

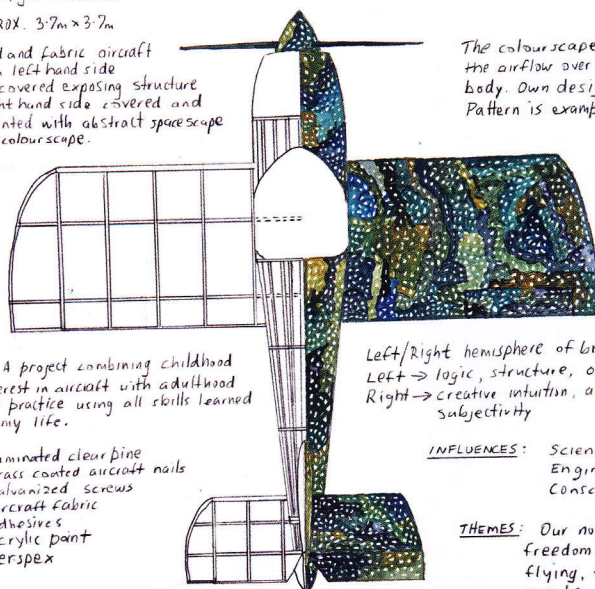
TITLE: Left and Right Freedoms

DIMENSIONS: APPROX. 3.7m x 3.7m

CONCEPT: Wood and fabric aircraft with left hand side uncovered exposing structure right hand side covered and painted with abstract space/scape or colourscape.

ASSOCIATIONS: A project combining childhood interest in aircraft with adulthood art practice using all skills learned in my life.

MATERIALS: Laminated clear pine
Brass coated aircraft nails
Galvanized screws
Aircraft fabric
Adhesives
Acrylic paint
Perspex



The colourscape may mimic the airflow over the wing and body. Own design aircraft. Pattern is example only.

Left/Right hemisphere of brain
Left → logic, structure, objectivity
Right → creative intuition, abstract concepts
Subjectivity

INFLUENCES: Science, Art, Nature,
Engineering, Metaphysics,
Consciousness, Design.

THEMES: Our notions of
freedom - ? space, art,
flying, freedom to
create anything that can
be imagined. BY

Bernard Vartuli, *Left and right freedoms (plan)*,
2011, graphite, gouache on paper,
44 x 55cm; image courtesy the artist;
Collection: Courtesy Masson-Talansier Collection.
Photo: Michael Marzik

Renegades: the dissident and the free-spirited

CAMILLE MASSON-TALANSIER

From the common human experience of the ages comes the reference material that artists harvest. They may draw on the recurrent forces of religion and philosophy to find meaning for humanity and mortality. Or they extract from nature to find a place in the natural realm. They fantasise with beauty, love, war and eroticism. They write visual diaries to describe daily life, or paint to glories of the past, or to present politics.

Renegades is a compendium of artworks emanating from the dissident and the free-spirited of Australian art. It is an eclectic artistic space where 'outsiders' of all persuasions rub shoulders. And it is where contemporary artists of a tormented *debut-de-siècle* would like to be – those who, as art critic John McDonald suggests, 'strive to emulate the unselfconscious creative processes of outsiders'.¹ Frequently, *Renegades* comes from places where art-making is a means of spiritual and mental survival; visual incursions into places of personal relevance for the artist, such as machines, home life, stories about illness, imaginings, spirituality, and whimsical fables.

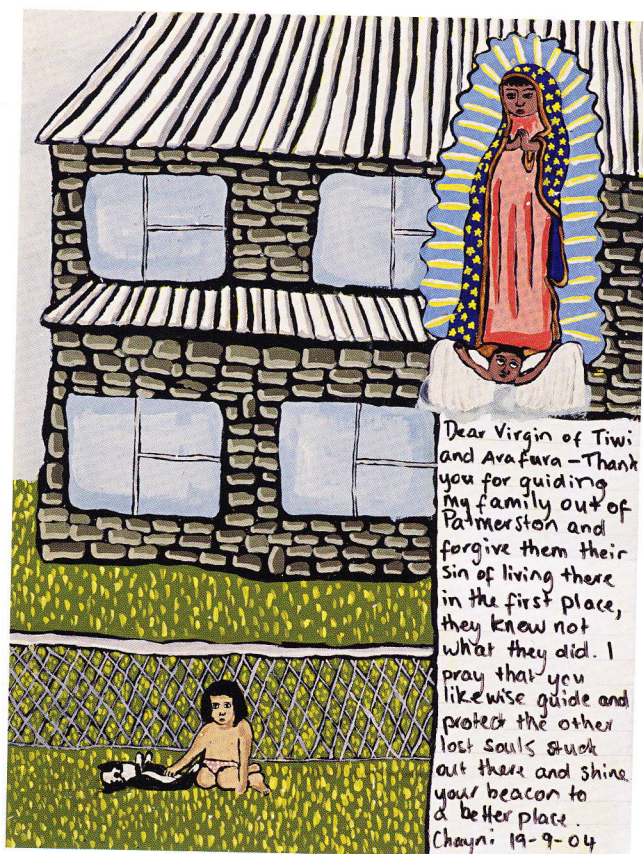
There are many surprises in *Renegades*; a cross-cultural, cross-generational conversation takes place, at odds with the idea of outsider art being virgin of the influence of contemporary movements, of past masters, or made only from the depths of raw impulse without reference or connection. Can there be such a thing as an

artist working in a vacuum, especially today when even the most isolated homebody, on stepping out, is serially bombarded with references to art at bus-stops, while generic mobile phone tunes play Beethoven's *Clair de Lune*? Today it is difficult to find old believers in the woods making art from birch trees.

This art just is. Not always infused with message, sometimes it simply has the merit of existing as a moment of bare expression. Yet the spiritual is often present. It is ever pervasive in the works of Paul Freeman, James Ackhurst, and Bernard Vartuli. Our renegades are specifically Australian, some with short shrift for political or religious discourse, others the opposite, as the revolutionary postures of Sam Bullock and Kyaw Zin Aung show.

Subtle historical and symbolic references abound and populate the exhibition so that with lateral analysis, strong visual parallels could be drawn between the following artists:

- Terry Williams' flying circus and Marc Chagall's circus paintings;
- Jimmy Thaiday's *Le Op* figure and Jean Dubuffet's *Limbour as a Crustacean*;
- Alan Constable's *Dr Who and Christ* and the Coptic frescoes of Egypt's Bawir Monastery from the 6th and 7th centuries;
- Christopher Mason's 'fat ladies' and Fernando Botero's El gato Colombiana bronze cat sculpture;
- Warren O'Brien and Ian Fairweather's work;



Chayni Henry, *Virgin of Tiwi*, 2004, acrylic on canvas board, 42 x 31cm; image courtesy the artist; Collection: Peter Fay. Photo: Michael Marzik

- Bernard Vartuli's plane and tower plans, and Leonardo Da Vinci's helicopter invention and Archimedes's screw drawings;
- Chayni Henry's *Virgin of Tiwi* and the votive paintings of Portuguese and Mexican Milagros.

A brief insight into the worlds of *Renegades'* artists may provide clues to where their journeys visually crossed paths, and how points of rupture exercised the greatest influence on their artistic careers.

Rheumatic fever made for a sickly childhood for fresh and childlike artist Sue Wooldridge. Schooled in her early years in rural Harden, New South Wales, she was soon to start working hard in a hotel making beds for a living. She went on to live in Sydney, running away from the rural life with a friend in a dangerous bid for independence, with little opportunity for study.

Sue Wooldridge's art is a language of its own. It is the jolliness and the angst of a grandmother surrounded by grandchildren and angels, poor health, and social housing. The words she cannot write appear as faces splashed across the canvas, each with a profound joy and melancholy for all to read. She has trained us to listen to her language. Her art is fed by the people she sees, by popular comic characters, her memories, and wooden historical figures, which acquire their own peculiar context. Her small worker's cottage in Sydney's central suburbs is the backdrop for a host of characters portrayed in her paintings.



Estelle Munkanome, *Untitled*, 2012, watercolour and ochre on paper; 76 x 56cm; image courtesy the artist and Ngaruwanajirri Inc, Bathurst Island; Collection: KickArts Collection. Photo: Michael Marzik

Forests cooling the towers of Bernard Vartuli's ink drawing are the ingenious solution of a Renaissance man applying his science to the 21st century. He possesses the curiosity and the methodology of his childhood hero, Leonardo da Vinci, and the idealisation of an unyielding world.

What if we could cool a tower with a forest? I noticed that it can be much cooler in a forest because the trees are cooling the air through evaporation ...

The Wright brothers who built the first aeroplane were childhood heroes. I was always fascinated by flight and made models, I would imagine what the airflow over them is like. I have translated this imaginary airflow into a spacescape. This drawing and model is a design for a small sportplane to go flying around in. I did a spacescape painting on one half to represent the subjective fused with the objective, as indispensable to each other. One, a stable framework or support enabling the other to express an idea.

... Art may be about perceiving beauty and experiencing wonder. Knowledge and understanding have no limit to their depth, making their pursuit an eternal adventure. I try to learn from nature because it has been at it since the dawn of time. I see nature as the ultimate know-how, the best blend of art and invention. I think every possibility in existence already has its example in nature.²

I have come into contact with an express visual language in hospitals where the artist-patient spends half-



clockwise from top left:

- 1/ Peter Drewett, *Five walking sticks* (detail), 2009-2011, apple and casuarina wood, ink, acrylic paint and pyrographics; various dimensions; image courtesy the artist. Photo: Michael Marzik
- 2/ Adrian King, *Restoration Island* 2009, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 90cm; image courtesy the artist and Lockhart River Art Centre, Cape York.
- 3/ Joasia Redestowicz, *I'm not yours anymore*, 2011, embroidery, 90 x 90cm; image courtesy the artist; Collection: KickArts Collection through Weave Arts Centre
- 4/ Alan Constable, *Untitled (ballet dancer)*, 2007, gouache on paper, 50 x 65cm; image courtesy the artist and Arts Project Australia, Melbourne.

an-hour immersed in a world incommunicado to step out triumphantly, leaving behind without a backward glance a work of art, ready to move back meekly into the world of confinement. The work of art was by-the-by, a step towards an invisible future or a brief recollection of the past; a fleeting act posed like catching a bus or eating breakfast. Others yet have an obsessive attachment to their work, holding it fiercely to their chests in a gesture of accumulation, possession and intense privacy. These are very different contexts from contemporary artists whose rationale will often support their *oeuvre* with a certain dose of savvy and crudeness distilled for the market.

The human is everywhere in *Renegades*: faces and bodies peeking and appearing together, isolated, jovial, huge and bloated, smudged into oblivion and idealised according to personal fantasy. The human in this exhibition is the focus of all attention – the human form in all its vulnerability, psychoses, playfulness and ideals. By extension, the things humans do, write, work on, dream, fight, imagine and observe are all there too.

Anthony Mannix's totemic women are only vaguely erotic. They are psychedelic talismans affixed with esoteric significance. Valerio Ciccone's action people are strong, frontal, facing the world without fear. Catherine

Staughton's humans are infused with complexity and drama, Leo Cussen's with wooden action and humour. Billy Kenda's are diving into the landscape, taken up by the action of doing. The narrative paintings of Adrian King, Patrick Butcher and Enid Kepple place the human in country while Christopher Mason's 'solid types' with small heads occupy and dominate space through sheer protuberance.

Sometimes artists have come from dissociated milieus; they have become artists after a life as a gardener or mechanic. An unexpected encounter or illness has sometimes metamorphosed into a new life as an artist. This first life elucidates the power of the second.

I have learned, so far, that the most important thing is to know what my values are. I went through my life not knowing what they were. Mine are knowledge, understanding and truth. Life unfolds from the values. I began studying art more than ten years ago but only recently became more serious about being an artist. I had a brush with mental illness and began painting again in hospital. I did a small A4 abstract pattern painting every day for two months. I guess I was interested in underlying patterns to life, trying to understand the physical or psychological structures that life hangs on. It was part of a redemption. I think many people suffer unnecessarily because they do not yet have a sound philosophy to live by. A philosophy of moral certainty. I inadvertently put a value on suffering and my mind and emotions took me to experience them because that's what I had put a value on. I had also mistakenly thought that my emotions were tools of cognition but they are not, only my mind is. Others put a value on depravity and their emotions and mind take them there. I think people are looking for their self, which is their identity, characterised by their values. The self is the only place where we can be ourselves, the place we belong.³

Geographical outsiders included in this exhibition, the creators of the 'little people' from Erub Island in the Torres Strait, speak of the form in parallel idioms. Using wood-fired clay figures, artists Jimmy and Sweeney Thaiday, Sarah Van Hooren and others have made *Kebika Legiz*, the little people, to narrate tribal Island stories about warriors, leaders and role models. Hair and drift from the beach are used to dress these figures of high standing.

Works in *Renegades: Outsider Art* have been grouped subjectively according to their more prominent visual idioms. Several themes serve to arrange the works within a visual and psychological frame: distortion, enlargement and simplification, repetition and the serial, isolation, lyrical and the scientific, narratives and amalgams. Many artworks could just as well fall under several themes but their intrinsic qualities with linked idioms offered the structural approach taken.

We are privileged to discover the breadth of artists working outside the normalised world of Australian art in so many configurations and contexts. I want to thank all the extraordinary people I have met and worked with on this project for their time generously shared, and for the trust they have given me, and the light they radiate.

1. John McDonald, 'How outsiders get a raw deal', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 September 2008.
2. B. Vartuli, personal communication, 26 August 2012.
3. B. Vartuli, personal communication, 26 August 2012.

Renegades: Outsider Art, curated by Camille Masson-Talansier showing at KickArts Contemporary Arts, Cairns, 24 May to 27 July 2013. This article is a reprint of Masson-Talansier's catalogue essay, available (along with an essay by Professor Colin Rhodes) at: renegades.org.au

Camille Masson-Talansier is a Franco-Australian artist and curator, born in Surabaya, Indonesia and educated in France and Australia. She began her research for *Renegades: Outsider Art* in 2011 while she was the artistic director, curator and artist-in-residence at Weave Art Centre, a Sydney non-government organisation with a mental health focus. She also spent two years as director of Lockhart River Aboriginal Art and Cultural Centre, and is a bilingual translator and interpreter.



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Striped Honeyeater nest (detail)
constructed from fine dry grass, covered and decorated with Erub feathers
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