

Avigail Allan in conversation with Kaye Glamuzina and Tracey Williams

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Avigail Allan: It was Michael [Parekowhai's] idea to have this exhibition and he said: "Someone's uncle will have a garage or a warehouse!" He was really not into the idea of using Auckland Council at first, "don't go to Council, one of you will have a big warehouse somewhere!" But the reality today is that property ownership is very rare. Today is very different from our supervisors' time. Many of today's emerging artists are Generation Rent, coming into their professional lives amidst economic crises and a huge decrease in property ownership. What does this mean for artists who need studios, artist run spaces and exhibition spaces?

Kaye Glamuzina: [The difference today] is not just about the economic crisis and property ownership but it's also about the massive rate of growth and the massive rate of demographic and cultural change. You know I went to Music School [at the University of Auckland], Tracey went to Elam [School of Fine Arts], and I was a generation ago but I'm not sure that it's that different. I'm from a migrant family; I'm the first person to go to university and actually in the '80s and the '90s it was quite rare to go to university from my high school in a small town.

Tracey Williams: Around the time Michael would have graduated I think there were around thirty to forty who would have graduated a year from Elam. Now you have one hundred graduating and that's just out of one art school – now there are many more art schools. And I'm feeling really anxious about the number of students that are being pumped out into the city.

KG: It's not being anxious about the number of students it's more being anxious about what's at the other end.

AA: Because we have this debt we have to repay and rents are going up, and as you said we have this huge demographic change of people going out into these professional fields but no space and lack of resourcing.

TW: That speaks to our point of asking: "what's on the other side?" There's this demand or this need with the number of people going out (in to the world from art school), but it's like the bits don't connect.

KG: But because there is so much change now in Auckland, there are lots of spaces changing now also. There are lots of empty spaces. So I do think that provides additional opportunities. With something like Symonds Street you go, "that's in everyone's interest!" And yes, we've had to work through some issues around it, but actually there are lots of empty spaces.

TW: We are at a time where these opportunities are available and people are picking up on them. And, related to what Kaye was saying as well, I think creative practice

is changing too. Some of the people we're working with, like Pop with Alt Group,¹ and the artists we've collaborated with through that work – it's really shifting the understanding of what creative practice is, and I think that's a shift that needs to happen as well. I still come across students that have been educated in the same way since [the 1970s]. But creative practice has changed! To work like this [with Council and with the public] and to work with a real audience-focus and to work in a city that is so diverse where there are these opportunities is incredible.

KG: Kind of circling back to your question, yes, there are particular challenges concerning property ownership and I think economically it's always been hard for artists. But, I do think if you look at the social and economic and cultural environment together it's kind of an exciting time.

TW: And in an art practice people can really step up to that. "How can I be part of this?" There are all sorts of opportunities to work not just across creative disciplines – some of the work we're involved with is with traffic engineers and businesses. I just had a meeting this morning with a man from the Takapuna Business Association. And he would say that about himself, "I don't know anything about creativity or the arts." But he did know Pop, and he did know that it made a difference [in activating the space]. Even in terms of what he's charged to do, he knew it was that one thing that transformed that space.

KG: We've been talking a lot about how you get people engaged with public art, because a lot of people don't engage, but if you ask people, "what did you do when you went to Paris?" Or, "what did you do when you went to New York or London?" People always understand the cultural fabric of a city. We're asking, how do we translate that and get people to understand that here [in our city]? We have some really good examples where it doesn't feel like Auckland is always ready for that conversation. And that's very much in the research we've just done. I was at a [meeting] with a whole lot of CEs last week and I was talking about the CRL [City Rail Link], it's an amazing opportunity to build an image of a city and to show creative practice. It's less than once in a lifetime. It's probably [going to be] the biggest transformation of this area we've seen in our lifetime. And someone asked [in relation to public art], "what's at stake?" and I said, "the human experience and the image of Auckland is at stake!" Because you could just have tunnels with trains and it could all be beige, but if we're going to be a world class city, you could change everyone who travels through the CRL, you could change their day, everyday. And we did some [rough] stats: 600,000 people visit the [Auckland] Art Gallery every year and something like 60 million will go on the CRL a year. And if we can do a really great job of showcasing and integrating creative practice in that system, how awesome would that be?

AA: So that's one way maybe that Council is shifting its roles and responsibilities by saying "we need to work on Auckland as an *image*." But is Council recognising the economic and social issues of having no private space to show? Is Council seeing a need to fill the gap in some areas, now that there's all these resources we have to provide all of a sudden?

KG: Like any organisation there's never *more resources*. I think it's made us think really carefully about where we put the resources we do have. I think the *image of a city* [in the sense of people building a cognitive map of where they are by what they see, feel, hear], particularly with public art, is that it's utterly democratic, everyone sees public art so I think that has a particular role to play in terms of the cultural fabric

¹ The Pop platform was created by Auckland-based multidisciplinary design studio, Alt Group. The following information was taken from the homepage for Pop: "Alt Group was commissioned by the Waitemata Local Board to create Pop as part of an artists' collective to generate creativity, fun, connections and experiences for Aucklanders." Many artists create and produce Pop projects. Go to <http://www.pop.org.nz/> for more.

of the city. We have a whole spectrum of programmes, for example, some focus on a small, specific area and a small, specific community. Certainly with social and economic issues it's made us think about where we put the resources that we've got. And it's made us analyse, what are other people [in Auckland] doing? Where are the gaps? I do think the changing demographic is a real challenge for us both in big and small ways. One of the things I think about a lot is that there are a lot of arts facilities, we fund some of them ourselves. But Auckland is going to potentially have a 25 per cent Asian population by 2030. We're building theatres and art galleries but is that [fit for] the creative practice that we need to show or not? I don't think we're highly engaged enough in that.

TW: Also if you take that audience focus that Kaye referred to before, and thinking about what we know from our own research about the theatres and galleries, is that [the theatres and galleries are] for a very narrow band of the city's demographic, which are predominately over 50-year-old white females. We need to think about what's being provided for youth, Māori, Pacific, Asian, migrants. We're just a small piece of the overall arts landscape and we're very much about city infrastructure and people and place, so we've taken an intervention logic in asking, "where are those gaps"? Hence things like Pop – very place-based, highly visible, public. Because those audiences [over 50-year-old white females] already have quite a lot of provision and they're often highly mobile and will travel.

AA: Yeah I guess in terms of the logic I'm kind of seeing. I mean the logic of Elam at the moment, if we're thinking of the *idea* of Elam, it's still driving that old idea of what a creative practice is and who the audience is.

TW: Things that go on walls, making things and then making people come see those things. Rather than the other way round.

AA: Yes, and maybe the shift in Council's logic is that it doesn't have any more resources as you say but all of a sudden the City Rail Link is happening and then there's space all of a sudden, or there's a huge demographic shift, or spike in one area and you go to that. It's about going out there and producing a language that's appropriate for those communities.

KG: We're not saying everything has to be this or everything has to be that and that's why you see such a breadth of work. I love the fact that we can commission Michael [Parekowhai] to do this work on Queens Wharf. Because by international standards we do not have a substantial public art collection in Auckland. And by international standards that's also not a big commission. It's not. One of the discussions I keep having with people is that they talk [badly] about Auckland as a city and when they use examples of public art they'll use [Antony] Gormley or Anish Kapoor or works that cost 25 million dollars. And this one is one and a half. So what I'm really hoping is that starts something! Auckland's mature; Auckland's maturing; we can deal with this. We can be proud of it as a destination work. So I would hope that this work is the start of us commissioning really substantial works for the city. Great cities have great art, and we should be able to do that. I do hope that over the next 10 years we can shift to having a city with a collection of public art that people love and when they leave, they'll miss the work. What do you miss about Auckland when you're not here? I want people to go, "I miss the Parekowhai." That would be awesome.

AA: But then I guess there's another tension around whether the art we're making for situations like that is appropriate? There's a lot of writing about how public art is often not so democratic because they [the artists, the commissioner] will dump stuff they *think* the public will like.

TW: That has happened, but I think that equally happens not just in public art but in building facilities and what you put in facilities. That exactly goes to what you were saying earlier about the focus being the place and the people, [when] you're working backwards to look for the content. I think there are plenty of examples where that's done really well. Creative practice is a spectrum. Because, actually, it [Pop] doesn't take away from that very high end practice that sits on the white walls of a gallery. Equally [with creative practice], it's around asking who your audience is. Edith Amatuanai is amazing at that. Edith has her high-end practice, she's totally clear about that, then she works in Ranui with youth and those things sit easily side by side as part of her practice. She's like, "that's right for that context, that's right for this one. I might do my work over here with these kids and it might pop up over here." It's about being able to understand that sort of complexity for what's right in what context and who your audience is, and where you are and how it relates.

AA: Especially in a situation like Auckland, everything is so Auckland-central-focused. When you think about the art scene especially. But Auckland is such a huge, diverse body. It's something you have to really be aware of.

KG: I guess circling back to your question - that is where Council asks, how do we serve the city? We are public servants for the city and how do we use all of these tools? And all this creative practice? And that's why people and place is so critical in trying to prioritise our resources.

TW: And while respecting all kind of practice. You can have Michael's lighthouse on a wharf and you can have paste-ups in Papakura in the shops. Phantom Billstickers have a poetry thing, [Phantom Billstickers National Poetry Day], that I saw as I was walking up Bond Street and it's just some billboards with poetry on them and I was just like, "that's cool."²

AA: It's so funny because often people from Elam will pull up their noses at Phantom posters but I think that's what Elam is missing out on... It's so accessible to the public. Elam students often laugh at Pop, "Oh, it's so ugly!" Maybe that is where artists need to fill the gap.

KG: I just think that you can have both.

TW: You can have both!

KG: Pop was ahead of its time. And I don't know if you've seen the Pop Marble Run, but it's a beautiful object.³ And if it was showing in the middle of Te Uru [Waitakere Contemporary Gallery] everyone would be going, "that's amazing." It's a beautiful object, it's sound activated, SJD did the sound for it. It talks to New Zealand visual language in terms it references the whole history of New Zealand art.

TW: And not to mention it references Fluxus and the Situationists.

KG: It's got all of that in this one object. And I go, how can you hate that? But it's about context. It's funny, I trained in classical piano and I cried for weeks when Prince died. Why can't I have both of those things? Why can't I love Stockhausen and John Cage and Prince and Beyoncé?

² On the 31st of March 2016, Phantom Billstickers announced their Poetry Posters project, "Phantom Billstickers has announced a partnership with the NZ Book Awards Trust to promote National Poetry Day – the biggest nationwide poetry event of the year." This event was launched on Friday the 26th of August. Go to <http://0800phantom.co.nz/category/poetry-posters/phantom-poetry-posters/> for more.

³ Pop Marbles by Alt Group was the 27th Pop project, installed in Karanga Plaza, 137 Halsey Street, CBD, Auckland from the 12th – 17th July 2016. Go to <http://www.pop.org.nz/projects/pop-marbles/> for more.

TW: I can listen to listen to Justin Bieber and Mozart!

AA: Yeah I love that UbuWeb shit but I can only listen to Mai FM in my car.

KG: That's exactly right. And all the thinking is the same. I don't have much time for the people saying we can only have "this" and "this" is the only thing of "value." I just think it's bullshit.

AA: We're talking about the disconnection between the public and, maybe, the Elam hive mind I guess? Are there common conflicts of interest between the Council working with the public and even an artist working with the public? And maybe not necessarily coming back to Michael's work on Queens Wharf, but maybe there's that conflict of interest with what the public wants and what Council want, even if it is a beautiful work. Is there a problem of putting it there anyway?

KG: I think there's a complexity about it! You see trends as well. There are pendulums that always swing so sometimes it's, "facilities are great!", and then it will be, "no everything has to be decentralised and democratised and out in the city," and then it's, "facilities are great!" The real challenge for us is how, in a rapidly changing economic, social and cultural environment, do we hold all of that and do the best we can for artists and for Auckland? That's really hard. The only other thing you might want to talk about Tracey, with the question around red tape, is the "broker model" that we've done.

TW: That's an awesome point. Do you know about the arts broker in the Whau?

AA: Actually, no!

TW: So there's an arts broker in the Whau Local Board area. There's an arts broker in Franklin, Māngere-Ōtāhuhu and Albert-Eden, but the pilot started in the Whau. The thinking behind it very much relates to this conversation completely. There was a group of people in the local community that were lobbying to have the local board give a space to a local group to make into another arts facility. It was in New Lynn. It was about to happen and there was a moment where we got to sort of pause and say, "Hey no, let's just have a look at this. What is the need? What's the driver?" In the end a good stocktake revealed there's actually a whole bunch of [creative activity] already happening in that area. There's also Te Uru two kilometres up the road, which Council has spent a lot of money on, and that audience is very well-served by that facility. The question was asked: what about all the other people [working or living in the area] and what's the range of creative practice? The stocktake showed there are musicians here, there are actors there, etc. A lot of those people that used to live in Grey Lynn and Ponsonby and are now living in Avondale and New Lynn. The recommendation was that the need was not a building, because we know from our own research that often putting something [for the public] in a building limits that offering geographically. There's a huge amount of resource that goes into keeping that building maintained and paying the staff. The need was actually more of a broker type model – there's a lot of existing infrastructure, there are halls, there are theatres, there are libraries. I went to a lot of those stakeholder meetings where we asked what they needed. People talked about the space that they needed and they would describe what would be happening there and the experience they would have there. One night I had this revelation – "Oh, it's a library! Or a marae!" The research done in looking at the need for that area at that time is that you almost needed a conduit – how do you map that stuff across? How do you make it visible? There are community choirs practicing in a lounge. But they could practice in the town square if you got them a permit every lunchtime and then people could enjoy it and people could get to practice and wouldn't need their

own special space. At the end of that piece of work, which was a whole lot of people in Council all sort of putting their heads together, [we decided that] you just need a person!

KG: And not a Council person.

TW: Not a Council person. A person embedded in that community. Council would pay for it. Because the money was there.

AA: A person instead of a space!

TW: Exactly, the Whau Community Arts Broker [Melissa Laing]⁴ works all across that area, across all arts organisations, all individuals. She connects into places like Te Uru and works with Unitec [Institute of Technology]. She maps stuff across and she activates empty spaces and shops, and utilises existing infrastructure. Did you see that video she took of the kids performing in the car parks? This group of local youth, [Creative Souls], did a series of amazing dance performances – in one they took over an empty indoor car park in the night. And she [the broker] is at arm’s length where it’s totally enabling.

KG: And you asked about red tape? Imagine what would happen if we had to produce that, if our staff had to produce that.

KG: Well we’d probably get 20 per cent of what she can get done. We work with her and if that programme looks awesome, [she gets to] go and do it. It’s a service contract and that’s fine. It’s just our job to get this kind of stuff out of the way so people can do really amazing work.

AA: That’s really interesting to know that there are places where Council makes these decisions that this is not an appropriate place for Council to be. Let’s get someone in between.

TW: And we’ve realised that with Pop. We’re quite happy for it to be artist-led so it doesn’t look like Council. We don’t want to turn up, “Look! Here’s Council doing some arts in Papatoetoe.”

AA: “Ooh look at us we’re cool and fresh and hip!”

TW: The last thing we want to do is have it look like Council!

KG: But at the same time you do want people to think, “Isn’t it great that ratepayers support this work?” So we do need people to champion it.

⁴ The Whau Community Arts Broker is a service funded by the Whau Local Board. Go to <http://www.artsw Hau.org.nz/> for more.