haka did their thing as well. It was amazing and stirring. We were lucky to have marched from one of the corners so we were seated on the group and saw the whole event. At the end of the performances, a women's ceremony involving Queen Victoria's statue in which she was wrapped in the aboriginal flag, evolved into a massed children singing event, after which the burning coals were taken and began a big bonfire at the side of the Square. It was a moving event, one I shall never forget of harmony, convergence and unity.

Besides the aboriginal art both at Tandanya and at the old Synagogue Place, there were 96 alternative exhibitions around the city in empty offices (vintage early 20th and late 19th century), as well as venues which allowed the surprise element to attract the eye. From then on, we had a remarkable weekend, going to the great Market which is full of foods, sundries, cafés and an Asian market as well. It was so much fun and much more advanced that I had remembered in past visits. We also attended the play, "The Death of Salvador Dali" which was terrifically wonderful play acted by three people who made it all work.

While taking a break at a café after seeing several shows on that Sunday afternoon, I saw this statement of Chief Seattle in 1854 on a T-shirt: "Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

I gave a lecture at the University about my *Women of the Book* show, which opened the semester for the art school. The questions were wonderful, and interest in the Edible Book High/Low Tea was also high. I had a wonderful rest of Adelaide, noticing that the land of Oz also see the Lehrer Report, and other PBS programs, as well as our slew of sitcoms and regularly scheduled evening mysteries and series, such as *The Guardian* (he's an Australian actor, by the way) and *Raymond*, etc.

BRISBANE

I had never been in Brisbane before, a booming city with tropical climate, many hills, and a sense of well being in Queensland. I visited first with Noreen Grahame, who is a print dealer and artist book dealer who does a remarkable Biennial of Artist Books (4th one last year). She took me around Brisbane, giving me the visiting fireman's tour with great skill. It was magnificent, and we ate a wonderful Italian lunch of Tasmanian mussels with a great red wine. She's quite a connoisseur. Then we walked through the botanical gardens where there is a Banyan fig and a Moreton Bay fig tree, plus the dragon tree, one of its kind in the world. We also visited the Queensland University of Technology right in the gardens which has a wonderful theater, a great gallery and a zest for multidisciplinary education which has embraced buildings of the Brisbane Technical College, the Central Technical College and Queensland Institute of Technology at Gardens Point. Dr. Sue-Anne Wallace is director of the Cultural Precinct.

At home at Anne Kirker's I was able to see Mieko Shiomi's fluxus film which honored her long career as a Fluxus artist in Japan. Then we had a wonderful dinner on the veranda in that tropical clime. The next day I visited the library at the Queensland Art Gallery (which had terrific exhibitions) and I saw the Fluxus material which had been developed over the years culminating in a gift from Francesco Conz and a Fluxfest the year before.

The bookshop at the Art Gallery is exceptional with much avantgarde and cutting edge publications. I also visited the State Library where Joan Bruce showed me some of the artist book collection they have been developing over the years, emphasizing local artists as well as national ones. I took a walk and saw the feather work of Elena Gallegos, which was outstanding.

MELBOURNE

The morning after I arrived I was whisked to Monash University where the great Len Lye was being commemorated in a centennial exhibition of his films, and some of his kinetic sculpture. A video presentation accompanied the show so that updated material and wonderful clips fleshed out this small show, which was documented with a catalog. If you don't know who Len Lye is, he was born in New Zealand, was fascinated by things that moved all his life, bought a sailor's papers in Sydney and went to London, did kinetic sculpture, painting, and animated films in which he painted directly on the film stock itself. He made adverts for Shell Oil, BP and for the Post Office in the UK. He then became a March of Time editor, coming to New York, where he met his wife Ann,

and even gigged with Merce Cunningham and John Cage. He died in Warwick, New York and although he always wanted to leave everything to MOMA, they never responded, so a Len Lye Foundation governs his work and his archive which resides in New Plymouth, New Zealand. A new book on Len Lye's life has been recently issued by Roger Horrocks, and you will see a short review in the Book Review section of Umbrella. His films are priceless, and you will see them in many film festivals. My favorite is Free Radicals.

After that, I was on my own for a while, took a tram to the Jewish Museum of Australia, which resides in Melbourne and has Helen Light as its director. It is the most user-friendly, interactive, cutting edge Jewish museum I have ever visited as far as the exhibits go. It is accessible and comprehensive, and I learned so much about the Australian Jews. I then attended a Friday night Sabbath dinner at the rabbi's house, and it was a full round table including a young rabbi from Los Angeles who had just arrived from L.A.

On Saturday morning, I visited galleries, some aboriginal and some clearly commercial. The art was of a high calibre and I was very pleased with my gallery hopping. The new cultural center is being created by two disciples of Liebeskind and although it has echoes of his work, the architecture is much too busy for me. Edifice complex resides even in Australia. I also noticed that most cities are clean, there are no apparent homeless, and no begging,

AUCKLAND

What a wonderful embracing, beautiful country. I was back where I wanted to be, with friends who wanted to be with me. Carole and John embraced me, I was staying in their new studio condo, a remarkable contemporary building with a deck in front and in back. We went to a gathering of women glass artists from around the world, who were speaking about their to each other. It was revelatory and amazing, and I was delighted to know these women artists who have been meeting and greeting each other from Wales to Auckland. They were going to have an opening later in the week, and I would be there to honor them.

After a visit to the Auckland City Art Gallery, which now has two venues, we went to Carole's Museum of Cultural Anxiety and her studio. That night, a party in my honor involved artists and writers from the Auckland area and old friends too. It was terrific, and the food and drink was wonderful. The evening was balmy and it was wonderful to talk of food, drink and culture with such wonderful people. I was amazed! Has Auckland changed with the influences of many Asians including Japanese, Indonesian, Islanders as

well as Mexicans, Italians, etc. You can tell by the foods which are as varied as any city can have. Parson's is a family-owned wonderful art bookshop with the latest titles everywhere. It is indispensable to the art community, one attached to the art gallery but now an independent bookshop. I gave a lecture at the University on the Women of the Book show, where a young woman showed me her new Haggadah (the story of Passover) told in English, Hebrew and Maori, all done on her computer, beautifully bound, and available for sale. I bought a copy for inclusion in my Women of the Book show which will have another venue in 2003. After that, we went to the Lane Gallery where all the women glass artists were exhibiting their work, and it was a stellar opening.

The next day I visited many galleries, including a William Kentridge presentation at the University Gus Foster Gallery. I then read my e-mail on the computer at the Auckland Public Library where I got a cash card and watched the minutes fly by while the computer slowly did its thing..but very slowly—with 500 messages to return to, I had my work cut out for me. We had an exquisite Italian dinner at "Delicious" a small Italian restaurant in Grey Lynn and the next day I was at the airport at 6 a.m. for my return home via the Sydney airport—backwards to go forwards, but that's the way it is down under.

*T-shirt
seen on a
young man
in Auckland!*

