

ONE ON ONE WITH BROOKE LEIGH:

Practice, Personal Challenges and her current exhibition

By Sabrina Basuki



Brooke Leigh, *Drawn-Out*, 2017, video still from one-hour artist performance.

Tell me a little bit about yourself. Who is Brooke Leigh--as a drawing and performance artist (and current finalist in the Dobell Drawing Prize #21)?

I am an interdisciplinary visual artist, who also curates and writes about topics that I am passionate about. I find curating to be such an invaluable experience. You always learn so much from working closely together with other artists. Writing is as important to my practice as art making. It is how I process and reflect. I've always expressed myself through words, ever since I was little. Drawing has always been central to my practice. I am drawn to its immediacy, tactility and the way that it is always in a state of transformation--or in Catherine de Zegher's words, "becoming". That is why my drawing has always been performative--a very intimate, emotional and physical experience.

I really admire Trace Emin's explanation of her work--that the drawing comes through her body--she says:

"My emotions force the drawing out of my hand" "every drawing has travelled my heart, my blood - Arriving at the end of my hand - Everything has come through me."

A strong emotional energy drives my work; whether through drawing, performance, video, audio--anything. It wasn't until years down the track that I worked out where that was coming from, but that's what pushes me -- this voice and externalisation.

As an art practitioner what is the biggest challenge for you personally--within your practice, and as an artist?

Perfectionism is something that I struggle with almost every day. Having to let something go--a work of art, a piece of writing, and say to yourself that it's good enough--that is one of my biggest challenges.

Judgement is really hard--having work viewed by others, thinking about how you are communicating your message, if it is going to be understood etc. You have to constantly question your work--because if you don't it won't progress or move anywhere--and the fact that you feel so closely bound with it leads to questioning and criticising yourself. Then comes the comparisons and self-doubt. It is very easy to compare yourself to other artists who appear to have it all--winning prizes, exhibiting in major venues, receiving major grants and international recognition (social media is very good for this) --but when you take the time to talk to them you realise that they also experience self-doubt, rejection, and emotional struggles like you do. It's weird when you have the revelation that everyone is human.

The ratio of applications to rejection letters can really leave you feeling disheartened. They say not to take it personally, and you know it's not personal, yet you can't help but feel that whatever you did 'wasn't good enough' (and therefore, you're not good enough). But you just have to get on with it and move on to the next thing.

That's my experience, anyway.

You
taught
me
so
well
to
swallow
my
soul



Sylvia Griffin & Ellen Dahl, *I Just Couldn't Keep Him Safe* (detail), 2019, archival pigment print, 110 x 67 cm

Let's discuss more about your show, *States and Senses* at Kudos Gallery. You've mentioned that the exhibition aims to "open up dialogue surrounding topics often suppressed and/or considered taboo such as shame, grief, loss, and traumatization". How are you doing this? And what do you want to achieve?

The nature of these topics is so complex, difficult and sensitive, which is also what makes them so important. By opening up very personal experiences such as loss, grief, rage, fear to the public, I hope to cultivate awareness, validation, connection and understanding. Validation is important. We are often told to "stop overreacting", to "stop being so sensitive", or similar statements that teach us to suppress emotions that are deemed uncomfortable or socially unacceptable. This happens to the point where we become intolerant to emotion. I hope that the exhibition will challenge these behavioural responses that inform our social norms-- and we can alleviate the judgement and shame that surrounds 'negative' emotions.

This theme that your work is about is something very personal, yet it seems that you resist from revealing the full story--of your trauma, shame or grief. Is it important for the audience to know the background to the works--the experiences which informed them--and will the artists open up about these? (For example, in their artist statement or during the artist talks?)

No. This exhibition focuses on the experience of 'states and senses'-- the intensity of emotional distress and its effects on the body. We have made a conscious effort to move away from identifying specific psychological conditions or contexts (such as crisis situations or events). I believe that it is important for there to still be a level of ambiguity to the work. Revealing too much risks becoming didactic. It is the artist's role to straddle between overstating and being too vague and not communicating enough. In the context of this exhibition, basically it's not about what happened (the event), but rather how it made you feel. All of the works in this exhibition have been very carefully articulated and considered. There has to be a certain distance to allow room for the viewer to bring their own interpretations to the work--to project their own experiences onto the work and relate to it.

Why do you feel like you want to unveil these states and senses from the perspective of women artists?

Well it definitely resonates with the recent resurgence of #metoo and #timesup movements -- women collectively speaking up. However, over the past two years I connected with certain artists finding common ground in discussing the relationships between our works and themes such as emotional and psychological states, sensitivity, mental health, and trauma. Each of these artists [happen to be women]. While suppression of difficult, uncomfortable emotional states happens universally, regardless of gender, there is an underlying, subtle conversation between some of the works about prescribed gendered views, and [women's experiences] from the perspective of mothers or daughters.'

**STATE AND SENSES
AT KUDOS GALLERY
30 APRIL - 18 MAY 2019
OPENING: 30 APRIL 5-8PM
ARTIST TALKS: 11 MAY 1-3 PM**

<https://www.arc.unsw.edu.au/art-design/kudos-gallery/exhibitions/2019-exhibition-program/states-and-senses>