

Tiana Jefferies In Conversation with Carrie McCarthy, Fish Lane, 13 August 2022

CARRIE McCARTHY (CM): You've just finished six months as Artist in Residence at the Hope Street Studio. What attracted you to this residency?

TIANA JEFFERIES (TJ): Recently, I've become really interested in how architectures facilitate different relationships between humans and non-humans. I hadn't yet worked on a project that explored this and felt this residency space was a unique opportunity. My process is usually quite responsive and site specific so I was excited to see what new interactions the studio would facilitate and what kind of material records these would result in.

CM: One of the unique things about this residency is its position on street level in South Brisbane. How different is that to your usual studio environment, and what changes if any did you notice in your practice as a result?

TJ: In the past, my studios have been quite open to the elements, so it was odd to not have rain and wind coming through the studio, not finding leaves, berries and possum poo around.

Being at street level and so visible meant I could 'exhibit' work at all times. This felt really weird at first, but I became more comfortable with things in progress, looking shit at times, moving slowly, being erratic. In an attempt to engage passers-by, I made as many different compositions as I could using the same materials. This was a really productive exercise and I liked that the potential of these materials was never fixed or limited.

CM: What are some of the things that inspired you about the location, and did that change depending on the day?

TJ: So much happened in the six months I was there. Both ends of the street flooded in February-March which inspired a lot of feelings. I collected materials from the surrounding areas after the floods. I find it so hard to process catastrophic events like that partially because their scale is so vast, but I find materials are like an anchor for feelings.

On other, less disastrous days people and their tiny dogs would walk past to do their business. I suspect many of them found each other during the longer lockdowns because of that invisible but lively virus that kept us indoors.

CM: The Hope St Studio is quite a small space, and you had lots going on in there. What were some of the limitations and how did you get around them? Did you specifically choose to work on certain aspects of your practice, or were you drawn more intuitively to particular things?

TJ: Because of spatial limitations and also being an enclosed space, it made sense to put aside the concrete and casting materials I usually work with. Instead, I worked with materials to form assemblages or soft sculptures by sewing, cutting, gluing and composing with the help of balance and luck. This way of working was determined by the materials I was collecting at the time: tent poles, trampoline poles and supports, tarpaulin, towelling, mozzie screening. Sort of like an umbrella, it made sense to put these materials together where one was kind of skeletal and one was like a skin or screen. I've been trying to bring sculptures to this point where someone could walk between them as if it was a landscape or a strange theatre set. The space was really helpful to work on this because there was actually room to imagine how someone might navigate the structures.

CM: What drew you to the materials that you have been working with during the residency?

TJ: I began the residency by bringing materials like tarpaulin, tent poles and trampolines into the studio and thinking about how all these materials prescribe a specific way of

relating to the outdoors. I wanted to explore materials that facilitate a sensory experience of weather, they allow a kind of intimacy that feels safe. After it flooded, the streets were lined with objects that had been discarded because they were touched by the weather in a specific way. So, I collected some of these thinking that perhaps they could be a kind of conduit between myself and localised weather patterns. I guess these materials are part of a wider desire to sensorially get close to climate in order to conceptually grasp something that's geographically and temporally distributed.

CM: Did you have a specific goal or focus during the residency?

TJ: The main impetus for making during the residency was a memory from when I was a kid of a bird hide, a structure in the wetlands where you can watch birds up close. I remember being there and overhearing something about it being used for cruising at night. To my silly little kid brain this seemed like a really mysterious but also magical place where one could be close to birds and also someone they loved. So process wise the bird hide structure offered an example of a structure or architecture that facilitated multispecies interactions and queer intimacies. I used visual language from the structure, its corrugations, curvatures, ideas of privacy vs surveillance to develop works that imagined more and new structures for these queer and ecological relationships to form.

CM: Your practice is based in Experimental Art - when did you become drawn to that way of working, and what or who were your main influences?

TJ: Early on I was attracted to a lot of performance art which has kind of stuck with me in terms of my process. I also always really liked the physicality of works that had a relationship or effect on my body before my brain could get there. Eva Hesse, Rachael Whiteread and Sarah Sze were kind of pillars for my practice early on. I always go back to Michael Dean's practice; I'm obsessed with his messy and unmonumental sculptures that have a sweet and like very elegant poetics to them. Others that have been really important to me are Oren Pinhassi, Ragnar Kjartenson, Karla Black, and closer to home I really admire Caitlin Franzmann, Ross Manning, Justene Williams and Robert Andrew.