

Mutant Collaboration ... a reflection

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There are currents that move, respond to wind, waves, temperature and geography and yet, whose flow is independent of demography. They are continuous, powerful flows which can be affected by many factors. Historically, artists accept upon themselves apprentices, not just as means to share labour and skill but also to share a way of seeing the world. Working together with Gary Deirmendjian has allowed me to apprentice myself to an independent current.

Gary recently completed the *warehouse mutant – balaclava* installation at the Pink William Studio in Balaclava and I would like to reflect on the experience of working together with and learning from Gary.

Gary was the lead artist in the project which was structured to allow the direction and momentum of the execution to form the installation itself. The work was a collaboration together with non-artists or artists of different medium and for each to contribute, and take ownership over, the work. Collaboration permits for multiple-authored works and sits in contradistinction to a participatory model, which involves following the parameters set down by the originating artist. This project was organic in nature in which the lead artist was able to share ownership. In doing so, Gary's practice permits collaboration to be used freely by all involved.

Allowing for fluid, organic teamwork the creation of the work encompassed two aspects, almost equally important. The first was the inter-human relations between collaborators and the second was the aesthetic formation of the sculpture itself. The process was as much the embodiment of the artwork as was the finished product. The negotiations and interactions which were precipitated by the projects were vital to the work.

Often the most rewarding projects are those that marry both process and outcome. Rather than the artwork only teasing utopian social romanticism, the actual actions involved can prove the imagined ideals a reality. This together with a shared authorship can allow for works to be slightly less synonymous with capitalism and individualism, and more deeply impact those directly involved.

Gary built a small scale model of how he envisaged the completed work. It offered a general sense of where we wanted to go without jeopardising primary focus on being present in the particular action of creation. This allowed the process to carry us in impromptu, expressive ways that cannot be known in advance. Relying upon a rigid pre-determined outcome can force the artist to miss opportunities to engage the energy that is present in the collaboration. Simultaneously a strong vision allows for confident experimentation and flexibility. These flows or currents allowed for dynamic, non-verbal expression.

The *warehouse mutant* will have a temporary, parasitic existence on top of a shipping container in William Street, Balaclava. Its ephemeral nature, like most temporary art, will hopefully question our modern obsession with futureness. Installed facing a

temporary human conduit from the Balaclava Train Station, passengers (should they notice) are offered visual stimulation without being sold something. In an age where communal culture has long been commercialised, it is satisfying to be involved in a project that does not require those who witness the sculpture a consumptive transactional exchange.

Perilously clinging to the shipping container the felinesque sculpture possesses both hard edges and soft curves. Emulating a snow covered, mountainous horizon, the plastic stretch wrap mimics a glacial form and suggests the mutant is filled with intricate pattern of ice crystals. And yet, the structure of the sculpture – deconstructed shipping pallet bones – allows the viewer to clearly identify the origin of the structures as the landscape of wholesale industrial factories, a packaging trans-national apocalyptic environment.

The sculpture's internal structure was made from pieces of shipping pallets – wooden slats forms as bones connected to a pallet spine. The full pallets were deconstructed using a crowbar, a tool that Gary has often used metaphorically as verbal representation of rebellion, power or anarchism. In many cases, the reconstruction of seemingly concrete notions of self, identity and authority involve, first, a destruction of its current form. Through the project, our communal dialogues involved a reflection on our individual notions of identity - the names we have adopted, the names we leave behind, the way we spell them and a thirst for improvement.

Emerging from the residue of consumption, these raw materials that have circumnavigated the globe, were selected and employed and manipulated by an ethnic fruit salad of individuals. Indeed, it is no surprise that the project connected so many previously unrelated people within the local area. Individuals who are employed in William Street escaped the everyday, for an instant, and instigated conversations with different people about a somewhat obscure subject. This project has helped assist Pink William in defining itself as a facilitated and unaffiliated shared space with a purpose of helping to shape the environments in which we live.

What intrigues Gary as an artist are concepts, materials and mediums that also resonate strongly with myself. It has been an eye-opening and extremely humbling experience to witness the strong and refined artistic qualities of an established practitioner working with these familiar constructs. Gary's strong work ethic, dedication and solitude (though romantic) are qualities that I admire, particularly in light of the considered and direct way he articulates his practice. In many ways Gary demonstrated to me a mode of being that is productive, artistic, sensitive and free, yet not unquestionably consumptive, something that should be simple, yet I have never really witnessed.

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