

Belinda Fox at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute



Belinda Fox applying flocking, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, 2006

Belinda Fox and writer Katherine McDonald exchanged emails during the first two weeks of the artist's four-week residency at the STPI in July 2006.

How did your residency at the STPI come about?

The Director of the STPI, Irene Lee, and I met in Australia whilst Brent Harris was working at the STPI. Through mutual interest, we organised an artist/printer residency. I was invited for a month-long stay and I set about applying for funding for travel expenses. I had also wanted to visit Tibet for art-based research and thought of bringing the two together, so I applied to travel first to Tibet, and then on to the STPI to make my first impressions of Tibet. The last two weeks would be for further development as a printer, working alongside their master printers. Luckily I got an Australia Council grant and an Ian Potter Foundation grant that helped pay for expenses. The STPI supplied an apartment for the month, and an artist studio for two weeks to make my own artwork. In return, I would work as a printer for the remaining two weeks.

Can you describe the extraordinary print facilities at the STPI?

Where to begin! The STPI set up is based on the American model where BIG is better! The options for large-scale projects are vast, and the addition of a papermaking studio has allowed artists a unique opportunity to make paper pulp images. Lithography, etching, woodblock, photo etching, screenprinting, and papermaking are available to the invited artists they publish. There is also an artist studio and accommodation, so the artist is completely catered for, and an amazing gallery space in which to exhibit.

Did you arrive with a preconceived idea for the work? How has your recent travel to Tibet influenced your thinking?

I had a starting point before I left Australia, knowing the blank canvas is very intimidating, but it was an open starting point. None of which I ended up using! After my travels in Tibet I wanted to draw on my impressions of my journey and my feelings about the cultural conflict between the Tibetans and the Chinese, and the inevitable duality of progress and tradition, and how the two coexist. The work I planned to make is to be shown at the Mildura Art Centre in 2007 as an installation, so that was used as my framework.

You probably had some idea of what could be achieved there in terms of technique and scale. You would have seen Brent Harris's paper pulp and flocking works at the Ian Potter Museum of Art (University of Melbourne).

Of course! I would have loved to get my hands dirty in the papermaking room but only artists they publish are allowed access to this specialised and expensive area, so knowing that beforehand, I set my sights on learning the flocking technique that Brent had also used to great effect. What I really loved was the velvet back 'void' it created. Flocking also stems from the tradition of textile/wallpaper designs — traditions that I use often in my art practice.

One of the most challenging aspects of a short residency is dealing with the pressure of a limited timeframe. How did you come to terms with that?

I tried to set myself a goal and a starting point before I left Australia, should the trip in Tibet not foster any new ideas quickly. I did not know if I would feel comfortable in the space or if things would come together, so I tried to not stress and just enjoyed making artwork again, as I'd had a whole month away from it. In the end, I got a large amount of work done and the trip to Tibet was so intense it allowed ideas to filter in quickly. I was just lucky it all came together, really.

Did the studio facilities meet your needs? Were printers assigned to assist you?

The facilities were awesome! Although I had etching, screen, litho and relief available to use, I only needed the flocking machine! I did not have printers assist me. However, I had fantastic feedback and help from Eitaro Ogawa, master printer at the STPI, who was always around if I had any questions.

What possibilities can you see for the new technical processes you have employed at the STPI?

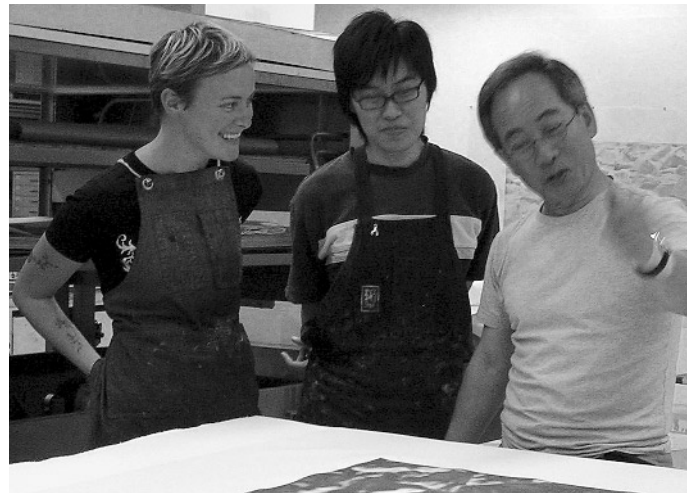
From this residency a whole new series is on the horizon. The flocking technique is very interesting and could complement my ambitions for installation work, so I am seriously contemplating purchasing the equipment when I return to Australia — which is very exciting.

You continue to use Asian cultural material in your images. As a Westerner making art for an Australian audience, how do you intend us to read the work?

People see all sorts of things in my work, not necessarily having to understand the finer points of Asian iconography. I think most people pick up on the core nature of my imagery, which reflects the notions of hope/doubt, beauty/decay and truth/lies. Having said that, this new series that has been made at STPI has a direct reference to Tibet and



Belinda Fox *Untitled study* 2006, pigment, flocking and cut-outs on paper, 70 x100 cm



From left Belinda Fox, STPI printer KC and Korean artist Chun Kwang Young

China, so there are key symbols used in some of the work. My aim is not to get so specific that it marginalises an audience, but I want to deal with a real issue and to do that I need to use particular symbols.

Do you think an artist travelling/working in Asia for a time can get a clear picture of the culture?

I have travelled a lot over the years to Asia and I find it endlessly inspiring. I think my work will always be from an outside perspective — that is where I sit. I am not sure if what I see as a traveller is just a mirror of my own beliefs, or if as an outsider I see more clearly because I am not in the thick of it. In the end, I think I see a culture from my Melbournian Western eyes, because that is my base. But being in a completely different culture allows you to see more clearly things that matter to you and perhaps your perspective of the world without the clutter of everyday life.

You still employ printmaking techniques in your work, but much of it is now large-scale mixed media. Do you still see a place for editioned prints?

Definitely! I am just enjoying working on unique images at present. This way I can work through ideas more quickly and not be held back by the labour of editioning. Developing ideas is my priority at present.

If you could do the residency all over again, would you change the way you worked?

No, I wouldn't change anything. I have the final two weeks to see Singapore. My reason to come to Singapore was to work at the STPI; my reason to visit Tibet was to 'be' there. It has been a great balance. These final two weeks working as a printer have been equally rewarding. Having the opportunity to work with the famous Korean artist Chun Kwang Young has been a highlight, actually. I am extremely lucky to be here at this time to be a part of a major STPI project. It is fascinating to work with such huge presses and to see how a large project evolves. I also miss working collaboratively with printers (since leaving Port Jackson Press Australia) so it has been refreshing to be part of a team again.

For more information about Belinda Fox, see www.belindafox.com.au

Katherine McDonald is a freelance writer and curator, based in Melbourne

Belinda Fox's residency was supported by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and the Ian Potter Cultural Trust.



Belinda Fox was a Print Council commissioned artist in 2002.

