

WILLIAMSBURG

ELLA CONDON, 27



What brings you to New York?

I'm in New York as a Visiting Artist at Parsons The New School for Design, making artwork and contributing to classes and the world of Parsons as much as I can. I'm working in the Fine Art and the Photography department. For some reason Fine Art and Photography aren't the same thing, which I find quite strange.

What's the main difference?

I think it might have been rooted in the idea of photography as more of a trade, something which is now an out-dated thought process. But on the other hand it also creates a really interesting world, working in the two departments. I get the Fine Art world, which is a range of media ... ceramicists and artists (who also use photography), and the photographic department, which is just purely photography. But I think it's changing, and the cross overs between photography and installation, two-dimensional to three, are apparent. So I don't really see much difference, but they're in different buildings still, different programs, they're both 2-year masters programs ...

But you're crossing between the two ...

Yes. Last year I completed my masters. A double course load, which was really great, but

really exhausting! Because I couldn't choose and I couldn't really understand the difference. A Masters of Fine Art by Research is what it's called at Sydney University, and then the area of specialty is Photography, and here it's a Masters of Fine Art in Photography. Sydney University is more research based and here the research is making work.

Now I'm making work as a practicing artist full time.

And you've been invited back to Parsons?

Yes, I'm the first Emerging Visiting Artist. It's good to have that subtitle, "emerging" because the profile of being a Visiting Artist is incredible. Vito Acconci, an amazing artist, is part of the Visiting Artist program. Obviously I'm very new in the art world and don't want to be compared to people of his caliber because they're amazing.

What about the people you're working with? Are they people you've found inspiring before your arrival, or did you meet artists once you arrived?

I didn't know my classmates before. One classmate in particular, Magali Duzant who is a great friend and someone I'm working with now, we're putting together a group show. But I guess I did follow Simone Douglas, who is the head of the program here, from Australia. I've been stalking her for about 5 years, maybe longer! (laughs) So I figured out that if I studied at Sydney University, I could then apply for exchange in the second year of my research degree to apply to go to Parsons. It was unlikely that I was going to get it, but I was like, 'Hey it's worth a chance'. I changed universities and applied and got it. This was a 5-year plan.

What is it about Simone?

She's a really inspiring artist. And an amazing teacher as well. She's very generous, really encouraging, really critical. I think the world here is quite different in that people genuinely want to help you.

As opposed to Australia?

Yes, the teaching here is amazing. I was just given a huge list of texts to look at that would be relevant to my practice, so I went to Strand Books straight away and bought all the books on the list. In Australia it's much more focused on independent study, which is also good. It's great to have the independent time to do questioning and research yourself. I think I'm really lucky that I got to have that experience. I think it really helped my work.

Can you try to summarize your new work?

Sure, sure (laughs). 'Sculpting with Light' was the title of my thesis. Looking at shifting contemporary photographic practice, which I think I mean in a literal sense and a metaphorical sense. Something that is not 2D anymore, something sculptural that is light installation based. I was inspired by James Turrell, a light artist who does beautiful work ... "Within Without" in Australia. You go inside this strange cone-like room, sit down and watch the sunrise or sunset, the light within the room slowly adapts as it comes through the hole in the ceiling. You are aware of light in a completely different space. Time changes, it's beautiful. You watch people experiencing it as well because it's open to the public. The light is changing. It slowly goes through shades of pink, purple, green ... But it's so subtle you



don't notice the shift. So as your eyes are adjusting you see the sunset or sunrise differently. He also has a permanent installation at PS1.

And how does photography fit in ...

I see James Turrell as a photographer ... a light artist. I see photography as being essentially light and time. Those two things are what I'm interested in. So I looked at all these artists who explore photography in three-dimensional ways. This is some of my installed work (shows work in thesis). It's called 'The Light Loop'. It's a kind of crystal rotating on a like a mini rotating disc, the sound is of distant radio waves being bounced. I look at light, and arrange it in different ways. This was projected onto a board from a data projector, and then reflected onto a reflective surface. So there was a sort of loop happening, so the light was projecting and reflective, you were experiencing a mirror image and you could see the light itself being projected. You are aware of light in all senses. Then the new work that I've been making now is more abstract again. I've been recording dust, and particles of matter falling through darkness. Using just available light, dust and time through still photographs and moving image. And then recording through sound as well. I discovered that I only have dust on my iPod, want to listen? I got on the plane from Sydney with just a 20 minute recording of dust!

You wouldn't think that dust makes a sound.

It's also mixed with distant radio waves. It sounds like a crackle, kind of beautifully similar to the dust. I got a sound artist to mix them together. That's all I have on the iPod! That's part of 'Trace of Light', the body of work I'm creating here.

What's your goal with this, with your work?

I guess just to continue to explore these ideas in a sculptural way, create new work, looking at light, connecting with other artists who are also interested in these kind of ideas. My eyes are really open to anything.

What does the role of Visiting Artist entail?

The role is fairly open, I'm just figuring it out as I go. Basically helping out as much as I can with the Masters of Fine Art programs, I'll do a couple of talks to students, answer any questions, do some one on one studio visits. There has also been interest in me talking about getting grants and the harsh reality of the art world. I'm also presenting at The Art and Research at the Outermost Limits of Location-Specificity, which is the conference in November at Parsons. And I'll talk a little about my work on sculpting with light there. I also have an exhibition at The American Australian Alliance in October.

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How did you even get into all of this?

I guess I've always just been really interested in art. In my first year studying Fine Art at The College of Fine Arts in Sydney, I had a really inspiring teacher Lynne Roberts Goodwin. I found the way she spoke about photography and her work incredibly inspiring, so I transferred to it as a major immediately and I've been pursuing it ever since.

Were you encouraged by your parents, what do they do?

My dad is an architect and my mum works as a writer within the social welfare sector. I find both of them very inspiring. I work as an artist educator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, and find this combination of art and education together wonderful.

We were talking before the interview about the challenges in Australia in the arts at the moment ...

Yes, with cut-funding and deregulation. I think it's horrific. It's already hard enough to get grants as an artist, Australia Council are under so much threat, it's very concerning. I'm not sure what the future holds.

Do you think that pushes people to go overseas?

Good point. I think as an artist, residencies can always be inspiring and I've found you can travel really cheap if you couch-surf and with enough perseverance you can get grants. I think the cost of living in the US is certainly less, for me anyway. Parsons are also

very generous and have given me use of their studio facilities and equipment, there's a whole network and community here that are really supportive.

It sounds like you're kind of doing a bit of everything ... how are you managing all of this?

Being an artist is very multi-leveled. The role of an artist is a complex one. Most people do many things. That's how I like it anyway.

What about New York? Is it a place you love to work in?

Yes, I love it.

Do you think you would live here more permanently?

No, just continuing to just go to and fro, in bursts between Sydney and New York.

What are the differences?

So many. For me, the way people think here is quite different ... the way people articulate themselves. I find people are very generous with telling you details of their lives on the subway or sharing intimate experiences in an open way. I think it's just different in Australia. We're much more reserved. I think we have a different turn of phrase and way that we communicate.

Can I share some inspiration with you? I have lots of journals, I'm very much into writing things down, Google Calendar fails often!

(Ella shows her journals)

You've literally hand-drawn the months of the year?

(laughs) Yes, because I have three jobs in Australia and I apply for grants once a week. I spent 2 months applying for grants at the beginning of the year and to make sure that I got every one done I physically write it down.

I also write down artist references and ideas for work... jewels, rocks, wildflowers, glass, dreamtime, astrology, time travel, maps, bird calls. I was recently out in the desert and that was really inspiring, being in Broken Hill in Australia. Looking at the land in a new way, seeing it all differently, seeing open plains, Australia is so beautiful! Being in a new space makes you see and think differently. Australia is a big country that I'm still discovering.

So you don't see yourself living permanently out of Australia?

I don't know, I guess I've lived in New York a couple of times, which is really great, and I get to go between the two. But I think I'm definitely an Australian artist. My ideas are rooted in land and time, which I find inspiring in Australia. Although I'm going to do some travel here as well.



Road trips are on the cards! Hopefully there's some universal ideas there.

Is there something that you do everyday without fail?

Well I'm a caffeine addict, through the summer it's definitely an iced coffee. I guess everyday I do a bit of journaling ... ideas ... I sketch some thoughts out. It sets me up in a good headspace, my brain gets a bit full sometimes.

Do you have any guilty pleasures?

Definitely Netflix, I've missed a lot in Australia. I'm catching up on Parks and Recreation.

Is music something that inspires you?

Yes, but I've just deleted all my music off the iPod for the dust. So currently the iPod is empty. I need to get on to fixing that. I'm a bit of a metal fan. I have quite an eclectic mix ... I secretly love Metallica. But I also love Rodrigo and Gabriela, they do metal covers and Stevie Nicks.

What about books? Do you read a lot?

I love art books. I go to Strand Bookstore and buy books on photography and artist books where they actually share sketches and install details. There are amazing finds at Strand. I've got a few novels that I brought with me, that I really hope I can read and not just do work. I'll send you a list of my favorite books! I love reading.

- Shadow of the Wind by Carlos Ruiz Zafon

- The Secret River by Kate Grenville

- Bonjour Tristesse by Francois Sagan

- The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

And do you have any favorite galleries in New York?

I love following artists, rather than galleries. There's some stuff way upstate that I need to go and see ... The Glass House. It looks amazing. Also a show just outside of New York called "The Dying of the Light" which is extremely exciting, all analog artists.

How would you sum up New York? When someone says New York what do you think?

I think I immediately think of the smell that comes to mind. And I think the beautiful light here ... buildings reflect one another amazingly. You just walk down an avenue, and there's light bouncing upon buildings, a glowing light, it's amazing. Yeah, the smell of subway air mixed with random chicken gyro places, mixed with cleaning products. There's some really familiar smells every time I come here, and then I think of light.