Using Blender Studios as a Point of Reference to Examine the Intersection of Fine Art and Street Art.

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ABSTRACT

Blender Studios is a hybrid cultural and commercial hub for Australian street art and fine art, operating both as a collaborative studio space for artists and as a base for a range of collective art endeavours. Utilising 'Blender Studios' as a case study, this research is based on the proposition that it has played a pivotal role in establishing a new aesthetic through the rise of street art. The practice-based creative component of the project takes the form of an exhibition and installation. The research period is inclusive of a two-year corporate residency undertaken at The District shopping centre in Melbourne's Docklands precinct. This corporate residency, and other Blender activities, raise questions such as: Does the radical street artist in a corporate/commercialised structure become, utilising Berlin-based writer Elvia Wilk's term, like an 'artist as consultant'?[1] The research undertaken for this project will highlight the paradigms and tensions between notions of both the urban art aesthetic and fine art frameworks. Furthermore, the research will reveal the manner in which cultural activity is sustained and valued through the lens of 'the Blender' and provide a potential blueprint for artistic endeavour of the future.

[1] Wilk, E, 'The artist in consultance: Welcome to the new management', *E-Flux Journal*, No. 75, 2016, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/74/59807/the-artist-in-consultance-welcome-to-the-new-management/, [accessed 7 August 2019].

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration (by performance / exhibition)

"I, [student name], declare that the PhD thesis entitled [title of thesis] is no less than 18,000 words and no more than 30,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

"I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.

Adrian Doyle Date 23/09/2021

This thesis was helped in the editing process by Steve Cox, a well-known academic and writer. Steve is also an important Australian artist who has been collected and exhibited world-wide.

DEDICATION

Angela Doyle, You gave me everything, when you had nothing.

Piya Suksodsai, You help me to be the best me I can be.

Blender Studios, You gave me a community to learn, grow, and make mistakes.

"*Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the place of Victoria University.*"

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GLOSSARY

Aesthetic – Pertaining to the artistic and beautiful, a perception that something is pleasing to the eye.

Art-vertising –The place where art and advertising sit, pushing the boundaries of what each can be. Artists and companies often aim to create art that is advertising, and vice versa.

Brandilisim – Using printing, stencil or other medium to create a form of street art that uses logos and brands from large corporations in a subversive context on the street. Alternatively, the term may also refer to when an artist creates a 'brand' with their name or tag, and places it prolifically on the street as a form of personal advertising.

Crew – A group of artists or graffiti artists, that identifies under one name or symbol, often the artists work together in collaborative artworks.

Composition – Arrangement or design of elements of an artwork to achieve balance, contrast, rhythm, emphasis, and unity, to make an effective expression of an artist's idea.

Genre – Paintings that depict scenes or events from everyday life, usually realistically.

Geometric – Design based on simple shapes, such as triangles, squares, rectangles, and circles.

Graffiti, Graff - A form of visual communication, usually illegal, involving the unauthorised marking of public space by an individual or group.

Graphic Art – A type of visual art made for commercial purposes. Examples are posters, advertisements, signs, book and magazine illustrations.

Illustrate – To create designs or pictures for books or magazines to explain or show what happens in a story.

Medium (plural – media) – Material that an artist uses, such as oil, pen and ink, chalk, watercolour: the technique, such as painting, sculpture, or collage, used with these materials.

Mixed Media – A work of art formed from a combination of more than one medium, often in an unusual combination of unrelated materials such as wood, clay, paint, and fabric.

Mural – a large painting that covers a wall or which is painted directly onto a wall.

Negative Space – the empty space surrounding shapes or forms in a work of art.

Nu-Muralism - a wing of the street art movement that encompasses high end, commissioned, highly skilled commercial murals (and refers to the fine art term 'Muralism').

Outsider Art - Outsider art is art by self-taught or naïve art makers. Typically, those labelled as outsider artists have little or no contact with the mainstream art world or art institutions.

Outline – A line that shows or creates the outer edges of a shape or form, also sometimes called the contour. Sometimes used to describe the final outer line on a mural or graffiti artwork

Pattern – A repetition of shapes, lines, or colours in a design.

Paste-up or Paste ups – Works of art created through printmaking, by gluing bits of paper or posters to a wall or surface with a wheat paste glue.

Piece/ Pieces – Usually refers to a graffiti work, or less commonly a street artwork, e.g. 'That's a nice piece'. The term comes from the graffiti scene.

Print – A kind or artwork in which ink or paint is put onto a block or sprayed through a stencil. The print is then pressed or sprayed to make a print (copy) of the design.

Realism – The true life-like appearance of people, objects, or scenes, as seen by the human eye. Realism art attempts to re-create the colours, textures, shapes, and arrangement of actual objects in the real world.

Repetition – A design that has parts which are used repeatedly in a pleasing way.

Scale – The ratio of the size of the parts in a drawing or artwork to their size in the original. If a picture is drawn to scale, all its parts are equally smaller or larger than the original.

Stencil – A cut out design which can be spayed and printed in public, usually illegally, and repetitively.

Stickers - Popular in the early street art movement, stickers are a way for a street artist to get a tag up quickly. Stickers are still widely used in the street art scene.

Spotters – A street art photographer.

Street Collage - When an artist uses paper, fabric, scraps, photographs, or other materials, and attaches them to a flat surface, this can be built up with paint and stencils or paste ups too.

Style – Artistic technique, an artist's special way of creating art.

Symbol – Something that stands for something else, especially a letter, figure or sign that represents a real object or an idea.

Tagging, Tag - A form of street calligraphy – the art of writing letters and words in an ornamental style using brushes, or pens, or paint, illegally and in public.

Wild Style – a complicated and intricate form of graffiti writing. It is more complex and requires more skill than a regular graffiti piece.

STRUCTURE OF EXEGESIS

This thesis is made up of six main sections exploring the definition of street art, four theoretical chapters, and a practical chapter, followed by a conclusion. Throughout this thesis, Blender Studios will be referred to variously as: Blender Studios; Blender; the Blender; and the Studios, depending on the context, this will help in the articulation and communication of certain ideas.

Chapter 1 Examines the definition of street art through a literature review, creating a context in which to usefully consider it for the purposes of this research.

Chapter 2 examines what the Blender Studios is and considers my personal role in its formation. It provides a comprehensive history of the Blender Studios from 2001

to 2021. It interrogates the changes that have occurred over the last twenty years and delves into the many units (some creative, some commercial) that now run alongside the Blender Studios. It explores the importance of Blender Studios as a collaborative, open-studio space and aims to frame it in an historical and contemporary context, while interrogating the influence it has had upon artists and street art. This chapter creates a standpoint to probe the Melbourne street art scene, using the Blender Studios as a point of reference to examine the intersection of fine art and street art.

Chapter 3 reviews the history and eventual development of the Melbourne Docklands precinct into Australia's largest urban renewal project. This creates a framework and context in which to understand how the Blender Studios ended up undertaking a two-year residency at The District Docklands shopping centre. This chapter follows the residency and cogitates ideas around 'artist as consultant', touching on topics such as corporate collusion, branding, creative collaboration with a corporation and considers the impact that a corporate environment has on the creative process. Throughout this chapter, an examination of the currency of culture will seek to determine whether large-scale studios, or independent art complexes, can safely collude with corporations without themselves becoming compromised or corporatised.

Chapter 4 reflects on the commodification of street art and covers the corporatisation and gentrification of the Melbourne Street Art movement. A history of the Melbourne street art movement is conducted to investigate the breadth and width of the local phenomenon, and to provide a brief examination of all the genres and sub-genres that have risen or existed around the street art scene or as a direct result of the scene.

Chapter 5 examines the art created throughout the project, examining the practical elements created as part of this enquiry, and framing it within a research context. The artworks include installation - both in a gallery context and on the street - and large-scale murals, featuring those painted with absolute creative freedom and murals created for and with commercial collusion that have left very little room for creative freedom or interpretation. A variety of works in this chapter directly examine

the intersection between fine art and street art. The works included range from sculpture, and painted water towers, to gallery shows, and street activations, and examine the impact of working with councils, communities, and corporations, in the context street art commissions.
It concludes with a final body of work examining the notion of street art and its intersection with fine art, which is the culmination of my practical research.

STATEMENT OF EXPERIENCE

For the context of this research, it is important to understand my role in the Melbourne urban art scene. From a young age I was tagging and writing on trains, and I was heavily involved in the Melbourne graffiti scene, which meant that a large part of my youth was spent immersed within it. As I got older, I moved into the fine art world and was lucky enough to study at art school. I was always playing with the notion of placing tags and art in the street.

In 1998, I met Regan Tamanui (aka HA-HA) who was an oil painter who was already playing with stencils. I soon also appreciated the immediacy of stencils, and I began to help HA-HA put up his own stencils. I was quite brazen at the time, having come from the graffiti scene, and putting up stencils was quick, fun, and captured my imagination; it was at this time that I became hooked on the stencil movement. The only other person apart from Ha-Ha who had put up stencils at this stage was Pslam. He had been doing stencils around Melbourne for about a year. He is the artist that I give credit to for putting up the first stencils in Melbourne, and there is no academic evidence to the contrary. Over the next year or two, the stencil movement began to grow, with several other artists regularly putting up stencils around Melbourne and its laneways; this was the seed that would grow into the Melbourne Street art scene.

In 2001, as I was finishing up a research Masters, I opened the Blender Studios in Franklin Street, in Melbourne's CBD. I was 22 years old, and when I set up and moved into Blender Studios many of my contemporaries followed, including both stencil/street artists, and artists from my Research Degree. We were very collaborative as a studio, and many of Australia's biggest street artists called the first incarnations of Blender *their* studio. It was at this time that the foundations of the Melbourne Street art movement were laid.

Now in its twentieth year, Blender Studios has made an enormous contribution to the Melbourne art world and has been instrumental in the formation and the longevity of the street art movement. Many important artists and projects have used the studios as a platform from which to spring into the Melbourne art and Street Art scene. Many important genres and movements of the Melbourne Street scene emerged directly from the doors of the Blender Studios. It is through my unique position of the director and founder of Blender Studios that I will examine much of my key research ideas. Being part of Blender Studios places me at an interesting advantage, which grants me the ability to ethnographically examine critical moments and ideas, drawing from my past knowledge and experience.

The role that I have been fortunate to play at the Blender Studios, and in the wider art, street art, and graffiti scenes, offers me certain insights which few academics could share. I think it's important to note that I view my experience passionately. I will, however, for the purpose of this research, remain as impartial as possible when articulating my key research enquiries or findings. The research that I have undertaken will of course be highly influenced by my position within both the street art and fine art world. Undoubtedly, and naturally, I will not be able to remain *entirely* objective. I feel that my role as founder of the largest and longest-running urban art studio in Australia has provided many benefits and has produced numerous vital insights into the subject matter and research that I have undertaken. For the purpose of this thesis, I feel that it is important to underscore my personal and historical connection to the subject matter, which underpins how much of my knowledge on the subjects were formed.

CHAPTER 1 - STREET ART

For the purposes of this research, it is important to understand how street art has historically been defined, and then redefine it specifically for the purpose of my research and for the context in which I am examining it. There is a variety of complexities involved in any attempt to define street art. Normally, a movement, or a period in art and history, is defined by historians, academics, writers, and social

theorists *after* a movement has come to some sort of a conclusion. It could be argued this retrospective distance between the movement and the historians' documentation of its ideas allow for a beginning, for philosophical changes and a climax, which also allows for future theories and projected predictions.

Academics and writers place a movement within a cultural or contemporary context, making casual links to broader notions of sociology and contemporary history. As the movement of street art is still active and changing – still very current -, its fluidity can make it difficult to adequately capture its influences and contributions to fine art, design, and culture. It is, however, undisputedly an expression of the young, as Kristina Marie Gleaton explains:

> Dispossessed young people in New York City in the 1970s and early 1980s channelling their frustrations and boredom into making visual art—not music, not sport, but art— is unprecedented. The art form that grew from this phenomenon enabled youth to view the world in terms of all the visual languages that were available to them as sources to quote from and remix.[2]

There is little doubt that street art has changed the way young people, and people in general, view art. It could be argued that it has become an art medium or artform in its own right, which operates outside the boundaries of what is traditionally understood as fine art.[3] Whether you think street art is low-brow, outsider art, or just an extension of graffiti, it is clear that it has made important inroads into contemporary art and Melbourne culture.[4] Although I believe it is determined to be outsider art by the fine art establishment, street art and street artists have captured the community's imagination, and have broken down barriers between art and the everyday person on the street.[5]

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[2] Gleaton, K., 2012 *Power to the people: Street art as an agency for change*. MA diss., Minnesota: University of Minnesota, p.10.
[3] Fitzsimmons, D. 'Street art as a tool for change', *Huffington Post UK*, 15 March 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/david-fitzsimmons/street-art-as-a-tool-for-_b_15329722.html, [accessed 26 November 2019].
[4] Gehrke, L. 'Street art in Melbourne: Why history is important', *Sense the Atmosphere* [web blog], 25 October 2013, https://sensetheatmosphere.wordpress.com/2013/10/25/street-art-in-melbourne-why-history-is-important/, [accessed 26 November 2019].
[5] Invaluable, 'The evolution of street art'*, In Good Taste* [web blog], 3 October 2017, https://www.invaluable.com/blog/the-evolution-of-street-art/, [accessed 26 November 2019].

Dr. Nicholas Riggle argues that many art critics evaluate street art by relating it to the history and critical background of institutional art. Critics tend to assess street art in terms of how such work would fare in a gallery or museum setting. Unsurprisingly, such assessments are invariably negative, but they do little more than point out the obvious fact that street art makes bad institutional art.[6]

The illicit nature, drive, and youthful energy that graffiti artists have, has been omnipresent in the activities of the urban and street artists since the inception of the movement in the late 1990s. To contemplate the origins of street art, one must be careful to avoid forming strict comparison between the teleological notions of historical forms of street art expression and the contemporary incentives of street artists who create today.

If street art's main context is to exist on the street, then it is fair to suggest, as Riggle does, that 'a notable feature of much street art is that its meaning is severely compromised when removed from the street.'[7] This makes further sense when you consider that, by its very definition, street art is likely to be created illegally and anonymously.[8]

Originally, graffiti was used by transients and nomadic people who illegally traveled on box-car trains crossing the United States. Each time a person travelled on a train they would leave their name, a nickname, or a symbol, to show that they had been there, for the other nomadic and transient box-car travellers. During the 1950s and 1960s these scrawls changed and developed, and slowly began to become more elaborate. Then, by the mid to late '70s, they morphed into the early graffiti movement, which, at its inception, was very much based around trains and centralised to New York and Chicago.[9]

The foundations of street art are evident in the activities of the first graffiti artists of the 1970s and 1980s. Conceptually speaking - and in my personal experience within the culture - graffiti has a 'kill, conquer, and destroy' philosophy, reminiscent of a dog leaving its mark on a pole for other dogs to recognise. The graffiti artist marks their territory with scrawls similar to those developed in the early New York street-scene

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[6] Riggle, N. 'Street art: The transfiguration of the commonplaces', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* Vol. 68, No. 3, 2010, pp. 243-57.
[7] Ibid, p. 245.
[8] Ibid, p. 246.
[9] *Who is Bozo Texino? The secret history of hobo graffiti* (DVD), Director, B. Daniel, Braddock, PA, Bill Daniel Productions, 2005.

of the late 1970s, and early 1980s. Understood only by other graffiti artists, the scrawls are part of a creative subculture that is completely self-referential, with the majority of viewers excluded from its meaning or context. Graffiti artists don't care about art outside the street culture, and only hoped for fame and respect from *within* that culture.

As graffiti developed, the art evolved into characters and elaborate lettering, which led to wild style graffiti,[10] puks,[11] and a whole genre of images and styles related to the sub-culture. There were a variety of attempts to commercialise the early graffiti movement within established contemporary galleries. Sarah Huang discusses the largest of these commercial shows:

> The post graffiti show at Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in 1983 was conceived as an exhibition, which attributed the subway artists' 'transition from subway surfaces to canvas, an extension in scope and content of their spontaneous imagery.'[12]
> Unfortunately, the show was not well received by critics. In a review printed in The Nation, Arthur C. Danto accused the show as being superficial in its presentation.[13]

Riggle argues that the significance of street art and graffiti hinges on it being outside of the artworld, and that this 'disconnection impedes the artworld's involvement in the [street art] practice and ensures that the works enter the museum, gallery, and art market only at great, if not total, cost.'[14]

Graffiti was, and in many cases still is, closely linked to gangs and territories, and is often compared to the hip hop scene. Melbourne's graffiti scene hit the walls in the mid to late 1980s. Its aesthetic mirrored the New York style. Melbourne had a large and strong graffiti community, and it, too, was very heavily focused on trains, and closely associated with gangs. This included the development of Melbourne's very own writers' bench, based on the New York model. Cameron McAuliffe explains:

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[10] Wild Style is a complicated and intricate form of graffiti writing. It is more complex and requires more skill than a regular graffiti piece.

[11] Puks are a stylised character that graffiti artists from the late 1980s and early 1990s often painted. The character sits somewhere between a dog and a human.

[12] Neumann, D. and Janis, S. *Post-graffiti*, exhibition catalogue, New York City, NY, Sidney Janis Gallery, 1983, cited in Hwang, S. *Between indoor and outdoor: The graffiti and installations of Barry McGee ("Twist")*, MA. Diss., University of Oregon, 2014, http://hdl.handle.net/1794/18704, (accessed 16 August 2019).

[13] Hwang, S. *Between indoor and outdoor: The graffiti and installations of Barry McGee ("Twist")*, MA. Diss., University of Oregon, 2014, p. 9, http://hdl.handle.net/1794/18704, (accessed 16 August 2019).

[14] Riggle, *,* p. 243.

> The development of writers' corners or writers' benches – the places in the subway network where different lines would intersect, and graffiti writers would wait to observe the subway graffiti as it passed by – intensified subcultural contact. It was at these locations that writers connected with other writers from different parts of the city, meeting people known previously only through their throw-ups and pieces. It was also here that writers took part in the qualitative attribution of style.[15]

The writers' bench was a very important part of the early Melbourne graffiti scene. Writers would regularly meet at Richmond Station to show photos, sketches, and pieces. It was a place to talk shop and legitimise an illegitimate art form for young participants in the graffiti scene.[16] It was a place where I, as a young graffiti writer, got to meet my graffiti heroes, and helped introduce me to, and entrench me within, Melbourne's graffiti culture; and this was the exact same experience for many of Melbourne's young graffiti writers.

Melbourne's graffiti scene will forever be a part of its underground culture, and it will, therefore, always be a part of the Melbourne aesthetic. It has changed little in its ideology since its inception in Australia, and it will always remain an exclusive culture, which you will not understand if you are not part of it.

Street art clearly has a different agenda. In the late 1990s, stencils slowly began to appear on the streets of Melbourne, New York, Sao Paulo, London, and Berlin. Many of the artists that made them saw them as an extension of their fine art or studio practice. This meant that as the Street Art stencil scene developed, the contributing artists on the street were considering context, concept, and composition. The street artists manipulate the context of the art by considering what building it is on, who is going to see it, and even anticipating the viewer's experience.

This difference in context is the single greatest distinction between street art and graffiti. Although the medium (spray paint) and canvas (outdoor wall) is often the same in nature, and comparisons are impossible to avoid, the differences between street art and graffiti far out-weigh their similarities. Riggle discusses the differences between street art, graffiti, and fine art thus:

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[15] McAuliffe, C. 'Young people and the spatial politics of graffiti writing', in Worth, N. et al. (eds.), *Identities and subjectivities: Geographies of children and young people 4*, Singapore, Springer, 2016.

[16] *Writer's bench 1 & 2* [online video], Presenter Guthrie, O. and Davids, S., Melbourne, Australia, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lx8cLRK5z0k, (accessed 10 May 2021).

> Street art raises problems for justifications of the museum that appeal to the purported uniqueness and power of the works it contains. Street art is largely ephemeral art that is usually cheap to make, free to experience, and owned and overseen by no one (or, rather, everyone). Museums often contain art that is extremely expensive (to make and own), costly to experience, and overseen by an elite few.
>
> …One might worry that this definition implies that graffiti is not street art. Here is an argument to that effect:
>
> (1) Graffiti is illegal writing, usually a pseudonym, on a public surface.
>
> (2) The material use of the street is not essential to the meaning of a piece of graffiti.
>
> (3) Given the definition of street art, then, graffiti is not street art.[17]

While street art proliferated as numerous exploratory gestures and genres, its origins were grounded throughout in the political and social realms of activism, with most of the early stencils and street art referencing the politics and social complexities of the time. The very start of the 21st century saw the rise of Muslim extremists, George Bush, Osama Bin Ladin, and, most importantly the bombing of the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. Artists drew from these events and many more, mixing them with Australia-focused issues, to create an early street art movement that was filled with sarcasm, satire, and sadness; creating art that was of its time but timeless.

The early movement was also closely aligned with printmaking as a methodology, due to the heavy usage of stencils. The stencil allowed for mass production and repetition, and repetition as a process grew to unimaginable proportions with artists such as Obey pushing Brandalism to its limits.[18] As Susan Stewart states:

> Street art is not graffiti, and it is not fine art. Although commercial artists have used aspects of street art as early as the 1960s… mass stencilling, posters, billboards, projected advertisements—but none of it is street art. That an artwork uses the street is not sufficient for its being street art.

[17] Riggle, pp. 249-251.

[18] 'Brandalism is a form of street art that appropriates logos from big brands, effectively using the economic might of corporations and turning it back on them by riffing on their ubiquitous brands as a critique of both them and the wider system they represent' Stuart, J. 'To OBEY or not to Obey? A critical analysis of the work of Shepard Fairey', *Contributoria*, 15 April 2015, https://medium.com/contributoria/to-obey-or-not-to-obey-a-critical-analysis-of-the-work-of-shepard-fairey-d310eb4217a3, [accessed 5 July 2020].

…graffiti attempts a utopian and limited dissolution of the boundaries of property.[19]

In contrast, advertising represents the mainstream or hegemonic culture of consumer capitalism and has been seen as an emblem, mediator, and propagator of principles and practices of property and ownership. Indeed, the ubiquity of advertising and its presumed success in commercial persuasion is often understood as symptomatic of an ever-increasing commodification of society.[20] That is to say that, in using the street, they relinquish any claim on the work's integrity, or on the integrity of the part of the work that contributes to its being street art. 'A notable feature of much street art is that its meaning is severely compromised when removed from the street', Riggle continues, 'An artwork is street art if, and only if, its material use of the street is internal to its meaning.'[21]

'Dogs in Space' was the first stencil I saw on the streets of Melbourne in the 1980s. In 1986 this stencil appeared in a variety of places mainly train stations in areas such as Chelsea, Mentone, and Richmond; these are stencils that I personally engaged with. Placed on the ground and on the walls around Melbourne, these early commercial stencils, painted in chrome, really captured my imagination. This was the first example of a commercial urban stencil that I had seen.

There is a clear demarcation between public art and street art. In a sense, all street art is public art since all street art is public. But to what extent is public art street art? Virág Molnár states, 'Public art denotes a broader category that includes various other forms of publicly and privately funded and commissioned art erected in public space.'[22]

Some public sculptures, which are clearly not street art, appear to use the street in a way that is internal to their meaning. The context and the history, however, derive from a very different place, not allowing for a similar outcome but allowing for a shared space. Virág Molnár describes how street art transcends graffiti and sanctioned art in terms of diversification of techniques beyond spray paint. She describes illegal statutes or re-configuring existing ones, changing, or altering street

[19] Stewart, S. 'Ceci tuera cela: Graffiti as crime and art', in Fekete, J. (ed.*), Life after postmodernism: Essays on value and culture*, London: Macmillan, 1987.
[20] Williamson, J. *Decoding advertisements: Ideology and meaning in advertising*, London, and New York: Marion Boyars, 2000.
[21] Riggle, p. 246.
[22] Molnár, V. 'The business of urban coolness: Emerging markets for street art', *The New School for Social Research*, Vol. 71, 2018, p. 43.

signs, ‘liberating’ billboards (culture jamming, sub-vertising) or “flash mobs”. It is clear street art is diverse in its mediums, it’s also diverse in its concepts and locations.

Molnár then brings up the idea that contemporary street art has expanded and diversified the repertoire of public art forms, focusing on genres, techniques, and ways of interaction with the urban fabric. She states that digital technologies have increased the appeal and visibility of street art, and have helped create new ways of documenting, sharing, and disseminating which has made it available to everyone regardless of location. Molnár writes:

> The evolution of the Internet and mobile communications technologies have been instrumental in sustaining this process. It has not only transformed fundamentally the documentation of this ephemeral urban art form, but diverse online platforms have emerged that are largely autonomous from mainstream institutions. New digital tools have also enabled practitioners to exert more control over their work, particularly when it comes to commercial usage.[23]

The emergence of this new digital ecology has not only accentuated the difference between street art and earlier forms of pop art or graffiti, but also awakened the interest of the market and paved the way for diverse commercial applications. Although the beginnings of the street art movement can be traced back to the late 1990s, street art saw a dramatic spike in its popularity starting around 2005, as Tim O’Reilly explains:

> The timing certainly has to do with some unusually high profile and successful stunts staged by prominent street artists, especially by Banksy that captured the mainstream media’s attention. But importantly, the spike coincides with a qualitative shift in the development of the Internet, which is often described as the Web 2.0 revolution. This involves the rise of a new generation of web applications–commonly referred to today as social media–that facilitate information sharing.[24]

Molnár elaborates on the emergence of street art and its commercialisation stating:

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[23] Molnár, p. 53.

[24] O’Reilly, T., ‘What is Web 2.0? Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software’, in Donelan, H., Kear, K., & Ramage, M., (eds.), *Online communication and collaboration: A reader,* New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 225–236.

> Street art emerged as a counter cultural artistic practice in the late 1990s that is different from graffiti but is also intertwined with its history. It has followed in the footsteps of other avant-garde and countercultural art movements where mainstreaming has been coupled with commercialisation, and in turn commercialisation has been widely seen to progressively erode the authenticity of the art form and integrity of the artist.[25]

Street art, public art, fine art, and graffiti are different artforms that can sometimes meet in a single work. In her article, 'The business of urban coolness: Emerging markets for street art', Molnár touches on a few very interesting points about changing the context of street art from the street to the gallery. The example she gives is the *Kissing policeman*, created by Banksy, which was originally painted on a pub in Brighton (UK) in 2005 and then eventually removed by the owner of the building and shipped to Miami, where it sold at auction for $US 575,000, creating a dilemma of authenticity, ownership, and context. Street art is in the public sphere, the image is owned by the artist, but who owns the artwork? In this case, it was the owner of the space or building that was used to create the artwork. 'It shows that the ownership of art displayed in public remains blurred'[26] Similarly, there are many examples of building owners or proprietors changing the artwork or its context by placing a screen or protective covering over it. This happened in Melbourne, after Banksy visited in 2003 and left one of his more famous artworks known as *The little diver* on the corner of the Nicholas Building. The artwork was subsequently covered with clear Perspex sheeting that stood out from the wall. The purpose of the screen was to protect the artwork from tags and graffiti, thus making it less ephemeral and changing the context of the piece. The screening with plastic of *The little diver,* however, had the opposite effect; rather than preserve the artwork it was quickly vandalised and had silver house paint dripped down the inside of the Perspex, destroying the artwork and making a strong statement about the ephemerality of street art and the success and fame of a few.

As Molnár outlines:

> Only a tiny fraction of street artists are commercially so successful that they can live off the proceeds from selling their work as art. Most street artists have to take on

[25] Molnár, p. 43.
[26] Molnár, p. 51.

> freelance design and other non-lucrative commercial assignments (e.g. decorating the interior of a bar) to be able to support themselves. The majority does not belong to a privileged and influential new cultural elite as suggested by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999)[27] but, rather, to a 'creative underclass'. Because of the precarity of their work, street artists have to be ready and able to constantly move across different markets while they also want to maintain a level of commitment to non-commercial engagements.[28]

Sanctioned street art and murals have not only been deemed acceptable, but they have become potentially lucrative for local authorities to support place branding and the development of the creative city. As Sabina Andron states, '*Streetartness* is therefore less a property of the inscriptions on city surfaces, and more a construct of the discourses which go up around them'.[29] This is supported by Pierre Bourdieu's sociologies of art, which suggest that art worlds and objects are shaped by several forces, which requires a network of agents with a good understanding of its spaces and with some command over them.[30]

Property developers who welcome street art on their hoardings, local councils who authorise paint jams and street art festivals, editors who publish picture books of street art from around the world, academics who comment on street art, and Instagram photographers with thousands of followers, have all come on board the street art movement to try to control it and manipulate it for their own personal gains. They have all become agents of change for street art. This has not all been negative, however, as these agents and commentators have undoubtedly supported street art in gaining worldwide recognition, which has seen artists gaining substantial fame and financial reward, as well as an artistic credibility that has allowed for these artists to exhibit in the largest and most exclusive institutions in the world. [31]

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[27] Boltanski, L., and Chiapello, E., *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 1999, cited in Molnár, V., *The business of urban coolness*, p. 48.
[28] Molnár, p. 48.
[29] Andron, S., 'Selling streetness as experience: The role of street art tours in branding the creative city', *The sociological review*, Vol. 66, No. 5, 2018, p. 1040.
[30] Bourdieu, P., *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*, New York: Columbia Press, 1993.
[31] McAuliffe, C., (2012) 'Graffiti or street art? Negotiating the moral geographies of the creative city', *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 34, pp. 189–206.

In conclusion, when defining street art there are number of import factors to consider, such as its collusion with fine art, its existence in the public sphere, its stereotypical mediums, and its origins in activism, graffiti, homelessness, and rebellion. Originating from the context of urban spaces, street art now lives in a variety of contexts, from the cultural recesses of galleries to large online and virtual communities. However, it is my opinion, as well as that of others, that it should always be placed in the laneways and on the public walls of our city. Street art should always be on the street, otherwise it needs to simply be called art. The core ideology of street art will always be at the heart of the movement as the contexts and commercialisation changes it towards Nu-Muralism. The true act of creating an artwork to bypass the gallery system and to exist in public, will always be in the heart of a street artist because that is where they feel the art should exist, and that is where the street artist believes their art can make the largest contribution.

Street art has become an important part of the Melbourne cultural milieu, evident by its appearance throughout the city in a variety of contexts. Street art is not only found on walls and laneways, but also in advertisements, on trains, trams, buses, and even in shops and on T-shirts. It has appeared at the National Gallery of Australia and the National Gallery of Victoria; it has been integrated into many parts of contemporary life in Melbourne and across the world.[32]

The street art phenomenon in Australia has caused an alteration in perception for artists and artwork, and, in turn, also on the audience's perception. In part, this can be attributed to the ability street art has to bypass the gallery, hence creating a new egalitarian model for the presentation of art. The public nature of urban art has in turn captured the imagination of the general public, turning many street artists into household names. Indeed, it could be argued the public has embraced urban art in a way they have never embraced fine art. This has conveyed upon street art and street artists a fame that is close to rock-stardom, which sees them travelling the world undertaking commissions, headlining street art festivals, and being paid very big money. The notoriety and accessibility of street art helped grow the public interest in it exponentially. Street art has broken down many boundaries and often leads to an

[32] National Gallery of Australia, *Space invaders* [website], https://nga.gov.au/exhibition/spaceinvaders/default.cfm?MNUID=6, [accessed 18 September 2019].

introduction to fine art for people who may have otherwise been intimidated by the fine art gallery model.

Much of this art movement, in Melbourne, has been focused on the Blender Studios, which has run alongside the street art movement since it opened in early 2001. With the Blender arguably being at the heart of the urban art movement, it is important to establish what the Blender Studios are, what this independent art collective has achieved, and why it is an important factor in the Melbourne underground art movement.

CHAPTER 2 - THE BLENDER STUDIOS

This chapter introduces the phenomenon of street art, examined through the lens of the Blender Studios. It follows the Blender Studios since it was established in 2001, exploring its origins, history, and its links to the urban art movement. It looks at the way Blender has expanded into a business and evaluates the different business operations and creative modules. The unique nature of the Blender Studios has revealed aspects of art knowledge that are critical to the understanding of the street art/fine art nexus in Melbourne, and is crucial in my understanding and examination of the intersection between street art and fine art.
This deliberation of the Blender Studios spans through the early years of Blender Studios and its history. I examine the Melbourne Street Art Tours, Blender Creatives, and the establishment of the Dark Horse Experiment Gallery. In addition, I touch on the politics of the Studios, its recent move, its philosophy and ideology, and the community around it.

Blender Studios is an art space that has striven to become financially independent and has aimed to always have complete autonomy and creative freedom in curatorial decisions and artistic directions. Alison Bain states that, 'The arts are often dependant on an infusion of government financial support.'[33] Blender Studios has never had any government support and would prefer to have autonomy. Autonomy is

33 Bain, A., 2005, 'Constructing an artistic identity', *Work, employment and society*, Vol. 19, No. 1, p.38.

an important part of the studio's ideology; it is import as an artist or art institution that your vision does not become watered down by bureaucracy.

Before Blender

In the 1990s Melbourne was a very different city: a suburban city, with elements of the 1950s still holding strong. Though John Brack's painting *5pm*[34] was painted over sixty years ago, the ideology it captured still held true deep into the 1990s. Masses of people finished work and headed for the station at the end of each day, to catch a train home to their quarter-acre block; barbeque dinners around above ground swimming pools. Most people used the city only for work.
On the weekends and evenings, the city was empty. For the artists of Melbourne, this left plentiful large and cheap studios available throughout the CBD. It meant a city filled with artistic activity. Melbourne became a cultural centre, home to many 'crafty' and unusual shops and galleries. As the 90s ended, a revolutionary cultural shift began. That cultural shift was gentrification. As the city grew, changed, and gentrification took hold, rent became too much for the artists and creatives, leading to a diaspora of the art community. I believe that a key turning point in the gentrification of Melbourne was the demolition of the relatively new Gas and Fuel Towers for aesthetic reasons, and to make way for the construction of Federation Square.

By 2002 many creative spaces began to shut their doors. Within eight years, nearly all the studios, galleries, and boutique shops had disappeared, and large-scale apartment complexes had taken their place. Melbourne had become 'cool' because of its laneways, art, and secret hidden shops. As people have moved to the city from interstate and overseas there has been a substantial construction boom and, ironically, the spaces and cheap warehouses that were the original drawcards were the first to go. In Melbourne the population growth has been exponential within the last thirty years: in 1990, recorded figures show a population of 3,154,000 while the 2020 recorded figures report 4,969,763.[35] Melbourne's population increased

[34] Brack, J., *5pm*, 1955, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Victoria.
[35] Macrotrends, *Melbourne Australia metro area population 1950-2021*, Macrotrends.net/cities/206168/Melbourne/population, [accessed 2 Feb 2021].

substantially in a thirty-year period, and it is clear to the long-term local residents that Melbourne's CBD has certainly been growing at a staggering pace.

This steep and intense population growth resulted in the city changing forever. This population growth will be a trend into the future, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics' projections suggesting there will be 12.2 million Melburnians by 2066.[36] This growth has changed the way artists and creatives use the city, and how they engage with their studio or creative space, and it will continue to do so. Creatives and artists have had to become inventive and malleable in their drive to secure studio spaces, having insecure leases and collaborating with corporations or government bodies in order to find suitable studio locations.

Blender Philosophy

As city studios disappear, the relationship artists have with their studio and how they engage with it has had to also change. In her article 'Constructing an artistic identity', Bain discusses the notion that artists need isolation to engage with the artistic process.[37] She uses interviews to collate data that specifically promotes the idea of the isolated artist:

> Large open areas in warehouse buildings might become a neutral gathering point where it is possible to see what other artists are working on. For the most part, however, artists seem to maximize their time by working undisturbed in contemplative isolation. Aside from brief encounters in the communal spaces and the occasional greeting in a stairwell, there are few opportunities for interaction amongst artists who share a studio building.[38]

Blender Studios differs from this; When the Blender Studios opened in 2001, the aim was to create a collaborative and vibrant space, and to nurture a supportive art community. There was no preconceived idea regarding the duration of the project, the primary motivation was to simply make art with like-minded people, in a 'cool' city

[36] Henriques-Gomes, L., 'Australia's population forecast to hit 30 million by 2029', *The Guardian*, 22 November 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/nov/22/australias-population-forecast-to-hit-30-million-by-2029, [accessed 15 July 2019].
[37] Bain, A., *Constructing an artistic identity*, pp. 26-43.
[38] Ibid, p. 36.

studio. The early days of Blender Studios were filled with all types of interesting people, large scale parties, group exhibitions, collaborative art, and creating an atmosphere and feeling of a welcoming creative community. This aspect of Blender Studios attracted artists even if they didn't have a studio, and so it became a centralised meeting point for creatives of many types.

Bain's research attests to the fact that there are few collaborative studio models like Blender Studios; perhaps people feel the need to be enclosed. I call the studio set up at Blender Studios the 'university model', with all studios being open at one end. One of the advantages Blender Studios has is that the early street art movement has made the Blender like a crew.[39] Artists are proud to be part of Blender, and there is a sense of community and comradeship.

Before the Blender Studios was established, I had been part of several small studios, and I noticed that most artists did not use their space, or they were locked away in a private space behind closed doors. This left the studio empty and lifeless and often made the space look like a storage area. When Blender Studios was established, there were several ideas that were implemented to ensure this didn't happen and these have been refined over the years.

When you are in a studio that has lockable doors, it creates a space definition which means that artists are less likely to share space and use the public areas. This allows for far less contact between artists, and, therefore, less collaboration and sharing of ideas. Blender Studios has no doors on any space, and this means that artists are forced to interact, and that studios must look good enough for people to see and engage with.

The open studio philosophy allows artists to connect, collaborate, and create, facilitating many benefits, and creating a natural system of mentoring and knowledge-sharing. It has allowed for collaborations and medium sharing and has given people opportunities through being part of a larger community network. Bain touches on the ideology that Blender Studios adheres to and suggests that the art school pathway can work for some artists but there is not one clear way to become an artist; from individual experimentation to apprenticeships, mentorships to private classes, there is no one specific path that leads to success.[40]

[39] A crew is a group of street/graffiti artists that work together under one name and have a similar philosophy to a gang.
[40] Bain, p. 35.

A variety of approaches and outcomes manifests in the range of shared practices in the Blender, whereby artists support each other in a variety of ways, such as sharing experiences, materials, and conversations, as they work in the shared spaces. This system of sharing allows both emerging and mid-career artists to profit from regular interaction and critical discussion as ideology and concepts are challenged and new kinds of artworks, mediums, and concepts, can change an artist's oeuvre.

History of Blender Studios

The Blender Studios has been a major part of the Melbourne art scene and has been in some way involved in every part of the Melbourne urban art movement. The Blender Studios has also been the base for major street art and fine art festivals, urban rejuvenation projects, and is the home of the Melbourne Street Art Tours, Blender Creatives, Blender Institute, and the Dark Horse Experiment.

In summary, so far, I contend that The Blender Studios is significant and relevant in supporting artists and their work, facilitating art movements or styles, and instigating collective public art initiatives and activities allowing the community to engage with art. To elucidate on these matters, it is relevant to consider the origins and history of The Blender Studios in detail, including how it changed with the times, and how it has fraternised with commercialisation.

In 2001, street art was just beginning to blossom. In its infancy, it was a political art movement that was heavily stencil-based.[41] George Bush was waging a war, 9-11 had changed the world and its politics, and the G20 summit had recently ended in Melbourne. The politics and activism that was a large part of this period in Melbourne, coupled with its geography, geographical isolation, and creative history, set the scene for street art to invade the city. The laneways were an unused canvas, the laws were mild, and Melbourne's inner-city spaces were the perfect places for artists to explore their creativity.

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[41] Young, A., 'Cities in the city: Street art, enchantment, and the urban commons', *Law and Literature*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2014, p. 147.

It was in this context that the Blender Studios was established. Spanning twenty years the Blender Studios is home to a suite of art projects that demonstrate the scope of its artistic operations, and, in turn, shed light on the street art movement in general, and how it interacts with fine art, education, corporatisation, and government.

The Early Years

When I signed the lease for the studios on Franklin Street, I was scared. I was 22-years old, on the dole, and I had just signed a lease for $2000 a week. At the time I was at the end of my research Masters Degree in Fine Art, and I was also doing work on the street and hanging around with urban artists. So, it was natural for both these groups to move in: the research-based fine artists, and the street artists.

The artists were young, and paying the bills was a challenge for most of us. It was all done in cash transactions. This struggle at the start of the Blender Studios was an important shared experience for the artists, creating a strongly-bonded community, and this helped to define the ideology that Blender Studios stands by today. An excerpt of text I wrote ten years ago, for The Blender Studios website, captures the mood of the time:

> I remember looking at the empty warehouse, there was rubbish and dust everywhere. It was hard to convince anyone that this space could be anything more than a demolition site. I was about 22 at the time (late 2001). Dividing the space into 14 open studios, I always dreamt of a hard-working and productive studio'[42]

After about a year, the studios started to develop a personality, as a true blend of creatives came together, with different beliefs, creeds, and socio-economic backgrounds and educations. After the first year, the name 'Blender Studios' was given. We were sitting around having beers, trying to come up with names, and James Dodd (aka Dlux) came up with 'Blender'. It became a fitting mission statement of sorts, as the studios had become a blend of different artists, craftspeople, and philosophies.

[42] The Blender Studios, *The early days* [website], https://www.theblenderstudios.com/theearlydays, [accessed 4 March 2020].

As the Blender opened, the art created within burst onto the streets. There was a real political element to the art created at the early Blender. The young artists felt that they had no voice and that the Australian art scene had been hijacked by pretention. The early street art movement felt like an alternative which was opposite to this. Politics was the main subject of the artists at the early Blender Studios, and street art became an extension of many fine artist's practice. For this reason, the Blender Studios became the intellectual heart of the early Melbourne Street movement. Research artists became highly influenced by the street movement, many making it part of their common practice, whilst street artists started creating art in a fine art context. My reflective statement from 2003 on the Blender website describes this era as:

> An interesting time in Melbourne, some nights there would be as many as 30 artists leaving the Blender with mops, rollers, cans everything. The city was under siege. We owned the town. We would all work in the studio and at about 5 or 6pm as people finished work, they would come over to the Blender to have a drink, smoke weed and make art, and then everyone would hit the town. It was stencils, paste- ups and parties. It was a very different city back then. [43]

As Blender Studios has grown and changed, we have endeavoured to put the artists at the forefront of all decisions, and we aim to help the artists through employment, sales, and constructive criticism. 'Artist first' is the philosophy that places the focus on the artists, it is about helping and supporting, and ensuring we do all we can so that the artists at Blender Studios can make a living from their art, are happy, and are not exploited.

Over the years there have been many kinds of artists with different personalities, cultures, and philosophies who have taken residency. There have been lazy, crazy, and socially inept artists, who can be difficult in a social, shared space. These situations normally work themselves out. If not, intervention has been necessary to address the problem; only on a few rare occasions has an artist had to move out. In summary, these principles ensure that the Blender Studios is a vibrant, creative space. The principles have become something that all Blender Studio artists understand and respect.

[43] The Blender Studios, *The early days*, [accessed 4 March 2020].

In 2004, The Blender Studios was forced to shut down. Towards the end of 2003, the owner of the building placed a giant Billboard across the front of the building, selling apartments which were proposed for the 110 Franklin Street property. The apartments were advertised at $139,000, and, in early 2004, we were told that we had until April to move out. It was also at this time that I broke up with my high school sweetheart and this had a massive impact on me and my ability to run the studios. I tried to set up a board/committee to run Blender Studios, however, this proved too difficult to arrange, combined with the task of finding a new space and my struggle to focus due to personal stressors. In April 2004, the Blender studios closed, and I moved to Asia.

The closing of the Blender Studios, it could be argued, created a rupture to the social routine of many young inner-city artists who used the studios as a place to meet other artists and have their ideas challenged and tested. After Blender's closure, St Jerome's in Caledonian Lane was the main bar where artists used to meet and connect. Many artists would meet there every afternoon. However, a year or two later, St Jerome's bar was shut to make way for the new Melbourne Emporium.

The Second Incarnation

In 2007, I moved back to Melbourne. In the three years that I had lived overseas Melbourne had changed a lot, and the anti-graffiti laws had become much harsher. Large areas of important street art were whitewashed as part of the preparations for the 2006 Commonwealth Games. Around this time, Melbourne had begun to become famous for its art and street art. There was an influx of artists moving to Melbourne from interstate and all around the world. With many new artists joining the already prolific Melbourne art scene, it didn't take long for the laneways to develop into public masterpieces, offering more public art to the City of Melbourne than ever before, turning Melbourne's urban streetscape into the world's largest art gallery. The movement had gained momentum and popularity, and artists were beginning to make a living. It was also becoming competitive. It seemed a world away from the early street art days - it all seemed so cliquey.

Most of the street artists from the first Blender Studios had found a new space and formed the 'Everfresh Crew' which became world famous for their murals and crew collaborations. The main difference that I noticed, upon my return to Melbourne, was that street art had become a commodity, with all the pros and cons this entailed.

In 2008, I was able to get the lease back on the same location at 110 Franklin Street and re-opened the Blender Studios. The proposed apartment complex had fallen through, and the building had remained vacant from the time that we had moved out. The space had been cleaned out which allowed for a different design of the studios. I built the walls a second time and this time I put in a space for a gallery. The walls were built to a similar design as the first Blender Studios, but they were better built. The studios were becoming famous within the creatives scenes when it closed in 2004, and when I re-opened the studios, they filled up straight away.

I have always chosen the artists that take up residence at Blender Studios. It was not a deliberate idea but one that developed over the years. I try to find artists with good work, who work in interesting mediums, who will work hard, and will be able to handle working in a busy creative environment.

The second incarnation of Blender Studios differed from the first in that there was a certain kind of gentrification which had happened through time. We had matured as artists and individuals, and the space was less raw, and less lawless; we had built the walls better and had less parties, focusing more on the creation of art. As we got older, we also got more professional in the way we presented the studio and ourselves to the public. Regan Tamanui (aka HA-HA) moved into a studio at the back and turned it into a residence; see Fig. 2 which shows the view from HA-HA's studio/living space spanning across the studio. Piyachat Suksodsai and I moved into the apartment above the gallery space, and, as I had before, I continued to live on-site at the Blender the whole time it was in Franklin Street. This allowed for the studios to always have a caretaker presence, which helped with atmosphere and safety.

Dark Horse Experiment began in 2009, operating under the name Michael Koro Galleries at the time. The gallery was originally set up by Regan Tamanui and myself, however Regan pulled out after three shows as he didn't really enjoy running the space and wanted to focus on his art.[44] Two years later Joel Gailer joined me in

[44] The name Michael Koro was created as a myth or fiction, based on both of our middle names.

running the gallery. We ran it together and produced some great shows together,including shows from artists John Kelly, Ben Frost, Angela Brennon, Anthony Lister, Marc De Jong, and hundreds more.

In 2011, Dickerson gallery director, Stephen Nall, merged his gallery with Michael Koro gallery to create the commercial gallery 'Dark Horse Experiment'. The first exhibition was a big group show, and the gallery was well received, with thousands of people coming to the opening. The first solo show was by Andrew Sibley; one of the last shows he had whilst he was alive. Over the next six months the gallery slowed down, and the bills piled up. At the end of a seven-month period Stephen Nall announced that the gallery was not covering the predicted cost, and that he would be leaving the partnership. Joel Gailer also left the gallery at this point. [45] It took me a while, but I soon redesigned the internal structure of the gallery, and it was back up and running under the same name, 'Dark Horse Experiment'.

From 2013 till the present, Dark Horse Experiment has operated as a research gallery, as depicted in Fig. 1. The idea behind a research gallery is that the art shown isn't always commercial but is artistically valid and deserving of a platform.

Figure 2. Internal view of Dark Horse Experiment Gallery, 2015.

Regan Koro Tamanui and Adrian Michael Doyle. It was believed that Michael Koro was a business partner that was met in Shanghai, and he had the gallery named after himself. However, after the Asian economic crisis we claimed that he could no longer afford to invest in the gallery. The name remained for a number of years.

[45] See details of *Subtopia* in Chapter 5.

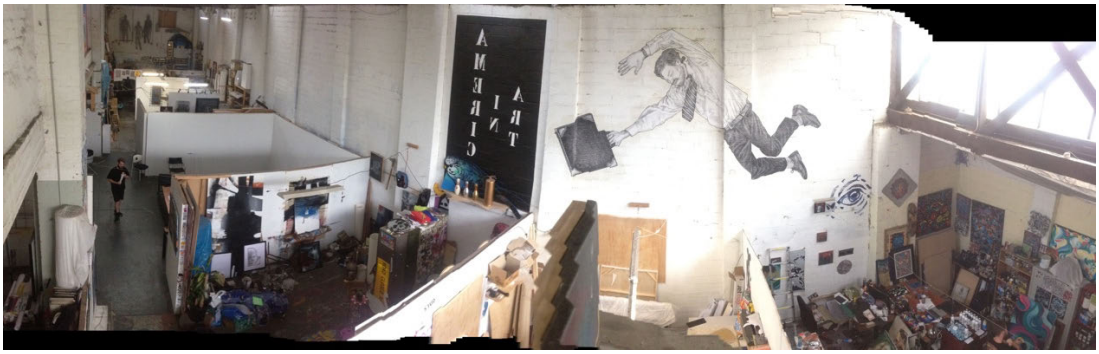

Figure 2. The Blender Studios on Franklin Street, internal view, 2015.

As the studios have developed, they have become well-known, with many media articles,[46] documentaries, television travel shows[47] and 'Subtopia'[48] helping to make Blender Studios a household name. Over the last ten years, other arms of the Blender creative suites have developed, become successful, and helped absorb the cost of the gallery and the studios. The cheap studios, plus the jobs, art sales, and other opportunities that Blender Studios affords, have made Blender Studios one of the most sought-after artists' studios in Melbourne. This has ensured that the quality of the art is always improving.

In 2009, came the opening of a further extension of the Blender Studios' activities, with the start of Melbourne Street Tours - a street art tour company run by street artists. Based out of the Blender Studios, the Melbourne Street Tour begins at Federation Square and weaves its way through the city laneways, finishing with high tea at the studios that includes an exclusive tour of the studios and the chance to meet the artists.

The Melbourne Street Tours have become iconic and an important part of our consideration of the impact of the Blender Studios, so it relevant to consider the history of how they were initiated. Initially, I was going to create the tours with Regan Tamanui and Matt Davis, but they were chasing their individual creative dreams. So, instead, I worked with Piya Suksodsai to set it up. The main thing we wanted to do was to ensure that the tours were run by street artists and that the tours were

[46] Including articles published in Qantas inflight magazine, *Lonely Planet*; *Vice;* and the *New York Times*, plus many more, both nationally and internationally.
[47] Some of the television shows include *Coxy's Big Break*; *Race Around the World (China), Goodmorning Britain* and many others, with programs in over 30 countries based on the Blender Studios and the Melbourne Street Tours.
[48] *Subtopia* is an artwork in the medium of reality television that was based on the Blender Studios.

legitimate, that is, that the information and content was coming from the actual street artists. After listening to several city tour guides giving tours of Melbourne, I realised that people were making up the truth about the Melbourne street art scene - and that they were taking street art and graffiti art out of context; their version of our reality made me angry. This was the main driving force in the decision to open the street art tours.

The main rule that has been set in place with regards to the Melbourne Street Tours is that to be a tour guide, you must be a street artist or have been a player or agent of the Melbourne street scene. The guides must have played an integral part in the Melbourne street art scene over a prolonged period. This means that they can speak about the art and locations with authenticity for the tourists. Fig. 3 shows Michael Fikaris giving a street art tour in Hosier Lane.

Figure 3. Michael Fikaris giving a street art tour in Hosier Lane.

In his article 'Graffiti or street art', Chris McAuliffe examines the sociologies of art, suggesting that the art world and objects are shaped by several forces and actors (including, in our case, walking tours), who define and decide what art is, where it can be found and how it should be valued and cared for. For street art to belong, then, it needs a network of agents with a good understanding of its spaces and with some command over them.[49] This is a true statement and in retrospect, I believe that the Melbourne Street Tours has become an agent in controlling the locations of

[49] McAuliffe, C., 2012, *Graffiti or street art?,* pp. 189-206.

street art in Melbourne. An unintended result of the Melbourne Street Tours is that many artists are aware of the routes that are taken by the tours, and this creates a cluster of art in the tour areas as artists aim to get their art shown on the tours and photographed by the people attending.

Over the last fifteen years, I have set up several legal laneways in Melbourne's CBD including: Blender Lane; Flinders Court; Lovelands; Electric Place; and the New Blender Lane. These laneways are public and mostly legal, as I have sought permission from the building owners. Once I set these spaces up, many artists start going there to put their art up. This certainly helps a rapidly gentrifying city to keep some kind of a role in the international street art world. However, part of the deal that I have made with the owners is to make sure that the lanes are looking good. This means that I am a street art curator (or dictator), deciding what gets to stay and what doesn't, in order to maintain the aesthetics of the lane and to ensure that these lanes can remain as street art spaces. Some of these lanes are now famous and my curatorial decisions often influence how Melbourne's street art is viewed by the local and international community.

Sabina Andron has the following to say about street art walking tours:

> Much of the literature on walking tours comes from tourism studies, and it emphasizes the cooperative and social value of these activities…Tours are processes of discovery, first and foremost through mobility, but they involve a themed and imbalanced exchange between a guide and a group of participants. Moving in a choreographed manner and as part of a group offers a fabricated experience of places, which are strategically packaged and presented in a certain way, at a certain rhythm. Street art walking tours in particular offer a rigid, well-rehearsed, non-collaborative presentation of their material, whose selection and presentation leaves little room for contingencies.[50]

It is an interesting perspective, and one of which I am highly aware. This view of the street art tour is focused on several street tours in London, where none of the tour guides are well known artists, and the tours don't get to finish at a studio where you get to meet the artists, see their studios, and have a very personal experience. One of the benefits of having a well-known street artist as a tour guide is that there is a

[50] Andron, p. 1037.

legitimacy to the tour, and the artist will talk about their own art on the street, share personal stories of the scene and allow guests an insight that you could only get on a tour.

Unless you are a street artist, or partake in illicit creation of art, it is impossible to understand and get this perspective on your own. Even if you placard yourself as a voice on the subject, you will only ever come off as a sort of 'spotter',[51] Criminologist Alison Young describes street art tours as having a 'deadening' effect and presents their mechanics as a 'diminished kind of walking'.[52] She states:

> The walking tour is accessible only to those who pay the fee, and it follows pre-designed itineraries. Detours and meanderings off-route are not possible. Conversation is controlled by the guide. Encounters with the street artworks take place for just the amount of time that can be contained within the time limit of the tour.'[53]

Aspects of this are true, you do have to pay to come on a tour, but there are several things that the Melbourne Street Tours do to ensure that the experience is unique, and conducted with respect to the art and the artists. There is no prescribed route for our tours, choosing instead to go where the best art is at the time, as street art is ephemeral; it seems redundant to have a predetermined route. Whilst you do have a guide who is talking, they are experts in their field, and you are very unlikely to find yourself in a position to discuss street art with a street artist on such a personal level in any other context.

Andron claimed of the tours that she went on in London:

> It became apparent that most guides take very little time to reflect on their own practice during the tours, and often refuse to acknowledge their roles in configuring London's Street art world. Guides commonly present themselves as mere observers and commentators, whose work bears no impact on the locations and types of street art works they include on their tours.[54]

This is certainly not the case with Melbourne Street Tour guides. As a rule, they are well known artists who are happy to discuss their work and then show you their

[51] A spotter is someone who photographs and documents street art but does not necessarily contribute to making art on the street, see Chapter 4 for more information.
[52] Young, A., 2016, *Street art world,* London: Reaktion Books, pp. 111-119.
[53] Ibid, p. 119.
[54] Andron, p. 1038.

studio space at Blender Studios once they have finished the tour. Often, the tour guides will even create small works, stencils, or put up stickers whilst they are giving the tour; if the artists are already out in the streets, then it seems a waste not to place up some art. As the director, I don't necessarily encourage doing illicit art during the tour, as a lot of things can go wrong, however, I don't believe I have the right to stop them. I have myself created a lot of work and placed up many stickers and stencils whilst being a tour guide; it is purely the choice of the street artist who is giving the tour.

We limit the number of people on tours to ensure an intimate experience and to allow the guests to wander around the Blender Studios at their own leisure. The Melbourne Street Tours are an introduction to the unsanctioned spaces that exist in Melbourne and once a guest has left the studios their relationship with Melbourne's urban spaces, the laneways, and its art, and stains, has just begun. Art historian Peter Bengtsen also describes his experience of a street art walking tour as having 'a certain unnatural, almost Disneyesque, feel to it' and attributes his lack of immersion to the ready-planned character of the tour.[55]

> It is not just that street art tours deprive one of the sense of individual discovery valued so highly by street art lovers, but they also play a substantial role in drawing the boundaries of the street art world, by naming and validating its art works, and enabling the formation of its audiences. Show it on the tour, and it is art; don't show it, then it is probably not – and all participants with their camera phones and social media accounts will unwittingly attest to that.[56]

Whilst the artists at Melbourne Street tours point out many of the important works Melbourne has, this is not at the detriment of other less famous works and is largely left up to the discretion of the artist who is giving the tour. One thing Melbourne Street Tours does do well is point out smaller and more obscure work that a non-artist would have trouble noticing or even identifying as art.

The idea of remaining anonymous as a street artist is laughable. Street artists in Melbourne have hardly ever attained the hiding of their identity, except in the very early days, when street artists were far more prolific, and street art was still an underground culture. These days, much of the myth of the street artists is created by

[55] Bengsten, P., *The street art world,* Lund: Alemndros de Granada Press, p. 158.
[56] Andron, p. 1037.

spotters, people online, and academics who, I suspect, imagine an underground world where artists are constantly on the run from police. Street artists strive for fame the way a musician or a fine artist would. The commodification of the artist as a person is something that started around 2006 in Melbourne, with numerous artists becoming well known as a persona.

There were, however, certainly some artists that did prefer to remain anonymous. Molnár writes:

> Most artists I talked to were principally open to commercial work. But there was one practice–common especially in advertising–that they seem to universally disapprove of. This entails turning the spotlight on the very person of the artist as a cool authentic urban character. Street artists generally prefer to work with companies that approach them because they like their trademark style which is often linked to their personality. They feel that in such cases it is less likely that they have to make aesthetic compromises because the client knows what to expect. Yet, in these situations corporate trespassing frequently occurs through trying to commodify the personality of the artist and ignoring the artwork.[57]

Although there are a few exceptions, most street artists like fame. The only street artist in Melbourne that I can think of who worries about his identity and keeps it a well-hidden secret is Lush or Lush Sux. This is not primarily for fear of police but, rather, fear from other street artists and graffiti artists who don't appreciate much of his content.

Andron writes that:

> Tours impose masses of people on perhaps otherwise quiet streets, severely altering the street dynamic through their presence. This occurs through temporary changes in traffic and pedestrian flows or street centres of gravity.[58]

The only time this would happen with The Melbourne Street Tours is when we have several school groups at the same time. Although we do try to avoid these scenarios, I can't personally understand what the problem would be with changing the dynamics of a street or laneway for just a few minutes. I feel that all disruptions to a public space are interesting, like a protest, performance, or even a car crash. In these

[57] Molnár, p. 49.
[58] Andron, p. 1037.

situations, the space is briefly interrupted or altered, and it gives one a new perspective on an otherwise usual location. One great example of this was a street tour that was organised by the Yarra Council in Fitzroy, around 2008, and was advertised in the newspapers, and it was free of cost. The two tour guides were Deb and myself. Over 140 people turned up, so we divided the group into two halves and set off blocking traffic and creating excitement as we shut down every street, lane, and location we visited. Although this is not a sustainable model for street tours, (for a number of reasons) it was jarring and space-altering, and was really something to see. I don't understand why people who claim to like altered public space would not appreciate such a spectacle.

Andron goes on to state that the presence of street art walking tours have:

> …long-lasting effects like touristification and gentrification. City streets, with their displays, affordances and hostilities, are the very material of these changing dynamics. They enable new discoveries but also create spurious zones of heightened attention, setting the terrain for even more tours, and eventually becoming significant agents of urban change. London has seen this happen in areas such as Shoreditch and Brick Lane, where the density of street art has contributed significantly to the affirmation, muralization and touristification of many streets and surfaces.[59]

Street art has changed considerably since its inception in the late 90s, so to consider street art in the same vein as it was once is not a realistic approach and is extremely naïve. Many academics seem to yearn, or have a nostalgia for, a period of street art that finished around fifteen years ago. The illicit nature of street art, the underground grass-roots politics and the raw nature of the aesthetics has given way to large scale murals, commercial projects, government sanctioned projects, and street art tours. Nu-muralism[60] has not been a bad thing for artists, as Molnár stated:

> In fact, however, only a tiny fraction of street artists is commercially so successful that they can live off the proceeds from selling their work as art. Most street artists must take on freelance design and other non-lucrative commercial assignments. [61]

[59] Andron, p.1037.
[60] Nu-muralism is the name that I give to contemporary street art, e.g., large-scale murals, commercial projects, and government sanctioned projects.
[61] Molnár, p. 48.

At Blender Studios, many of the artists can make a living from their art, through direct studio sales, large-scale mural commissions, holding workshops, and giving tours. This isn't always evenly distributed, as some artists will naturally be more popular than other artists. People may view this as wrong and exploitative, but I would have to question their motives, as I believe that artists of all creeds, wealth, and aesthetics, deserve the ability to make a living through their art, hard work and passion, and to be paid for their time and commitment, ultimately, however, it will always be the public's choice who succeeds.

When the Melbourne Street Tours opened in 2009, there were only two bookings. Soon after, a Melbourne newspaper, the *Herald-Sun*, ran a feature story about the Blender Studios, introducing the Melbourne Street Tours and published interviews with HA-HA and myself.[62] After the story came out, the tours began to grow, and over the years we have refined them and the way they are presented. We made flyers early on to place in hotels and at the visitor's centre in Federation Square. Fig.

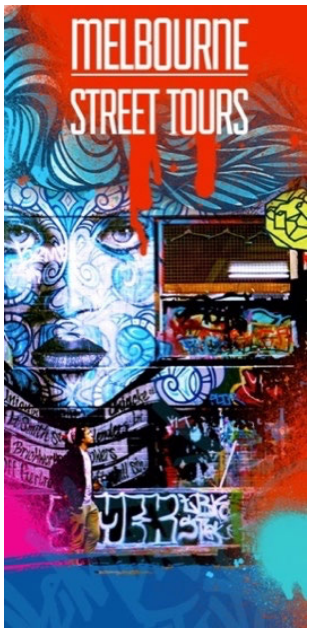

Figure 4. (Left) Melbourne Street Tours Brochure, 2010.
Figure 5. (Right) Melbourne Street Tours Brochure, 2016.

4 shows the first flyer for the Melbourne Street Tours, created by French street artist Nelio, in 2010, while Fig. 5 depicts the newer flyer that was created by Western

[62] 'Street art tour of Melbourne', *The Herald Sun*, 20 November 2011, https://www.heraldsun.com.au/travel/australia/street-art-tour-of-melbourne/news-story/1527d06ccbc429171628d9d92c6b89f4, [accessed 4 May 2019]

Australian street artist, Hancock. The tours have now become a larger business, utilising seven tour guides and a full-time administrator. We have an education section, and we work heavily with young people and schools. Well over 25,000 students come on the Melbourne Street Art Tours every year, with schools regularly coming from places as far away as Germany, Singapore, and Arnhem Land.

After many years working with youth and supporting youth-orientated art projects through government and schools, The Melbourne Street tours created educational specific tours in which there was close collaboration with teachers to ensure that the tours can be added to school units, lesson plans, and educational goals. Through this expansion into the educational sector, we also added workshops focusing on freehand stenciling and pre-cut stencils. We give out education packs to teachers with lesson plans and tasks based on Melbourne street art and the local artists. This means that the tours have helped Blender Studios become part of the general art education in many schools. This has no doubt helped to promote the Blender Studios agenda, promoting our version of the Melbourne street art scene to students in art classes across the country. Many might gasp at this thought, but Blender takes the education of the public very seriously and tries to remain as bi-partisan as possible.

The workshops have created a new arm of the Blender suite named the ‘Blender Institute’. The workshops have become popular and have grown rapidly in the last few years, with well over 150 workshops a year. The education and youth-focus of the Blender Studios has allowed it to be in a unique position as it gets to write the history of Melbourne street art and has told its version to well over a quarter of a million people since the Melbourne Street Tours opened.

Street tours have changed the way street art is viewed in Melbourne. The tours have introduced hundreds of thousands of people to Melbourne’s Street art movement, and to art in general. The benefits to the artists, the young people, the studios, and the Melbourne art and street art scene, far outweigh the negatives. The corruption that the tours cause, or have caused, to the street art scene is something that would have mattered in 2004. But, to be realistic, that time has long gone, and the benefits to Melbourne and its urban culture are earned and created now, with little effect on street art, gentrification, or Melbourne’s creative culture. The idea that this form of street art can be corrupted is just not true. Street art was corrupted long before the Melbourne Street Tours was created.

Street art has largely been hijacked by middle-aged people and young artists who, without the street art gateway, would probably struggle to enter the fine art world. It has become a sort of hobby for many of the current artists and has been for many years. Most contemporary street artists are either big name mural painters doing silos and large-scale projects, or artists that put collections of small, mostly legal works around the city. Either way, the art is nearly always created in the studio and then placed in legitimate and often government-sanctioned spaces, with very little illegitimate art created in the public sphere. When art is created legally, in the studio, and placed into a legal lane, space, or art gallery, with little risk, this changes the notion of street art - which has always been an illicit art form. I think of this kind of art as urban art, and it is a direct result and bastardised version of street art. Many people who make contemporary street art do so in a legal context, or only for the gallery. This is not a negative slight on artists that create this way, I just do not consider it street art. Rather, I consider it urban art as this is the label that governments and corporations use to discuss sanctioned art, so it seems natural to describe this format of art under the banner of *urban art*.

The success of the tours has changed the Blender Studios in ways that we could not imagine. It meant that some days there were/are multiple groups of people that tour through the studio. This is both a blessing and a curse. In the early days of the tour, we were not used to people coming through the space. It is very distracting to have members of the public looking at you, your space, and your art. It sometimes felt like you had a studio in a human zoo. The initial reaction and adjustment period led to politics, and to some artists feeling exploited. It took a while for all of us to get used to the tours, but the benefits helped us to accept the changes.

Now that the tours are running professionally there is much less disruption to the artists, and everyone has got used to the groups coming through. An upside to the tours is that they have completely changed the economy of Blender Studios as, for example, we now have lighting, cheaper studios, and free Wi-Fi, plus many of the artists make a living through the opportunities that come from the studios. All the people who have come through the studios on the tours over the years have helped to make the Blender brand, and its artists, very well known.

Since the Melbourne Street art movement began over 20 years ago street art has become big business for Victoria. Much has changed since 2000; the kids creating the first street art have grown up, and so has street art, becoming the largest and

most popular art movement in Melbourne, and consolidating Melbourne's reputation as a creative city.

The Melbourne Street Art Tours have now run for over ten years, and during that time, I have seen thousands of domestic and international tourists come to the city purely to see the street art. In an interview for the CBD news, I was asked to comment on this significant impact:

> I estimate that street art is worth about $72 million dollars to the Victorian economy annually. It is a major boost to the travel industry, hotels, restaurants, and bars, with tourism campaigns focused on Melbourne's urban art. The laneways are the cultural veins of an internationally recognised creative city. Over the last 20 years the laneways have been activated with artwork, and the public spaces have been transformed as Melbourne's laneways became the world's largest public art gallery. It is an amazing wonderland of creative hidden treasures.[63]

This transformation has largely happened alongside the digital transformation which gave the street art movement platforms like Facebook and Instagram, where art can disseminate quickly and efficiently to the entire world.

The Blender Studios has managed to monetise street art and the studios themselves via tourism and education initiatives and this has also helped many artists in the process. As Blender Studios has become financially efficacious it has been in a better position to develop its websites, promote artists, improve facilities and amenities (e.g., lighting). This is a long way from our shared early struggles when most of the Blender artists, including myself, were on the dole.

Whether it is ethical to monetise the Blender and therefore help in the commercialisation of street art is a question that wouldn't be being asked if Blender Studios was a fine art studio exclusively. It feels like it's okay to be a commercial fine artist, but not a commercial street artist. The commercialisation of street art and the move into Nu-Muralism is something that was inevitable, but the Bender Studios at least tried to direct most of the money and opportunities to the street artists on the ground.

As Blender Studios has become a cultural institution, its principles remained focused on the art and the artists. The hegemonic structures between the artists

[63] Doyle, A., 'Major tourist attraction in decay!', *CBD News*, 22 February 2019, http://cbdnews.com.au/major-tourist-attraction-in-decay/, [accessed 9 September 2019].

really didn't change with the Blender's success. It's business as usual, and, within the studio itself, the fact that there are more opportunities, projects, and money in general means that there is more to gain than ever by having a residence at the Blender Studios. This, combined with the contract they agree to upon selection, has meant that artists are more focused and driven than they have ever been.
Its financial success is relatively recent if you consider that the Blender Studios is only 20 years old. For the first fourteen years, Blender was running at or below cost and was struggling to pay rent and stay afloat, and it wasn't until early 2014 that the business started seeing profitable financial returns.

The ethics of the commercialisation of the Blender Studios was one that polarised the Blender artists. I think it culminated with the screening of the artwork *Subtopia* on the ABC (further discussed in Chapter 5). *Subtopia* was an artwork I created in the medium of reality television, and for one year everywhere I went I had a cameraman follow me, when it was finally screened on the ABC many artists felt they didn't get enough screen time or had been misrepresented. The film did blur the line for me between my art and my role as the director of the Blender Studios.

After *Subtopia*, some artists felt Blender should be supporting them further, or that other artists were getting more commercial-or-critical success. Blender Studios became bipartisan and there was a period of destabilisation that had a great effect on the studio community. Some artists argued against the commercialisation of the Blender Studios, questioning the direction of the studios. Some people took exception to my own personal success and believed that it was because of the Blender Studios that I was successful as an artist.

In many ways, I think that may be true. The Blender Studios is a very personal project, spanning half my life. If Blender helped in my creative success, it makes sense, since I was the one who came up with the concept and then set it up. These conflicts divided the artists and ultimately caused some of the most interesting artists to leave.

These issues caused a massive disruption to the harmonious social relations within Blender Studios and for the first-time, internal politics had tarnished the studios' external reputation and damaged the working environment. In the end, most of the detractors either came around or moved out. It was a hard time for Blender and for me personally. The politics, and the artists being hurt, or feeling

disenfranchised, shows that the move into commercialisation for Blender Studios and its artists did not come easy or without real cost.

The Blender Studios is bigger than any one person; it is an aqueous environment that is exciting and challenging, with freedom within the artist group to make constructive critiques of each other and pass on important lessons on art and the art world. Any negative impact on this ideology is a threat to the philosophy of the studios.

The Blender Studios recovered from this tumultuous period and the changes have in fact continued and become normalised. What's more, there is now no question about the direction of the studio. All the current artists feel pride towards Blender Studios and in being part of the 'Blender Crew'. The Blender Studios has stopped being an experiment, whilst aiming to remain experimental, and has grown and changed, and tried to remain relevant, in both the street art world and the fine art world, cementing itself in the Melbourne art vernacular.

As mentioned, The Melbourne Street Tours and Dark Horse Experiment Gallery have been running for over ten years now and have become anormal intrinsic part of the studios. To understand the scope and function of the Blender Studios, then, the following need to be briefly outlined: its extended creative suites; the 'business units', including Blender Creatives (ongoing); Melbourne Projection Space (completed); and the Blender Artist Market (in hiatus). This will demonstrate the many facets of artistic activity at Blender Studios, and how commercial endeavour is tied to the sustainability and impact of street art and creative art endeavours. This articulation of the Blender Studios business modules helps in the examination of the intersection between street art, fine art, and commercialisation.

Another, newer arm of the Blender creative suites is Blender Creatives, set up in 2014. Blender Creatives developed to meet the demand for commissioned works and operates as a creative agency producing murals and art for commercial clients. The first project Blender was asked to create was a series of moss sculptures to help the Bendigo Bank create a community website named Plan Big. Our next project was to create large sculptural coins for Nintendo. In the process of creating the artwork many of the Blender artists gain further employment based on their skills. Now Blender Creatives has become one of the largest projects run through the Blender Studios, a professional operation with a full-time manager that has in the last

two years engaged over fifty artists for paid creative work. Over the last six years, Blender Creatives has worked with Facebook, Beyoncé, Amazon, Marvel, Bank of Melbourne, Disney, local state and national governments, and many more. Fig. 6 depicts a mural painted for Telstra which I designed and installed through Blender Creatives.

It can be hard to negotiate the commercial aspect of Blender Creatives as some of the clients want to hire a specific artist, which is something that we do, and other companies want to create the work under the banner of the Blender. The commercialisation of the urban art scene has become huge and if you don't collaborate with these commercial entities, many great opportunities can be lost. So, we do undertake commercial work, but we came up with some basic rules. We don't do direct advertising, and we always push to give the artist creative freedom. Much of Blender Creatives work is managing and creating large scale murals.

Figure 6. Telstra commission by A. Doyle, Bourke Street Mall, Melbourne, 2015.

It has been a precarious balance, particularly in the early days, maintaining the Blender Studios' credibility and creative freedom in the wake of the commercialisation of urban art. It is a balancing act that I believe the Blender Studios has, successfully navigated, overall. We have been strict in following the rules of commercialisation that we have created for ourselves. This is a clear link between

fine art and street art as both must necessarily fraternise with commerce, and both create rules on how they feel this should be done.

These rules are the crucial difference between street art and commercial art.

Figure 7. The Melbourne Projection Space, 2015

These rules give street art credibility, and this pushes closer the boundaries between street art and fine art. One of the least commercially viable projects that has run from Blender Studios was the Melbourne Projection Space (MPS), a public art projection gallery. Opened in 2009, the project initially ran under the name Melbourne Propaganda Window (MPW), with Michael Meneghetti, until 2013, when it changed to Melbourne Projection Space (MPS). This space occupied the front windows of Blender, at 110 Franklin St. The three large windows were made into giant screens and projected on from the inside to the outside, creating Australia's first permanent public projection space, with openings running continuously throughout the year. Fig. 7 provides a context of the space. We showed hundreds of artists over a six-year period through this platform.

It was a difficult project to run as there were quite a few problems that needed solving in order to sustain the projection space. The main issues were both technological and financial. The cost of running the space, projection maintenance, and the cost of electricity bills meant that at the start we were unable to make the

space free. There we also many technical issues, different with each show, which often took a lot of time and energy to work out. Light pollution, scale, and sound were issues that had to be sorted out individually each time an exhibit was set up, but we persevered and managed to show hundreds of projection artists in one of the most unique public art spaces in Australia.

In late 2013, Michael Meneghetti left the MPW, and Alex Gibson replaced him. I had managed to get the price of the space down by about half, but we really wanted to make it free so that we could attract the best artists. Alex had a vision to make the space free for artists, however, this involved selling space in-between artworks for advertising. I felt uncomfortable about this idea and so with a difference in ideology and aesthetics, Alex decided to leave the space.

It was at this point that I took it over on my own and changed the name to Melbourne Projection Space. It became free as the tours started to make money and it ran continuously through to the end of the Franklin Street Space in January 2017. It was helped by several people, including Stephanie Gleeson and Yandal Walton, who worked hard to make each show a technical success.

Since leaving the Blender Studios property in Franklin Street, the Melbourne Projection Space is in hiatus. Undoubtedly, that was an important project for Blender Studios as it was a unique public art space which sat at the intersection between street art and fine art. Projects like these can be ephemeral and can be malleable for a variety of locations. This project demonstrates how some ventures have artistic and creative value but limited commercial potential, but that this may change and develop over time, with projects naturally completing or recurring at some future date, in new iterations, as circumstances change, and new opportunities present themselves.

Blender Artist Market

The Blender Artist Market was set up in 2013 in the Blender Laneway. It was run in collaboration with Northside Projects, which consists of George Manofdarkness and Mathew Salvo. The market ran concurrently with the Queen Victoria Market Summer Night Market, on Wednesday evenings. The Blender Artist Market consisted of about 30 stalls and four live musical acts each week. During the markets the Blender

Studios and Dark Horse Experiment gallery were opened to the public, offering the unique opportunity to see inside the art studios which normally remain closed to the public.

The Blender Artist Market was a great way to bring the Blender Studios, and the art in the gallery, to the general public. From the front of the lane all the way back down and through the roller door into Blender Studios, the space was filled with stalls, art, music, and food. We would also have the studios and gallery opened and people could walk around the studios, check out the art, and leave via the front door, creating a circuit in their passing. Fig. 8 shows this unique activation in the Blender Lane. The Blender Artist Market was very successful in attracting large crowds and helped boost the Blender Studios' notoriety.

Figure 8. The Blender Lane Artist Market on Franklin Street, 2014

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how Blender Studios has ingrained itself into the Melbourne art world and been a major collaborator in the evolution of the Melbourne street art movement. Through its unique ideology, the Blender Studios has maintained steady growth and moved with the times, surviving a changing art world and street art world whilst maintaining relevance. Furthermore, the Blender Studios has become a well-known 'brand' that has run a number of cutting-edge

contemporary art projects including Dark Horse Experiment (the research gallery); Melbourne Street Tours; the Blender Artist Market; Melbourne Projection Space; and Blender Creatives. The projects have, in turn, brought in community, built energy, and created greater opportunities for the artists.

Articulating the evolution of these projects demonstrates the manner in which the Blender Studios has carefully commercialised its endeavours over time. This leads to a clearer understanding of the Blender Studios and how it has contributed to the street art and fine art culture in Melbourne. This is vital in the examination of the intersection between street art and fine art.

The open studio system ensures that all the artists need to communicate, creating a strong social community - a factor which I argue differentiates the studio from other artistic endeavours - and both mimics but crucially adapts fine art culture for a street art or 'blended' context.

As Blender Studios has transformed over the years to become an institution in its own right, it has managed to commercialise aspects of itself in order to remain independent and relevant and this has had both positive and negative consequences. As the city has evolved, the Blender Studios has had to be malleable, and change has become a certainty.

As Blender Studios struggled to keep up with the rapidly rising rent at 110 Franklin Street, in Melbourne's CBD, the studios decided to embark on a large-scale artist-in-residency at the Docklands. The next chapter follows the Blender Studios in this critically significant phase as it collaborates with a corporate entity in order to ensure its future. It will raise further important issues about the corporatisation of art and shed light on the conflict and tensions this creates for artistic endeavour, including how the gentrification process 'kick-started' by artists is not without substantial risk for all stakeholders.

It is important to understand the breadth and width of the Blender Studios' history. Fig. 9 provides a timeline which is crucial to understanding and examining the events that have happened at the studios to lead it into becoming the independent art studio that it is today.

Blender History Timeline

Late 2001	• Secure first lease on 110 Franklin St, and the studios begin.
2002	• Studio fills up as artists move in. • James Dodd (aka Dlux) came up with the name Blender Studios. • The hub of the developing urban art movement became Blender. • Sticker movement developed through the bicycle couriers who proliferated stickers throughout the city. • The Blender stencil wall begins to develop as artist use it to practice their stencils.
2003	• Andy Mac facilitates the sale of a major collection to the National Gallery of Australia I with most or all the street artists from Blender being included.
2004	• Blender was becoming well known and was featured on a tram detailing hidden Melbourne secrets. • The closing of the first Blender Studios. • Artists use St Jerome's bar as a meeting space after Blender shut. • The opening of Everfresh Studios.
2005	• Large amount of art cleaned off walls in CBD and along the train tracks in preparation for the 2006 Commonwealth Games.
2006	• Changing of the graffiti laws, the beginning of large-scale gentrification and the Commonwealth Games.
2007	• Re-opening of the Blender in the Franklin Street property. • Refit and redesign of Blender Studios.
2008	• Blender laneway paint-up.
2009	• Launch of the Melbourne Street Tours. • Launch of Michael Koro Galleries
2010	• Blender starts getting media attention.
2011	• Melbourne Propaganda Windows open to the public.
2012	• Blender Project Space launches in a small section of Michael Koro Galleries

	• Michael Koro Galleries changes its name to Dark Horse Experiment and merges with Dickerson Gallery Melbourne. • The Blender Artist Market begins, which opens up the Blender Studios to the public. • Blender gets first commercial job for media shop and Bendigo Bank. • The airing of *Subtopia* on the ABC.
2013	• Dark Horse Experiment partnership fails, leading to the end of the commercial gallery. • Politics emerge at Blender as artists become divided over commercialisation. • Dark Horse Experiment becomes a research gallery. • Painting of Rutledge Lane Empty-Nursery Blue
2014	• Beyonce filme clip in Blender Laneway. • Melbourne Propaganda Window changes its name to Melbourne Projection Space. • Scouts Australia commissions street art works for their jamboree and thousands of scouts visit Blender Lane. • Blender Creatives, a creative agency, is opened with the first project for Media shop and the Bendigo Bank.
2015	• Blender sets up a number of laneways around the CBD including Lovelands, Flinders Court, Blender Lane, and Electric Place.
2016	• Opening of BSIDE studio and gallery in Brunswick Street for younger artists. • Meeting of Styles Festival operated from Blender, 210 artists in 9 Melbourne Laneways. • The closing of the Melbourne Projection Space. • Lease on Franklin Street ended.
2017	• Blender Studios moves to Harbour Town, which soon changed its name to The District Docklands. • Blender Studios is launched at Docklands by Melbourne Lord Mayor, Robert Doyle.

	• Set up of the Cut-Out in Docklands. At 20 metres high and 80 metres long this space featured on it over 80 artists from all over the world. • Worked with the District to help activate the Docklands Community Artists' Garden. • Additional Blender Project Space is opened in a large space in the shopping centre. • Blender Lane Artist Market is opened at Docklands for money, under the name (The District artist market).
2018	• Worked with the District Docklands to create murals and space activations around the centre. • The Blender Artist Market contract was given to Rose Street market to manage. • We were asked to move spaces at the Docklands, so decided to leave and find a permanent space.
2019	• Blender Studios moves to Dudley Street, West Melbourne, with a five-year lease. • Built the new space to be a hybrid of the previous two spaces, with 22 studios, a gallery, event space, laneway, an office, and an Air B&B to help to pay for the space. • Launch of the new space at Dudley Street, West Melbourne.

Figure 9. Timeline of the history of Blender Studios, by A. Doyle.

CHAPTER 3 - ARTIST AS CONSULTANT

This chapter will interrogate the hypothesis that artists and corporate entities can work together to activate and renew urban spaces, but that this process can be fraught and challenging. This chapter will investigate the period from December 2016 to December 2018 when the Blender Studios was physically located in 'The District', a shopping centre in Docklands, Melbourne. To this end, I will examine the relationships, the compromises, and the benefits to each party, and the sacrifices that had to be made during the Blender Studios residency at The District Docklands. This will be achieved through the theoretical framework of Wilk, providing a lens for understanding some of the historical considerations informing the relationship between art and business. This will lead into a chronological overview of the residency from an ethnographical perspective, including the background and context under which the residency occurred, why the decision was made to relocate, what initiatives were instigated and implemented for the duration of the residency, how the various operations of the Blender Studios functioned during this time, how the residency ended, and some evidence supporting how the residency impacted the activation and renewal of the Docklands site. The chapter will conclude with some reflections on the gains and losses for both parties and why this process was fraught and challenge.

Residencies in the Workplace

Elvia Wilk brings up the term *Artist-in-Consultance* in her article, 'The artist-in-consultance: Welcome to the new management[64]. In artistic terms, the artist as a consultant is similar to an artist in residency. Wilk, however, discusses it from a business and human resources perspective:

> It is in any company's interest to invest what amounts to a pittance in its grand scheme to support a working artist's incisive critical projects. Ostensibly critical perspectives are typically exactly what the company is paying for. This mirrors the hiring of a management consultant, whose job it is to tell a company how naughty it's been, and simply by being there provides the remedy for the naughtiness. Both types

[64] Wilk, E., 'The artist in consultance', np.

> of consultant are elite outsiders with special knowledge, a knowledge that must be perpetually kept under wraps in order to stay special. Thus, both types of consultant spend most of their time engaged in the act of justifying their presence, honing their critical tools but never actually using them to dismantle anything. —is this not the very definition of bureaucracy?[65]

Wilk here seems to be bringing to light the function of these residencies and the benefit to the corporate entity, then turns to a discussion of how both are engaged mostly in justifying their presence within that corporate entity.

Wilk's writing defines what is the effect of the intervention of artists in the workplace, and also raises the potential for artist consultancies to result in improvements in business productivity, touching on the idea of cultural capital as a currency and real value versus projected value of artists in the workplace. This is something that will be discussed further in this chapter.

Wilk examines three different examples of artists as consultant, focusing on creative outcomes. The first looks at the idea of the spectacle of the artist and the novelty of the residency (what Max Kozolff called 'fledgling technocrat') and often ends in the aestheticisation of the company's product or technology. [66] The second version of artist-as-consultance is described by Wilk as 'antagonism.' This is when the artist works against the system, to shock, critique, and question, through creation, both the employees and the company's product. The third kind of residency discussed has no name; it encompasses the idea of no final outcome or artwork. This means that the act of the artist creating art, *becomes* the outcome. Wilk's raises the question of autonomy and the effect on artistic independence of artists and their craft in the workplace, concluding, 'That the idea of the artist as a consultant serves only corporate interest, with few exceptions.'[67]

There are contextual differences in between these residency models and what transpired between The District Docklands and Blender Studios. Wilk's ideas of artists in working factories to help production was not at the heart of our residency. The benefits that come from Blender Studios being at The District was from its ability to attract crowds through its various projects. Blender Studios has a creative and

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[65] Wilk, np.
[66] Burnham, J., 1980, 'Art and technology: The panacea that failed', in Woodward, K. (ed), *The myths of information,* Bergen: Coda Press, 1980, np.
[67] Wilk, np.

youthful reputation, with strong links to the community - something that was very appealing to the managers of The District Docklands. As Wilk says for the corporations, artists are the original disruptors, and artists have a special kind of knowledge by dint of being artists (that transcends profit). Plus, they are 'harmless' and 'need money'.[68]

It was an unusual and unlikely collaboration between Blender Studios and the Harbour Town Shopping Centre, which in 2017 rebranded under the name The District. It could be argued that Wilk's ideas have been tested via the Blender Studios residency at The District. Our collaboration was based on mutual advantage and both parties benefited from the residency throughout the duration of the relationship, but, in line with Wilk's findings, the corporate collaboration ceased as soon as it was no longer valuable to the corporate entity.

I have used The Blender Studios as a physical case study to ethnographically examine the idea of the artists-as-consultant as twenty-four Blender Studio artists undertook one of the largest artist in residency projects in Australia, at the District Docklands shopping centre. As Director of Blender Studios, I aimed to test and challenge many preconceptions regarding how such artistic and corporate 'partnerships' operate during the period of the residency. However, a principal shared intention underpinning the entire collaboration, from the end of 2016 to the end of 2018, was to change the view of the Docklands area and activate under-utilised or vacant urban space.

Throughout the collaboration, there were many compromises, but, unlike most corporate collaborations, I believe this one did, in many ways, work, at least at the beginning. It has been important to witness and document the artistic impact that Blender Studios achieved at the Docklands shopping centre (see Fig. 10 for an example of this), and how the corporate environment affected the Blender Studio and its artists.

[68] Wilk, np.

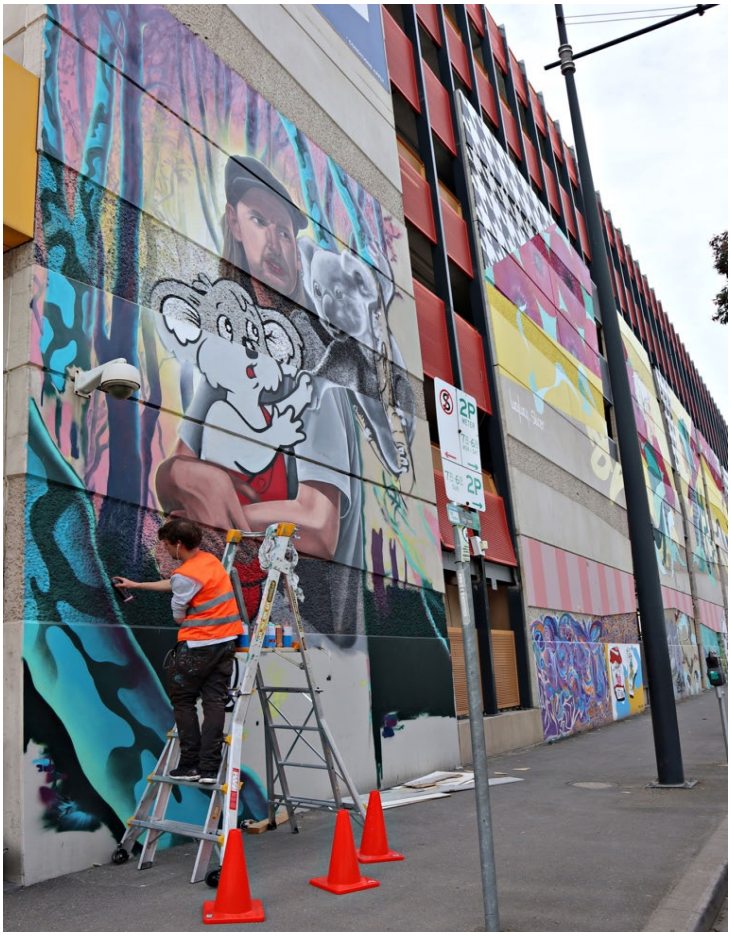

Figure 10. Blender artist Maha works on his mural at the shopping centre as part of the Docklands rejuvenation project in 2018.

The Docklands is a location of reclaimed urban space on the edge of Melbourne's Central Business District (CBD), formally industrial and now redeveloped for high density housing, retail, restaurants, and bars. The Docklands has struggled to gain the public's support and has been thought of as a failed opportunity, summarised poetically as 'a shiny new wasteland' by Wen-Juenn Lee in her publication 'Last July'.[69] Corporate-style design and large-scale development for profit meant that the urban design of The Docklands was not at the forefront of consideration, and, as a result, the retail areas, waterfront precincts, and liveability of the new suburb, have suffered.

The establishment of an arts precinct at The District (formerly Harbour Town Shopping Centre) which led to the invitation for Blender Studios to relocate there, was not the first-time corporate planners utilised art spaces to assist in the

[69] Lee, W., 'Last July', *Southerly*, Vol. 78, No. 3, 2018, p. 120.

rejuvenation of Docklands. In 2010, the Creative City Initiative and Michael and Andrew Buxton (M.A.B) came together to create the Docklands Spaces Program, which included a number of art galleries, and a few studios. [70]

Kate Shaw describes the Docklands Spaces Program as, 'attempts to perform according to the standards of the corporate entities that created the soulless, dispiriting, windswept failure.'[71] The main problem with the project was that it was over-managed, and the numerous conflicting corporate demands made it hard to maintain the project. The project artists were granted unsecured leases for limited month-by-month tenancies. Shaw states that 'The provision of long-term secure affordable space for cultural production at Docklands would have created a very different effect.'[72] She concludes that the 'temporary spaces movement does not have the capacity to solve the problems at places like Docklands.'[73]
The issues that dogged the first arts program are lingering, with unsecured leases and undetermined timelines potentially undermining the second attempt at a creative incursion into Docklands.

Docklands: A Brief History

In order to appreciate how Blender Studios ended up at The District Docklands, a retail and commercial hub, it is crucial before proceeding to understand some of the background of the Docklands precinct, including its history and evolution from the biggest port in the southern hemisphere to a struggling urban renewal project. The issues that will be discussed in the following section include examining the social structure surrounding the creation of the precinct from its inception and the social demographic that occupied the newly-created, luxury apartment housing. Furthermore, a presentation of the detail of the historical context will demonstrate the complexities of urban expansion and renewal, outlining how urban spaces do not remain static or fixed, and how and why fine art, and more specifically street art via Blender, was invited into this significant situation as an attempt of urban gentrification to invigorate and activate a sluggish and manufactured urban culture.

[70] Shaw, K., 'Melbourne's creative spaces program: Reclaiming the creative city (if not quite the rest of it)', *City, Culture and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2014, p. 146.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

Blender was accosted to bring the District's urban spaces to life through its connection to both street art and fine art, to bring Melbourne's artistic identity to Docklands and tie the rest of Melbourne to the Docklands precinct through the intersection between street art and fine art.

In 1886, a new channel from Port Melbourne to the city was completed. This saw the beginnings of what was to become known as the West Melbourne Dock area (or Victoria Docks). Building the new docks was a huge undertaking with mass excavation on a level that, up until 1889, had been unprecedented. The West Melbourne swamp had 2,308,247 cubic metres of dirt taken from it to create the new dock areas that helped the city become more flexible and able to receive many more ships.[74] Once finished, the Victoria Docks redefined the landscape of Melbourne, changed the direction of the Yarra River, and created the vast new Victoria Harbour, at the mouth of the Yarra River. These docks created an important infrastructure that helped Melbourne grow for over 80 years. Fig. 11 shows an image of Victoria Harbour and Docklands in the 1930s.

The Victoria Harbor Docks was open consistently until the early nineteen eighties with ongoing upgrades. In the 1940s and 50s Victoria Harbor was Australia's biggest harbor, servicing much of Victoria and Metropolitan Melbourne. In the 1980s, even before the opening of the Bolte Bridge by the Kennett government in 1999 which closed it off to large ships, the no longer useful Docklands area had turned into a derelict wasteland of abandoned sheds and broken-down wharfs. By the mid-1980s plans were drawn up by the Victorian Government to create a new suburb to connect Melbourne's CBD to its waterfront.

[74] *Only Melbourne*, 'Melbourne docklands history' [website], https://www.onlymelbourne.com.au/melbourne-docklands-history, [accessed 13 November 2019].

Figure 11. Aerial View, Victoria Dock, West Melbourne, Victoria, 1920-1939. Image courtesy of Museums Victoria Public Domain.

Development Victoria managed the development of Melbourne's Docklands project from its inception, creating many of the problems the Docklands has to deal with today. In July 2007 the Docklands officially became part of the City of Melbourne. This was beneficial for Docklands, as the community-focused City of Melbourne created policies specifically for the suburb and began to address many of the problems.

The Docklands Melbourne is Australia's largest urban renewal project, and it has been continuously under construction for nearly 25 years.[75] Currently over two-thirds

[75] *Victorian Places*, 'Docklands' [website], https://www.victorianplaces.com.au/docklands, [accessed 13 November 2019].

of the planned developments are completed with three new suburbs that have been created over the last 20 years (see Fig. 12). There has been a vast amount of

Figure 12. Docklands at night. Photo: Steven Wright, 2015.

investment into the Dockland rejuvenation project to date, with over 12 billion dollars of private investment alone directed into Docklands.[76] This does not consider the major government investment and infrastructure projects that have connected the Docklands to the city.

Figure 13. A good example of commerce versus culture in Docklands, as John Kelly's 'Cow up tree' (2000) has to compete with a café that has been set up to utilise the sculpture as a selling point for its products.

[76] *Development Victoria,* 'Docklands' [website], https://www.development.vic.gov.au/projects/docklands?page=overview, [accessed 13 November 2019].

Upon its expected completion date of 2025, Docklands will have absorbed close to $20 billion of investment from private entities. Once the whole development is complete there will be around 25,000 people living in the Docklands and 80,000 working in Docklands, many at the major company headquarters that have taken up residence there.

Docklands will sit next to the new Fishermen's Bend precinct, which when completed in 2050, will house 80,000 people, and be the place of employment for a further 80,000.[77] Fishermen's Bend is overtaking Docklands as Australia's largest urban renewal project, with five separate suburbs connecting the CBD to the bay. It is stretching through two municipalities, with a proposal to connect trams to Docklands and the city.

Docklands is 1,900,000 sqm in size; 44,000 sqm of water and 37,000 sqm of open space.[78] It was expected that the project be completed from start to finish in 25 years, but bureaucracy and changes in policies mean it's likely to take longer.

There was one main original urban planning design for the Docklands. It was European in style; canals were planned as well as public space and a couple of suburbs. Docklands Heritage review states, 'On 31 May 1996, written expressions of interest were sought from developers for purchase and development of this land'.[79] Within a year or two the overall design was compromised in the name of corporate need, and many large-scale, high-density apartment buildings were constructed by companies exploiting the property boom. This resulted in a reduction in the initial community focus of the planning and a general shift towards 'finance architecture' driven by a profit imperative.[80] I feel that Docklands was a real shift for Melbourne, both aesthetically and architecturally. Melbourne is an old city, with lanes and stains, this new Docklands seemed like something from the Gold Coast.

Within five years the Docklands Esplanade and Harbour Town Shopping Centre had become failed ghost towns. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* stated:

> Spencer Street seems to be a mental border, and its potential for integrating the city into southern suburbs, and possibly one day into Footscray, has not been well

[77] *Plan Melbourne*, 'Fishermans Bend' [website], https://www.planmelbourne.vic.gov.au/current-projects/fishermans-bend, [accessed 4 April 2020.]
[78] *Docklands, Victoria* [website], https://tinyurl.com/p5aufuc5, [accessed 19 November 2019].
[79] McDougall & Vines, *Melbourne Docklands heritage review*, Norwood, SA, McDougall & Vines, 1997.
[80] 'Finance architecture' is the term given to building where the design isn't as important as the profit.

> thought out. How can we make a promenade area work, with outdoor cafes and pleasant walks, when the wind threatens to cool your coffee too fast, blow your napkin into your food and make conversation difficult?[81]

There has been much improvement in the last ten years in Docklands since joining the City of Melbourne, but it is still struggling to attract people, and a negative perception by Melbournians remains that Docklands is a failed, cultural wasteland. Alan Davies, in his 2010 article 'Is Docklands a dog?' writes:

> In my view the absence of any sort of really compelling reason to go to Docklands is the key failing and that goes back to how it was conceived. Federation Square, Southbank and the laneways are all close to the arts precinct, the town hall, theatres and all the attractions of the CBD proper. Even taken on its own, Fed Square has the Ian Potter Gallery and ACMI. Southbank has the casino and a real market.[82]

It was this windswept and empty version of Docklands that Blender Studios, and its 24 artists, moved into at the end of 2016.

It is really significant that the Blender Studios was invited to collaborate with the District, considering a number of other 'arts' initiatives had already tried and clearly failed. I have demonstrated in this subsection how the Docklands precinct has been a significant urban development for Melbourne, and how it has not worked, for a range of reasons. In this context, Blender Studios still decided to take a clear risk in its collaboration with The District. What is the difference between Blender Studios and the other arts organisations which had tried and failed to work with the Docklands in artistic engagement? Blender Studios' link to both fine art and street art put it in a unique collaborative position, as it brings both street art cool and the legitimacy of fine art to the collaborative table. We needed space in the city, and they wanted some of what makes Melbourne, Melbourne.

Since these early attempts at an art precinct in the Docklands, The District changed owners, and the new owners, Ashe Morgan and SC Capital, I believe, were willing to take a bigger risk and trusted that, through Blender Studios, its artists and

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[81] Macleod, A., 'Docklands is different but there's no reason to write it off', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 March 2010, https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/docklands-is-different-but-thats-no-reason-to-write-it-off-20100316-qcgw.html, [accessed 4 July 2019].

[82] Davies, A., 'Is Docklands a dog?', *Crikey*, 18 August 2010, [website] https://blogs.crikey.com.au/theurbanist/2010/08/18/is-docklands-a-dog/, [accessed 10 November 2019].

its art, street art, and murals, it would get a unique legitimacy it was lacking, that could not be manufactured or bought.

Corporate Collaboration

The following section examines the partnership undertaken between Blender Studios and The District Docklands shopping centre. It will explain the background of our reason for moving there and examine the residency, space activations and creative engagements Blender undertook whilst at The District. From there, I will explore the challenges and benefits of corporate collusion and creating in a space that has only corporate intentions, providing a holistic description of what the experience of the artist-in-consultance was like.

Through my research I have found little evidence of a similar large-scale collaboration of this type. In my opinion, there hasn't been such large-scale long-term collaboration of this nature between a corporate conglomerate and an independent art space.

After the first year of the collaboration, I wrote a passage reflecting on the complexities of the relationship and how tenuous it was:

> I think what has transpired at the newly named District has become a really important case study of the currency of culture. I just worry that one rogue worker or one crazy artist, could rupture the relationship that is required in order for this project to exist. I believe that this has become one of the most successful corporate and artistic collaborations in Melbourne. With much commitment and sacrifice on both sides. I worry that people who are unaware of its importance could be flippant with its value, and that it is on the edge of a cliff and could easily fall off.'[83]

Blender Studios relocated from its gritty urban origins surrounded by laneways in Franklin Street, Melbourne, in late 2016 (Fig. 14. depicts Blender Studios in its original Franklin Street location). After calling our Franklin St warehouse home for sixteen years, the studio was forced to relocate due to major rental increases. The move into Harbour Town shopping centre was a cultural shock as the difference

[83] Doyle, A., 'Docklands is becoming cool', *Docklands news*, August 30, 2018.

between the dirty laneways of Melbourne's CBD, arguably the natural habitat of street art and artists, and a stark, clean shopping centre in Melbourne's Docklands,

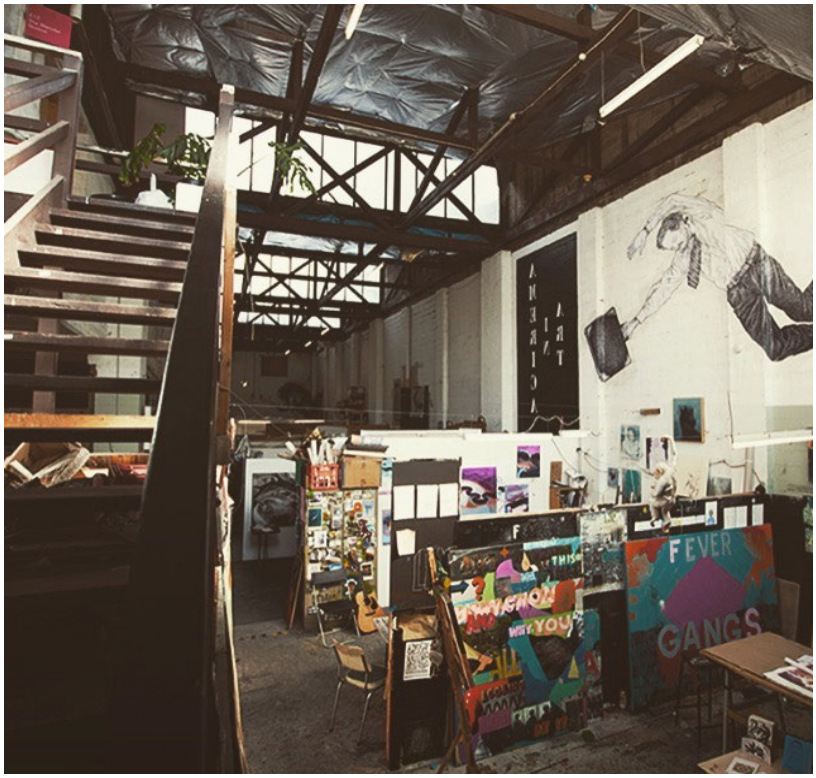

Figure 14. Blender Studios at Franklin Street, 2013.

Blender Studios relocated from its gritty urban origins surrounded by laneways in Franklin Street, Melbourne, in late 2016 (Fig. 14. depicts Blender Studios in its original Franklin Street location). After calling our Franklin St warehouse home for sixteen years, the studio was forced to relocate due to major rental increases. The move into Harbour Town shopping centre was a cultural shock as the difference between the dirty laneways of Melbourne's CBD, arguably the natural habitat of street art and artists, and a stark, clean shopping centre in Melbourne's Docklands, was challenging. However, we had no choice; we needed the affordable studio rent, and they needed us to help in the rejuvenation of the shopping precinct. For better or worse it was within this corporate and commercial environment that the immediate future of Blender Studios rested.

Surrounded by vacant shops and construction, and alongside our normal artistic production, our co-opted purpose/function was to rejuvenate space and contribute to urban gentrification. Originally, the studio was just a huge space - a large empty shop - and it needed a great deal of planning, and many of the artists felt dejected. The space was bare and white, and it felt very corporatised.

Initially, the studio seemed like an extension of the barren shopping centre. After a couple of months, the gallery and all the walls for the studios were finished, and the studios started filling up with art, sculptures, and graffiti. The space slowly started to feel like an art studio instead of an empty shopping centre. The Blender Studios transitioned despite the corporate aesthetic and managed to reinvent itself successfully. Some artists even felt the new space was more conducive to art creation than the old space. We all had huge spaces, and fantastic lighting, and air-conditioning, and heating, throughout the space. Blender Studios took a hit to its reputation for moving into a shopping centre, however, by the time of the official relaunch (opened by Mayor Robert Doyle in August 2017) the studio had managed to somehow keep some of the essence of the old space. Many of the people that came to the launch felt that the studios had begun to make the transition well, despite the limitations and community perception of Docklands.

A few months after the move to The District Docklands, Renew Australia was hired to set up the Docklands Art Collective, which consisted of around ten art spaces. These art spaces were run under the umbrella of Renew Australia and consisted of around three galleries, four studios, a puppet studio, a recycled paper shop, and a comic museum. Between Renew Australia and the Blender Studios the new art precinct took up around a quarter (one whole wing) of the entire shopping centre.

As Shaw mentions in her article 'Melbourne's creative spaces program: Reclaiming the creative city (If not quite the rest of it)', in regards to her previous experience with artistic endeavours at Docklands, unless there is a secure lease for artists and arts organisations there will be little positive change.[84] It seemed that history was determined to repeat itself for the Docklands Art Collective as managed by Renew Australia at The District; only short-term or monthly tenancies were being offered. Blender Studios had a different arrangement, albeit an informal verbal

[84] Shaw, p. 146.

agreement that potentially could be broken at any time. It was a risky venture for any art business to move in under these conditions. This is especially the case for gallery spaces such as Dark Horse Experiment, given they are required to line up artists for exhibition programming months, even years, before the show.

Throughout the artist-as-consultance process at The District, the Blender Studios lost quite a lot of autonomy having to give quarterly reports to the management, with statistics and justification of projects, and attend regular meetings with the management as well as the strict security, and general rules of the centre (see Fig. 15 for total stats on Blender's activations during the two-year residency period). The generally corporate atmosphere and heavy security presence set the scene for a number of conflicts between artists and The District's security guards, with explanations often required by the corporate benefactors. This was something that had to be carefully managed as both parties were very sensitive and took these confrontations personally.

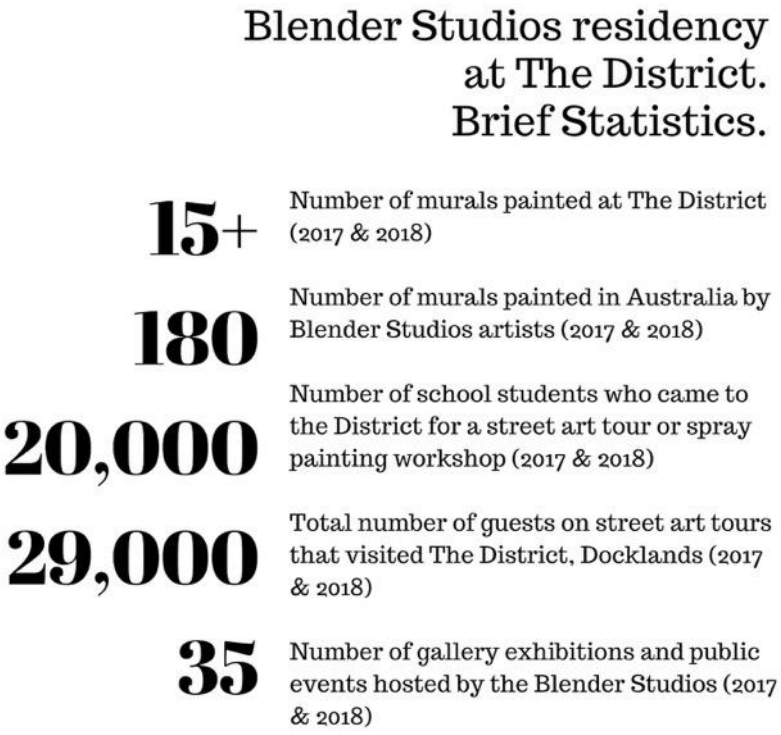

Figure 15. Approximate statistics of visitors and activations that the Blender Studios facilitated over two years at Docklands, Blender Studios, 2019.

The planners at the Docklands Shopping Centre curated an interesting mixture of corporates, workers, shoppers, and artists, sharing the public space. The needs of the Centre Management were carefully choreographed within this unlikely combination, with the retail business and shoppers at the centre of their focus.

As the artist as consultant worked its way through the residency, the relationship between the arts organisation and the corporate body grew and changed, as did the value of the creative collaboration. The District is owned by Ashe Morgan and SC Capital; gigantic multinational conglomerates that are known for large-scale property investment. These corporations need to be accountable to their stakeholders. Justification of the benefits of a costly rejuvenation project such as the Docklands arts precinct are hard to articulate and can be difficult to justify in a world based purely on immediate profit, growth, and financial accountability. It was encouraging to see a corporate entity like Ashe Morgan embracing, enabling, and endorsing such a cultural rejuvenation experiment. It is hard to articulate and lock down exactly what it was that the Docklands art collective and the Blender Studios brought to the District.

As this collaboration or residency unfolded, it became more important than ever for the relationship between Blender Studios and the District, to be beneficial to The District, Docklands, and its stakeholders. Although there was, for a short period, hope for Blender Studios to become permanently part of the shopping centre, I did not feel it would be of mutual benefit.

The District changed considerably over the two years, as did our relationship. At the beginning, we a close working relationship with The District. It began with us creating murals around the centre, setting up a public mural park, which we named ‘The Cut-Out’ (see Fig. 16 and 17 to see the transformation of the Cut-Out into a public park), and running workshops and school holiday art programs. When we moved in, we had already worked with Harbour Town/The District for many years through our creative agency Blender Creatives and the relationship was positive and strong.

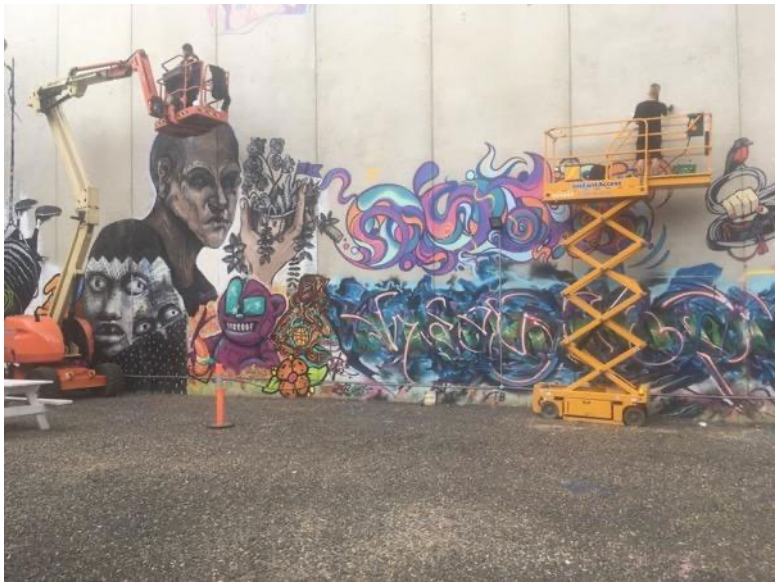

Figure 16. Blender Studio artists painting in the Cut-Out space at the District, 2017.

Figure 17. Fully activated Cut-Out space with the artist markets and street art collaborations, 2017.

There were many changes that Blender Studios was part of at The District, and many that we were not. The whole time we were at the shopping centre the place evolved fluidly. A number of commercial, creative, and community changes also happened within the shopping centre during our two-year residency including: an artist garden (see Fig. 18 and 19 to see the garden change in just one year), art

activations, large scale murals, public workshops, the creation of the Cut-Out public art park space (the largest project Blender created at the District), the opening of a bowling alley, Woolworths, H&M, the building of the Docklands primary school, the installation of a new roof, the rebranding of the name to ‘The District’, the opening of the cinema, and the hiring of a number of new managers that took roles within Centre Management. It felt as if there was always something going on and the construction of these developments and stores was a constant disruption, yet it was a necessary part of The District’s future.

Figure 18. The site of the edible garden before Blender Studios street art activation, 2017.

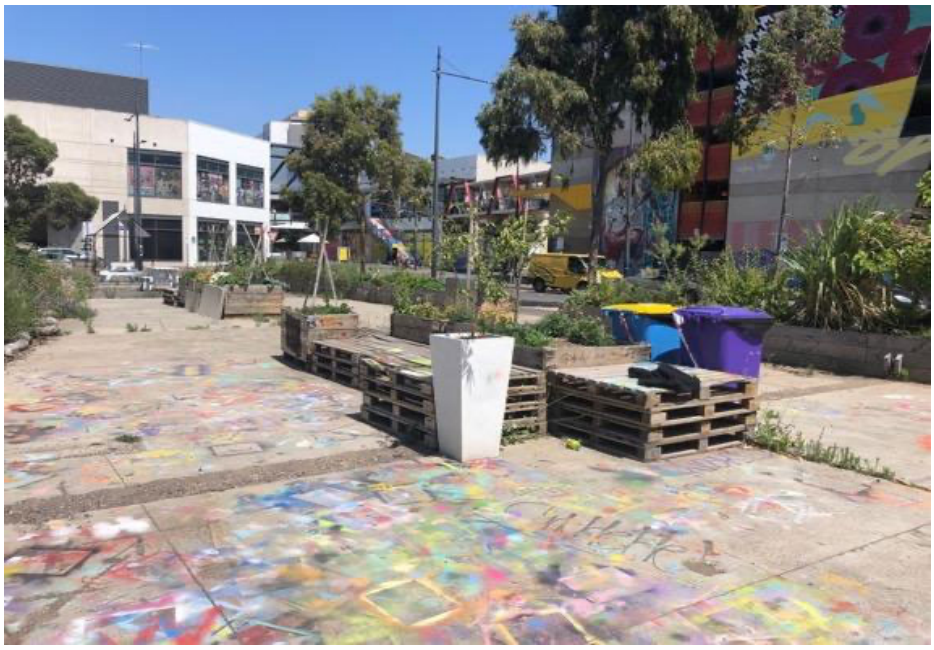

Figure 19. The urban garden space a year on, with a Lucy Lucy mural in the background curated by Blender Studios, 2018.

Uncertainty of Corporate Commitment

In the summer of 2017, the main instigator and key collaborator in the creation of the art precinct, Kelly Jensen, left The District. At the same time there was a change of management. This is significant because Jensen was the person who approached the Blender Studios and invited us to be part of the District's arts precinct and after much discussion, we had both agreed on the idea of Blender Studios as an artist-as-consultance through a residency.

I felt that the departure of Jensen from the District management team was quite a big blow for the collaboration between The District and Blender Studios as she was quite a visionary in regard to space rejuvenation. Jensen had big plans for The District and many of them involved Blender Studios. Many of the ideas and much of the success of the art precinct, art park, market and murals can be attributed to Jensen. Her ability to work between various cultural and corporate groups, and to convince people of her large-scale ideas, meant that she was a principal stakeholder in the Blender Studios residency at The District.

The main reason why Jensen left The District was because of the arts project. She

had begun setting up what would have been a substantial and important arts project that I feel would have put Docklands and The District shopping centre on the creative map as a great art space, and potentially change the community's opinion on The District and Docklands. These projects, however, take time and energy, and the benefits are not clearly stated. Some of the corporate entities at The District felt the art garden, the Cut-Out mural park, and the arts precinct, were not generating benefits worth the energy and money. I also feel that a lack of understanding by The District management of the value of culture was one of the main reasons that Jensen was let go.

The fact that our main collaborative partner moved on created uncertainty in the corporate collaboration. Jensen's position was never replaced and most of the important work she had begun was stopped. We had been working on several important art activations, and major works around the precinct, and large-scale murals by Adnate, Lister, and the Blender crew, were all cancelled. The relationship between The District management and the Blender was beginning to change and was never truly the same after Jensen's departure.

The largest project that we created with Kelly Jensen and the District Docklands, was 'The Cut-Out'; originally a large disused block of land that had two abandoned cars in it. It was a lockable space, and we were able to run workshops within it, and paint on the huge, uninterrupted wall (20m h x 110m w), which wrapped around the space. Over nine months, more than 75 artists from all over the world painted over 100 murals, filling the entire wall space with art.

As the wall started to come together aesthetically, The District realised the importance of the new resource and took out the fence, laid down Astroturf, and turned it into a public space, complete with food vans on Fridays and a small bar. They even knocked a hole in the wall connecting the new public space with the shopping centre. It was quite a transformation from a derelict unused space to an amazing public art park (see Fig. 20 to see the park once activated).

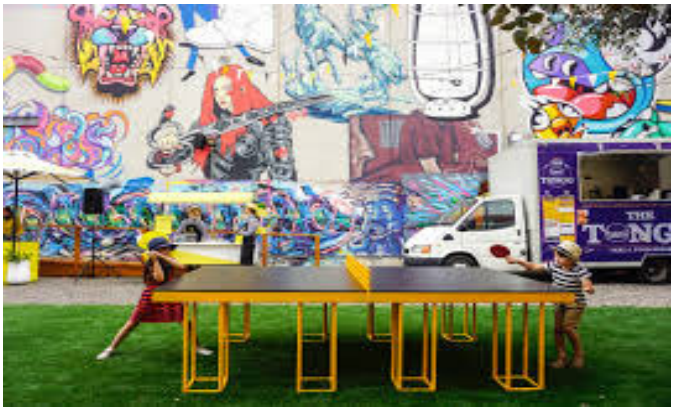

Figure 20. The Cut-Out is turned into a public space by The District after the walls are covered with art, 2018.

When the District opened the art park, they also commissioned us to reopen the Blender Artist Market, which was to be run under the name ‘The District Docklands Artist Market’. The market started off in the summer of 2016/17 and ran on Friday nights. The shopping centre extended its hours to 9pm on Fridays, to run in conjunction with the market event, but the market struggled early on. The artist market was no longer a labour of love, this too was a corporate collaboration, as we were paid to operate the markets. Although we were sad to shut down the original Blender Lane Artist Market, in Franklin Street, when the studios changed location, we would not have set it up in a shopping centre unless we were paid.

The shopping centre wanted to activate the space in the arts precinct and so the market was run in front of all the art spaces. After the summer, we moved the market to Sundays, and got all the galleries in the art precinct to open their doors. This helped it to feel a little more like the original Blender Artist Market. However, it was in a very different context, and had a very different atmosphere. A year later, the centre management told me that there would be a cut in the budget.

The guys from Northside Inc. who worked in collaboration with Blender Studios to run the market operations wanted to negotiate the price, but whilst we were in talks with centre management, they hired the Rose Street market as the new market organiser.

Figure 21. The original Blender Artist Markets in Franklin Street, 2015.

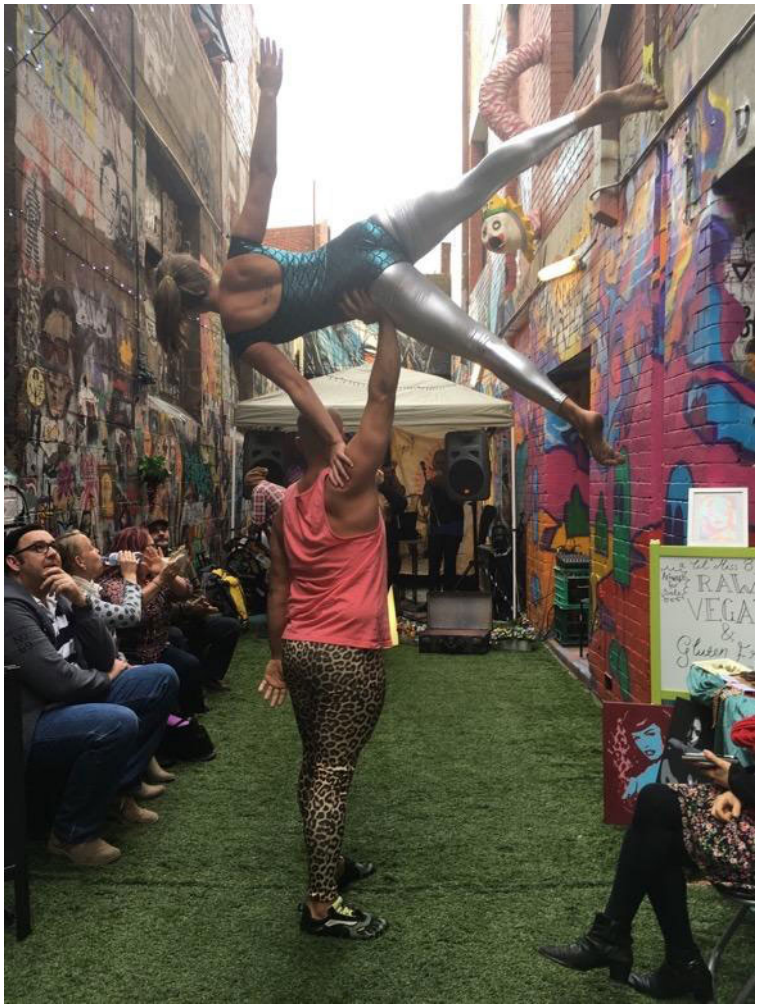

Figure 22. Performers at the Blender Artist Markets in Franklin Street, 2015.

The original Blender markets were hot property, making all the top ten lists and gaining a reputation for being quirky and interesting. We had built up all the stall holders and performers over the years, due to our reputation and style. It felt like The District then took our hard work and intellectual property and gave it to the Rose Street Market to manage, all so that The District saved a few hundred dollars a week.

Figure 23. The Docklands Artist Market at The District, 2019. Image courtesy of Visit Docklands.

This caused a severe and irreparable rupture in the relationship; the trust had shifted, and it was clear to me that we had become a disposable resource. Despite this, the collaborations and murals continued, even as the rift in the relationship grew larger, and over time needed much energy to maintain. The examples of the various endeavours so far work to demonstrate how our contributions were used to establish an activity on site, only to have it co-opted for corporate use, as in this case of the artist market. This can also be seen in other activities Blender took part in, such as the Cut-Out space. Fig. 24 shows the end result of the Cut-Out project, one of the largest projects Blender Studios has undertaken.

Figure 24. Development for the new Woolworths and Dan Murphy's, 2019, where our street art Cut-Out used to be.

Progress of Commerce

As development of the new fresh food shopping area engulfed the Cut-Out wall, we were given a new space to gentrify with murals. The District, through Blender Studios, commissioned Lucy Lucy to paint a gigantic mural on the side of their five-story carpark (see Fig. 25). The space underneath this mural became the new freehand paint and practice area (see Fig. 26 which shows a mural by artist Maha on the same carpark wall).

Figure 25. Lucy Lucy, at The District, Docklands Curated by Blender Studios, 2018.

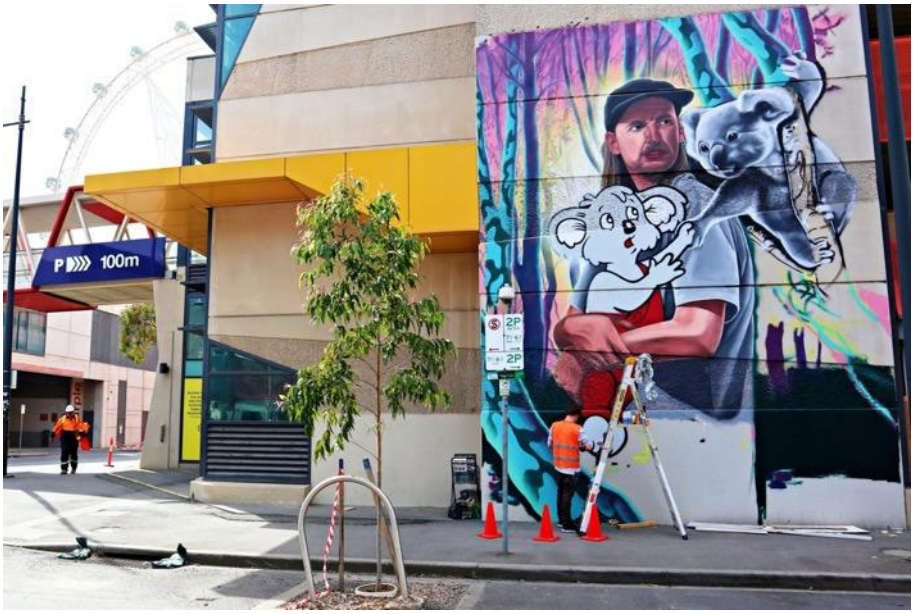

Figure 26. Blender Studios artist Maha contributes a large-scale mural to The District complex, 2017.

The beginning of construction meant the end of the public art park, but for the brief time it was open it was a great example of one of the creative outcomes that happened as a result of the collaboration between Blender Studios and The District.

It also demonstrates how disposable and temporary the corporate interests considered the artworks and Blender's contribution to the creative landscape. Wilk discusses the idea of artists providing a 'novelty spectacle'.[85] This was certainly true in the case of Blender's activations at The District, Docklands. Even Blender's studio space was set up so that people visiting The District could enjoy peering through the windows at artists whilst doing their shopping, adding to the idea of artist as spectacle (see Fig. 27).

Fig. 27. Exterior view of The Blender Studios, situated in the shopping centre at The District Docklands, 2017.

As the two years at The District came to an end, I anticipated that the art collective at The District would be shut first, I thought this for a number of reasons. Firstly, The Blender Studios relationship with The District was far more collaborative than the Docklands Art Collective. In many ways Blender Studios had become part of the fabric of The District culture, and so I felt that Renew Australia's project would be the first to go, because many of the galleries and projects in the art collective struggled to remain open most days. The sporadic nature of the opening times made the art precinct less successful and a potential target of the corporate machine.

[85] Wilk, np.

These speculations that I recall from this period underline how precarious our situation was, and how much power the corporation had over us. One of the questions that recurs when considering the predicament of the artist as consultant is: How to address this inequity, in a capitalist system that prioritises profit over other goals?

At the end of our two years, in November 2018, I was called into a meeting with The District management. They disclosed that because of the construction of the new $200m Marriott, they would need to have the space that Blender Studios occupied. As an alternative to our original space, they tried to offer me the downstairs spaces where the arts collective was. The catch was that the other galleries would have to move out before we could take it over for the cost of $100,000 AUD, and with a guaranteed lease of just one year.

For the previous 18 months the Renew Australia group had facilitated the running of the Docklands Art Collective. They, however, were paid to run the space as part of a grant that The District received, which ran for two years. This meant that The District was getting paid, Renew Australia was getting paid, and the spaces were given to the artists for free. But the grant was for only two years, and that time was up. So, The District management was trying to come up with a way that the art precinct could be maintained, whilst ensuring they would still receive money from the space. This was not a well thought out plan by the management. Blender could never concede to such an offer as it goes against the ethics of the Blender philosophy; it would have hurt the Studios' reputation, and left many young artists without a space, for the sake of Blender's long term space security.

The idea of the collaboration, and the artist-as-consultant, had reached its conclusion. The need for The District to make a profit led to a situation where there was little reason for Blender Studios to stay. An insecure lease, high cost, and low value for money, were some of the reasons that inaugurated the tipping point where real currency and corporate needs eclipsed the currency of culture. All the power of the artist-as-consultance had become focused purely on The District, with little to no benefits for Blender. So, the decision was made to move Blender Studios back into the CBD.

Conclusion

The opportunity to use such a large-scale residency program as a source of data and ethnographic research has given me an understanding of the process of working in a commercial environment whilst trying to maintain creative freedom and has helped reinforce the ideologies that have always been intrinsic to the Blender Studios and its principles.

This corporate style residency has assisted in the theorisation of the idea of an assimilated art community where the potential for corporate collaborations and spaces for art practice that challenge, critique, and disrupt traditional art institutions and artistic practices is enabled.

As Blender Studios embarked on its journey as a collective at The District it became its own hidden and secret world, filled to capacity and exuding a crazy and amazingly creative energy. It became a world within a world. This was despite the location in the shopping centre, surrounded by the ideals of consumerism and corporate needs.

Although Blender Studios had little choice in moving to the Docklands, it has been an interesting and worthwhile experiment that benefited the Blender Studios and its artists in a myriad of ways. The reputation of Docklands as failed, windswept, and boring, has been one of the hardest obstacles to overcome throughout this process. The public view of the Docklands rejuvenation process has been very critical and although the Blender Studios succeeded and prospered at The District, the stench of Dockland's poor reputation was never far away.

The lively murals and activations that Blender Studios created around The District certainly helped invigorate the stark architecture and created an interesting and much needed juxtaposition to the functionality of the grey corporate walls. Although the association with the management at The District went through many phases, we always maintained a congenial relationship. This at times was a challenge, however, given the cultural and social differences.

Ultimately, Blender Studios lost its autonomy to The District, having to attend regular meetings and play by *their* rules by providing quarterly reports and extensive justification of projects. This meant that The Blender Studios became accountable to a corporate boss which, in turn, compromised aspects of the autonomy needed to run such a creative enterprise. It is clear there will always be a level of compromise

in autonomy when a creative embarks on an artist-as-consultant in a corporate environment.

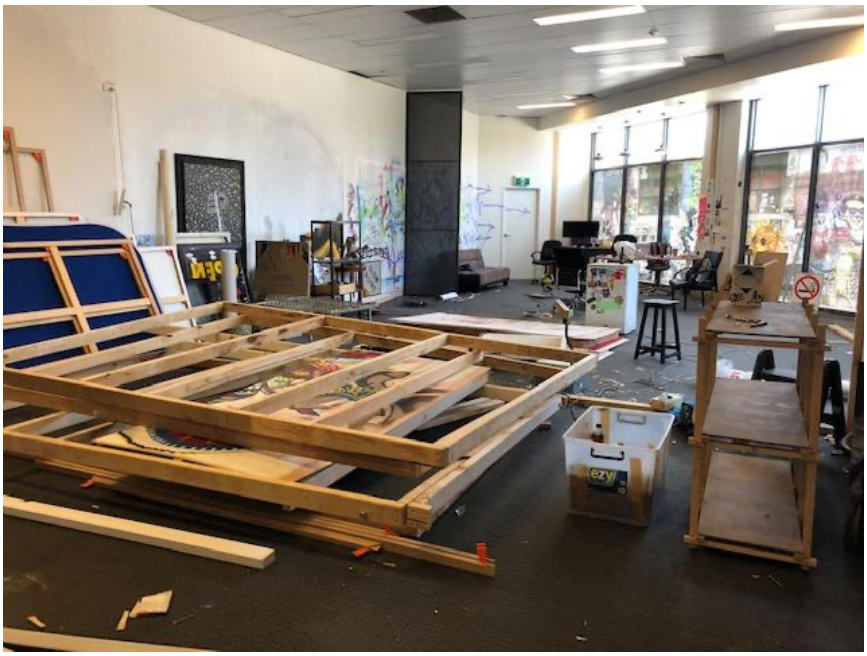

Figure 28. Moving out of The District, Docklands, 2019.

During the two years of residency at The District, Blender Studios created many temporary and major works at the Docklands. The collaboration and space rejuvenation and artist-as-consultant was, in many respects, very successful. Both sides of the collaboration benefited from the relationship to varying degrees. The artist-as-consultant that Blender undertook with The District created a delicate balance for the studios, as we had to navigate between supporting the vison of the studios, its philosophies, the needs of the artists, and the cultivation of creative atmosphere, whilst striving to meet the needs of the corporate bureaucrats who needed Blender for its cultural credibility.

Does the radical street artist become, utilising Wilk's term, like the 'artist-as-consultant' in this corporate/commercialised structure? Blender Studios with its 24 artists, gallery, and street tours embraced the residency with full energy. Although there had to be compromises, there were also successes and failures. In many ways, Blender Studios was at the mercy of the Centre management.

Moving back into the city has been an important step back to the urban origins of Blender Studios. Although the experiment with The District was successful in many

ways, it did hurt the Blender brand. If it had have gone on longer the failure of Docklands would have overshadowed the success and history of Blender Studios and its reputation. Eventually the studios would have faded away into obscurity.

For Blender Studios, the experiment showed that corporate collusion can serve artists' needs as long as there is an understanding of the value of the relationship and the benefits for both parties. In our case, once our main contact left the company, the understanding between the two parties became weaker. Eventually Wilk's idea of the artist-as-consultant serving only the needs of corporation became a prophecy, as the currency of culture gave away to the corporate greed of real currency.[86]

Shaw was correct when she stated that nothing can be done with Docklands as long as the corporate companies refuse to give long term leases and only see the arts organisations as a temporary fix.[87] The truth is that organisations such as the Blender Studios may have the ability to help places like Docklands, but for this to be a more balanced transaction for both parties it would take much more commitment and risk from the side of the corporation. It could be argued that there is no reason for the corporation to risk more, or commit any further, as they achieved an outcome that suited them. In the end it was Blender Studios that took all the risk in the relationship.

Now, as the new sections of the shopping centre have opened, most of the art is gone. There is some evidence that Blender Studios was there, however, I really believe that the Blender Studios' time at The District could have had more of an impact, long term, on the permanent space, infrastructure, and the environment of the shopping centre.

This chapter has presented and summarised what occurred for the Blender Studios during a two-year residency, or, as Wilk describes it, as an 'artist-as-consultance'. This project was undertaken in a peculiar and unusual simulated urban space in Melbourne's largest urban renewal project. The key constancy in success or failure in this process has been the ability to work with corporates and managers and maintain relationships with the security and the key stakeholders. Relationships are the crucial constancy to any large-scale corporate residency, and it is something

[86] Wilk, np.
[87] Shaw, pp. 139-147.

that is important to form in all tiers of the management tree. Once relationships are formed, it is then key to maintain and nurture these relationships in order to ensure all aspects of the corporate clique are benefiting or are, at worst, not bothered by the artistic intrusion.

The low rent for studio artists combined with large spaces and a large, free exhibition space at Dark Horse Experiment, allowed the Blender Studios management to convince the sceptical Blender artists to take the chance on The District. The artwork and exhibitions produced, and the other initiatives, murals, and the temporary installations (refer back to Fig. 15 for summary of activities) made Blender's adventure into Docklands a worthy and interesting venture. It is difficult to measure the impact these activities had on the overall urban renewal of Docklands, however, Blender survived and thrived, despite Docklands.

After this extraordinary project, it is my belief that the artist-as-consultant relationship will never work in favour of the creative, or their projects. The artists will have very little long-term impact on the corporation they choose to collude with, and the relationship will always turn to the partner who offers the space or pays the artists. The corporate investor will always put the value of money before the value of culture.

CHAPTER 4 - STREET ART: THE UNSANCTIONED AND THE COMMODIFIED

In this chapter I look at the current popularisation of street art and its commodification and collusion with institutions and commercial entities. There is also an investigation of the subcultures of urban art, some that exist because of the street art movement and some that run alongside the movement. I will examine the extraordinary rise of the street art photographer, I touch on the Cave Clan (a group of urban explorers) and I look at 70K (a crew of artists who exist between fine art, street art and graffiti).

Commercialisation of street art or graffiti is a contentious and derisive issue that has polarised the urban art community and created a division between old school graffiti writers and street artists. There is a variety of reasons why the graffiti world

resents the street art world. In graffiti there are many purists who believe that there should be no evolution in style or technique. These artists are often 'train writers.'[88] who have been painting since the 1980s and early 1990s, who live by the motto 'if it ain't steel, it ain't real', meaning that if it's not on a train then it's considered culturally banal. This extreme ideology is quite normal in the graffiti world, so it makes sense that many graffiti artists with these ideals would reject any form of commercialisation.

There are also graffiti artists though who look at street artists receiving fame and success and want to get a 'piece of the pie'. Some of these artists have made a successful transition from street lettering to painting characters, and then to street art. But many have not, and it could be argued that this has made them bitter towards the street art movement. The reason that graffiti artists often struggle to transition to street art is because graffiti's main conceptual context is 'kill, conquer and destroy', meaning that there is no consideration of aesthetics, context, or composition. The idea of graffiti is maximum coverage, with no regard to any other rules. This means that they want to tag as many places as possible, there is no consideration of infrastructure, or context, or content, only who can get the best location, which is mostly judged on its visibility to the public. Graffiti is a self-referential counterculture that doesn't care about the general rules of aesthetics, art, or public opinion. If you have never created graffiti, then you have very little chance of understanding the tag or piece, and even less chance of understanding the culture.

Graffiti is a youth culture that is male dominated and very masculine in its nature. The early street art culture was also predominantly male, this was because much of the early street art culture was creating art in very illicit and dangerous locations. Many people were critics of these male dominated art forms. Whilst graffiti has remained hidden and male dominated, street art has become commercial and is now becoming largely dominated by woman. This could be because it has become less illicit, as most current street artists create art in sanctioned locations or via paid commissions. Very few contemporary street artists work in dangerous and highly illicit environments.

[88] A Writer is the term given to graffiti artists, but is derived from the term writing, as in writing on a train or wall. A group of graffiti artists in plural would be writers.

The main similarity between street art and graffiti is the medium (spray paint) and the fact that both the movements work within the 'unsanctioned city'.[89] The early street art scene was closely associated with the graffiti scene and although the differences were large, the act was similar. As street art has changed and commercialised, this association with the graffiti scene has disappeared as the act of making street art has moved further away from graffiti and closer to fine art and craft.

Street artists have always considered the space that they engage, who may be viewing the artwork, and the scale, location, and architectural environment. Initially, designers were attracted to the early street art scene, this was because of stencils and as a result many of the early street artists came from design backgrounds. Street art is often refined, funny, or political, and it is far more relatable to the everyday person than graffiti, which is self-exclusive and considered ugly by many.

Street art's biggest strength lies in its ability to bypass the gallery system and go directly to the people by placing the work in a public sphere. Alison Young brings up the idea of graffiti as a second, hidden world when she talks about illicit spaces or uncommissioned spaces. She describes the city as legislated space:

> In cities, the lines of law tend to coincide with those of cartography and time tabling, resulting in the image of the city as a smooth, compartmentalised, organised around boundaries and function.[90]

The disturbance of the legislated city from a street art artwork can be quite a surprise, and depending on the person, it's not always a pleasant surprise. Jane Bennett describes her experience of discovering street art in her article 'Enchantment for Modern Life':

> In the first instance, a surprising encounter, a meeting with something that you did not expect and are not fully prepared to engage. This feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one's default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition.[91]

This disruption has worked in favour of the street art movement, where the illicit nature of street art has helped propel artists into legend status. The myth of the

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[89] Young, pp. 145-147.
[90] Young, p. 146.
[91] Bennett, J., 2001, *The enchantment of modern life: Attachments, crossings and ethics*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

artists spreading through the suburbs has captured the imagination of the people who regularly engaged with the artwork in their suburb.

Street art and graffiti are both movements in the public realm, while fine art is often hidden in exclusive high-end galleries and can often exclude the masses. There is a close correlation in the content and medium between street art and fine art, however, fine art has a history of evolution through millennia, with well-researched concepts and techniques.

I believe street art can work well when it's fraternising with fine art or operating in the intersection where street art and fine art meet. What this means will be further elucidated in the creative element of the research, which seeks to demonstrate qualities of both street and fine art. Having covered many of the nuances between street and graffiti art in Chapter 1, I will now turn again to the commercialisation of street art, pointing out how this evolution has occurred.

Street art fundamentally has a democratic outcome. It is clear that street art has its origins in illicit creations and while this is not democratic in nature, it has been argued that this creates an unsanctioned space, which by definition is democratic.[92] The democratisation of street art lies in its ability to create art for a wide audience in a public sphere. Street art captures the imagination of ordinary people who just happen to be using a shared public area in which somebody has chosen to make art illicitly. It is not an advertisement, but an attempt by someone to aesthetically add to the city, even if it comes with risk.

The notion of space traditionally refers to something anonymous, whereas place distinctively accounts for the meaningful experience of a given site; that is, it is 'consumed space'.[93] Places are fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world. In the article 'Street art, sweet art? Reclaiming the "public" in public space', the authors note how occupiers of an area that has been painted in street art observe how appreciation of their neighbourhoods can be extended far beyond the sphere of local inhabitants to include 'foreign' visitors. Thus, street art functions as a kind of beacon product, encouraging a form of destination window shopping in its appreciators. In doing so,

[92] Young, pp. 145-162.
[93] Visconti, L., Sherry, J., Borghini, S., & Anderson, L., 'Street art, sweet art? Reclaiming the "public" in public space', *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 37, No. 3, October 2010, pp. 511–529, https://doi.org/10.1086/652731, (accessed 3 August 2019).

the conversion of space to place builds the self-esteem of the locale, revitalising all that it touches.[94]

The magic that street art has in revitalising spaces and bringing art to the public has allowed the street art movement much public notoriety and commercial opportunity. This has allowed the movement to become very public and celebrated, with artists becoming well-known household names; a fame that is usually only afforded to rockstars and actors. This kind of notoriety has appealed to the marketers who want to cash in on the culture. The commercialisation hasn't all been bad for street art; Molnár describes a general trope that frequently surfaces with respect to the commercialisation – and especially the mass-marketing – of street art is that it can democratise access to art, making it available to people who would not be able to afford to purchase original artworks, visit museums, or otherwise engage with art.[95]

The commodification of street art in general was happening very early on in the street art scene. The first commercial project created by the Blender Studios was in 2009, and since then this involvement has slowly increased to the point that we now regularly participate in commercial activities and have a creative agency business running out of the studios, which is called Blender Creatives (discussed in Chapter 2). Blender Creatives has become a large project and a commercial success for Blender Studios. The shift towards commercialisation in street art simultaneously occurred across Melbourne with the rise of commercial studios and *art-vertising* projects in shopping centres, on buildings, on wine labels; the list is large.[96] Older studios such as the Blender Studios and Everfresh Studios, who have been part of the non-commercial rise of street art have had to change the way they run in order to ensure they get a piece of the commercial pie.[97]

It is a fine line between street art and Brandalism. Using your brand, style, or tag in art-vertising can be a challenge for your credibility, due to the control a client can

[94] Ibid, pp. 511-529.
[95] Molnár, p. 50.
[96] Art-vertising refers to content that sits on the boundaries of art and advertising, see Glossary for more details.
[97] Everfresh is an underground urban art studio that emerged from the first Blender Studios, in 2004. The studios have had several incarnations and are currently run out of Collingwood, Melbourne.

have over your brand.[98] In her book, 'Unmarketable: Brandalism, copyfighting, mocketing, and the erosion of integrity', Anne Elizabeth Moore states:

> 'Commercialization of new art forms, particularly of the countercultural variety, is nearly always seen as leading to co-optation and loss of authenticity while artists who benefit from the process are accused of selling out.[99]

Street art represents a utopian ideology whereby space has been co-opted for art or mark-making' for the benefit of the location and the community at large. Anne Cronin describes advertising as:

> …representing the mainstream or hegemonic culture of consumer capitalism and has been seen as an emblem, mediator, and propagator of principles and practices of property and ownership (Wernick, 1992; Williamson, 2000). Indeed, the ubiquity of advertising, and its presumed success in commercial persuasion, is often understood as symptomatic of an ever-increasing commodification of society.[100] [101] [102]

The first street art advertising incursion arrived early on in Melbourne, with the opening of the Croft Institute (a bar themed as a science lab) in 2002-3. The Croft painted around town a four-layer stencil that was a cartoon featuring puns about The Croft. It was technically ahead of its time and was clever guerrilla marketing (see Fig. 29). This was a very successful campaign which was created by this small bar. The Croft Institute went on to become a cool, themed, hipster bar, which has been part of the Melbourne bar scene now for nearly 20 years.

A second advertising campaign, for a much bigger company, came out across Melbourne's CBD in 2003/4, which promoted the launch of a new beer, Grolsch. The advertising company stencilled shadows on walls and placed empty Grolsch beer

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[98] Razak, I., 'Brandalism': Is Melbourne's street art being taken over by corporations?', *ABC News*, 9 July 2017, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-09/is-melbournes-street-art-being-taken-over-by-corporations/8681136, [accessed 17 December 2019].
[99] Moore, A.E., 2007, *Unmarketable: Brandalism, copyfighting, mocketing, and the erosion of integrity*, New York: The New Press.
[100] Cronin, A., 'Urban space and entrepreneurial property relations: Resistance and the vernacular of outdoor advertising and graffiti', in Cronin, A., & Hetherington, K., (eds), *Consuming the entrepreneurial city: Image, memory, spectacle*, New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 65-84.
[101] Wernick, A., 1992, *Promotional culture: Advertising, ideology and symbolic expression*, London: Sage, cited in Cronin.
[102] Williamson, J., 2000, *Decoding advertisements: Ideology and meaning in advertising*, London and New York: Marion Boyars, cited in Cronin.

Figure 29. Guerilla marketing by the Croft Institute in 2001. Image by More Of The Same.

bottles in front of them to create an optical illusion. Both these advertising campaigns were successful in creating an association between their brand and the Melbourne Street art scene. This is partly because these art-vertising incursions were so ahead of their time that they were helping form the beginnings of the Melbourne Street art scene and laying precedent for what was acceptable commercially, defining rules and helping to write the book on what is tolerable when pushing commercial ventures.

It wasn't until 2006 that the first large-scale commercial commission piece was created in Melbourne. Chupa Chups were the first company to hire artists to create art-vertising when they employed Everfresh Studios to install a promotional artwork in AC/DC Lane. It was the first large scale artwork commissioned by a corporation and, alas, it was not well received and was quickly defaced.

Figure 30. & 31. This collaboration between Phibs and Reka from Everfresh was painted over the commissioned Chupa Chups artwork, 2006. Image by Witness 1.

After the work was defaced, Reka and Phibs did a second non-commercial mural over the top of the commercial work and the mural was left unadulterated (see Fig. 30 & 31). Although it got defaced, the Chupa Chups project created by Everfresh slowly opened the gate for more commissioned work, and over the next four years things started to change as large-scale collectors and international street art festivals emerged all over the world and street art became more popular and more commercial.

From my experience, a positive from this move to corporatise the urban art world was that artists began to get paid and have real budgets. This changed the scale and nature in which artists could create. Artists had access to scissor lifts and booms, enabling them to get up high and work quicker. Artists also could afford to paint with quality materials, and this meant that the quality of the murals changed, further helped by advancements in the technology and quality of spray paint.
The technology of spray paint noticeably changed in this period, with many international manufacturers realising the potential market for paint sales to street artists and graffiti artists, in Australia and around the world. In the 1980s and ’90s spray paint colours were extremely limited, most Australian spray-paint artists just had the standard six colours of Dulux cans. Some companies now have as many as

900 colours in several different pressures with over 100 different nib designs.[103] Nibs have changed a great deal since the 1990s, where there was one standard nib, now you can get hundreds of different types. Each nib is like a paintbrush and expels paint differently, making the nibs act like brushes for street artists, allowing them to push the technical possibilities of the medium.

By 2010, some artists were beginning to make a living from their commercial street art by creating large-scale murals. This has today turned into what I call Nu-Muralism; a wing of the street art movement that encompasses high end, commissioned, highly skilled, commercial murals (and refers to the fine art term 'Muralism'). As Wilfried Raussert outlines, *'*a generally agreed upon definition of a mural is a monumental and foremost two-dimensional art form that is designed for display on a wall'.[104]

Murals created today are now painted in a similar vein to other mural art movements, such as in Mexico, Ireland, and throughout history where large scale commissioned works have been government-sanctioned or privately funded. Nu-Muralism is in many ways a great link in the intersection between fine art and street art as it references fine art through the history of murals, but it is still street art and was derived from artworks on the streets. However, once a mural is created for a client it becomes commercial art. Nu-Muralism is not a bastardised version of the street art, it is a changed and altered version.

Modern street art has changed dramatically from the early days. There have been a number of important movements within the Melbourne street scene as demonstrated in the Street Art Timeline (Fig. 34: Timeline of Melbourne street art). As each movement has evolved from its predecessor, it becomes clear that street art is extremely diverse and ever-changing.

The Economy of Street Art

Through my position at Blender Studios, I have seen street art become an economy in its own right. Creative street art and mural commissions have become a multi-

[103] A nib (aka cap) is the nozzle of a spray paint can, which creates different line qualities depending on design.
[104] Raussert, W., 2020, 'Muralism', in Raussert, W., Anatol, G., Thies, S., Berkin, S., Lozano, J., (eds), *The Routledge handbook to the culture and media of the Americas,* Abingdon: Routledge, p. 402.

million-dollar industry. Artists like Adnate have produced murals for the state government, such as on the 20-story high Housing Commission flats in Collingwood; The Blender studios has created all the Marvel Studio murals, and painted the Facebook offices in Melbourne; and Apparition Media is doing direct advertising and have become a large production house.[105] The commercialisation of street art has been a long process but as much as artists tried to resist the lure, the money offered is often too big to refuse. Wilk talks about this dichotomy in her article, 'The Artist-in-Consultance: Welcome to the new Management':

> For the corporations, artists are the original disruptors and artists have a special kind of knowledge by dint of being artists (that transcends profit). Plus, they are 'harmless' and 'need money'.[106]

This makes artists an easily exploited target for the corporate world. Add to this the certainty that artists have been pitted against each other for small projects, grants, and sales, and this makes them highly vulnerable for exploitation from many government, corporate, and commercial entities.

The art world is about critique and quality of idea and craft, whilst the commercial world is about money, and there is a cyclical journey for the artist between the two – even necessarily playing the two off against each other. It is easy to understand how an artist who succeeds in this cycle may be considered a sell-out.

To understand the role of collaborative endeavours and studios it is important to describe the associated collectives or sub-cultures. Some of the subcultures that I will discuss appeared independently in the Melbourne scene, others started as a direct result of the street art movement. Throughout the years, there have been several subcultures which have formed around the street art movement. Shaw describes a sub-culture as, 'Collective(s) of people who have an affinity with one another because of a set of principles, practices, or way of life.'[107]

I feel that street art, and even Blender Studios, could be considered a sub-culture at the beginning, but street art has become a culture in its own right with sub-genres and many facets and layers. Blender too, has changed and morphed into a business

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[105] Willingham, R., 'Melbourne public housing mural by Adnate: The tallest in southern hemisphere', *ABC News*¸ 15 September 2018, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-15/collingwood-mural-tallest-in-southern-hemisphere/10238136, [accessed 5 April 2019)]
[106] Wilk, np.
[107] Shaw, pp. 139-147.

based around street art, and although it has utopian ideals, it is not a small underground project anymore. Where once street artists walked together, helping, and supporting each other, the introduction of money into the street art scene has pushed this unity away, replacing it with competition and jealousy.

Street art has had substantial evolution in a very short period - an epoch of 20 years. If one looks at the history of street art on the timeline in Fig. 34 it will be noticed how quickly things have changed and how many genres there have been in such a short period. There are many other smaller changes that have occurred in the Melbourne Street art scene in the 20 years, those I have listed are the events or changes that I felt are significant to the evolution of the genre. There is no other genre in history that has had so much evolution and change. This is a completely Melbourne-centric view of street art history. Many other major street art cities had similar changes and genres, however, Melbourne's street art and its history was unique in both aesthetics and ideas, until the rise of the internet.

Now, I would like to talk about the rise of the internet and the effect this has had on street art. Molnár states:

> The evolution of the Internet and mobile communications technologies, especially the proliferation of user-generated content and design, information sharing and collaboration, have been instrumental in sustaining this process. It has not only transformed fundamentally the documentation of this ephemeral urban art form, but diverse online platforms have emerged as alternative spaces of deliberation, valuation and consumption that are largely autonomous from mainstream institutions of the art establishment.[108]

O'Reilly writes that:

> The emergence of this new digital ecology has not only accentuated the difference between street art and earlier forms of pop art or graffiti, but also awakened the interest of the market and paved the way for diverse commercial applications.[109]

This changed the way street art has been able to be assimilated around the world. And the way street artists have been able to control their own market and economy. Molnár states that:

[108] Molnár, p. 53.
[109] O'Reilly, pp. 225–236.

> New digital tools have also enabled practitioners to exert more control over their work, particularly when it comes to commercial usage. Although this development can also be seen as ambivalent in the sense that it introduces greater entrepreneurialization into artistic activity and creativity.[110]

The internet is responsible for the worldwide rise of street art, creating a situation where street art can be shared instantly, anytime, anywhere. O'Reilly continues:

> Street art saw a dramatic spike in its popularity starting around 2005. The spike coincides with a qualitative shift in the development of the Internet, which is often described as the Web 2.0 revolution.[111]

There are many results from street art becoming a mostly online movement. The first I want to mention is obvious; it is the dramatic changing of context from the street to the computer or phone. Another negative, and the one that I have the most problem with, is that street artists are blurring out the imagery that they are creating as this looks better in a photo. This means that artists are now more concerned with the photo image and how it looks on Instagram and Facebook than the original public street art. This change of context to street art has been great for artists that are tech-savvy, meaning that those who are best at social media will be the most successful, but it has been difficult for artists who are not so conversant with social media and photography who just want to create street art in context on the street. Street art's rise on the internet was not created by street artists, it was created by a sub-culture that exists *because* of street art.

With their photography book, *Subway Art*, published in 1984,[112] - long before the existence of the internet - Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant became famous for capturing graffiti and subway art. With the rise of the internet coinciding with the rise of street art, also came the rise of the street art photographer. Known as *Spotters* by street artists, their name is derived from the trainspotters in England. These street art photographers, or 'Spotters', are a unique form of photographer that focuses purely on street art. The focus of a Spotter is to get the first and best photo of the latest

[110] Molnár, p. 53.
[111] O'Reilly, pp. 225–236.
[112] Henry, C., Cooper, M., *Subway art*, New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1985.

street artwork, then place it online, either on a blog, or social media. If the Spotter is well known, they will eventually put out a photography book of Melbourne Street art, or they might print off the best photos to sell in small galleries or market stalls.

Spotters can be very competitive and often try to find out the inside scoop on street art and the next mural, but they don't share this information with other Spotters, as they see them as direct competitors. This subculture was at its height around 2014, when much of the documentation of the Melbourne art scene came from Spotters. They have had both a negative and a positive influence on the street art movement and are often to be found standing around at murals whilst the artists are painting. Because of this close proximity, they are often mistaken for being part of the artist team and are offered mural jobs. This made them powerful for a while, until people realised that these Spotters were not qualified to curate murals and navigate the bureaucracy that is required in these types of creative projects.

Spotters are often more tech-savvy and connected than a street artist, and can create a photograph of a new or existing artwork, and have it for sale on a blog or in a gallery very quickly. This can blur the line of ownership of art in public space. Molnár, describes the ownership of the art displayed in public, as:

> …remaining blurred, and artists who create cultural value are sometimes unable to translate this into economic value. The photograph can itself become a separate artwork and be commoditized independent of the artist's original intention and without the artist's benefiting from the process. Street artists and photographers are often in competition with each other in documenting and disseminating urban art, and photographers representing a more established profession can gain the upper hand in claiming and cashing in on intellectual property rights.[113]

In my opinion, street art needs Spotters as they help to get the ephemeral art documented and online to the public. They also help in the plurality of markets. The duality of the Spotters is that they commercialise street art and use a photograph of an artwork to exhibit, or sell, whilst claiming to be helping street art and its culture. The Spotters have been an integral part in the rise of street art in Melbourne and across the world and they have become an interesting subculture of the street art scene, linking street art, and, at times, fine art, and the Blender Studios, to the street

[113] Molnár, p. 51.

art world via their online photographs and blogs. As long as street art is out there being created, there will always be someone who will want to take a photo of it. The Spotters' existence will always be fed off street art and art created in the public sphere.

A different subculture that ran alongside and was set up before the street art movement was the Cave Clan; a crew that are infamous for their navigation and mapping of underground urban Melbourne. The Cave Clan is best described by Jeremy Nadal in his article 'Heading underground: The secret world of the Cave Clan':

> Since the Cave Clan was first established in 1986 by three Melbourne teenagers (Woody, Dougo and Sloth), a whole philosophy has flourished around it. As a lot of Melbournians lose interest in their old theatres, warehouses, and other antiques of the landscape, urban explorers seek to understand and appreciate the past. Cave Claners [sic] view themselves as lucky enough to have discovered that between the cracks of our safety-padded city are tiny little manholes that lead to a forgotten universe of underground waterfalls, colourful murals, and a general aura of freedom.[114]

The Cave Clan became a notorious covert art-and-exploratory crew that from the late eighties to present existed primarily in the dark, undisclosed cavities, and the depths of hidden Melbourne (see Fig. 32.). Well known for underground exclusive, elusive, and illegal art, the Cave Clan became an urban myth, with their well-known 'Clanny awards', and the obscure and unusual artworks they produced. They formed a sub-culture that developed a unique language known only to people within the sphere of the Cave Clan. The Cave Clan don't want to be famous or make a radical difference, they just want to explore elicit, unsanctioned spaces. From the late 1980s, this secret community explored nearly all new and old hidden spaces, drains, bridges, and buildings - anything that could be climbed, explored, and traversed - and this became the true medium of the Cave Clan.[115]

[114] Nadal, J., 'Heading underground: The secret world of the cave clan*', UMSU* [web blog], https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/HEADING-UNDERGROUND-THE-SECRET-WORLD-OF-THE-CAVE-CLAN/, [accessed 1 January 2020].
[115] Nadal, J., *Heading underground*, np.

Figure 32. The Cave Clan explored and created art in Melbourne's urban underground. 2010 Image courtesy of Fringe Lane TV.

From 2002 to 2008, 70k was a crew that pushed the boundaries of graffiti and street art with their kill, conquer and destroy attitude, and their calculated attacks on the public infrastructure and the city as a whole, caring only about the tag and its location, not aesthetic. 70k pushed the boundaries of graffiti and street art as they created the biggest tags in the hardest spots in the city, bridges, skyscrapers.[116]

They pushed the idea of tagging and graffiti closer to art with monolithic artworks such as the image in Fig. 33, where an abandoned skyscraper became an artwork with the addition of tags. There was a core group of seven artists in the collective who would train and keep fit, turning the act of graffiti into an army precision operation as 70K went 'all city'.[117] Many people believed they were criminals and not artists. As they became one of the most infamous art crews in Australia. They also became the most wanted by law enforcement agencies, so they went on the run. Once on the run they put out a DVD of their exploits, which funded their travelling. Whilst travelling, they painted all over the world including Europe, Russia, and

[116] MacDowall, L., 'In praise of 70K: Cultural heritage and graffiti style', *Continuum*, Vol. 20, No. 4, pp. 471-484.
[117] All City is when an artist or a group of artists have done so many tags and pieces that it is considered to cover the city.

Japan, creating tags and art in impossible and truly amazing locations, and this travel led to the release of a second DVD.

Figure 33. ‘214 Tags’, an abandoned high rise building with a 70K tag in every window. Image by Andrew Curtis Photography, 2004.

History of Melbourne Street Art Timeline

Year	History and Street Art Genres
1999	- Stencil art One-layer stencils that were produced for their ability to repeat an image quickly and cleanly.
2000	- Political movement Once the stencil scene was established it very quickly became about politics at the time George Bush was in office, and 9-11 was about to happen.
2001	- Street art in studios At this time Blender was established, and street artists began having studios in which to make stencils, have a community and plan their art.
2002	- Tiles and early street sculpture In 2002, Space Invader visited Melbourne, placing around 26 tiled artworks around town, there are now 13 left. Space Invader led other artists to think about street sculpture. This was the beginnings of the street sculpture movement.
2002	– Stickers Sticker have been an important part of the street art movement originating mostly from bike couriers putting up stickers throughout their workday. Stickers quickly took over the city. Stickers still hold an important place in street art culture.
2003	- Simple characters Often two layers or done as one continuous line simple characters were quick and fun and could sometimes be combined with stencils.
2003	- Banksy visits Melbourne In 2003, Banksy came out to Melbourne and placed stencils in many inner-city suburbs. As his fame rose so too did the controversy and most of his artworks were destroyed. There are only three left in public now.
2003	- Street art on the canvas Artists began to leave the wall and explore creating art on canvas, boards or more often than not, on found objects.

2003	- Collaborative street art As artists started to use canvas, many stencil artists collaborated with images and freehand.
2003	-The transformation of Hosier Lane Andy Mac's Citylight's lightbox gallery space set the scene for Hosier Lane to slowly evolve into the public art gallery that it has become today. By 2004, the laneway was only a quarter painted.
2004	- Rise of the character As street art grew and changed, there was a move away from stencils and into freehand spray. The characters were clean, clever, and often referenced pop-culture.
2005	- Street art on social media With the rise of Myspace and other social media platforms street art soon found itself the centre of an international art movement.
2006	- Commonwealth Games For the preparation of the Melbourne Commonwealth Games, the government changed the laws to make vandalism a bigger crime, and then cleaned off as much art as they could throughout the city and along the railway corridors.
2005	- The shift to freehand With the changes in law, artists needed to work quickly to ensure they didn't get caught. The best way to work quickly was by creating art freehand.
2006	- Influx of artists In 2006, street art was becoming popular in many major cities, Melbourne was one of these cities, and the fame Melbourne received created an influx of creatives from the region and abroad.
2007	- Street art as an international movement Melbourne quickly became one of the international street art hotspots, this meant that artists from all over the world came to visit to leave their mark, making Melbourne one of the most complete and historic urban art locations.
2008	- Paste-ups and the collage movement

	As the laws became stricter, there was a move towards paste-ups. As it was not a criminal offense, it was considered littering. This made it enticing to people who were afraid of going through the justice system.
2009	– Stencils revisited As street art grew in popularity and artists refined their work for canvas, there was a shift to multi-layered stencils. With some artists creating well over 20 layers. Stencil art quickly became about realism and was popular with street art collectors.
2009	- Tours and tourism Street art was becoming popular, Melbourne Street Art Tours opened, and the laneways began to fill with art throughout the CBD and the inner-city.
2010	– Street art collectors People started discovering the cheap prices for which street art could be obtained. Art started to sell, people could afford street art and they knew the artists because it was in the public realm. Also, many collectors switched from buying fine art to buying street art as investment art.
2011	- Fine art as street art As street art influenced all aspects of creative Melbourne and some fine artists made the jump from fine art into the street art world.
2012	- Street art as popular culture Street art becomes an important part of Melbourne tourism, design, and the Melbourne brand. Street art's accessibility made it extremely popular with the public and it seeped into all parts of the creative environment.
2013	– Spotters As street art grew in popularity it attracted a number of photographers who documented the scene and helped artists to have an online presence.
2014	– Muralism A shift towards brushwork and traditional signwriting techniques allowed artists to paint detailed and realistic work.
2014	- Painting for Instagram

	As artists became bigger on social media, it changed the way they painted. As artwork looks better in a photograph if left slightly blurry, this is how street art started to look. This was great for social media but not so great when viewed in real life.
2015	- Portraiture There was a shift towards realism and in particular large-scale portraits.
2016	- Economic muralism Artists stopped considering the conceptual aspects of their art to meet clients' briefs.
2017	- Large scale buildings As the money poured into street art, ambitious projects took hold and large-scale realism projects took place on some large buildings around Melbourne.
2017	- Silo Art Trail As street art became part of popular culture many rural towns came up with a plan to paint the silos in towns that are feeling economic hardship in order to create a trail that people follow, creating an economy out of nothing for the struggling towns.
2020	- Infrastructure As people try harder to make larger street art, giant murals on infrastructure such as dams and skyscrapers are being organised and should be finished by the end of the 2021.

Figure 34. History of Melbourne street art in timeline, by A. Doyle.

CHAPTER 5 - PRACTICALITY OF URBAN ART IN A FINE ART CONTEXT

Creating Street Art in a Fine Art Context

As part of my research, I have made a number of practical investigations that cogitate the hypothesis that street art can sit within a fine art context, and vice versa. This chapter gives an overview of the practical work that I have created during my candidature. There is much to discuss as I have made many investigative works, ranging from public art, muralism, installation, and painting, in a variety of situations including curated art, commercial projects, council initiatives, urban renewal projects, and large-scale murals. These practical projects have helped in my understanding of the intersection between fine art and street art.

In this chapter, I will primarily discuss the creative artworks that have been produced as part of this research project, and/or, in the case of previous works, provide an important context to the new works created for the final exhibition, titled, *Suburban isolation*. This exhibition is a reflection on the creative and academic research I have undertaken during my time examining the intersection between fine art and street art.

It is difficult to summarise the intent and scope of the creative practice, but it testifies to many of the themes and issues raised in the previous chapters. For example, the works produced for Power Box, INK Hotel, and the water towers and AFL murals that I created demonstrate the breadth and variety of commercial commissions that provide an income for the Blender Studios. At the same time, the work produced is careful not to compromise artistic integrity; working on a cliff's edge to create commercial art that is not direct advertising and still falls under the umbrella of street art, or Nu-Muralism, and, therefore, maintains the integrity of both Blender Studios and the artists involved. These murals were created as part of my research project and probe the different fingers of commercial art making, as I create murals for community and government, commercial and private entities. Each mural created has a very different set of circumstances as each project is created in different formats, contexts, and cultures. When creating art in a commercial context it is not just about making an artwork, one must also fulfil the requirements of the client, who may have very different ideas of muralism, street art, and outcome.

There are also a number of projects that I received through Expression of Interest (EOI) tenders in Balwyn, Box Hill, Mitcham, and many more. These projects still have rules, however, which vary in that the outcome isn't commercial and is much more based in the idea of the community. This often means that community consultation is required and that ideas can become very watered down.

If you are lucky as an artist, you may be given the opportunity to create a mural in a context of creative freedom; this was the case in the murals for Telstra, Castle on the Hill and many more. In contrast, an exhibition held halfway through my research, 'You are all the Same', explores and connects to the unauthorised and unsanctioned roots of graffiti. Then, I create illicit art, in the vein of Brandilism, with my paste-ups, on a number of public incursions created on several occasions during my research. Superficially, these works are simply paste-ups, but upon closer analysis, these works are pure *art-vertisments*.

Subtopia stands on its own, an experiment in the rock-star persona of the street art star and spinning off the huge public success of the Blender as discussed in Chapter 3.

I have also curated a number of projects during my candidature, but one project in particular that I would like to examine is the Central Pier cycling wall for which I was given a theme and asked to curate Australia's best street artists into a collaborative composition. Finally, 'Empty Nursery Blue Lane' and 'The Vault' demonstrate how the illicit and unruly energy of street art can literally paint over and obliterate fine art and vice versa.

This chapter will discuss each of these works individually and culminate in a discussion of the final exhibition project outcome, demonstrating how the many strands of inquiry come together creatively at, for, and by, Blender Studios, appropriating the entire endeavour into one final metaphor for collective activity that transcends the street art/fine art dichotomy.

Empty-Nursery Blue Lane (2013)

> *The immersive quality of the site's-built environment and the project's "urgent ephemerality" generated embodied reactions that helped challenge perceptions of the laneway space.*[118]

In 2012-2013, the Melbourne City Council began a rejuvenation project in the Hosier Lane and Rutledge Lane area. This was in an attempt to make the Hosier-Rutledge art precinct a safe and friendly urban space for both the community and tourists alike.

At the same time, a group of homeless women put forward the suggestion of installing CCTV cameras to increase safety in the area with the idea being that the CTTV would only be for the prosecution of violent crimes and not for minor offences. The urban art communities felt this wouldn't be the case, however, and there was immediate outcry that the CCTV cameras would compromise the creative energy in the area. So, the council consulted with the community and created a collaboration with RMIT's School of Public Art, initiating a series of 'rejuvenation' art projects that engaged with the public and added to the culture of the Hosier Lane precinct. I was lucky enough to have been chosen as one of the artists involved.

As part of the rejuvenation of the precinct, the council planned to adequately clean, solve its waste management issues, and improve pedestrian access, seating, and basic facilities. The Council wanted to focus on the inclusion and 'empowerment' of young people who engage with the space, with an effort to maintain the vitality and diversity of the many subcultures that frequent the area.

Past Experiences and Art

For *Empty-nursery blue lane* (2013) I drew heavily on my formative experiences of the past. Houses and suburban life provide a major influence on my aesthetic imagery. Most of the important events in my early life were focused on a quarter acre block in the heart of suburban Frankston. We had an outback toilet, complete with its

[118] Hilary, F., & Sumartojo, S., 'Empty-nursery blue: On atmosphere, meaning and methodology in Melbourne street art'*, Public Art Dialogue*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 201-220.

own dunny man. We went through numerous above ground pools and, sadly, many pets. My house was not really different from any other suburban house. It was a curated world in which I learnt social skills and behaved within the confines of a perceived normality modelled by my parents. I watched from a very young age as my parents struggled with house payments while they worked so hard in jobs they despised.

When I found my nephew drowned in the backyard above ground swimming pool, the suburban dream came crashing down around my family. Within a year of this event the bank took our home. This catastrophic experience made me reflect on my childhood home, the hold it had over me, and its influence on who I thought I was. Through creative expression, I began to play with the idea of creating a colour that represents my childhood and my suburban tragedies; inspired by the use of blue by artists such as Picasso and Klein.[119]

Melancholy and resignation best characterise Pablo Picasso's Blue Period.[120] When Picasso's close friend Carles Casagemas committed suicide, his grief found expression in a series of deeply sentimental paintings which comprise his blue period. Picasso communicated his experience through his colour and imagery. His blue period pushed the notion of how colour can be used as a vehicle to communicate emotions. In contrast, Yves Klein's use of one colour over an entire canvas presented the idea of colour as the singular communicative tool. Klein likened monochrome painting to an 'open window to freedom'.[121] He worked with a chemist to develop his own particular brand of blue made from pure colour pigment and a binding medium, it is called International Klein Blue. Klein adopted this hue as a means of evoking the immateriality and boundlessness of his own experiences and vision of the world.

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[119] Cortázar, C., 2011, 'Exploration of blue', *Catalina Cortázar*, pp. 1-9, http://www.catalinacortazar.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Paper_Catalina_Cortazar.pdf, [accessed 16 March 2020].
[120] Chalif, D., 'The death of Casagemas: Early Picasso, the Blue Period, mortality, and redemption', *Nuerosurgery*, Vol. 61, No. 2, 2007, pp. 404-417, https://doi.org/10.1227/01.NEU.0000255482.80697.80, [accessed 16 March 2020].
[121] MOMA, *Yves Klein Blue monochrome* [website], https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80103, [accessed 16 March 2020].

Figure 35. ‘Empty-nursery blue lane’ from above as an animated GIF. Image courtesy of David Russell 2012, GIF source: https://tinyurl.com/4v4a8c48

The colour of Empty-Nursery Blue was created by sitting in the studio and creating hundreds of different blues until I found the one that I felt expressed my experiences the most. It was a baby blue that had hints of mauve in it. It’s a beautiful colour, a bright pastel, as shown in Fig. 35. I felt this colour expressed a feeling that something had been disturbed. That ‘all is not quite right’. I took my disturbing yet beautiful colour to a paint lab, worked out its recipe, and named my colour ‘Empty-Nursery Blue’. But what good was the colour if it was without a context? I needed to find something to paint to physicalise the concept of the colour, so I decided to test it on my parents’ new house, painting it ‘Empty-Nursery Blue’.

My parents had moved to an island in the Gippsland Lakes. It was a significant removal and escape from the realities of suburban Frankston. Their house stood alone in the landscape, with only bushes and trees to keep it company. Not even a bridge links the island to the nearest shop. However, this physical removal from the past does not automatically come with emotional removal. Empty-Nursery Blue, once placed in this context, became a symbol of a collective past, engulfing the new house with the memory and emotions of an old and important experience - one that represented my family’s suburban dreams and failures.

The Empty-Nursery Blue Lane Project incorporates my past and my present, my suburban heritage and my immersion in Melbourne Street Art and laneways, in a street art piece using the colour Empty-Nursery Blue. By using Empty-Nursery Blue to completely cover Rutledge Lane I was symbolically 'coating' my present with my past. By doing this, I was also claiming that a colour in its pure form can be street art or graffiti. This is, for me, a direct conceptual link from fine art to street art.

Physically, this 'coating' of the past occurred through the use of spray guns, a scissor-lift, a generator, and 260 litres of paint. When you walked through the painted laneway your eyes could not focus, everything was a particular shade of baby blue (see Fig. 36). The cool and calming blue was all one could see, and the temperature dropped in the baby blue lane, creating its own microclimate. The distinction between the colour and the chaos of the entry to the lane created a vivid blue glow that permeated out of the lane, leading some people to have a feeling of vertigo. This giant 'empty swimming pool' was an all-encompassing public installation which made the viewer part of the art.

Once completed, the artwork lasted for only an hour before spray paint was handed out and the giant artwork became ephemeral (see Fig. 37). Over the next few months, the laneway slowly returned to its original form.

Through the creation of the Empty-Nursery Blue Lane I conceptually linked the intersection of fine art and street art. Referencing swimming pools, and all the familiarity and trauma that had become my art and personal iconography. The lane became a site-specific and immersive environment; it was a fine art installation. Furthermore, the work manifested the claim that a colour itself in its purest form can be graffiti or a 'tag'.[122] This artwork was both street art and fine art at the same time.

[122] Originating from the graffiti movement, the tag is a quick scrawl in a public space that is still used today by both street artists and graffiti artists, (see glossary for further details).

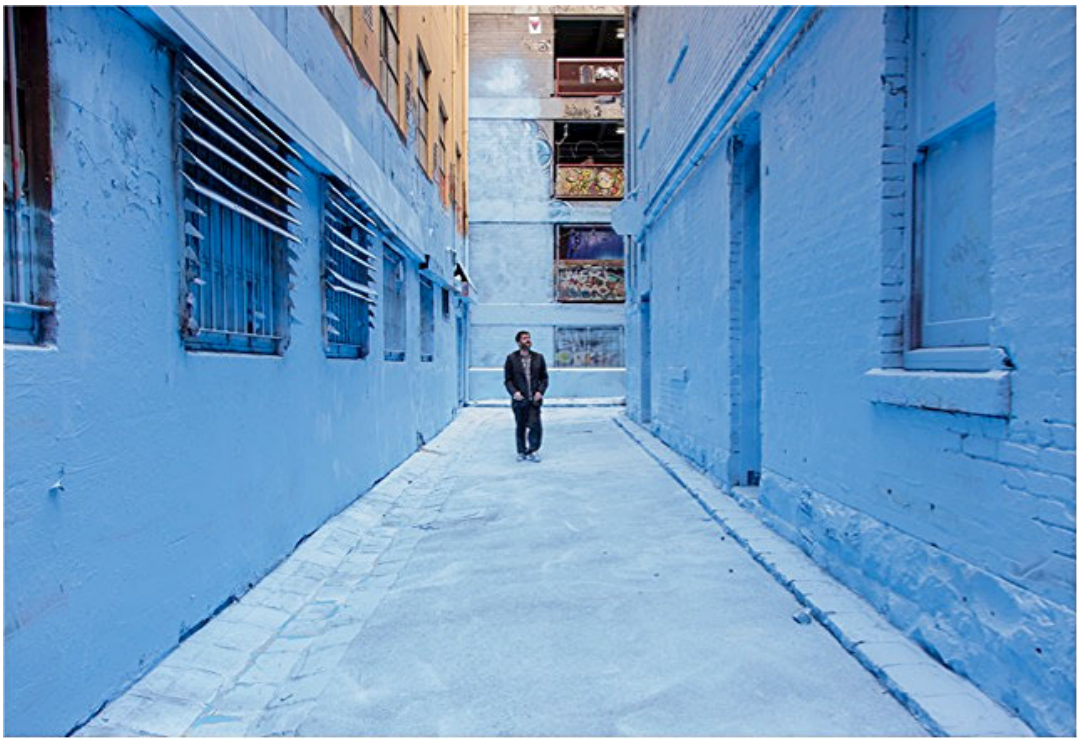

Figure 36. Detail ‘Empty-Nursery Blue Lane’ with figure, 2013.

There are many things that I felt worked well in this installation. It was very successful in relating street art ideology to fine art ideas and construction. This installation turned a whole laneway into an artwork, engaging the entire space, creating an intersection of my past and present, and an intersection of fine art and street art.

The artwork lasted for an hour which in some ways was a shame as it meant that many people that would have loved to engage with it felt that they had missed it in its true context. I feel that the ephemeral nature of the artwork was both a strength and a weakness. I have wondered how the artwork would have been perceived if its lifespan was extended, or even permanent, however, this would have changed the intention of the artwork.

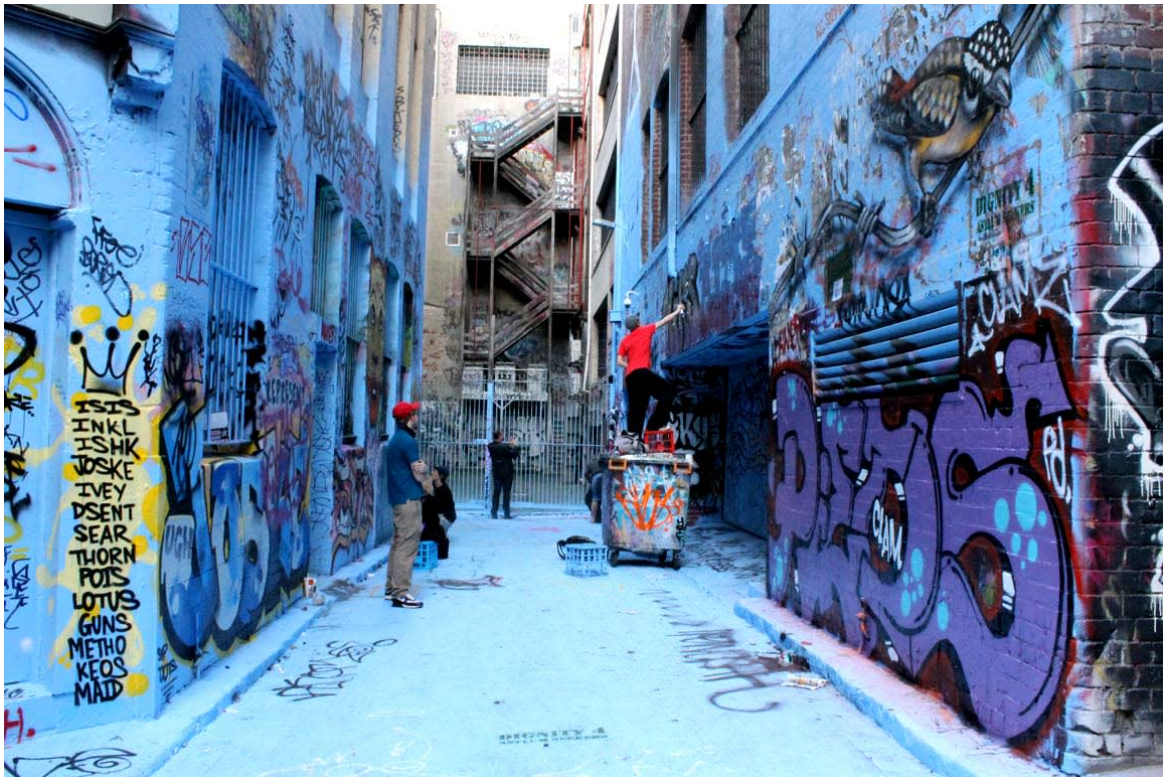

Figure 37. The aqueous nature of the work allowed for it to organically blend back into the urban landscape, 2012.

Empty-nursery blue lane (2013) generated a large amount of media interest and the divisive nature of the artwork meant that for a couple of weeks I could not go anywhere without a security guard. In the end, the Council cancelled the entire collaborative project (Urban Laboratory) because of the controversy that my project caused.

After Urban Laboratory was cancelled, the Council then set up a group called Hosier Inc. in its place. This group was made up of residents near Hosier Lane, and Spotters, not artists. The Spotters and most of the residents were particularly upset by my *Empty-nursery blue* incursion, as they didn't understand art, street art, or graffiti history. Strangely though, once they had a budget and free reign in the entire precinct, the first thing they did was paint the entire main laneway black: a move that was not an artwork and which had seemingly no aesthetic reasoning. This was a move that I had no voice to argue against. Very quickly the artistic integrity of the Hosier and Rutledge Lane precinct fell apart and, within a few months, cameras were placed in the laneways.

It could be argued that an unintended consequence of the *Empty-nursery blue* laneway project was that it catalysed the demise of the precinct. In response to this situation, I created a plan for the potential rejuvenation of Hosier Lane, which I felt

could give the laneways the creative credibility that they deserve. I met with Cr. Robert Doyle, and he thought it was a great idea, however, he felt that I would have to engage the Hosier Inc. group made up of local residents and Spotters to make the project happen. I believed this was not in the best interests of the precinct or the best way to move forward, and so I declined the project and the laneway slowly fell into aesthetic disrepair. The original plan that was pitched to Melbourne City Council has been included in the Appendix, see page 236.

The Yellow Peril Project

The Yellow Peril Project is an original concept designed to extend and develop the important themes commenced in *Empty-nursery blue lane* incorporating intervention in an existing space or artwork through colour, and blurring the boundaries between street art and fine art. In order to understand this project, we will look at the fraught history of the public artwork and the career of the artist, before outlining the concept for the project and why it constituted, for a variety of reasons, an impossible work to achieve during such a research project and currently has failed to be implemented. If this street art and fine art incursion were to happen it would have to be done after the completion of my research, as it may have a detrimental impact on my progress and the stakeholders involved.

History of *Vault*

Ron Robertson-Swann created his artwork *Vault* after he was awarded the public commission from the City of Melbourne, in 1978, as part of the upgrade of the City Square precinct on the corner of Swanston and Collins Street. The City Square architects wanted a focal point for the square; something different and modern. The $70,000 price tag (approx. $350k in today's value) attracted a great deal of attention and once the design and a photo of the maquette were released, the media went wild. The sculpture was heavily criticised and ridiculed for the cost but also the aesthetics - such as the starkness of the yellow colour in the City Square.

When councillors first saw the proposed sculpture, they became polarised. They were soon split, with one faction led by Don Osborne, who opposed the work, and the other by the much younger Lord Mayor Irvin Rockman, who championed the piece. Rockman pushed hard for the artwork to be placed in the location in which it was designed to be situated. Robertson-Swann named the artwork *Vault* in 1980, however the Ex-Mayor Osborne had nicknamed it the 'Yellow Peril'. The media loved this nickname, so the title 'The Yellow Peril' stuck.

Vault was built from large sheets of prefabricated steel and was erected in its contextual home in the corner of the new City Square, in May 1980. It soon became a symbol of the crumbling Council and its myriad mistakes. In 1980, Queen Elizabeth ll opened the City Square development, which had been plagued with complicated delays mostly due to controversy surrounding its nickname 'The Yellow Peril'. Even the Queen was bought into the issue, reportedly wondering if the sculpture might be painted 'a more agreeable colour'.[123]

In December of 1980, the Liberal State Government sacked the entire City Council and then *Vault* was dismantled and placed into storage. In 1981, *Vault* was exiled to the strategically abandoned Batman Park, where it was reconstructed in the safety of solitude. Although still a highly contentious piece, it was now safely out of the way of the community psyche and was left for the skateboarders to use at their discretion. *Vault* remained in Batman Park until 2002.

In 2002, after two decades, the building of the new ACCA gave the opportunity to rejuvenate the artwork and move it to the Southbank arts precinct. Next to the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, and the Victorian College of the Arts, yet still far enough away from the conservatives who fear the abstract and have no sympathy for the Melbourne oeuvre (Fig. 38 depicts *Vault* in its new location). In 2017 *Vault* was recommended for heritage protection through inclusion in the City of Melbourne Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay following a heritage study of the Southbank Area.[124]

[123] Brown, S., 'Hidden Vault: Tributes to "Yellow Peril" sculpture found in public places across Melbourne', *ABC News*, 5 April 2016, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-05/vault-yellow-peril-sculpture-tributes-scattered-across-melbourne/7248702, [accessed 27 November 2019].
[124] City of Melbourne City Collection, *Vault* 1980 [website], https://citycollection.melbourne.vic.gov.au/vault/, [accessed 5 January 2020].

Figure 38. *Vault* (aka 'Yellow Peril') at its permanent home, next to ACCA. Photo courtesy of Melbourne Daily BlogSpot, 2012.

Vault has become a landmark in Melbourne, and a symbol of censorship, public art, and democratic space. It has become an iconic motif that has helped shape and guide Melbourne in the development of its own design aesthetic. The sculpture has been inspirational for many building and propositional architectural projects designed in Melbourne, and its motif can be found throughout the city in architecture, sculpture, and design.[125] In fact, there have been very few, if any, other sculptures in Australian history that have ever had such an influence on Australian art and, in particular, Melbourne aesthetics. Geoffrey Wallis articulates how important this sculpture has become to the Melbourne psyche:

> Every so often it is decreed that Melbourne needs a landmark, an icon, something to denote the city. This ignores the fact that Melbourne already has its symbol - not as instantly recognizable as Sydney's Opera House or Harbor Bridge, but probably more reflective of the city itself: Ron Robertson-Swann's sculpture, The Vault [sic].[126]

[125] Brown, *Hidden Vault*, np.
[126] Wallis, G., 2004, *Peril in the Square: The sculpture that challenged a city*, Briar Hill: Indra Pub.

About the Artist

Born in Sydney, in 1941, Ron Robertson-Swann studied at the National Art School before continuing his study at St Martin's School of Art, in London, in the sixties. After returning to Australia, Robertson-Swann received a number of important sculptural commissions while also continuing his painting practice. He has exhibited across the country, in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Canberra, as well as several regional galleries. He has participated in group shows at the Art Gallery of New South Wales as well as the National Gallery of Australia. Roberston-Swann has also won several awards including the Bathurst Prize, the Alice Prize, and the Comalco Invitational Sculpture Award. His work is held in a number of collections across the country, including Parliament House, the Art Gallery of NSW, the Australian National Gallery, and internationally.[127]

For Robertson-Swann, the installation of *Vault* represented an ending to an ordeal over his first major public artwork. He never intended or wanted the attention that this sculpture brought to him. It was international news, yet the artist was not intending to cause a furore.

The Project

I would argue the 'Yellow Peril' has become a symbol of resistance in the fight for public art and community space in Melbourne and is, therefore, significant on many levels. I plan on painting *Vault* in my signature colour, Empty Nursery Blue, in an unsanctioned collaboration (see proposed artwork concept in Fig. 39). I propose that the ideas and contention of public space, public art, urban art, authorship, and authenticity, are as important and as relevant today as they were in the 1980s. I don't wish to cause the artist harm by generating unwanted attention, for me the idea of usurping another artist's work isn't ideal, but for the nature of the research, and to create street art in public that clearly redefines the boundaries of fine art and street art, it will be necessary. I can see no other work more suitable to usurp than *Vault*.

[127] Australian Galleries, *Ron Robertson-Swann* [website], https://australiangalleries.com.au/artists/ron-robertson-swann/, [accessed 4 February 2020].

My hope is that this project, ‘Empty-Nursery Blue Peril’, will raise these issues in a new context by revisiting aspects of the original contention. Personally, I have always felt that street art has struggled to make the transition to the gallery, and once you put it in the gallery it can lose its significance. Street art and graffiti belong in their original context, on the street. By painting my Empty-Nursery Blue ‘tag’ onto ‘The Yellow Peril’, I am creating a context where urban art ideologies meet fine art and form a hybrid street artwork that simultaneously works as a fine art piece.

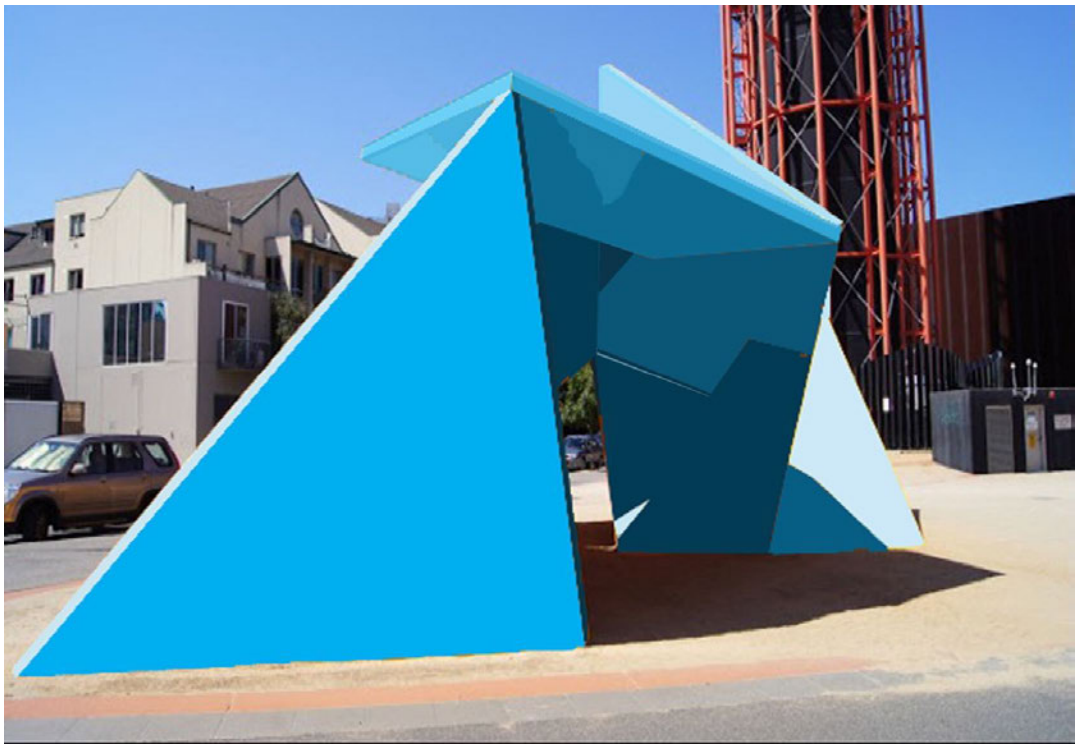

Figure 39. Proposed artwork for Empty-Nursery Blue Peril by A. Doyle, 2019.

In order to understand why I have chosen to create this artwork we must also examine the colour that I have chosen to use. Over the years, I have been playing with the idea that the colour of Empty-Nursery Blue is essentially my graffiti ‘tag’, but also my representation and connection to the past. It is the reason why I painted the entirety of my family home and Rutledge Lane in this colour. This idea that a tag can simply be a colour is something that I will continue with, and which I feel will be an important conceptual aspect of this work. *Vault* has been tagged many times over the years. I remember that as a young man even I dropped a tag on it when it was in

Batman Park. If a colour is my tag, then all I will have done is tag it once again. Thus, I would like to incorporate my past and my present in an unsanctioned art collaboration using the colour Empty-Nursery Blue.

Vault is a work that has changed the way Melbourne views public art. It was a catalyst for conservative change towards the arts, and it pushed the public art movement in Melbourne back many years. Ron Robertson-Swann had no intention of changing the landscape of politics, public art, or architecture, and yet his impact has been massive. The artwork brought up many issues that still haven't been resolved.

I am sure this process was not easy for Robertson-Swann. While *Vault* has a history of censorship and neglect, the 'Empty-Nursery Blue Peril' is not meant as disrespect for the artwork, the artist or his journey. Instead, many of the issues that 'The Yellow Peril' represents are still relevant and important to revisit in contemporary Melbourne, and I am certain the Empty-Nursery Blue Peril will bring many of these issues back up, making them relevant and contemporary.

Conclusion

Vault was a revolutionary artwork that changed the politics of Melbourne, and the way Melbourne views art. My hope is that the 'Empty-Nursery Blue Peril' is seen to commend the original artwork, while also being considered an artwork in its own right. I believe it will add an additional layer of history to the piece.

This ephemeral artwork brings up issues of authorship, authenticity, aesthetics, public space, and much more. I feel this work will be a successful exercise in bridging the intersection between street art and fine art. However, after consulting with a lawyer, and some of my respected art colleagues, it has been decided that this project is not one that I will complete as part of my PhD. As an unrealised concept, the work still forms an important place in the research. As a proposed idea it shows that the bridging of fine art and street art can be achieved, and I am sure it will be a project that I will continue to try and realise.

‘YOU ARE ALL THE SAME’

Dark Horse Experiment - 6th July to 4th August 2018

Introduction

Throughout this research, I have been exploring ways that street art and fine art can interconnect through aesthetics, craft, and through concept. Taking street art off the street and changing its context changes the oeuvre of the medium. Once placed into a fine art context, street art is immediately compared to fine art. This can set a dangerous precedent where street art is set up to fail. Here, I investigate how street art can work in this intellectually challenging and historic art context and environment.

Exhibition Description

Through the use of images, technique, composition, and medium, I attempted to create a series of paintings that successfully makes the transition from street to fine art. This is done through art that is heavily reliant on urban aesthetics but, once put in a gallery context, is clearly fine art. The images included are inspired from the early street art movement, graffiti, and the idea of the ‘Australian dream’.

Much of the urban art movement developed in the late 1990s, which means that many of the images used in the early street scene reflect my generation and the cultural influence from the 1980s and ’90s. I drew ideas from culture jamming and political satire, advertising, and popular culture, which were some of the main themes in the late 1990s to early 2000s. In the exhibition, *You are all the same!*, the mediums included a mixture of spray paint, pastels, acrylic, house paint, oil paint, and ink. Except for the spray and house paint these are not traditional street art mediums. However, the application of the medium was important to the texture that I was trying to achieve.

The composition and the scale were carefully chosen to reference the large scale of street art. The composition is crowded and over-loaded with imagery and narrative. This is something I find common in the street art aesthetic, as there is often a lack of subtlety in the images that street artists choose and the way they place them on the wall (see for an example Fig. 40, the Blender Lane stencil wall). This brutalisation of aesthetic is part of the street art vernacular.

Figure 40. Blender Laneway, the stencil wall on the side of Blender Studios, 2016.

The paintings for *You are all the same!* were as physically big as I could make them. I painted on canvas stapled directly on the wall and I used many mediums to build up the background of the canvas. The initial painting I completed on canvas was raw and filled with tags and graffiti. This was built up and washed out a number of times, leaving a very layered background that references a graffed-out lane.[128]

This show had two research concepts running through it. The first is the idea of creating an artwork that examines urban art and how it may work in a fine art context. The second idea was that these works examine the idea of 'the failed dream'. The failed Australian dream is something that I have explored as content in my work for over twenty-five years, so it seems natural for me to use this content when exploring the idea of urban art in a fine art context. Although the failed suburban dream is driving much of my content, there are many ways to explore these images and ideas in an urban art arena.

The repeated use of the stencil of the woman's face is a motif throughout this body of work. The stencil is used as a print and is a direct reference to urban art tools. Although worked in with a variety of mediums, the stencil of the woman's face falls somewhere between a print and a drawing. The essence of the face is carried through each artwork but remains honest to the original image. The figure, which is a motif, appears in most of the works, and is a direct link to fine art through its medium, craftsmanship, and composition.

Another conceptual link to urban art is the use of the cartoon stencils. These stencils are up to six layers and are representative of familiar images from my generation. This is a strong link to the early street art scene, as many artists created images of popular culture from that period. Artists such as Ben Frost or Obey used or manipulated these types of images as early as 1999. Many of the images I chose

[128] A 'graffed-out lane' is a lane that has many layers of graffiti over several years and is completely covered in marks.

to reference by culture jamming, which is an early street art technique that manipulates and changes famous logos. Marc De Jong is a good example of an artist who in the early 2000s created a series of stickers that played with famous logos and advertising. This was something that I brought into the cartoon style stencils, giving them depth and authenticity.

'You Are All the Same!' is in its essence an artwork or a tag; I have been writing it on the streets of Melbourne since 2001 in paste-up, stencil, and free-hand styles (see Fig. 41), and it is recognized as my statement or tag by the street art community. So, for it to become the name of my exhibition is therefore a form of art-vertising, thereby changing the context of the statement to a more complex conceptual signifier.

Figure 41. You are all the same written on a wall in A'Beckett Street, Melbourne CBD, 2011.

With this body of work, I have changed many aspects of my usual painting style. For instance, I signed each artwork. Usually, I would never do this on one of my fine art paintings as I believe it changes the composition. In street art the signature is very important as it adds to both the fame and interest in the artwork. Although often crude in nature, the signature is an important feature, so I decided to sign the artworks, carefully including it into each composition.

A strong connection that this body of work has with fine art, is its references to older Australian paintings and artworks that were created in the 20th Century and

have become icons of Australian art. This reference is important as it really places the artworks into an Australian fine art context. Through both composition, imagery, design, and sub-text, I borrowed from the following artists and paintings (as shown in Figs. 42-49):

Figure 42. Brack, J., *The bar*, 1954, oil on canvas, 97.0 × 130.3 cm, in a comparison with my artwork *A night out* (below, Fig. 43). Image courtesy of National Gallery of Victoria.

Figure 43. Doyle, A., *A night out*, 2018, acrylic and mixed media on canvas,170 x 228cm.

Figure 44. Tucker, A., *Victory girls*, 1943, oil on cardboard, 64.6 x 58.7cm, in a comparison with my artwork *Nu images of modern evil* (Fig. 45).
Image courtesy of National Gallery of Australia

Figure 45. Doyle, A., *Nu images of modern evil*, 2018, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 164 x 196cm.

Figure 46. Whitley, B. *The shower*, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm, in a comparison with my painting *I'm in the shower* (Fig. 47). Image courtesy of Bonhams.

Figure 47. Doyle, A., *I'm in the shower*, 2018, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 175 x 180cm.

Figure 48. Arkley, H., *Australian home*, 1993, acrylic on canvas, 175 x 255cm, 1993, in comparison with my art *Suburban dream* (Fig. 49). Image courtesy of Hamilton Gallery.

Figure. 49. Doyle, A., *Suburban dream*, 2002-2018, mixed media, 35 x 61 x 54cm,

Figure 50. Doyle, A., *Hunting season*, 2018, mixed media paint on canvas, 145 x 110cm.

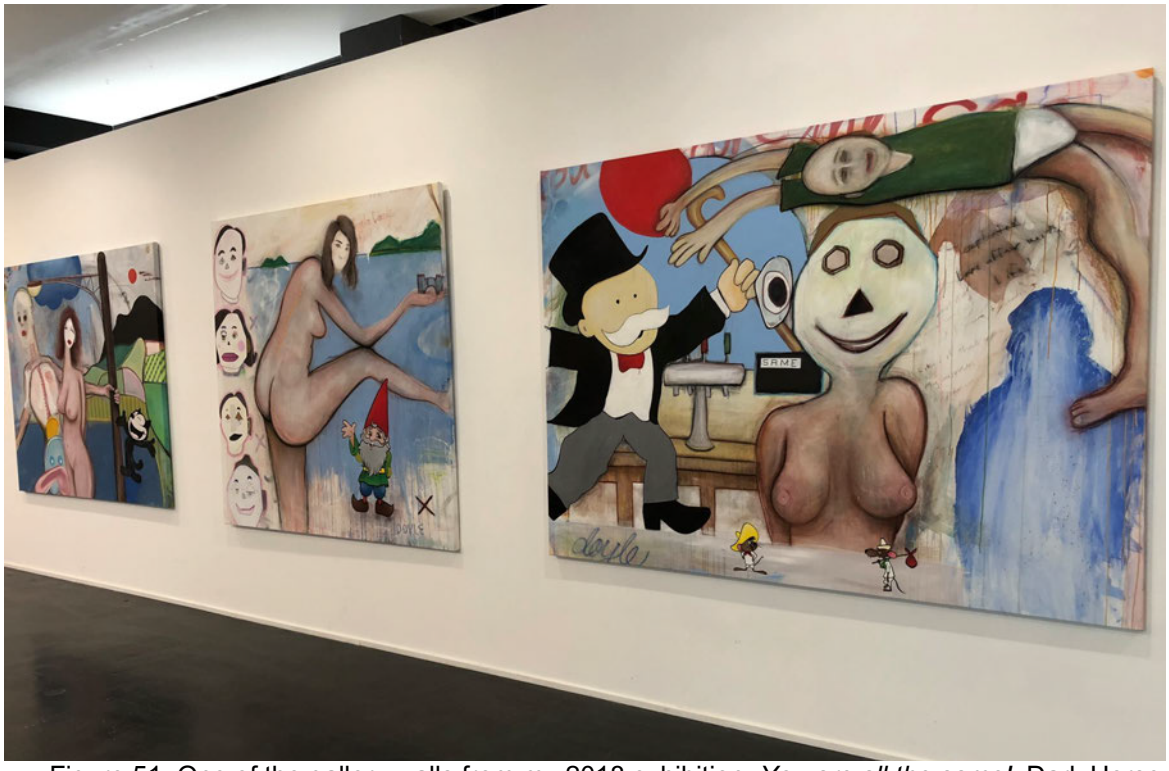

Figure 51. One of the gallery walls from my 2018 exhibition, *You are all the same!*, Dark Horse Experiment Gallery, Melbourne.

Conclusion

There were many things that came together well in this body of work, including the aforementioned use of stencils, the compositional layering, and the repurposing of the tag throughout. However, it failed in its primary intention to make artworks that formed a transition from fine art to street art. This happened for a number of reasons.

In many ways, the art in this exhibition became more fine art than ever. It was as though the harder I tried to make the work reference street art, the further from street art it became. The composition was challenging as I kept trying to control and manipulate it. Often on the street there is no control over the layering of imagery, colours, or marks. Even though I tried to remain loose in my approach, the compositions ended up with a stronger fine art subtext. I believe the paintings in their own right were quite interesting, and the show was quite resolved and accomplished. As a show I felt that it was well crafted and consistent. As an investigation into the ability to transform street art into fine art, however, I feel that the show did not succeed. Although the paintings were raw and made with the assistance of stencils and spray paint, and with many layers of medium, it was not enough.

The final body of work was too articulate in its application, and the randomness and choice of imagery did not appear random at all. The links to fine art also made it too overloaded, conceptually. It seems that the best way to create paintings that can sit in both the street art and fine art arena, is to bring elements of street art into a fine art painting. Or, to potentially place fine art into a street art context, perhaps into the street, or to usurp an existing artwork such as with the idea of the *Vault* intervention. I believe that what I was trying to achieve with the *You are all the same!* exhibition was achievable, however, it would need to be created differently and presented in a different format.

Figure 52. Doyle, A.,*The family holiday*, 2018, acrylic and mixed media on canvas 243 x 201cm, 2018.

Figure 53. Doyle, A., *Waiting at the Doctors*, 2018, acrylic and mixed media on canvas 200 x 220cm.

Subtopia

Working in the medium of television

An artwork from 2012 that I feel was successful in communicating between mediums, genres, and movements, and examining the intersection between street art and fine art, was *Subtopia*, which was an artwork in the medium of television. I wanted to work in what I believed to be the medium of the people, and this was television, or more precisely, reality television. I feel that life can be art, and with this project the borders of reality, art, urban art, and television were blurred to become all these things at the same time.

Once I had decided to create the artwork, I came up with a basic theme and the name *Subtopia*. I bought a camera and began to film my everyday life and life at the Blender Studios. With the project underway, I then contacted Jacob Oberman who worked in film. He decided to come on board as the director of the program. My partner and co-director of the Blender Studios, Piya Suksodsai, allowed us access to all aspects of life at the studios, and we filmed everything.

It was confronting filming all aspects of our lives and opening up all facets of the Blender Studios. Not all the artists liked being filmed, and I believe that at this time some artists began to resent the openness and the challenges to their art morals with which *Subtopia* was confronting them. *Subtopia* was primarily documenting my life; it was a portrait in the medium of television. It followed my family, explored my history in Asia, and touched on my childhood. After about six months, we had made a two-minute preview, and we showed it to Renegade Films.[129] They decided to produce *Subtopia*, and once on board they managed to sell *it* to the Australian Broadcasting Commission (The ABC) who commissioned three episodes.

With Renegade and the ABC on board, the project changed substantially. We had access to great equipment, travel, and research, but it came at a cost. Renegade became producer and the project changed. It was really hard to maintain *Subtopia* to my original vision.

[129] Renagade Films is a television production house run out of Melbourne.

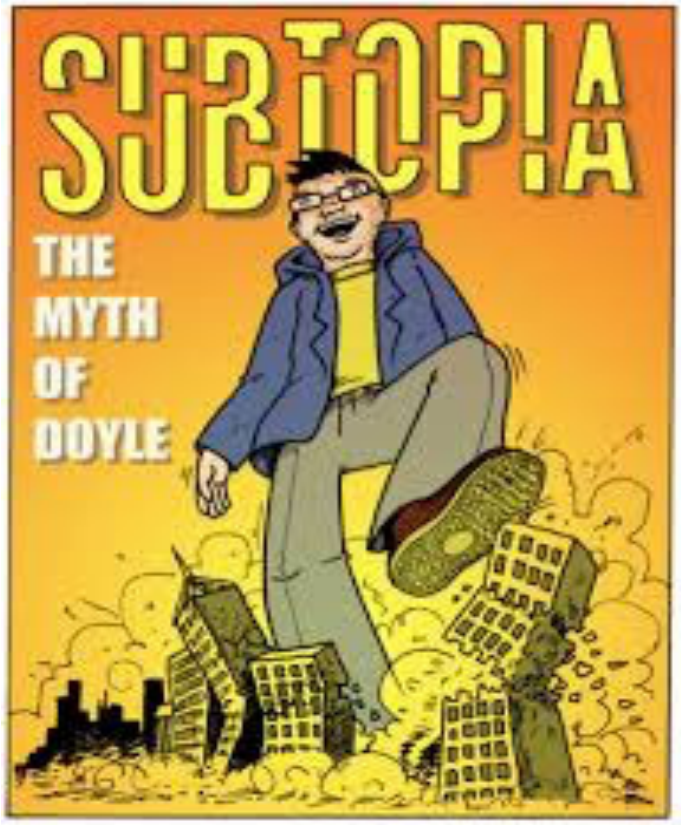

Figure 54. A flyer for *Subtopia* put out by the ABC as advertising, 2012. Image Courtesy of Renegade Films.

My intention was to create an artwork in the medium of reality television. However, to Renegade it was a job that needed to be completed under budget, and on time. It was hard to negotiate with them over artistic direction, as they came from a very different perspective and culture. Eventually I lost control of the construction of *Subtopia* and finally and most importantly, I lost control of the editing. Much of what was agreed on was changed at the last minute, and *Subtopia* moved from a warts and all examination of my life, to a simplified and celebratory documentary about Blender Studios and my relationship with Piya (see Fig. 54 which shows this shifted portrayal in a flyer released by the ABC). I felt that Renegade were fair and truthful through the process, and I still remain friends with the producers. I wanted to make art, I had a vision, Renegade helped me to realise this vision. And Jacob Oberman helped me to create it. Both relationships came with compromise, however, I could not have made an artwork in the medium of television without either of them.

The unadulterated version of *Subtopia* that was made with my input and consisted of three episodes (the second version became 2 episodes.) The original had a side plot following my brother around Western Sydney, committing crimes and partying; at one point he even called the Queen a 'cunt', it was not a happy family portrait. It was these side plots, and honesty of the characters that made *Subtopia* interesting. These raw, rough characters are real, they are ordinary, they are the quintessential Aussie battlers. This version of *Subtopia* was a real and honest look at Australian suburbia, the Blender Studios and the art that was created in and around it. I think of *Subtopia* as a portrait in social realism with suburban metaphors symbolised through strong iconography in the imagery and plot.

Conclusion

The changes made to *Subtopia* at the end of the creation process were substantial and concept-altering. Having made a work in the medium of television, I can honestly say that it is a hard medium in which to collaborate, as it has so many stakeholders. Any idea is destined to be diluted in a project with so many stakeholders.

I see *Subtopia* as an artwork - an artwork in the medium of television. I was lucky to be able to make this project work, even after it was changed to two episodes. I felt it was still an artwork in the medium of television, which showed the everyday life of the Blender Studios and the artists and street artists who create there. *Subtopia* aimed to blur the line between television, fine art, and street art.

In September 2012, *Subtopia* was aired on the ABC, and I launched it in a gallery as a projection onto a canvas, with the idea of it referencing a moving painting. It was also played live on the big-screen at Federation Square. By changing the context of the works and playing with the presentation I was able to change the work's intention, and, in some regards, its interpretation. Context directed this work, as it was made to be watched at home, on the television. '*Subtopia*' was an interesting examination of the link between fine art, street art, television, film, installation, and reality.

‘The Castle on the Hill’

Working in a street art festival.
An artwork created in 2019 as part of the Big Picture Festival in Frankston.

In 2019, I was part of an urban street art festival located in Frankston. The ‘Big Picture Festival’ runs every year and artists from all over the world converge in the vicinity to paint. I was given a large wall, with creative freedom, and this was a great opportunity to play with the idea of creating fine art in a street art context. Having grown up in Frankston, and with suburbia being a large component of my conceptual obsession, I wanted to create an artwork that was an honest critique of the suburban dream.

This project afforded me the opportunity to convert one of my paintings into a large-scale street art mural. In a direct attempt to place my painting into a street art context, I chose a work from five years ago. This painting had large flat areas that I felt would transfer well from the canvas to a wall.

In the transfer from the original artwork to a large-scale mural there was much to consider. As a painting, this artwork was originally 165cm x 100cm (acrylic on canvas) and was very detailed (see Fig. 56). This work was part of the ‘New Australian Landscape’ series.[130] I felt the suburban references and content would transfer well from gallery and canvas to a laneway behind Savers in Frankston (see the completed mural in Fig. 55).

[130] Doyles Art, *New Australian landscapes* [website], http://doylesart.com/new-australian-landscapes/, (accessed 23 January 2020).

Figure 55. Doyle, A., ‘Castle on the hill’ 2019. The completed mural in situ, Frankston.

Figure 56. Doyle, A., ‘Castle on the hill’ 2010, mixed media paint on canvas, 160 x 110cm.

Conclusion

This work was generally successful in transcribing from the canvas to the street, yet there was something missing. The original painting had a better outcome as the detail and the depth of colour, coupled with the intimacy in which it is viewed, meant that the original rendition was more interesting.

There was also a loss of intimacy in the transfer because of the change in scale, and the fact that one views a mural from further back. The location meant that the mural was painted up high - about one story off the ground - resulting in the artwork having to be viewed from below. The last issue with the street art version was in the time restraints. As this project was part of a festival and required a scissor lift, I had to paint the mural within a certain timeframe because of budgetary restraints, and I didn't get to add as many details as I would have liked.

I could have painted it for another week in order to get it up to the same level of the original painting. However, even with the mural not being developed as much as it could have been, there were still many things that were successful. Overall, it was a resolved street art mural that had evolved from fine art.

Ink Hotel

Working in a Commercial Environment

In 2018, I was commissioned by Next Story Group to rebrand their new Southbank Hotel with urban art. This included the creation of a mural that encased half of the lobby (see Fig. 57 & 59). I was also asked to come up with some urban sculptures, a Lego artwork (see Fig. 58), paste-ups, and artwork designs. This was very much the opposite of trying to make fine art out of urban art. Instead, it was using urban art in a design context. I decided that the best way to meet the client's brief was to create a montage of different street genres, painted by a variety of artists. The concept for the artwork was to create the look of a Melbourne laneway and the project was curated in close collaboration with the hotel management. The main intention of this mural was to change the aesthetics of the hotel. By placing street art activations around the hotel, the hotel was radically transformed. It changed the atmosphere,

creating a uniquely Melbourne urban art experience. The piece was very successful in transforming the space and recreating an urban experience. The Ink Hotel's art activations created by the Blender crew were a great example of 'design street art'.[131] [132] When creating 'design street art' artists have to work very closely with the client and the client's brief. This type of mural is a form of Nu-Muralism: the artists still get to create the composition and many of the ideas, it just has to go through a process of bureaucracy and approvals. Nearly all commercial murals go through this bureaucratic process in order to create with commercial government or private funding.

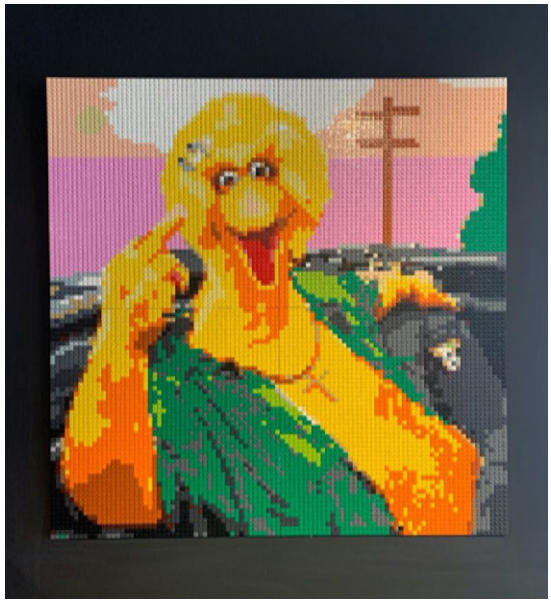

Figure 57. Doyle, A., 2018 Lego artwork, 100cm x 100cm, 2018.

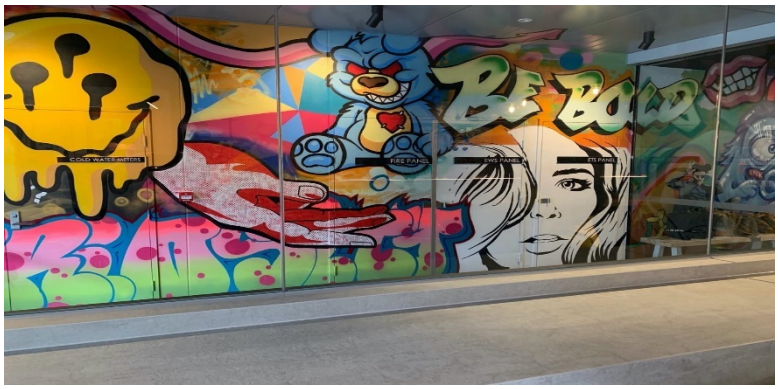

Figure 58. The commissioned entrance way to the 'Ink Hotel' 2018.

[131] The 'Blender Crew' is a term I use when I curate a mural with artists from the Blender community.
[132] 'Design Street Art' is the term that is often given to street art that is made in a design context.

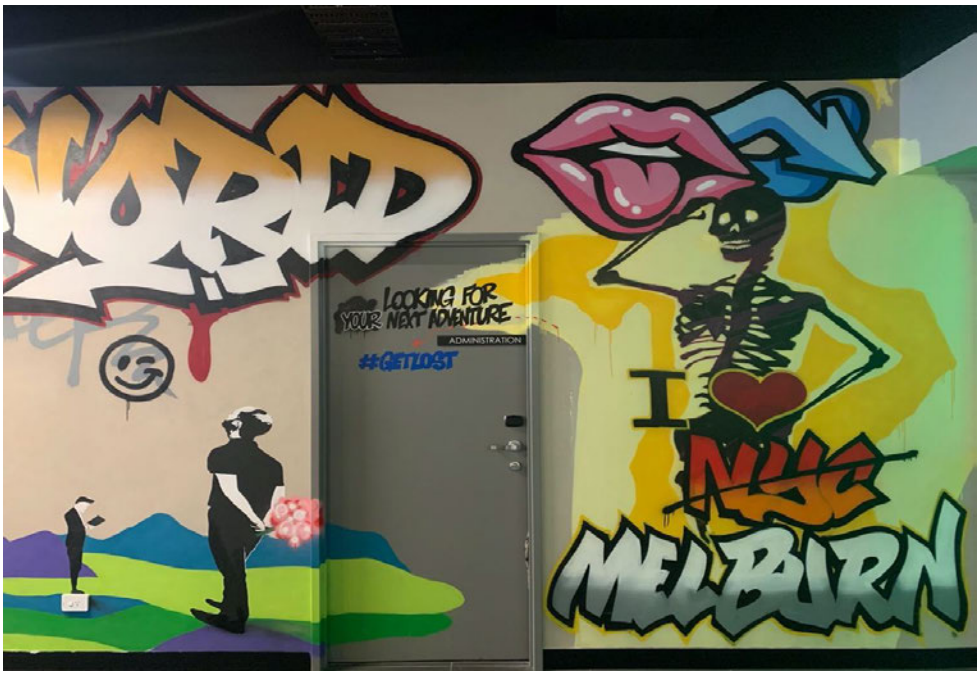

Figure 59. Lobby view of street art installation at the 'Ink Hotel' 2018.

The Water Towers and Western Queensland

Working Within a Community

In 2019, Red Ridge Interior Queensland (RAO) contacted me to create a series of murals on water towers and other major infrastructure in Western Queensland.[133] This was an opportunity to create something special and place some of my practice and research into a unique location. After long discussions with the key stakeholder, I put together a presentation. My vision was unique, and it differed from the art on the many silos on the silo trails that have popped up around Australia.[134] The key stakeholder was on board with my vision and liked my design, however, it was the stakeholder's job to deliver my ideas to the towns as part of the community consultation. The first town that I worked with was Augathella. A town of around 400

[133] Red Ridge Interior Queensland Ltd, *Trailblazing the West: the art trail of the Outback* [website], https://www.redridgeinteriorqueensland.com/trailblazing-the-west, (accessed 5 March 2020).
[134] Such as the Silo Art Trail in Victoria: 'Silo Art Trail', *Home* [website], http://siloarttrail.com/home/#, (accessed 7 February 2020).

people, it is situated roughly 800 kilometres west of Brisbane. Augathella is a town that came into being initially as a resting place for bullock teams coming from further west.

Design Process

The town made a mood board for me to use as inspiration, and the design I came up with answered many of the community needs. My response was modern and sensitive in the way it referred to Indigenous iconography, the local community, and the Australian landscape, and it answered most of the town's requirements. My initial design would have made a truly awesome urban artwork. This design was also true in its reflection of both my artwork and my research, and it had the artistic integrity that is required in such a large and important project. (see Fig. 60 for the design). Once submitted, this design passed through all the bureaucracy required, and even one town meeting. It looked as if it was set to be approved and that I would be painting the artwork that I wanted to. However, the key stakeholder was not able to make the second meeting in Augathella to discuss the minor changes which had

. Figure 60. The original design for the water tower that I drafted and planned to ensure the town's requirements were met, 2020.

After this meeting, we were asked to start the design from scratch, and the key stakeholder gave me the details of a local shop owner with whom I was to collaborate. I created a new design, and he sent me images and messages on where objects were to be placed. It was hard to make any kind of composition with the instructions I was given, and it was a difficult process artistically, resulting in over 20 designs. It was also a hard exercise for my artistic ego as I was forced to sit back and take note of every detail and whim from someone whose qualification was not creative but geographical.

Rather than working with the artist to make art or street art, this town decided that the artist was merely there as a contracted painter, whose input is of no consequence. This led to a design process that has satisfied a recalcitrant town, but to me looks dry, boring, and inauthentic (see Figs. 61 & 62 for the revised design). The result is a design and idea that are the opposite of what was discussed during the initial ideas-meetings with the key stakeholders.

Street Art is a medium that has captured the public's imagination. Even so, street

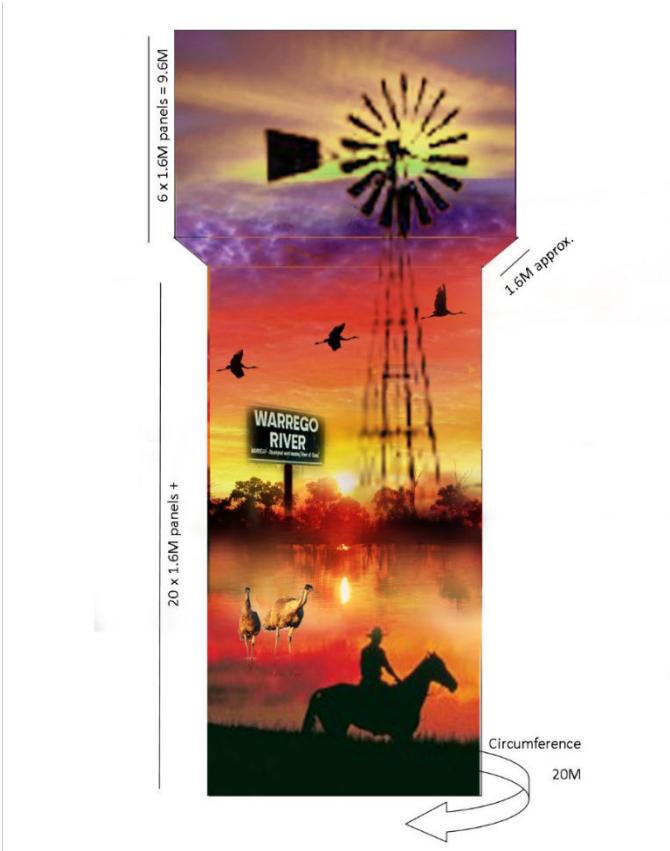

Figure 61. The final, agreed-upon design that was drafted in close collaboration with locals – Side One, 2020.

artists that often work in a commercial environment surrender complete control of the content and all other creative aspects of their art to people who have n o considerations other than budgetary. This has arguably led to a lacklustre and derivative period of urban art, with the big murals and silos looking more like the artwork of outsiders in their constantly repeated style.

It would have to take all my creative ability to transfer this design into a dynamic artwork. I ensured that the community member knew that as an artist I use the design as a reference point only. Even with a banal design I was determined to make an artwork that had substance in its craft and composition. I wanted to make an artwork that the community felt ownership over and that I was proud of.

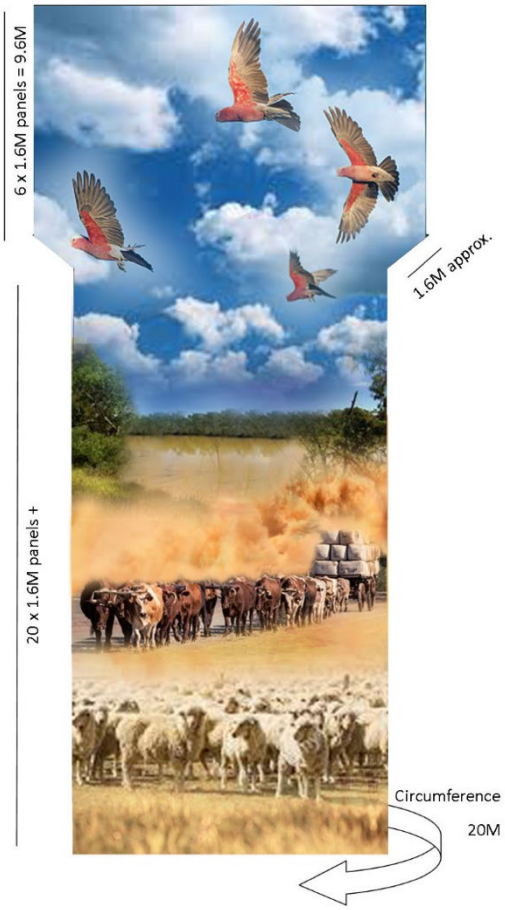

Figure 62. The final agreed upon design that was drafted in close collaboration with locals – Side Two, 2020.

Creating the Artwork

After eight months of design negotiation, I hired a motorhome, filled it with paint, and headed up to Western Queensland with two artist assistants, Maha and Su Pan Sa, arriving in Augathella in the height of summer. The project took three weeks to

complete, in extreme heat. As many days were reaching up to 52°C we had to organise conditions that were demanding and unusual, and we had regular breaks with lots of ice and medical checks. Camping in the desert added a further element of displacement. All of this, combined with the scale, the distance, the flies, dust, and storms, meant that the project was the most challenging I have ever been part of.

The giant water tower was very intimidating at the beginning; the height of the tower being just eight metres short of that of the Westgate Bridge. The final piece was something to be proud of as it was an interesting artwork with an overall resolved composition. The adversity of the project is ultimately of little relevance when compared to the needs of the town and the tourists that will see it.

As the project neared completion, we fell into a routine of sorts, and the size and scale of the project became achievable. I deviated from the design quite a bit in order to ensure that the composition worked and that the colours and images chimed together. It took a lot of strategic planning as the birds' heads were the size of a one-storey house. Using the natural grid that already existed on the structure, we played with the scale to ensure that the images were the correct size and location on the tower. I used an airless paint gun to colour the tower, and then used spray cans and brushes to fill in the detail. In the end, the community member I worked with on the design was very upset that I had changed the design so much. Fortunately, the whole town loved the artwork and the key stakeholders signed off on the project (See Figs. 63, 64 and 65 for the finished mural). Now they run a light show on the water tower every night and the town has ownership over the mural.

Figure 63. The final outcome of the water tower in Augathella (View One), 2020.

Figure 64. The final outcome of the water tower in Augathella (View Two), 2020.

Figure 65. The final outcome of the water tower in Augathella (View Three), 2020.

TAC Bicycle Lane Project

Another project I did as part of my research was a mural to celebrate the launch of the Melbourne bike lane map. Funded by the Traffic Accident Commission (TAC), the mural was painted on the hording which is in front of the troubled (and now shut down) Central Pier. At 100 metres long and four metres high, it was a big project. The mural was to be curated by me, through Blender Creatives. I decided to give each artist 10-metres, and I designed the composition around each artist's sketch, to ensure the overall resolution of aesthetics. I chose eight artists for the project including: Adnate, Kafeine, Lucy Lucy, Presto, George Rose, Geoffory Carran, Su Pan Sa, and myself (see Fig. 66 for the final outcome).

The mural was part of a launch introducing the new bike lanes and a new cycling map, which showed all the bike paths and lanes around the city. So, I decided to give each artist a suburb contained within this reference area. The map's aim is to create awareness around biking in the city.

Figure 66. The final outcome of the 100 metre TAC mural commission in Docklands, 2021.

This mural was unusual as I was able to keep a degree of freedom in my own design. However, the curatorial aspect of the design was closely scrutinised. For my design, I played with the link between street art and fine art, I used a painting from my final exhibition to explore the idea of creating similar pieces in different contexts. It was a painting that was itself already an investigation into the intersection between

street art and fine art. I worked hard on the detail of the artwork and resolved it as an artwork in its own right. I then painted the bike map in my aesthetic style, linking it to the painting and creating a new and interesting way of referencing the client's brief (see Fig. 67).

I feel that this work was an interesting mix of street art and fine art as it falls into Nu-Muralism which is a form of street art.[135] The overall project pushes the idea of art, Nu-Muralism, and the client's needs.

Figure 67. TAC Mural (detail depicting my section of the artwork). The design heavily references my paintings from my final exhibition and has the map of the Melbourne bike lanes as part of it, 2021.

[135] As mentioned in Chapter 1, 'Nu-Muralism' refers to high-end, commissioned, and highly-skilled mural street art works.

Final Artwork: ‘Suburban Isolation’ at Dark Horse Experiment

Figure 68. The flyer invitation to ‘Suburban Isolation’, exhibition by A. Doyle, 2021.

The final exhibition, for this research was staged at the Dark Horse Experiment in 2021. Entitled *Suburban Isolation*, it is the physical culmination of my research (see Fig. 68). The show uses the Blender Studios as point of reference to examine the intersection of fine art and street art. This body of work looks to ask questions about the conceptual legitimacy of street art in a fine art context, by exploring a number of directions in which street art may either exist successfully in a gallery or at least co-exist with fine art to work in a gallery context.

Paintings

Description of Artwork

Through practical research of different mediums, contexts, and imagery, I have built up a large practical component that examines, through paint, the intersection between street art and fine art. My most recent body of work has manifested into a group of artworks that explores street art and its potential to be placed successfully into a fine art format (see Fig. 69 for a gallery view of the show).

After my last exhibition *You Are All the Same!*, I felt that I had been trying to introduce too many ideas and new techniques in my quest to find this intersection, and that I needed to work within my historical style to examine the strategies and develop techniques and skills that may work in the quest to understand the limits of street art when placed into a fine art context.

Figure 69. Gallery view of ‘Suburban Isolation’ by A. Doyle at Dark Horse Experiment, 2021.

The paintings are still overtly fine art, yet they evince an undeniable feel of the street. This has been achieved in a number of ways, including through the mix of mediums and the build-up of paint, through the choice of images, and through the almost crass, yet somehow beautiful, figures which are the focal point for these paintings.

By going back to my original style, I have been able to change some of my applications and techniques to blend aspects of my street art into my fine art paintings, making them a mix of the two. I felt that by using my natural painting style I was able to really identify and concentrate on the important marks which I felt were aesthetically critical to the work research.

The paintings can be divided up into two categories: ‘Suburban Landscapes’ and ‘Suburban Houses’. I will discuss ‘Suburban Landscapes’ first, which consists of psychological imagery that is very much part of my personal narrative and strongly

representative of my experiences. These paintings examine the isolation of the *Australian Dream*. Over the years, I have developed a visual and conceptual language which is deeply rooted in my suburban origins, and this has been the focus of my entire practice. So, to create fine art with a street art link, I felt I had to use the iconography and ideas that I naturally employ to help inform this connection. These paintings look inwards, with areas of abstraction and impossible landscapes, sitting between abstraction, surrealism, and landscape (see Fig. 70 for a for detailed gallery wall view).

Figure 70. Doyle, A., 2021, Gallery view of *Suburban Isolation* (detail), Dark Horse Experiment.

This series needed to be punchy, honest, and an extension of my creative field. I used a number of paint mediums including acrylic, oil, ink, spray, marker, and enamel house paint. Rough in parts, the paintings use texture and marks which appear both deliberate and spontaneous. The colour of my works is important, and much thought goes into developing them, and the compositions. These paintings represent a suburban dystopia that is somehow uniquely Australian. Vast landscapes of suburbs devoid of life, spreading across the canvas like a bacterium. There is also a sarcasm

in the composition and colour, creating an eerie disturbance to the imagery as it moves between beautiful colour fields and Australian landscapes. The result is a refined critique of the Australian dream that sits in the fine art context by the very use of the gallery, yet examines closely the intersection of street art and fine art.

Figure 71. Doyle, A., *Suburban isolation*, 2021, mixed media paint on canvas 170 x130cm, at Dark Horse Experiment. Photo courtesy of Bravin Winn.

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Figure 72. Doyle, A., *The three sisters*, mixed media paint on canvas 135 x 95cm, Dark Horse Experiment. Photo courtesy of Bravin Winn.

Figure 73. Doyle, A., *Peninsular link*, 2021, mixed media paint on canvas, 195 x100cm, Dark Horse Experiment. Photo courtesy of Bravin Winn.

Figure 74. Doyle, A., *You are all the same*, 2021, mixed media paint on canvas, 125cm x 125cm, Dark Horse Experiment. Photo courtesy of Bravin Winn.

The second body of paintings, 'Suburban Houses', are more subtle in their approach towards my personal iconography. These artworks reflect outwards towards shared, collective, cultural symbols and forms. With no specific personal narrative, the artworks rely on the quietness of the images chosen, and how they are painted. They incorporate contemporary pop-culture imagery to reference the early street art movement which also contained a strong influence of Pop Art and generational references.

I also chose imagery from *The Simpsons* to reference, specifically, the houses in which different characters grew up. This makes the reference subtle, and the idea is to give the viewer a sense of the familiar, whilst leaving the interpretation open. Painted in a mixture of spray paint and acrylic, the paintings are simple and refined in their craftmanship.

Figure 75. Doyle, A., 2021, Gallery view of small paintings (suburban houses), 170 x130cm, Dark Horse Experiment. Photo courtesy of Bravin Winn.

Figure 76. Doyle, A., *Urban link*, 2021, mixed media paint on canvas, 50 x 50cm, Dark Horse Experiment. Photo courtesy of Bravin Winn.

The personal narratives and symbology in the first series of paintings counterbalance the open interpretation and less directed experience that the second body of paintings evoke. The paintings are interesting and make clear references to street

art, particularly through their medium, and mark-making. Overall, though, I felt that the paintings became fine art as soon as they were put into a gallery context.

The Pool Room

This mixed media installation was a site-specific, immersive artwork, created at the Dark Horse Experiment. Constructed as a self-enclosed room in the gallery, it is built out of wood and plaster-board, with three walls lined on the inside with floor-to-ceiling mirrors, and a blue roof and floor. The back wall is set up as a Perspex wall, with a built-in gutter to catch the paint - a mechanical pump lifts the paint from the bottom to the top. This is reflected infinitely through the mirrors, thereby creating an immersive experience. The paint is pushed hard against the Perspex wall, creating a vast blue paint waterfall. The smell of the paint is overwhelming as it slowly drips onto the floor; as it dries, it creates beautiful patterns that reveal the intricate pigments within the paint, leaving evidence of its journey through the waterwall.

The sound is heavy and constant, and not at all relaxing, as it is moving too fast and creating a relentless and encompassing audioscape. The reflection of the paint pouring down the wall becomes infinite; it makes one feel as if one is in a strange blue, moving tunnel, or under a swimming pool, creating an atmosphere of disturbance and unease (see Fig. 77). The work remains ambiguous and open ended, and much room is left for interpretation.

Figure 77. Doyle, A., 2021, Install shot of *The pool room*, Dark Horse Experiment. See a video of the installation here: https://www.facebook.com/doylesart/videos/10157601886160518

The pool room extends the idea of the *Empty-nursery blue lane*, as it crosses between street art and fine art. Ephemeral in nature, 'Empty-Nursery Blue Lane' lasted only an hour as a completed 'static' installation work of pure blue. After this, I gave out free paint for artists to paint over it. The work then took on a durationalal aspect as it slowly turned over time from the monotone blue colour back to a mess of graffiti and marks. The ephemerality of this work was both a strength and a weakness, strongly referencing the ephemerality and temporal nature of street art itself. Also, emphemeral, *The pool room* exists for longer, yet only for the duration of the exhibition, and it is as temporary as any installation in any gallery. However, as the paint slowly drips across the floor, ever-changing and growing, it makes more dynamic the static nature of dried paint on a surface; its wet, chemical sheen of pigment and acrylic turning it from a covering, or coat, into a material, visceral, smelly, and messy environment, which can never be fixed or contained. To that effect, I can add that the paint was carried through the outer, pristine gallery on the soles of the shoes of the audience, forming a trail of spidery blue footprints. *Empty-nursery blue lane* was very successful at interrogating the line between fine art and street art; *The pool room* is its clear extension, moved from the context of the street

into the gallery. This change of context, rather than controlling the work, makes it more unstable, dynamic, and uncontrollable. I was interested to consider how such a large and public artwork may be transformed into a gallery work whilst still maintaining the essence of the original. The erasure, claustrophobia, vertigo, or sense of drowning is similar for the audience experiencing both works, but, in each, is crucially and critically unique. *The pool room* is not attempting to be a print or a replica of *Empty nursery blue lane*, it is more a reinvention of the street artwork to fit into a fine art gallery.

A Model Studio

Description of Concept

As Blender Studios has grown and changed over the last 20 years, it has always maintained a connection to street art, whilst simultaneously pushing fine art and art research. From the early days, the Blender Studios has created a community of dedicated, hard-working artists that toil together. This has facilitated a connection to both street and fine art worlds and has allowed me to work alongside some of the most important artists within both genres.

As the studios grew, changed, and moved with the fashions, they have always remained a relevant part of both the contemporary art world and the street art world in Melbourne. This research project has made me focus on the links between the two movements and, in turn, has made me examine if or how an artwork can exist across both areas. This has led me to the conclusion that the best link I can find between the intersection of street art and fine art is the ‘Blender Studios’ itself. Therefore, I am presenting the Blender Studios as an artwork. All aspects of the studios form an artwork which works in both a street and a gallery context. It is an artwork that has been evolving and changing over time.

The artwork is the very concept of the Blender Studios, as well as the physical space it entails. Every studio space, the laneway, the toilet, the gallery, even the artists, all aspects are part of this living artwork. The physical space is malleable, and the location is interchangeable. To encapsulate this idea, I have decided to make a symbol or representation of Blender Studios as an artwork; this I have called ‘Model Studio’.

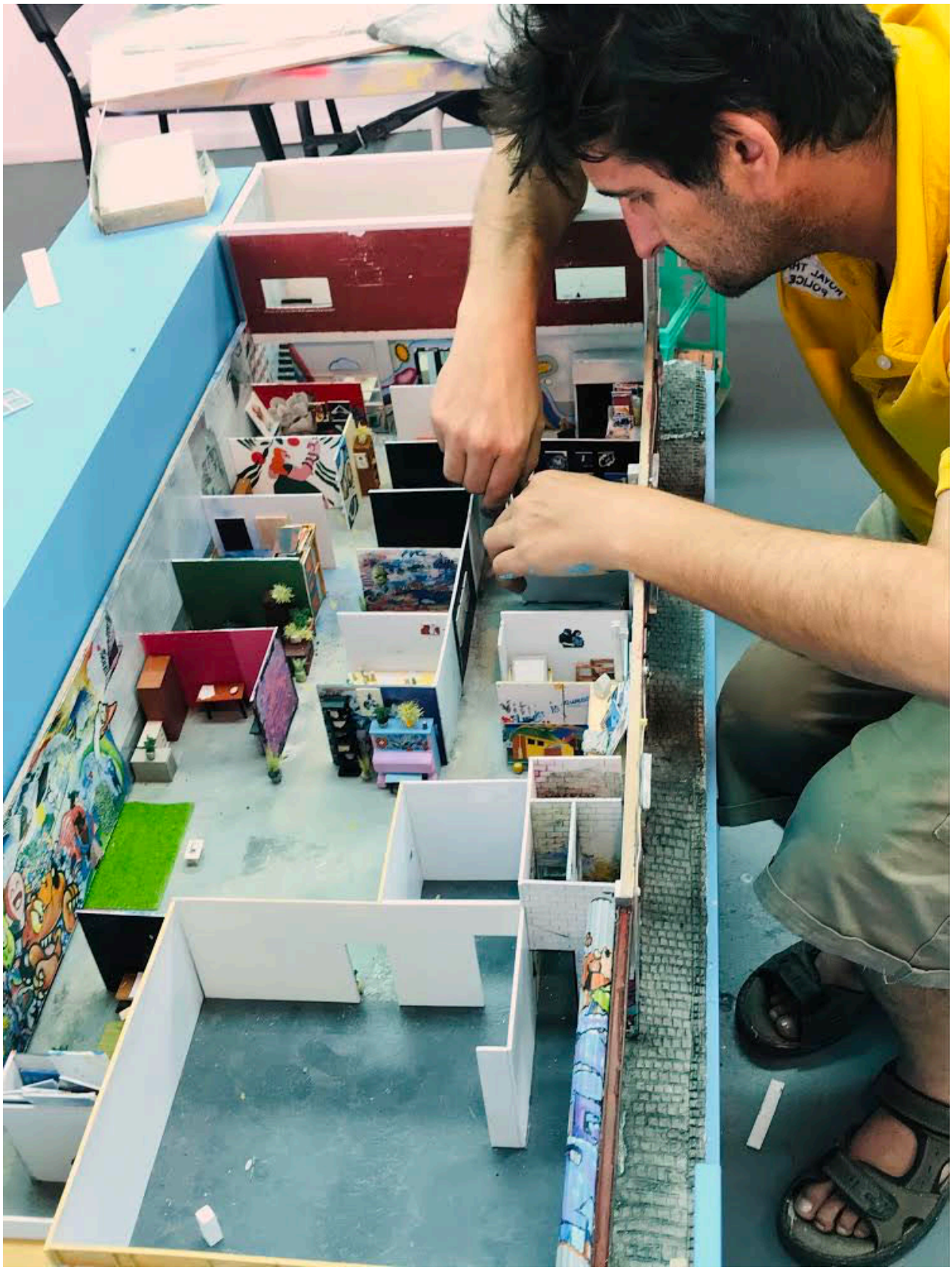

Figure 78. Install shot of A. Doyle working on *Model studio* at Dark Horse Experiment, 2021.

I decided to build this model as a snapshot of the Blender Studios, as the studios are constantly changing and evolving. I chose to capture the studios in April 2020 (see Fig. 78). This was at the beginning of the first COVID-19 lockdown. To assist in this year-long process, I brought in Akemi Ito. He assisted in the building process, and his hard work and knowledge of materials and process, were invaluable in helping to make this artwork possible.

The Blender Studios is housed in an old warehouse that has seen better days, and the model needed to reflect that. It was ideal using the location itself in which to build the work, as it meant I just had to walk around the space to get references. All elements needed to be aged. The build-up of rust on the chains, beams, and fixtures, presented a curious challenge because it wasn't just a colouration, but also required texture. Many techniques had to be invented in order to make the replica of the Blender Studios.

The basis for all the surfaces is compressed polystyrene plastic sheet, around 0.25 mm thick. This is commonly used in diorama builds as it is a soft, easy to work material with a shore hardness of 35. Its softness and responsiveness to heat precludes the use of high-speed tools. The challenge that came with this model was that it was not working to any conventional scale. To assign a scale, one wall was perfected, and the scale was invented from that. It was important to me that this piece was an artwork in its own right and not a perfect scale-model, so the scale had to be played with. Scaling has been a complicated issue, with regular recalibration required. Techniques had to be refined in order to build all aspects of the model. The order of process throughout was largely dictated by the process itself and had to be worked out as it was built.

To apply a replica of the murals to the walls 'Water Slide decals' were applied, and then carefully painted over creating a series of miniature paintings (see Fig. 79). The most significant reason for using water slide decals is that you can force the decal to soften and conform to the shape of the surface it's being applied too.

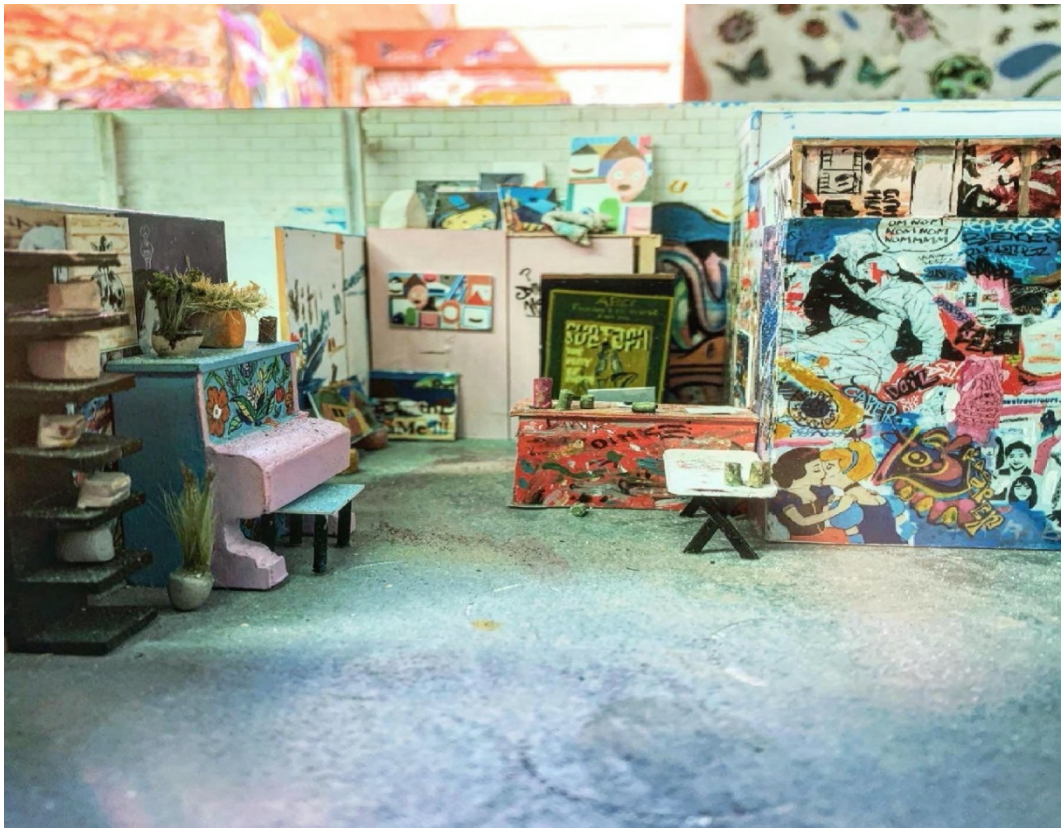

Figure 79. Doyle, A., *Model studio* 2021, (detail), Dark Horse Experiment.

All the techniques used in the building of this diorama were in the service of storytelling, which is an essential element of the artwork. Blender Studios has been the longest running and most consuming project that I have been part of. Spanning 20 years, the Blender Studios has been running for half of my life. In reflection, this artwork is personal and symbolic, and I cannot consider the physicality of the studios without contemplating my personal journey with Blender Studios.

It is a portrait or a diorama of a space that I have spent much of my life physically within. To emphasise this aspect of the artwork, I decided to build the model into a plinth and then paint the top parts of the model and the entire plinth ‘Empty-Nursery Blue’ (see Fig. 80). In the exhibition, I continued the Empty Nursery Blue across the floor and up the wall. This helped link the work and personalise it with my ‘tag’.

Figure 80. Doyle, A., 2021, Gallery shot of *Model studio* by Dark Horse Experiment, 2021.

The idea of Blender Studios as an artwork places it in a realm of situational aesthetics and warmly references Banksy's *The walled off hotel*.[136] This artwork, which is a living, working hotel faces the graffitied wall which divides Bethlehem, between Palestinian territory and Israeli territory (see Fig. 81). Banksy's artwork is an excellent example of the link between fine art, street art, and relational aesthetics. A hotel, designed as an artwork, that functions in the everyday, just as *Model studio* claims that Blender Studios is itself, a living breathing artwork, existing in both the fine art and street art genres. Being both a working studio and an artwork, the Blender Studios is pushed into the realm of situational aesthetics.

[136] Higgins-Desbiolles, F., 2018, 'The walled off: The paradoxes and promises of Banksy's hotel in Palestine', in Young, T., Stolk, P., McGinnis, G., (eds.), *CAUTHE 2018: Get smart: Paradoxes and possibilities in tourism, hospitality and events education and research,* Newcastle, NSW: The University of Newcastle, pp. 188-199.

Figure 81. Banksy, *The walled off hotel*, 2019, an artwork by artist Banksy in Bethlehem, Palestine. Photo courtesy of Alamy.

The You Are All The Same Paste-Up Project

The following paste-up project represents another creative methodology that seeks to integrate fine art and its concepts with street art and printmaking. Paste-ups involve the process of an artist creating a 2D artwork that is glued to a surface. Paste-ups are often initiated in an artist's studio, and can be made by gluing either a collage, drawing, photocopy, print, or painting to a surface. The main glue used by street artists is a mixture of wallpaper glue and wheat paste. It's cheap and waterproof, and it holds the image for years. This medium is often considered to be a safe way to make street art. This is because it is prepared in the studio and quickly put up in the street, therefore limiting the time where one may risk getting caught. The criminal repercussions for doing a paste-up are minimal, as it is not considered permanent and can be removed with soap and a scrubbing brush. The punishment is most likely a littering fine. This following is a quote of mine from an article I wrote for the CBD News that articulates my thoughts on paste-ups:

> A problem I have with paste ups is that it destroys the surface of a good wall and makes it next to useless to create on for the future muralists. There is certainly a place for paste ups around town but not next to murals or on famous mural walls. Surely street artists can find their own new walls… Pastes ups work best when they are subtle and hidden and require discovery, or when they are bold and obnoxious. Don't get me wrong I love paste ups and I love putting up paste ups. I see it as an extension of my art practice and it's something I have done for many years. Yet I would never put a paste up over someone else's or next to someone else's work.[137]

Most of the time, paste ups are boring, and often the artists who create them do so with very little connection to printmaking history, or the street art past, with its grass-root intentions and political undertones. I feel most artists that create paste-ups do so because they're scared of the criminal consequences of a more permanent medium.

It was around 2006-2008 that artists such as Baby Guerilla, and Miso came onto the scene with their paste-ups. They were amongst some of the first female street artists in Melbourne, and both successfully managed to push the idea of paste-ups to a new conceptual level. Baby Guerilla's commercial paste-ups are some of the largest paste artworks in Australia. She has been instrumental in the development of fine art as street art, and for females in street art.

For the past four years, I have put up about 500 individual paste-ups around Melbourne. Each year, I create the artwork on A1 paper, and it is always the same; White on black, in basic text, it states: 'YOU ARE ALL THE SAME' (see Figs. 82 and 83). This artwork is repetitive and much like graffiti in its delivery, with one message repeated over and over, creating a form of Brandilism.[138] Although the statement is subjectively true, it is also a truth that not everyone wants to see. Unlike graffiti, which is self-referential, this artwork uses the philosophy of graffiti coupled with the medium of paste-up to create a public statement. By putting these paste-ups repetitively in a public forum, the artwork takes on the mantle of propaganda. It is in this space that the artwork has caused debate and has been successful in bringing fine art into a street art context.

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[137] Doyle, A., 'Visual junk ruining Melbourne's laneway culture', *CBD News*, 24 June 2021, https://cbdnews.com.au/visual-junk-ruining-melbournes-laneway-culture/, [accessed 1 July 2021].
[138] See Glossary for the definition of Brandalism.

Figure 82. ‘You are all the same’, paste-ups placed around the city (1), 2020.

Figure 83. ‘You are all the same’, Paste-ups placed around the city (2), 2020.

Practical Conclusion

The work practical work that I have created and examined during this research project has revealed a variety of different contexts where street art can exist. Throughout my research, I have created art in public, in galleries, commercially, with public consultation, through art festivals, and illegally. All of them have attempted to examine the space where fine art and street art exist.

The main practical exhibition created for this research was very much a fine art show. The paintings were fine art in their presentation. Conceptually, there is a clear reference to popular culture, and much of the technical aspects borrow from street art, and yet, the paintings are clearly fine art. *The pool room* exemplifies this notion; this immersive installation was a reinvention of *Empty-nursery blue lane* (2012), which pushed the intersection between fine art and street art. The installation was a successful reinterpretation and a resolved and accomplished artwork in its own right.

It was raw and painterly and captivating, and although less ephemeral than *Empty-Nursery Blue*, it was a successful investigation into how important location is to context.

The most successful of the four artworks in blurring the boundaries between street art and fine art is *The model studio*. Conceptually, this artwork is academic, and craft-driven. It is a carefully constructed symbol of Blender Studios. The concept of Blender Studios as an artwork is the link: by claiming that the whole space is a living, evolving artwork it places the studios into a conceptual situation where both street art and fine art are treated equally. The artwork on the walls and in the studios are all various versions of the actual art that is created at the studios. Conceptually, claiming that the Blender Studios is itself an artwork means that all the history, and artists, and its association with street art, are also part of the art.

My practical research has included many artworks in many different formats. I created large scale projects, worked with clients, curated, and created illegally in the dark of night. I had gallery shows, did academic research, and undertook a variety of investigations into the boundaries of street art and fine art. All these investigations have interrogated my hypothesis, examining the meeting of street art and fine art in a variety of ways and contexts, mixed in with my experience at the Blender Studios. This has given me an articulate and intricate understanding of the many genres, movements, and situations within which street art exists.

During this research, I have come to the firm conclusion that street art belongs on the street. It struggles to work in contexts other than the public sphere. When the space where street art exists is controlled, or changed, it becomes an inferior version of street art. Street art has changed the artworld and made a huge contribution to Australian culture, yet it belongs in the unsanctioned space. In context, it is amazing, colourful, and democratic. It is when street art is taken off the street and placed either directly or indirectly into a fine art gallery, or gallery of commercial context, that the street art doesn't hold up.

The intersection between fine art and street art is an aqueous place that can never be completely defined. There will be, and has always been, art that crosses the boundaries of fine art and street art. This intersection is not easily achieved, as one will normally give away to the other and the balance is hard to realise. There is no doubt that street art works better when it is in public and that's where street art should be seen and created.

CONCLUSION

Street art and Fine art

Urban artists have for many years tried to make the move from the street to the gallery, but with little success. There are a few Australian artists who I believe have effectively made the transition from the street to the gallery. Peter Daverington (aka Punch) is one such artist, with his classical references to Renaissance art, and his bold patterns that reference old school graffiti styles.[139] Daverington is an artist who has managed to mix styles, mediums, and techniques, and has works both on the street and in high-end galleries. Anthony Lister is another artist who has always blended his street work and studio work.[140] Often, the imagery and content are the same, yet Lister has managed to merge street and gallery with very little perceivable difference between the two. He has shown in pre-eminent street art festivals, and at the same time exhibited in academic spaces and museums. Reko Rennie is a well-known indigenous Australian street artist who creates large scale murals that reflect his culture and heritage.[141] He shows in major art biennales around the world, and in galleries and museums, and is well known for his street work. And finally, Craig Cole's paintings that capture and examine the chaos and beauty of graffiti through his fine art oil paintings.[142] He chooses his subject matter (often an abandoned building or trainline) based on the graffiti that is on them, then he paints the graffiti scene in oil on canvas and exhibits it in a gallery.

Whilst these artists have their origins in graffiti, all of them have had formal art training. This makes them quite different from most urban artists. To make the leap from street art to fine art it certainly helps to have an academic Fine Art Degree. Most urban artists have little regard for art history, art school, contemporary art, or Academia. Therefore, urban and street art is a form of outsider art.[143]

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[139] Murray, P., 'Peter Daverington: The bewildering spectacle', *Art Collector*, No. 70, np., 2014, https://artcollector.net.au/peter-daverington-the-bewildering-spectacle/, [accessed 5 July 2020].
[140] IRIS, *Anthony Lister profile* [website], https://www.irismagazine.com/issue-one/anthony-lister, [accessed 5 July 2020].
[141] Australian Council of the Arts, *Artist stories: Reko Rennie* [website], https://australiacouncil.gov.au/news/stories/reko-rennie/, [accessed 6 July 2020].
[142] Invurt, *Craig Cole 'self-imposed rules'* [website], https://www.invurt.com/2021/01/13/exhibition-self-imposed-rules-craig-cole-dark-horse-experiment-22-01-21/, [accessed 24 May 2021].
[143] Davies, D., 'On the very idea of "Outsider Art"', The British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2009, pp. 25–41, https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayn056, [accessed 7 September 2020].

There are some examples of street art making the jump into a fine art context, although it is rare and nearly always done by a formally trained artist. If the artist is considering the art history, then this makes the art different than that produced by the uneducated street artist. As an outsider art movement, street art operates outside of fine art and this allows it a freedom that fine art doesn't have. It also means that street artists struggle to make street art and place it into a fine art context. This is because they are often unaware of the context of the art that they are making, and where it may sit within the history of art and the gallery.
After all my experiments in and investigations into the intersection of street art and fine art, I believe that street art has an unnatural relationship with the gallery. It is very rare when a street artwork is resolved in the gallery. Street art works best in context, on the street. Street art has ability to capture the imagination of the public and to critique and poke at society. This has made it a very powerful medium when it's in place on the street.

As street art has evolved it has grown from a grass roots movement into in interconnected world-wide art movement which has changed design aesthetics across the globe. Street art has appealed to the marketing and advertising giants for its ability to communicate to the masses. As capitalism seeps into the soul of the urban art movement, it is hard to predict where it could go next. Street art has had many faces and genres and has been a major part of Melbourne's cultural landscape. Street art has created its own economy and as an art movement, has been largely based online. Street art has been an important, culture-altering movement.

Street art no longer finds itself the hidden, underground, grassroots artform that it once was - it will never be this again. I feel that it is likely to keep progressing in its own right as an artform, not really pushing boundaries or creating new genres. Street art's mass popularity has in many ways been its demise, as it becomes part of contemporary popular culture and ceases to be a counter-culture movement.

Blender Studios

Blender Studios has been an important part of Melbourne's cultural landscape for 20 years. It has settled in its permanent home after its brief two-year residency at

Docklands. In retrospect it was hard for it to be based in a shopping centre; Docklands was a blight on the Blender Studios' reputation.

However, if we had not moved to Docklands, we wouldn't have the awesome property that we have today. Docklands was not just an artistic social experiment it was a necessary evil. As we lost the 110 Franklin Street property, we were only given two-months in which to find a new space. It was fortunate timing that Docklands was in the process of opening up an arts district, and that they wanted Blender Studios, so I was able to negotiate a good deal for the two-year residency. The time spent at Docklands allowed me to plan and save, so that the Blender Studios could go back to a city warehouse. After the relationship with Centre Management at The District began to change, and personnel began to turnover, I began to seriously look for a warehouse in the city. It was only by luck that we found a space, at the end of 2018. It had holes in the roof and numerous leaks, but it was in the city and had its own laneway (Fig. 84 shows work being undertaken on the roof). With the tours, projects and the workshops subsidising the cost of the space, it was achievable.

Figure 84. Fixing the roof at the new warehouse property
at 35 Dudley Street, Melbourne, 2018.

Blender Studios has now been in its new location, at 35 Dudley Street, for two years. I feel I can now, with hindsight, truly reflect on Blender's time at Docklands. That period was valuable and important, although it did feel odd to use Blender Studios and its reputation to try to make a shopping centre 'cool', and this did reflect negatively on Blender Studios' reputation. People felt that Blender belonged in the city, and it was a hard adjustment for the artists and supporters alike. Blender Studios went from the heart of the city to an almost abandoned shopping centre.

Personally, and professionally, I really took Blender Studios' time at Docklands seriously. I worked closely with the management to help activate the space and gentrify the walls with our art. We did all we could to help the artists, small

businesses, and management, work in a cohesive environment. In the end our time at Docklands had little long-lasting effect on the culture of ‘The District’.

I do not regret the Studios’ time at Docklands, it was a necessary and interesting experiment, although I am very glad that it has moved on now, and no longer has an association with any other entity. I believe an independent art space like Blender Studios needs complete autonomy in order to function at its highest, optimal level.

Blender Studios and the Docklands Art Space (Renew Australia) couldn’t fix the problems that ‘The District’ and Docklands have. After my time in the Docklands, I don’t think there is much that would be able to fix the area. It needs some substantial public infrastructure, such as a major museum. In the end, the only thing that will make Docklands work will be time and population.

The Studios’ reputation has now mostly recovered, as Blender Studios has now found a permanent home next to Flagstaff Gardens. It’s a warehouse space with its own laneway. It holds the gallery and studios and is almost a replica of the original Franklin Street site, only bigger. Blender Studios has moved on from Docklands and has a new generation of artists who work hard. The Studios have evolved and changed and have once again become an independent large-scale city workspace. Docklands proved that Blender Studios is bigger than its location.

The artists at Blender Studios work within the many different genres of art, and in many different mediums. As street art falls into popular culture and mediocrity, it is the aim of the Blender Studios to remain current and contemporary. This will happen through the artists, the projects, exhibitions, parties, tours, and hard work. The studios are bigger than any one person, it will continue to be a living breathing contemporary artwork until its conclusion. Blender Studios has become an institution that will hopefully last many more years and will help emerging and mid-career artists well into the future.

Figure 85. Cleaning out the new Blender Studios warehouse space at 35 Dudley Street, Melbourne, 2018.

For the first time ever, Blender Studios has a long term lease. We are currently two years into a five-year lease. At the end of this lease, the Blender will have been running for nearly 25 years. By then, I will have spent well over half my life facilitating the running of Blender. So, there are a few possibilities for the future of Blender after this period:

- The first possibility is for a manager to be put on, this would allow the Blender to continue and grow into a different and refreshed space. I would most likely oversee the management and have regular consultations with the manager to help them in the running and direction of the space. I would keep a studio at the space and work between Blender Studios and Thailand.

- Shut down the studio space and gallery and just run the tours, projects, and workshops. This would entail getting a small space in the city to finish the tours, run workshops, and have an office. This option would only require a minimal change to the management structure of the tours to set up, as we currently have a tour manager. However, this would see the end of Blender Studios as an art space, gallery, and studios.
- I could consider selling the Blender Studios as a business. With the street art tours, and Blender Creatives being a profitable enterprise, it would easily sell, but I'm not sure it would be wise to leave the Blender brand, the artists, and the projects, in the hands of someone else. It takes a very specific skill set to be able to negotiate the many different personalities and creative projects that the Blender Studios represent.
- The final possibility would be to shut the door and walk away. This would include closing the tours, workshops, gallery, studios, and projects. This would be the decision that would have the most effect on artists, as Blender Studios employs around 14 artists on a weekly basis, in various roles, including tour guides, workshop teachers, and those who work on major projects and artworks. And, currently, art sold from the studios allows around 80% of the artists that work out of Blender to make a living from their work in some capacity.

All of these possibilities will rupture the normality of the Blender Studios, but change is a necessary constant that even Blender Studios cannot avoid. At some point, all of these possibilities could eventuate, or none of them. If I want a specific management system to eventuate, I will need to work towards it or, at some point, something will happen to make it end, and then the possibilities will naturally unfold. The most likely scenario is the first one, where a manager is put on and I assist with the curatorial and business direction.

Regardless of what happens to Blender Studios, it is likely that it will be the last independent large-scale, art studio in Melbourne City. When the closure of Blender Studios eventually happens, it will be the end of an era that stretches back to before the beginning of the street art movement, to a time when there were plenty of large-

scale inner-city studios and a centralised art-world focused within the city. The city and the Melbourne art world has changed, street art has run alongside the gentrification of inner-city Melbourne. Blender Studios, once gone, will leave a hole in the city that was once filled with art and artists. As the final independent city studios close, the diaspora of the artists into suburbia and a decentralisation of the Melbourne art world will be complete.

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APPENDIX

Images of Other Artworks I Have Created During This Research:

Figure 86. Nunawading Community Hub, mural by A. Doyle and Blender crew, 2021

Figure 87. Doyle, A., and Blender Crew, 2021, Mural at Nunawading Community Hub, (detail).

Figure 88. *Play me I'm yours* project rolled out by Art Centre Melbourne, in collaboration with Blender Studios, involving 22 pianos and 20 community groups. Pianos were placed in public, once painted, created, curated, and creatively managed by Blender Studios, 2011

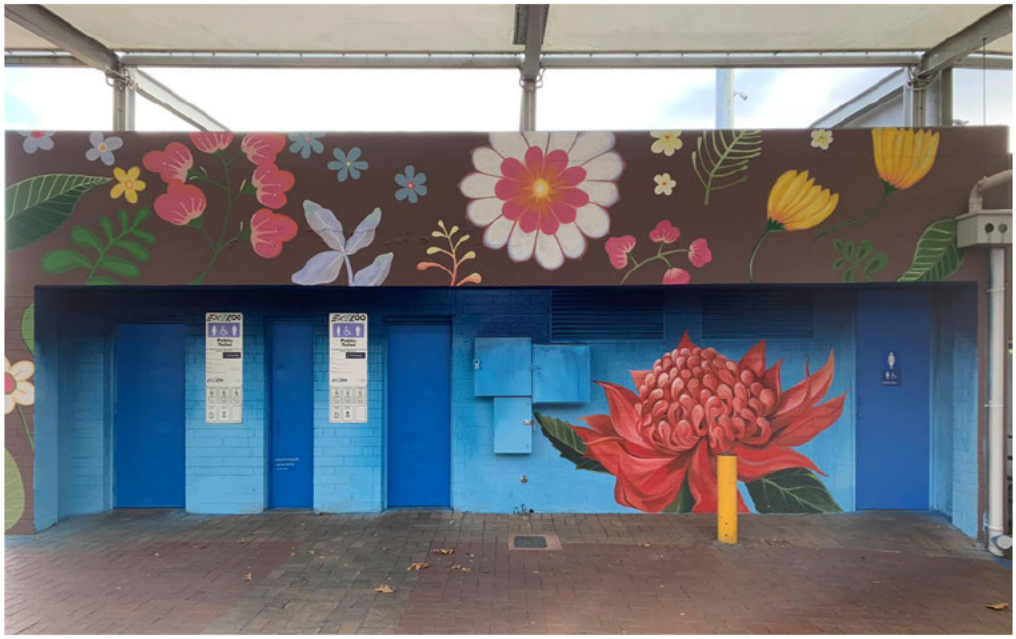

Figure 89. Doyle, A., and Blender crew, 2021, Mural at Britannia Mall, Mitcham, detail (1)

Figure 90. Doyle, A., and Blender crew, 2021, Mural at Britannia Mall, Mitcham, detail (2).

Figure 91. Doyle, A., and Blender crew, 2021, Mural at Britannia Mall, Mitcham, detail (3)

Figure 92. Blender Creatives was asked to curate eight traffic boxes in West Footscray, 2019, this my contribution.

Figure 93. Doyle, A., and the Blender Creatives crew, 2021, AFL Mural project for the District Docklands, View 1.

Figure 94. Doyle, A., and the Blender Creatives crew, 2021, AFL Mural project for the District Docklands, View 2.

An Exploration of Previous Artworks Using Mirrors

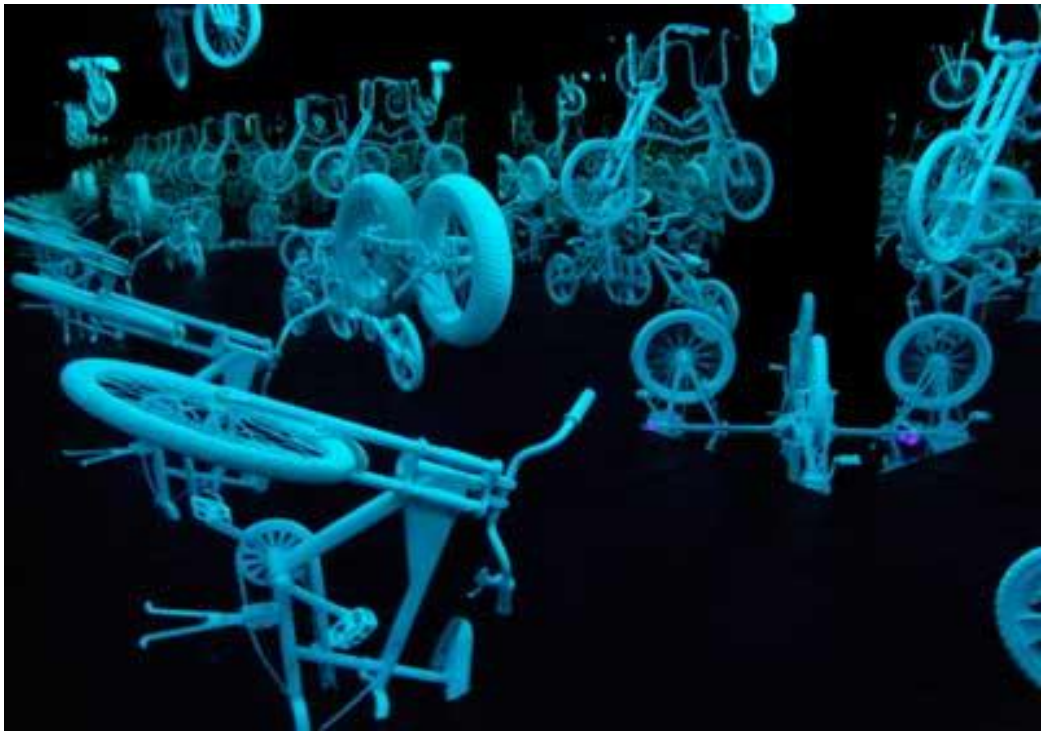

Figure 95. Doyle, A., *The Mirror Room*, 2012, immersive installation (view 1), Mirror, bicycles, UV-light, UV-proof paint, enamel paint, 5mtrs^3, Dark Horse Experiment.

Figure 96. *Doyle, A., The Mirror Room, 2012, immersive installation (view 1), Mirror, bicycles, UV-light, UV-proof paint, enamel paint, 5mtrs3, Dark Horse Experiment.*

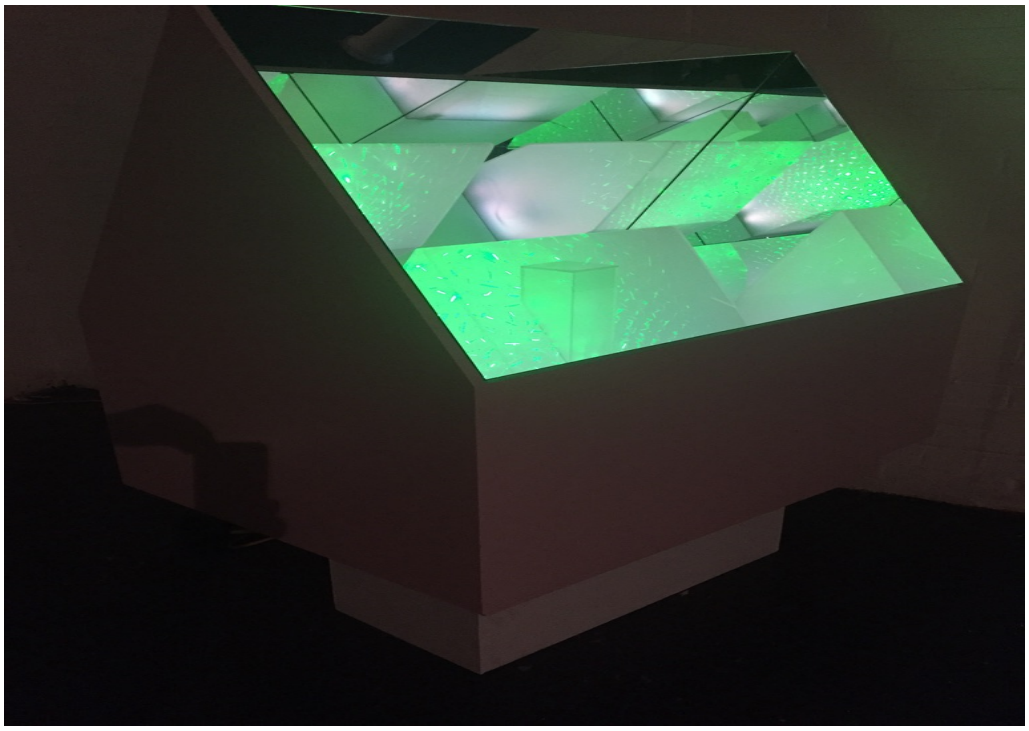

Figure 97. Doyle, A., 2017, '*Reflective house in pale pink*, Sculpture (View 1), Perspex, mirrors, lights, wood, epoxy resin, powder coat paint, Dark Horse Experiment.

Figure 98. *Doyle, A., 2017, 'Reflective house in pale pink, Sculpture (View 1*), Perspex, mirrors, lights, wood, epoxy resin, powder coat paint, Dark Horse Experiment.

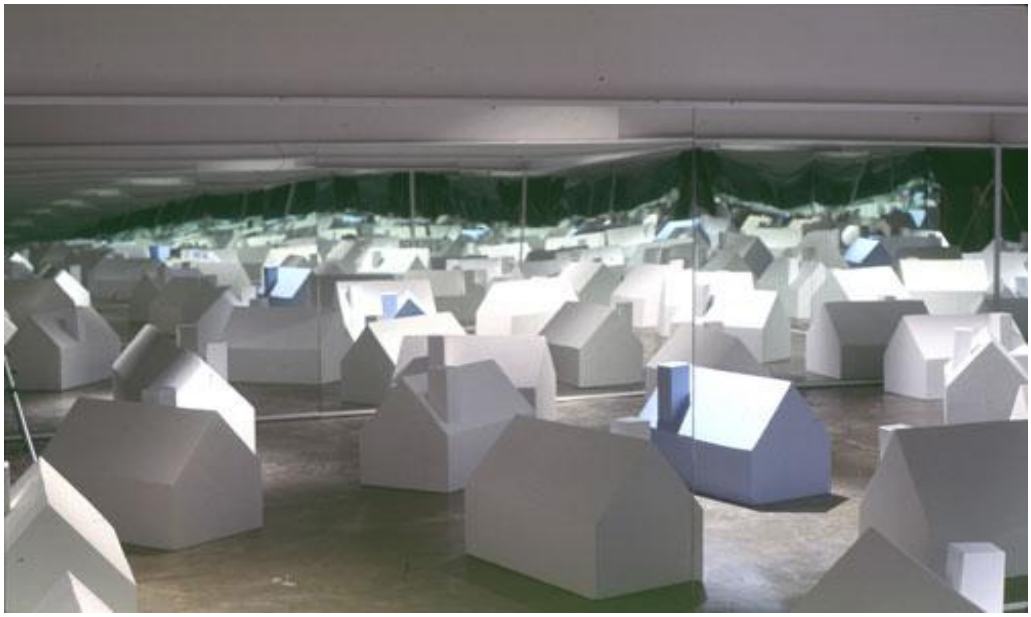

Figure 99. Doyle, A., *Suburban myth*, 2003, Immersive Installation (View 1), Mirror, high density polystyrene, 2 pack epoxy resin, Empty-Nursery Blue paint, enamel paint, 5mtrs x 7mtrs. Sq. West Space Gallery.

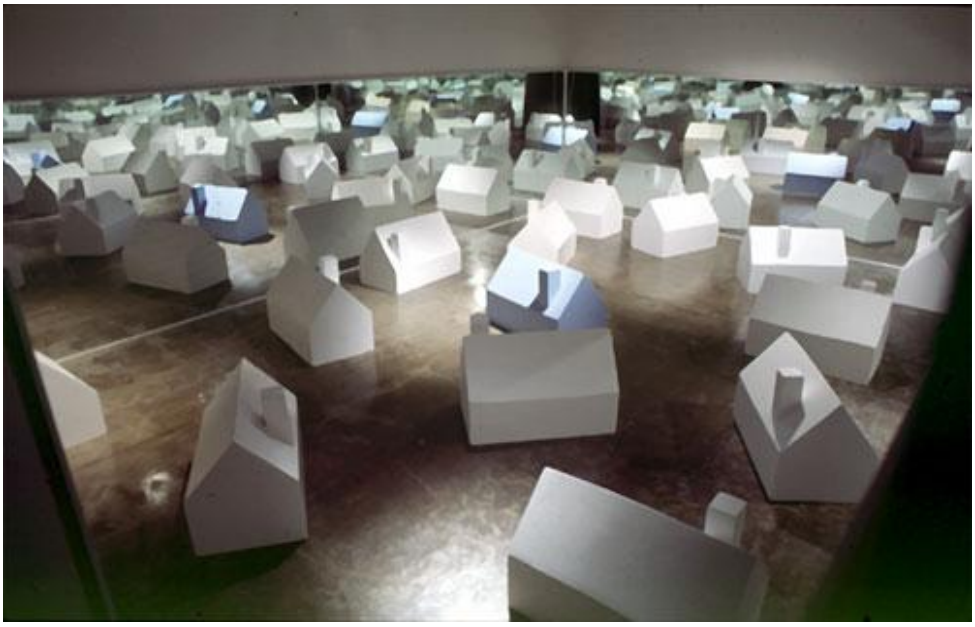

Figure 100. Doyle, A., *Suburban myth*, 2003, Immersive Installation (View 1), Mirror, high density polystyrene, 2 pack epoxy resin, Empty-Nursery Blue paint, enamel paint, 5mtrs x 7mtrs. Sq. West Space Gallery.

Images of Other Artworks Created Before This Project Which I Feel Hold Relevance:

Figure 101. Doyle, A., 2011, Install shot of paintings in *New Australian Landscapes*, Dark Horse Experiment, 2011.

Figure 102. Doyle, A., *The coin house*, 2015, one dollar coins in marble, Dark Horse Experiment.

The Blender Studios

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Hosier Lane Rejuvenation Project

This proposal has been put together in an attempt to revive Hosier Lane, Melbourne's world-famous street art laneway. In the past couple of years, the quality of artworks and safety of this laneway has gone through significant changes. The aim of this proposal is to create a plan to restore the laneway to its former glory.

BACKGROUND

Hosier lane first began life as a service lane for the clothes factories that called Flinders La home. Horse and carts would march down the cobbled stones making quite a noise. For many years not much happened, the forum was built and in 1999 Andy Mac launched Citylights. Citylights was a bi-monthly exhibition on light boxes affixed to the Forum theatre. Two years later the first paint when up in Rutledge lane and the rest is history. Melbourne History.

OVERVIEW

This proposal is comprised of three key stages to facilitate the renewal of Hosier Lane:

1. Reclassification
2. Rejuvenation and Maintenance
3. Facilitation (role).

Throughout these stages Adrian Doyle will be the lead curator and facilitator of the project.

STAGE ONE: RECLASSIFICATION

The first step for our renewal program will be to clearly separate Rutledge Lane from Hosier Lane and reclassify these laneways. Through the use of signage, education and promotion we wish to clearly define Hosier Lane as a curated space that is not a legal laneway. This means it will become illegal for anyone to paint in Hosier Lane without permission. This will be a controversial move; however, we wish to designate Rutledge Lane as a legal painting zone.

The two zones will need to be clearly defined with signage and in the early days of implementation we may need someone on the ground and the support of local police and business owners to politely make the public aware of these distinctions.

By distinguishing the two lanes as separate zones we are still allowing a ‘free paint spot’ for graffiti artists and young street artists to practice their skills in Rutledge Lane, while maintaining Hosier Lane as a higher quality, curated outdoor gallery for urban art.

We will clearly provide contact details for any artists wishing to obtain a spot in Hosier Lane to paint, and these applications would go directly to Adrian Doyle who would be in charge of curating the artworks in Hosier Lane. Through this process the laneway would become essentially a ‘Wall of Fame’ to showcase the best of Melbourne street art and also offer a place for big name international street artists to paint when visiting Melbourne.

By establishing this curated level of quality within the street art in Hosier Lane the local community of painters will begin to gain respect for the pieces and over time as the rejuvenation project evolves this will help deter any unsolicited painting and tagging (don’t cap what you can’t burn). This evolution of respect will not happen immediately and there is a high chance of ‘backlash’ over the changes to this infamous laneway however this risk has been addressed in both stage two and three (RRT & Facilitation).

It is suggested that no artists be charged for damage if found painting in Hosier Lane without permission for a period of two months as the changes are brought in, out of

respect for the urban art culture. We suggest ground support staff (see stage three) and the local police simple move on anyone found painting without permission in Hosier Lane and issue a warning to the offender. Our response team (see stage two) is in place to recover the artworks from these offences.

STAGE TWO: REJUVENTATION & MAINTENANCE

Stage two comprises two separate elements:

- Rejuvenation
- Maintenance (Rapid Response Team)

REJUVENATION

After the reclassification stage has been implemented stage two will commence shortly after. Stage two involves the rejuvenation of existing walls in Hosier Lane to bring the standard of artwork within the laneway to a high quality, world-class level.

This will be achieved over an 8-week period through organized ‘paint jams’ each weekend. Each weekend six different selected artists will be invited to create an artwork within Hosier Lane and given a dedicated spot for their piece. Over the 8-week period this will equate to 48 new artworks in Hosier Lane which will completely rejuvenate the walls and begin the new chapter of the laneway as a curated outdoor urban art gallery.

The artists selected for this project will be chosen by Adrian Doyle. Doyle will endeavor to create a lineup that celebrates diversity within the art scene, choosing artists from different backgrounds, cultures and styles. Artists will be chosen for the quality, aesthetics and integrity of their works and will be welcomed to paint whatever their creative heart’s desire. The composition of the works within the laneway will also be highly considered.

These ‘paint jams’ may be promoted and advertised as a public event to help promote the laneway rejuvenation project and offer a unique event for visitors and street art fans of Melbourne to witness. By choosing high-profile street artists and

gaining suitable media coverage this will also help create awareness for the project and promote the positive reputation of the laneway in general.

During this period of rejuvenation, the Rapid Response Team (see below) will be engaged to respond to any damage to the works.

MAINTANENCE - RAPID RESPONSE TEAM (RRT)

The RRT will be engaged during stage two. This team of artists will be on call to restore any damage or tagging to artworks in Hosier Lane within 24 hours. By having a quick and ongoing response to these incidents, this will help deter taggers from vandalising the artworks.

The RRT will be made up of various street artists and overseen by Adrian Doyle. Where possible the artists will restore the original works, however if too much damage has occurred then the artist may paint a new piece over top.

STAGE THREE: FACILITATION (ROLE)

This key element of the project will see the creation of a new role for a person to become the ongoing facilitator of the laneway program. The role would be an ongoing position operating three days a week and would be a multi-disciplinary role to ensure the ongoing maintenance of the laneway by liaising and working with a variety of community groups, locals, businesses, council departments, artists and other interested parties.

It would be advisable for the person in this role to come from a street art or graffiti background so as to have a solid understanding of the urban art culture as well as contacts and respect within the community. The role will also require experience in youth work or community services, a WWC and a proven ability for strong written and verbal communication skills and a high level of initiative and confidence.

This facilitator would be in charge of liaising with various groups including tourism agencies (a spokesperson for Hosier lane), Community Safety, the City of

Melbourne, The Blender Studios and homeless outreach initiatives. The facilitator's role will be to constantly think of ways to improve and maintain Hosier Lane whilst also being on the ground to support this development.

The facilitator will form good relations with the local community and ensure that all invested parties feel included and considered. They will assist Adrian Doyle in his role of curating the laneway and offer support, advice and information to visitors and artists alike on site.

The role will also aim to engage with youth in the area and run occasional workshops within Rutledge Lane (designated free paint zone). They will also be in charge of promoting the laneway on social media channels. A weekly or monthly report on the laneway may be submitted to the City of Melbourne that includes a list any incidents and suggested ways of avoiding future problems of similar nature.

Finally, the facilitator will also be artistically adept so they can help fix any tagging that may occur and take the place of the RRT.

The Blender Studios

WWW.THEBLENDERSTUDIOS.COM

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blendercreatives@gmail.com
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Memorandum of Understanding – Studio Lease

- Studio to be sublet to ……
- Rent is due on the 1st of each month
- The rental cost is $ per month payable on the 1st of every month
- Bank details

    - Bank Details for transfer:
    - Michael Koro Gallery
    - BSB
    - Account Number

Studio Conduct

- It is expected that studio artists utilise their space regularly and engage in a decent amount of creative work to help maintain a positive and motivational vibe within the studios
- Please be aware of your neighbours if using spray paint or other smelly mediums. There is an outdoor area to be used if fumes are excessive.
- The Studios will be a shared space where events and tours are also held, please understand this and be flexible with the multi-purpose use of the building.
- Rent **will increase** 3% per year. (As per our lease agreement with the landlord)

- Every artist will have a key to the studios and access is available at all times however please be mindful of excess noise.
- You must give **at least 30 days written notice** if moving out of your studio.
- Ensure the lights are turned off and all doors are locked if you are the last to leave.
- If moving out you must return your studio to the clean, blank state you found it in.
- Ensure that no damage is done to any areas, flooring, staircases etc.
- Each artist is responsible for getting their own studio bin and emptying this when required. We provide council bins outside the roller door.
- Artists are requested to donate an artwork to the Blender Studios collection on the completion of the residency.

Communal Areas

- There are a number of communal areas included throughout the space.

Please don't use communal areas for storage (except for obvious stuff like food in the kitchen etc.)

- Please always clean after yourself when using communal areas such as toilets and kitchen etc.

Parking

- Laneway parking is only available for drop off and pick up only, no more than 40min (please put your contact details on the windscreen).
- No parking is allowed in the laneway under any other circumstances.

Guests:

- If a studio artist has friends or guests at the studio, they accept full responsibility for security and damages. If you open the door and let someone in, they are your responsibility until they leave.

- Guests should respect the studios and other artists and residents and behave accordingly.
- Studio artists are also responsible for any issues/rubbish/mess made by their guests.

Sound restrictions:

- Music must be kept at an appropriate level at all times and take into consideration the communal environment of the studios and your neighbouring studio artists.

Responsibility: The Blender Studio does not accept responsibility for damages or loss of materials from the studios. If you have valuable items please kindly find your own lockable storage.

Signed by Artist

Date