



## Careers:

Harriet Morgan, Alex Vivian and Rob McKenzie all studied at the Victorian College of the Arts together, graduating in 2005. Like the classic TV show *7 Up*, we return to ask the question what does it mean to have a career in art in Australia.

### What are you doing now?

Harriet: Life at the moment: working in an art supplies shop almost full-time and I'm organizing an exhibition in a space there. My job allows me to play in three bands, drums & bass guitar (all fall in the arena of metal) as well as solo-noise under the name of Military Position. I am putting together a publication of my own articles and varied pieces, which is something extremely important to me. Exercise is important as is eating well and looking after my dog makes me happy. Menial things have taken prime position and allow for optimal creation.

Alex: I make art and exhibit semi-regularly, mostly in Melbourne. I take turns, day in day off making art. I am making work at home right now, not having a studio since my residency at Gertrude Contemporary. This seems to suit me well at the moment. My room is large. Kate Smith and I were searching for a joint studio but we didn't find anything. I've been involved in some group shows recently in Australia, Europe & USA and generally trying to work on building ideas behind my practice etc. I like working in front of the television, or on my bed. I work on things at home half the week and spend a lot of time sourcing objects from around Melbourne, be it second hand or new. Usually I am working on bits and pieces towards something else. Recently I have been bleaching soft toys, covering housewares in faded clothing via thick layers of PVA glue. Basic alteration. Also working on some general thoughts towards stench and the idea of presence, this has been an ongoing theme in my work over the last couple of years. There are a lot of bad ideas to wade through. I am happy to keep working on something and anything and wait to see where it goes. Currently working towards a solo show at Sutton Project Space in April.

Rob: I work for an art advisor in New York called Thea Westreich. She is also an important collector. I do research for her about new artists, books and price information about art, mostly contemporary, but also some classic modern work. It is a full-time position. It exposes me to a lot of art and artists but unfortunately it does not leave much time for my own projects – so my studio at home has been often used as a record and sometime guest room in the last six months.

### How have you made Art a viable part of your life in Australia? Are there any relevant attempts here, both successful and failed, that might elucidate this?

Harriet: I ran a gallery, Joint Hassles, for over three years. Viable is not the word I would use for it but emotionally and idea-wise, I guess it was. The gallery didn't fail, but success isn't a term I would use for it either and I mean this in the most positive way. There was a heavy work-load involved and after three years, it had run its course and naturally ended in a positive way. To me art has never been about making money and Joint Hassles in particular based itself on the same premise but at a certain point it needed to go in a more commercial way. I don't really need to explain that in order to maintain a space, you need to cover your overheads whilst also making enough to get by, and that money often shapes artistic outcomes or the nature of a business. Taking the stress out of curation has meant that I now only have to consider the work and can change location as I please, which is a much more relaxed approach. Nowadays, sadly, time and money override art things for me as music has to take the prominent position in my life. I feel OK about working where I do as it has always funded other things, it's just a shame there aren't more hours in the week to make art and music. The music and (more so) art worlds here are defined as 'scenes' (because that's what they are) and I find them to be problematic only in the sense that your presence is sometimes, and in general largely, required (aka lots of socializing). At the moment I would rather be at home making work or relaxing and preferring not to socialize. Perhaps this will change again. It's difficult to maintain a 'viable' position within both the art and music world (let alone both at the same time) as applying yourself to one is often enough, unless you're making a good living off one or both.

Alex: I try not to think too hard about art being a viable source in my life. It makes me nervous. As soon as I start thinking about my work being viable it tends to suffer. Fortunately I am able to receive government payments to sustain living. Of course this kind of lifestyle won't last forever. I have worked before in terrible jobs. Haven't we all. When I turned 30, I quit my job and applied for payments. It was impossible for me to work a terrible job and be making my own work in the manner that I wanted. Which is a relaxed, often slow approach. Space, time is so necessary. I want to start thinking about some jobs I can acquire over the next couple of years or so as my cheap living definitely has an impending sense of doom. Cheap housing is such a nice thing, but unfortunately it comes with so many problems I don't need anymore.

Rob: When I first came out of art school I had a lot of enthusiasm and energy. I organized some exhibitions with friends like Kain Picken, Nick Selenitsch and Chris Hill and also did an art zine called variously *Slave*, *Calories* and *Sandwich*, which channelled a lot of my enthusiasms. I was very passionate about Australian art, reading all the books I could, from Bernard Smith's classic history *Australian Painting* to all the issues of the magazine *Art & Text*. At some point I had an interest in learning about other contexts and places and that took me overseas, first to Germany before I settled, at least for the time being, in America. One particular *leitmotif* that I recognized as being essential to the history of Australian art was short bursts of extreme energy that never found a larger supportive economy to allow it to survive. I did not feel that I had the ability to overcome this limitation and decided it would be more productive to work elsewhere. So perhaps my answer would be that I tried to make art and Australia a viable combination for me, but had to give up Australia as I could not see a bright and happy future for this relationship. Sort of like a pre-emptive divorce so things could never get too sour.

What do you feel you gained from your art studies at the Victorian College of the Arts?

Harriet: Well for the first two years I didn't do anything except 'hang around' not doing much, being 18 and all. I think I was being affected nonetheless. This is not to say that my behavior was accepted and endorsed as I almost failed each semester. I worked hard in third year but making work didn't come as naturally as I would have liked. The education, or things, I gained from VCA weren't just to do with teachers, (all those Alex mentioned plus Sean Baxter) but was also who I met and how they changed or affected my thoughts and life. We had an interesting group of

students. Namely, selected peers taught me to think differently and for myself. Art school was a strange and largely innovating place, not fundamentally unlike high-school (helped by the cafeteria) but without the strictness and learnt thought-patterns. Hard to explain. I can't really define what I gained but I definitely wouldn't have met the people I know now. Guess it was more important than what we perhaps thought and has certainly affected my subsequent life.

Alex: I had studied Visual Arts for a couple of years at RMIT Tafe so when got to VCA I was 21. I knew a few people already attending; Christopher LG Hill whom I had met through a friend several years earlier was one of them. James Lynch, Geoff Lowe, Sue Dodd, Lyndal Walker, Elizabeth Gower, Jon Campbell, Kim Donaldson, Jan Murray, Kate Daw, Mathew Griffin, were my teachers/sessional staff. I think if I had done more at art school it would've been more beneficial but I think it was important for me to learn time allowance with my practice especially if it doesn't rely on heavy laboured 23-hour paintings etc. I guess also, in a way, it taught me that one idea is good, but never enough, one should keep thinking and working, keeping ideas fluid and open. My first show outside of art school was curated by Harriet at Room in Auckland which was run by a few people who went on to be involved in Gambia Castle. It took me a while to start applying for shows in Melbourne; I was too nervous to apply to TCB and other artist run places. Which is silly, now I think of it.

Rob: I went into art school straight from high school. It provided me with an instant peer group and people to speak with about art. It was also a great introduction into what it means to make a scene – people posturing for different positions or taking a stake for or against an aesthetic, or political, or personal ideology. It was certainly a lively environment and I met great people that I am still sometimes in touch with. It was also an important starting ground to practise discussing art, honing skills of critique, judgement, analysis. Also the teachers there, people like Geoff Lowe, Lyndal Walker, Janenne Eaton, they all offered me a lot by suggesting reading material, artists to look at, and encouragement. Good teachers spread the insider knowledge of trade secrets.

### What artists are you interested in currently?

Harriet: Being involved in art, in what I considered to be an intense way, largely turned me away from it, which is simply from a case of overkill and perhaps an intense approach? I'm not sure but now I am ready to come at it in a more independent way. Being an artist seemed far more rewarding than what I was doing at the time, however I never felt the urge to produce art and 'make it' (however I did with music). Locally I've always been interested in Alex and Kate Smith's stuff. I thoroughly enjoyed Brent Harris's new works. More so I've been looking back to artists like Vermeer, Velasquez, Durer and even further to Da Pancale, Heda, Fabriano, Francesca, Uffizi, Da Forli, Cosimo Tura and a lot from that time. I'm probably more interested in that art than ever and definitely over contemporary production. Things go in phases, I guess. Contemporary work often flies by me and I need to immerse myself in it often to understand it. 'Modern' work I enjoy includes Janet Burchill and Jennifer McCamley, Carl Andre and Chris Kraus. The incredibly attractive wall drawings and other collected works of Sol Le Witt. MONA doesn't have a great deal I like but it does have the Paul McCarthy painter video that made me re-interested in the concept of making art. Mike Kelley and Bruce Nauman's work. Dan Arps and the movements of the Gambia artists. Malevich. Allan Charlton, Richter and others I can't think of.

Alex: I have enjoyed John Nixon's show at Anna Schwartz in 2012 and a show I was involved in curated by David Homewood, *Micromanagement*. I have been intrigued by other shows I have seen footage of on the internet; Facebook or more official sites like [contemporaryartdaily.com](http://contemporaryartdaily.com). Francis Till & Oscar Enberg *hey man> hey hows it going*. I saw photos of this on Facebook. I liked Kate Newby's *Crawl out your window*. Nicolas Ceccaldi at real fine arts, featuring the butterfly/ angel wings on floor. I have been noticing a presence of Donald Duck in Isa Genzken's recent shows, which excites me. There he is, Donald Duck. I am in favour of an exhibition I did with Joshua Petherick at Conical (*Toll*, 2012), Lisa Radford's bus seat paintings at Techno park. (Didn't make it to show but saw photos online and one in the flesh on Kate Smith's wall at home and another as part of Christopher LG Hill's wall painting at Gertrude contemporary studio artists show.) I loved Kate Smith's show *deep privacy* at Sutton.

Rob: I have been looking closely at Bernadette Corporation who recently a big exhibition at Artist's Space. Some of their videos are online or can be ordered through EAI and there is a fascinating connection between their work in fashion, publishing, video and text. Henrik Olesen, who had a small project show at MoMA last year and did an excellent exhibition at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, has also been another favorite. His work often makes interesting suggestions about the body, like in a series of deconstructed computers he emphasizes the way the body does not stop at the fingertips, it keeps going out into whatever it touches, it becomes contiguous with its surrounds. Outside of these two, there are many artists whose images and objects have reverberated for me, but it might be simply one object, image or idea. Perhaps a list is fun, and might include Sam Pulitzer, Clyfford Still, Picabia, Jana Euler, Josef Strau, Juan Davila with Constance Zikos, Emily Sundblad, Andy Warhol, Sherrie Levine, Jack Goldstein, Mathieu Malouf, Nic Ceccaldi and Ellsworth Kelly.

### What are you optimistic about in art or otherwise, in Australia or otherwise?

Harriet: The Australian art scene as I know it has its pros and cons. It's never made me particularly feel optimistic per se, but there are awesome people and artists involved – there's just a lot of crap to sift through. I look forward to making art this year and in the future, writing about interesting things, putting out my own publication of selected articles, collaborating with others on new projects, curating a few shows, keeping healthy, living in nature with my dog, undertaking further study and continuing to make a lot of music.

Alex: I am optimistic about showing too much, which I do admit I have not exactly lived up to in the last couple of years. But it was important in a way, while I got my grounding. Australia is so tiny and I feel if you are showing too much to all the same people, you are revealing a certain secrecy behind your work. I do admit a certain presence is important. I would like to open an art space in the next couple of years for six months or a year, just something brief, casual. I really liked y3k's idea of starting a space with the idea it was only going to run for two years.

Rob: I'm optimistic about expertise, people becoming involved in their subject in great detail and really having knowledge about it. I'm also optimistic about nature, the sun, water and the earth. I'm optimistic about art.

## THIRD/FOURTH: ARTIST FACILITATED BIENNALE

Dan Arps, Sean Bailey, Olivia Barrett, Matthew Benjamin, Jon Campbell, Trevelyan Clay, Fiona Connor and Michala Paludan, James Deutscher, DoubleFly, George Egerton Warburton, Endless Lonely Planet, ffxXed, Alicia Frankovich, Justin K Fuller, Marco Fusinato, Greatest Hits, Ardi Gunawan, Hao Guo, Christopher L G Hill, Matt Hinkley, David Homewood, Matthew Hopkins, Lou Hubbard, Renee Jaeger, Helen Johnson, Kenneth Biennale (curated by Kenny Pittock and Amy May Stuart: Chris Clarke, Christo Crocker, Christina Hayes, Chris L G Hill, Christine Pittcock, Christopher Scutio), Legendary Hearts (Kieran Hegarty and Andrew Cowie), S.T. Lore, Patrick Lundberg, Carrie McGrath, Rob McKenzie, Taree McKenzie, Nick Mangan, Gian Manik, Kate Meakin, Adelle Mills, Tah Moore, Kate Newby, Elizabeth Newman, Virginia Overall, Sean Peoples, Joshua Petherick, Kain Picken, Lisa Radford and Sam George, Nick Selenitsch, Kate Smith, Sydney (Esther Edquist), Masato Takasaki, Ben Tankard, Alex Vivian, Nicki Wynnichuk, y3k. Coordinated by Christopher L G Hill.

## Maison Martin Margiela > H&M, December 2012

By Liv Barrett and Fiona Connor

In my zone, Margiela two tone – Fucking Problem, A\$AP Rocky feat. Drake, 2 Chainz, Kendrick Lamar, 2012

Performing his own enigma, Martin Margiela would respond to press inquiries directed towards him as creative director of Maison Martin Margiela via fax. Electing a facsimile - a blatant copy, a replica, a fake, a floating semblance of an original - as the preferred means of correspondence was a gentle provocation in spirit of the clothes and accessories produced by MMM. The history of the label is a playfully serious series of meta-objects that use the history of fashion as an index of material to work with (and against). Of the 24 capsules that compose the label, Replica is the one that has distinguished the house with its most salient personality traits: the imitation, the displacement and resurrection of garments. Aberrant items found in the marketplace of used clothing are translated through Margiela's manufacturing processes and the subsequent MMM item is a replica but also a render; a drawing of a garment that passed by, an image of a piece of second-hand clothing reflected on the specular surface of Margiela.

MMM has perfected the post-modern luxury object: an idea contained in the skin of an image, produced in perfect materiality with aristocratic facility. Dangerously persuasive, Margiela goods are critical objects realised in the forms which they critique. Often, to be able to see what is occurring in the clothes, you must grasp the reference to an earlier garment, or a design standard, or the inculcated routines that is less concerned with designing a look and more concerned with producing a way of looking. Laying out these definitions of MMM, it begins to sound a lot like classifications of contemporary art. It's Margiela's enduring accolade of cleverness-verging-on-Conceptualism that means the label participates in many of the same practices that complicate the consumption of contemporary art. An example: a significant portion of the audience for both MMM and contemporary art can't afford to possess, in any great abundance, the objects that they're devoted to contemplating. In 2012, H&M was invited inside this problem, when the multi-national mega-retailer announced it would produce a line designed by, and labeled with, Maison Martin Margiela, with prices that bow down from the four-figure heights of Margiela towards the one-out-of-four-dollar-signs-highlighted-in-the-google-summary realm of H&M.

Of all diffusion lines pursued by Main Street fashion retailers over the last decade, this was the most logically sound - Margiela already spoke the language of replica and diffusion fluently and in its own terms – but it was also the biggest failure. The garments and accessories are of a quality of counterfeit goods, but because the line was developed out of a corporate agreement there is no sense of the uncanny that can take place in a true fake. The contrast of MMM and H&M's approaches to design, production and the theatics of the brands' personalities means that when Margiela performs a replica of itself under the dictate of H&M, it produces a double-negative and the gesture becomes very hard to read. In a sense, it was Margiela's history of producing replicas that was the one thing that made this diffusion line seem possible. But when masses of Margiela are squeezed together on the racks of an H&M store, suddenly the situation isn't as precise as the concept aspires to be...

So, in advance of actually seeing the collection, the images generated around the range, in the form of a lookbook, prepared audiences for the fusion of these two fashion identities. The imprinting that occurs as a result of seeing the lookbook is necessary to make the items believably Margiela, because every encounter that consumers have with the garments and accessories is attended by the angelic images that lift these unimpressive garments up. But the backdrops of the lookbook were scripted in the language only of Margiela - imperfect white walls imprecisely joining a worn wooden floor, giving the impression of an atelier - a space for creative practice rather than a space for creative marketing conceit. Scrolling through the images was like looking through an abbreviated archive of the fashion house's designs, each item a reproduction of an earlier Margiela piece, H&M still a transparent veil at this point.

The most obvious incongruity about Margiela in an H&M store is seeing multiples of garments side by side. In MMM stores, they deliberately only ever display one example of each garment, nursing the myth that each Margiela piece exists as a singular object, while still operating in the requisite production cycles of fashion labels. It is clear through MMM's design, however, that the label chooses to react to standardized procedures and to talk back, but when this reaction is serialized through the economically rational sprawl of H&M, it becomes a pattern. The sophisticated illusion of Margiela is that it keeps you believing that the reaction is a new move every time.

Margiela and H&M make such different promises to their audiences: Margiela rewards people who notice structural things, and H&M rewards people who can navigate images of extreme disparity - the \$5 bikini top on the million-dollar body; Lana del Rey in a fluffy jumper, the fluffiness and gravitas of this icon tearing the viewer in two directions. The guise of the MMM and H&M collaboration is that Margiela is offered at H&M price points, democratized and made amply available, but what you really get is a radically impoverished remake; and was it even necessary to produce Margiela at a more accessible price range? Marni, Versace, Lagerfeld, this all makes sense because a momentary arbitration in style is what these designers trade in. But Margiela's dedication to twists and metaphors, embodied critiques, these are the kinds of gestures that somehow still provide nourishing encounters, regardless of if the item is possessed.

## AN INVITATION

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He exits with his sandwich and she opens the letter.  
Inside is a drawing of a domino. Six black dots on a white surface.  
Right beside her the phone rings and she answers.

Hello. (It is him).

Did you get my message?

Yes.

The phone hangs up on the other end. She puts the receiver down. THE PROGRAM IS PAUSED.

It is 3AM and outside their window is a flickering light. Same time, every night, only for a few minutes. They watch it flash on the wall. On and Off. Light and dark. A dance. A message. No thoughts. No conspiracy. Around the room are their various presents to each other. ... the dominos ... the globe of the world ... a silver heart and dagger necklace ... a golden timex watch. The light bounces from each gift, drawing angles and shapes, and they close their eyes once again and descend into the night. For now the dots are facing upward. The dominos are stacked in their favour.

May Day Morning. Autumn. People talk to themselves with antennas aimed at the sky. It is a sky blue and coldly clear, crowded with messages and with magenta leaves, with revolving blades and with curved beaks. Helicopters hang in mid-air stuttering and suspended like mobiles. Just next door is a man without a leg who collects canaries in wooden cages. They visit the man on Saturdays where he is always found indoors watching soap operas and disaster documentaries. Today is Volcanoes. Flooding lava, red and turbulent, brutal and disruptive. Cracks. Unstable ground. Seams of heat. He alternates between the channels as they prepare coffee – 'Who were you with the other night?' – 'Nobody. Please believe me, baby!' – 'Look I've gotta nose like a tiger, it never misses. She has a scent like acid and I can smell her on your lying skin' – flying tracking shot of a black granite mountain – 'The temperature inside the crater is as hot as the surface of the sun' – chop, chop, chop – 'the contained pressure causes flaring explosions and a single event would contain enough energy to power a small neighbourhood.' The coffee is black and not so sweet, and afterwards he offers them a liquid that is both cold and clear. Three tumblers of Firewater. It is potent and transparent. It is illegal and home distilled. It can explode. It can cause blindness. And they drink to its good health. The intercom buzzes inside the television and a voice speaks - 'You have to start thinking about the future, just like I am.' The one-legged man explains that Italian assassins would once leave a dead canary upon their murdered victims. It was a signal of betrayal. Singing little birds that had been suddenly silenced. He then invites them outside to see his Limited Edition. It is a black Ford LTD. The P6 Monarch series. It no longer drives and rests quietly alone inside storage. It breaks his heart, but he wants them to sit on the leather seats and to listen to an Elvis Presley tape entitled 'Live at the Sun'. It is a recording of the King that is warm and large hearted. 'I forgot to remember to forget' is playing as she reads an old comic in the back seat. A SPY VS SPY. 'Elvis was in the tank unit while he was stationed in Berlin, and was a part of the crisis', his tobacco smile is magnified in the rear view mirror, 'Colin Powell also served in the same unit, but they were both just figure heads.' She flicks to a page with the Grey Spy. This character was a neutral presence and only lasted awhile before disappearing. Everyone agrees they prefer heroes and enemies. War is so much better in black and white. 'Did anyone else notice in the Spy Vs Spy cartoons that the author signed his name in Morse code?' He switches tapes and they listen to 'Suspicious minds'. There are six ashtrays inside the car: one in each door and one in both the front and rear panels. It is a vehicle built to contain clouds. The same clouds that stole the man's leg. The song ends on a plea for love and they close the doors once again on the beautiful LTD. Outside the canaries are singing and chewing on cuttlefish bones. No-leg feeds them liquid protein and they say goodbye and begin to head home. The ground matter crunches underneath as the shadows of three buildings loom above them – all grey and uniform. The Housing Commission Buildings have been constructed in the shape of letters. There are four S shaped buildings and one Y shaped. In all of the area, the only vowels, are I and U. These are the speaking letters of the patterned towers. Speaking for all those abandoned to uncertain lives encased in spelling. Godzilla crawls among them. King Kong too. They live amongst rooms of gifts, rooms of codes and white rooms of flickering lights. Foreign tenants with astral travelling definitions of HOME. Once inside the door, she spins the globe of the world and lands her painted red finger on Antigua. They begin to guess what it is like there. Tropical visions of blue, green and white. A place with no seasons. A paradise of jungle and coral reef. Hotels. Crowds. Cruises. Gambling. A place for the lucky numbers. Outside their room, the light is still flickering through the window. On and off. Light and dark. A dance. A message. And he decides to translate the signal from the key to morse code – '11. Meet me. No-one home'

It is a message to everyone, to anyone, to someone!

It is an Invitation to Love and Amen to that!

She undresses and hums some more lines from 'Return to Sender' while he closes the blind. They say Goodnight to Elvis, to the King who has disappeared, to the invisible man who has left all these messages for us loud and clear. PRESS PLAY. A black screen covers the dots at the end of the transmission and the credits roll. The woman is left stranded on an empty telephone and 'I forgot to remember to forget' plays eternally – so don't worry for the blue and lonely, for there is always another invitation to love, and always another invitation to transmit.

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S.T.  
LORE

30 May to 23 June 2013 | MARGARET LAWRENCE GALLERY | Tuesday to Saturday 12pm-5pm | Victorian College of the Arts, The University of Melbourne  
40 Dodds Street