

'in memory we trust' 2016

By Khaled Sabsabi

When I was first contacted by Campbelltown Arts Centre to be involved in 'Another Day in Paradise' exhibition, I had to think this offer deeply. The exhibition's brief from the curators, Ben Quilty and Michael Dagostino, was straightforward, "make a work with the intention of exploring and responding to the death penalty and profiling human rights through the multiple layers of social justice systems globally". Consequently keeping to the exhibition's theme I made my first point of contact by visiting Ben's studio to see Myuran Sukumaran works and discuss their relationship. During this visit, what captured my attention while looking at Myuran's works was a sense of movement in his works, a transformation into deformation, and before leaving the studio I asked to access digital images of the works and any email correspondence and court transcripts, to give me greater insight into Myuran's story.

Over a period of three months I researched, read Myuran's stories and correspondence emails and revisited his work images regularly. I asked myself many questions and would often struggle to find answers to these questions. I categorised and contemplated the personal, public and political circumstances that surrounded the situation. I examined notions and definitions of mercy and compassion as well as questioned, flaws of authority and privilege, associated with commentary on the other and their laws. During this development period I felt extremely challenged, perplexed and over whelmed.

Post the reflection, what impacted me most and gave me a way forward was meeting Myuran's mother Raji Sukumaran one afternoon in Parramatta. The meeting was set for 4pm with a few other people but I arrived at 3.40pm and saw Raji sitting at a table. I said hello and sat down to speak. Upon brief introductions a woman in her early 50's stopped at our table and started to tell Raji to let go, she spoke about how God does things for mysterious reasons and that everything is done for a reason and we must let go. During this encounter and for the whole time this person was standing over Raji, like a preacher, Raji didn't say a word, she just kept looking at her while crying silently. Once the woman left I asked Raji if the woman was a family friend, Raji replied "I had never seen her before". Besides this experience and odd moment of public judgment, I left the meeting with Raji's voice continually echoing in my head saying, "I just want to see him again".

I returned back to my studio and Myuran's images, I further thought about my new work as an opportunity to look at the denial of Australia's Zero Tolerance drug usage laws as opposed to a more moderate and healthy approach of harm minimisation methodology. I also started to look at commonalties between myself and Myuran.

I migrated with my family to settle in Auburn and so did he and his family. I went to Granville Boys where I was discriminated against, he went to Homebush Boys where he also was discriminated against. I had a run in with the street and drug scene in the early 90's, he also at a later date. I use art as a form of therapy and escape and so did Myuran. Building on this thought, I felt that I needed to approach the development of the new work as a form of collaboration with Myuran through his works.

The works 'in memory we trust' deal with the weight and mark of memories. The works numbering system is based on an opinion poll that the ABC's Triple j radio station published on January 27 2015 which accordingly showed that 52 per cent of people agreed that Australians convicted of drug trafficking in another country and sentenced to death should be executed. The SMS poll surveyed 2,123 people and was conducted by Roy Morgan Research over the Australia Day weekend.

There are three layers in each of the work objects presented. The paper and transparent layers represent the complicity of Myuran's situation within the personal, public and political. Throughout my practice I've always been interested in ideas and philosophies around the 'seen and unseen' and how these perceptions can be calculated and projected upon a subject and or circumstance to position a desired and imagined outcome. For 'in memory we trust' this is reflected in my choice to use light, colour inversions and materials to make objects which denote our memories, visible yet invisible. The intent to abstract designs in 'in memory we trust', is my attempt to lead to the translation into deformation and the irrationalities of voidness.

The colour orange is the opposite of blue along the colour spectrum, representing and subverting the fluorescent blue black-lights which we have all had some sort of contact with in public spaces. The acrylic orange-light lit piece features the off-cuts from the acrylic glass objects, which is also an attempt to open questions around our opinions, actions and laws relating illegal drug usage and the burden this sensitive issue has left on our abilities to function as a healthy society. Considering the entire scale of impact, from the human and well-being to the maintenance and economic costs. As a society we acknowledge the profound power of art and its abilities to change lives so why is art always looked at as an alternative not as a central prescription for dealing with our selves.