

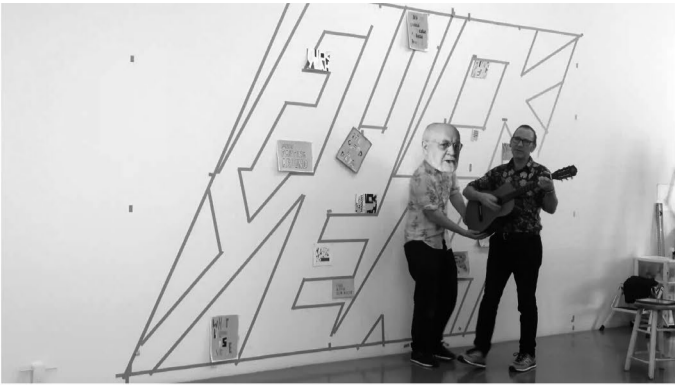
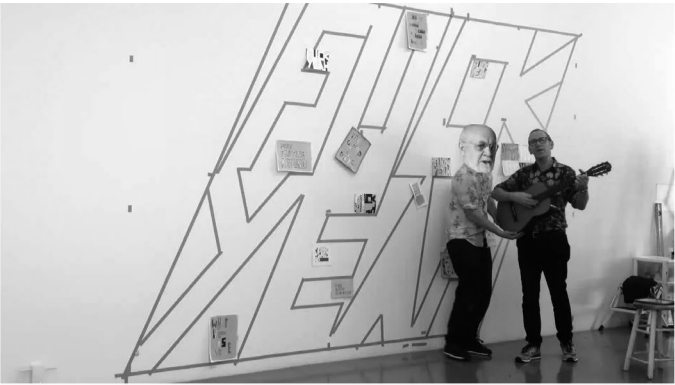
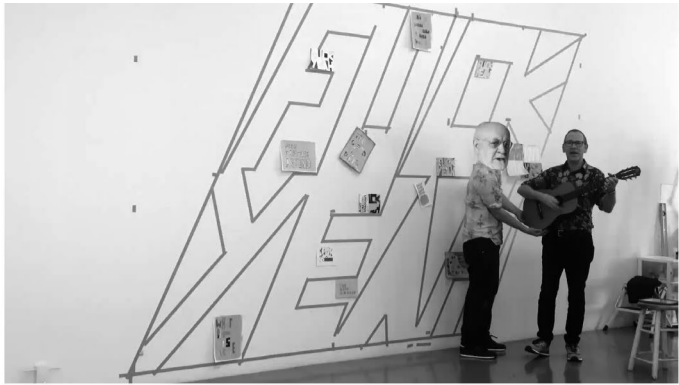


JON CAMPBELL

**DARREN
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**piss farting around
10 October – 7 November 2015**



2.30 pm, Saturday 12th September 2015, foyer of the Establishment Hotel, Sydney, Jon Campbell is leafing through two sketchbooks. The first was completed during a Greene Street Studio Residency in New York that the Melbourne artist undertook in 1991. The second records Campbell's experience of a second Greene Street stay, this time in early 2015. Before embarking on the first residency the artist's work was mostly figurative, inspired by artists such as Alex Katz and Leon Golub whose work he was to encounter in the museums of New York. By the time he returned to Melbourne, text had found its way into his paintings, influenced by the language of the city around him.

While the more recent sketches reflect the hard-edged text paintings Campbell is now known for, what hasn't changed is the artist's eye and ear for the vernacular and his keenness for colour - evidenced by this exhibition which crosses decades as the artist crossed continents.

In 1991 I didn't go there with any preconceived idea of what to do. I just took the sketchbooks, got some cans of paint and started up.

PISS FARTING AROUND

That's what I'm going to title the show, says Campbell, opening the 2015 sketchbook to the words rendered in delicate watercolour. Piss farting around—but I wasn't! I like that saying though, that there is time to piss-fart around actually. Giving yourself space is really important. It was a time of reflection. I hadn't had that for a while.

How did this experience compare with that of 1991?

I was just younger, you know. I hadn't made as much work, I didn't know as much about what I wanted to do. Before, it was a straighter response - I might have painted what I saw in the street. This time I was asking, 'what do I want to do with all of this?'

I wasn't going looking for subject matter this time. I've still got things to do with the recent text works, so I didn't feel like I was looking for a change.

There were things I wanted to see, and to see if they'd have some effect. It's not a direct thing. I went up to Dia Beacon for the first time and saw all that great '60s and '70s conceptual work in situ.

There's something about how those artists' work, their ambitions for the work, all those things become really important, so I'm thinking a lot more about that. I wasn't thinking about those kinds of things in '91.

The museums are so incredible there, there's plenty to keep you going. The beauty of having time is that you can go back to these things, so I could go four times to the Matisse show. You'll never see On Kawara again going around the Guggenheim like that. That won't come here. So that extra bit of time is really important.

I went to the Matisse cut-out show in 2015. That was really incredible. Beautifully made, they were fresh, and had this incredible presence. I had previously looked at those quite a lot in reproduction, but to actually see them, the paper is hand-painted, it had pinholes in it, and you could see where it was glued together. They're so simply made, but they still felt big and in the world. That simplicity, just putting three bits of paper together - it's just kind of incredible.

BIG PERSONALITY

Straight away on my return I got back into the studio. I had a couple of big paintings I wanted to do. One was Piss Farting Around, and I did a big Personality. In the New York studio I only made small things, so I could carry them back. Part of me was busting to work on something a bit bigger to get a bit more engaged in painting.

How did that compare to 1991?

The first time, I made the paintings there. I bought a roll of primed cotton duck from Pearl Paints - which has closed down now - and I cut it in half, rolled it out and pinned it up, and painted quite loosely on it. I was going to come back to Melbourne and re-paint them, using them as an underpainting. But when I came back, it didn't feel like something to go over. I quite liked them and felt that actually, they're about that time. The ones I'm going to show, that's exactly how they were made at the time, I haven't touched them up at all.

IF THE T-SHIRT FITS

One thing I did get this time was this Neil Young poster, it was advertising t-shirts, I found one on the street and took it back to the studio. I've repainted a

little 'Fuck Yeah' onto his t-shirt and I'm going to put that into the show. I think that one will have a nice relationship to the earlier work. Not that I'm thinking 'It's gotta fit' or anything.

What are you anticipating will emerge when you see the early and recent works together?

I dunno! I'm hoping that they will both look interesting together. I'm wondering if the figurative ones will make me think about that again.

About getting back into figurative painting?

Yeah, I don't know if that's something that's possible. I've always just followed the work, so I haven't had any grand plan, like to paint these hard-edged works for a couple of years, then move on. I've got the earlier paintings back in the studio at the moment. I've had a bit of a look but the studio's not big enough to get them all out. So I'll be interested to see if there's anything going on with them sitting next to the recent paintings.

I did show the early works in Melbourne in Powell Street Gallery in late 1991. I remember people looking at them like, 'What's this all about?' Hence, I've still got most of the work. I think I sold a couple of things.

Maybe it didn't make any sense? One painting had me, a basketball player, and a Manet painting. It was art-sport-me, which is still part of what I do, but people were scratching their heads about it at the time. I'm happy I've got a chance to bring those works out again.

A lot of artists say 'I'm at this point now, let's forget about what I did 20 years ago.'

I don't think it should be one thing or the other. You shouldn't get locked into what one person or the market thinks it should be. The fact is I have got some back catalogue now - let's see it! There are all kinds of things in storage that might never get shown again. Well, some of them are pretty good.

There are a lot of things that carry on. The look of things has changed, but the core subject matter in most instances is still there.

Later in the afternoon in the Darren Knight Gallery room as part of the Spring 1883 Artfair, Jon performs a song he wrote at Greene St in homage to Henri Matisse:

*Henri Matisse, I'm thinkin of ya
Henri Matisse, I think I love ya*

*Come on now and tell me what to do
Should I put the pink and green next to the blue*

*That's Henri with an I
Not Henry with a Y*

*Come on now and tell me what to do
Should I put the pink and green next to the blue*

*That's Henri Matisse
Not Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec*

*Come on now and tell me what to do
Should I put the pink and green next to the blue*

*I wanna use colour like you
I wanna have spunky assistants like you*

*Come on now and tell me what to do
Should I put the pink and green next to the blue*

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Chloé Wolfson in conversation with Jon Campbell, September 2015

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piss farting around at Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney
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