

Crafting self-esteem

Stuart Bailey

Stuart Bailey is a Melbourne based artist and curator. He works in a variety of media with an emphasis on site-specific installation. *Crafting self-esteem* explores issues around the past uses of the building now occupied by the Fremantle Arts Centre but once Western's Australia's first purpose-built lunatic asylum. The exhibition brings together sculptures by a group of troubled teens, a wall drawing by Stuart, and a selection of prints by Basil Hadley (1940-2006) from the City of Fremantle Collection. Stuart's commentary on the impact of institutions on the individual is joined by the voice of Basil, the project's fictional mentor, as well as an art therapy class conjured by Stuart.

Stuart was introduced to Basil by André Lipscombe, the Collection's Curator. Stuart perceived immediately that he and Basil shared an illustrative approach, a sense of the absurd and a love of old-fashioned dirty jokes. Painter and printmaker, Basil Hadley always saw himself as an outsider. Following a brief stint at Ealing School of Art, Basil emigrated to Australia as a 'ten pound Pom' in the mid sixties. He enjoyed a long exhibition history from a Perth and then an Adelaide base.

The prints selected by Stuart are from the late seventies and are referred to as the 'mixed media wall theme' group by Basil's associates. Looking back on them, they combine Basil's technical facility and embrace of the 'juvenile'. Their scratchy, splotchy, dribbly passages have the look and feel of glitches 'against' the system.

Although Stuart never met Basil, Stuart has always felt that Basil would have looked kindly on those delinquents attending their first art therapy session. Basil would have grasped how patronising the system really was and just how prescribed its opportunities for self-expression were. He would have relished the possibility that the lumpy, coarse sculptures which they fashioned out of cast-off materials were deliberately bad.

As well as the project having the potential to revive interest in Basil's work, there was always the possibility that Stuart could cause offence. Stuart has never been deferential to Basil but he has maintained that that he has been taking instruction from him. *Crafting self-esteem* would not have been possible without an artist as inventive as Stuart who was willing to reflect on the real and imagined relationships within the project. Through Stuart's tactical nous and playfulness, unexpected schemes have been generated. Consequently, we look to this project as one of many that turn on the regional character, dark history and eccentric sensibility that is Fremantle Arts Centre's.

Jasmin Stephens

A Note from Stuart:

Mindful that Basil is not able to see the exhibition, I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to him. My hope is that Basil would feel that he and I are working in the same spirit.