

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND: on the road with jah

part III

The West was not on the original itinerary planned for me by Art Network and the Art Librarians, nor was Tasmania, but by fate, I was slated for gigs in Tasmania and by friendship, I was invited to the West to savor the difference.

TASMANIA

A quick stopover with Jane Stewart, superb librarian at the University of Melbourne who picked me up at the airport, gave me a fine cup of tea and a warm blanket, and then led me on a quick tour of other areas of Melbourne I had not seen, before leaving me off at the airport. I sent my luggage ahead to Perth while I went down to Tasmania, a place of exotic beauty to the North American and anyone else as well. As you approach the Hobart airport, you feel as though you were landing in Hollywood-Burbank, but after you make the turn, you know you're somewhere else. Meg Taylor, the librarian of the Art & Music Branch of the University of Tasmania came to pick me up. I had already known Meg from a conference in England in 1976, and also from lunch in Melbourne, a few weeks before. We whizzed off to home where I could see the USS Truxton in the bay, a nuclear American ship which would meet with negative reaction in Wellington later in the month. Hobart, the capital of Tasmania, is a port city with old shipping traditions. We went to the Tasmania Gallery of Art, where we saw films of Mowbray Bay and the first discoveries of Antarctica, which were being celebrated this year, and then to see the art collection. Oddly enough, there was an exhibition of Maori works of art there, contemporary art including Peter Taylor's sculpture, and the Victorian Galleries, newly refurbished in keeping with the period, which showed portraits of Aboriginal chiefs and beautiful landscape painting of the 19th century. To be sure, I controlled myself but my ire was up when I saw those portraits of those proud Aboriginals, 90% of whom had been slaughtered by the new Anglo-Saxon settlers in Tasmania!

The next day allowed me to see a beautiful view of Mt. Wellington and the harbor, which although looking beautiful, was highly polluted largely due to zinc byproducts which were spewn forth from a mill 15 miles up the coast. The skies in Tasmania are incredible, different from the rest of Australia and from New Zealand as well. Marion Hardman, artist-photographer and the reason for my being in Tasmania, led me up Mt. Nelson (by auto) and to the Tasmanian College of Art, a very large complex once occupied by Science and Engineering, part of which moved to another part of the State. As a result, the College inherited a large part of these buildings, once destined for the education of scientists and now spread out to teach painters, printers, papermakers, sculptors, photographers, video and filmmakers, and more. The lecture I gave was part of a series called Art Forum, and from the questions and dialogue after my talk, I realized I was in the equivalent of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, a student body stimulated, interested, and keenly aware. Geoff Parr, the director, was in Europe at the time, but I was later to tell him my impressions of his student body.

During my short stay in Tasmania, I did meet Tim Payne, a Californian teaching papermaking at the College. I also saw

clear blue skies, felt Antarctic winds, and walked through the bush enjoying the variety of flora such as gum trees, wild cherries and saw birds of all sorts, including rosellas. I even saw a bumper sticker with "I Love Vermont" on it as well as a magnificent rainbow.

A quick visit to the Copping Colonial Convict Museum, where lifesize models work in the Blacksmith's Shop, and the Washerwoman is washing and the Bushmen are sharpening wheels reminded me of Walt Disney's life-like robots at Disneyland and Disney World. A quick look at the most beautiful coastline I have ever seen led me back to Hobart Airport and a quick trip to Melbourne before leaving for Perth on an Airbus, the first I had ever flown. It feels like a long bus.

PERTH

Perth is very much like Los Angeles both in weather and in horticulture. Intense blue skies however belie the fact that Australia still is untouched by the sulfur dioxide that pervades our atmosphere in L.A. The phone book in Perth is a fascinating tool, not only for its phone numbers but also for its instructions in 8 languages--Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Turkish and even Vietnamese. In addition, there is a dial-a-recipe, dial-a-prayer, dial-a-horoscope as well as the Cricket Sportsfone and Roster Petrol Stations (to tell you when you can go on a Sunday for gasoline, since not all service stations are open).

My host, Allan Vizents, an American who moved to Perth and established Media-Space, allowed me to investigate the A to Z Library, a service of Media-Space, making accessible to the members and to anyone in the community a fine selection of contemporary alternative publications and tapes from all over the world.

I visited in Perth everything from the Western Australia Art Gallery, a museum building which is awesome in scale with too much empty space to account for its collection, but still demonstrating a rich tradition of ceramic sculpture and crafts, as well as a fine painting collection from Sydney Nolan to Emile Nolde to the Aboriginal Gallery, where I was stirred and moved by the culture of the Aboriginals in the West Desert. The first impression beyond the Art Gallery was that I was in a frontier town, but soon I saw super-gra-phics, boutiques, and then a whole bank of skyscrapers either completed and empty or just in the process of being built, which was blocking off the view of the Swan River, a river which is a necessary part of Perth and one in which you can drink the water without any hesitation. So from frontier town to metropolis meant that something was missing--a true sense of the city. Yet I felt a great deal of energy in Perth.

I visited the Resistance Bookstore which sold anti-nuclear materials including bumperstickers, as well as Exposeur, a new wave fanzine shop run by Sonia Jenkins, who because of travels and connections had the most recent magazines from the UK and the States as well as from around Australia. I gave lectures at Perth Polytechnic, the Claremont Art School and Media-Space, as well as Praxis. (Profile in an adjacent part of this issue). I even attended a football game (Australian rules) in the rain in a sea of umbrellas, to my delight and to my camera's delight. I saw lots of umbrella trees native to Australia and New Zealand, as well as the

Indian Ocean in which there were sheep boats which look like floating hotels waiting to set sail.

Because of economic problems all over the world, the boom that Perth had felt the past few years was dissolving somewhat, but that energy of being far from the seat of government with a fairly mild climate, and close connections with the rest of Southeast Asia, made Perth different from Sydney in many ways. Perth was still growing, and Sydney was an established great city of the world; Perth reminded me of what Los Angeles must have been 50 years ago, ripe for settlement, a multi-ethnic foundation, and room everywhere.

Flying back over the whole expanse of Australia and its red desert, I was astounded by the landscape, so dry and so red and so big. Arriving in Sydney, I was quite different from when I had left. I had seen so much, learned so much, and had so little time to absorb it all, but I was bubbling over with news and enthusiasm.

My return to Sydney was a short stay before leaving for the States. I took pictures of buildings and neon signs and graffiti I had missed, took a harbor cruise, saw the Biennale show again as well as visiting the new photography gallery in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, organized by Gail Newton. Two commercial galleries that are important in Sydney, among others, are the Oxley Gallery and the Frank Watters Gallery, both showing contemporary art and both dedicated to doing the best for Australian artists.

The last day in Sydney was my birthday. After a marvelous Italian breakfast at Cafe Roma, I visited the Umbrella Shop,

run by a nice older couple, both wearing umbrella charms. They showed me a marvelous antique collapsible umbrella, and we talked about their shop, which is under the railway bridge, and my interest in umbrellas. I told them I was carrying home an umbrella from India which I had bought the day before and a Balinese umbrella, which was given to me as a gift. After a final visit to the Australia Council and the Visual Arts Board Director, Nick Waterlow, I headed for Doyle's in Watson Bay for a birthday party luncheon with 17 friends where we toasted each other with the best Australian wine money could buy, eating fresh fish and seafood, and just enjoying the "Aboriginal summer" day, saddened only by the absence of other friends who just couldn't make it.

What can you say? The warmth, hospitality, joy and friendship, the informality, the touching circumstances that allowed me to enter so many homes, that information so very freely given—yet something more—something that stays with you, that you cannot express, that touches the depths of your soul and will remain with me forever. As we drove back to pick up my luggage, we passed on the freeway the sign END, ULTIMO (40)—and in fact, that was it! But it was not the End, not the Ultimo, for I must return. It calls to me even at this moment. Primo, not Ultimo! Thank you Australia and New Zealand, Thank you my new-found friends, thank you for your gifts which are spiritual and immaterial but ever-lasting. I must return.

—jah

PROFILE: media-space & praxis, perth

Media-space, founded by Allan Vizents, an American who landed in Perth by accident and stayed, was established by a need of eight people in Perth, like Paul Thomas and Neil Sullivan, to talk to each other, committed to information, to publishing work, through discussion, and putting art ideas together into any form. "So we asked 6 or 7 people to meet together once a fortnight and as soon as we got together, we realized the excitement that the idea generated by sitting in a room with a tape recorder. It was so exciting that we decided to meet once a week, every Friday, and see how the work went."

As Allan told me in conversation, "Media-Space was based around work." It all began in March-April 1981. The Friday afternoon meetings are open to all, some people come and then disappear, others have stayed, especially the original 8. What began as a search for terms became a definition of language, allowing dialogue to come easier once the terms were defined. "Yes, once you begin to define terms, you start to understand the way you think and what happens in putting visual work together." The blending of objective and subject terms and points of view seemed to be a solution.

The original group comes from various media: printmaking, photography, drawing, and all are lecturers whose abilities have crossed the spectrum of the arts.

Not only has dialogue been one of the goals of Media-Space, but the group is also concerned with communication involving the acquisition of machinery and equipment to allow people to express themselves in new media. The A - Z Library is a collection of books, audiotapes, newspapers, alternative space information, magazines—"a commu-

nication link with the outside world because of isolation here. You can work anywhere in the world and have access to the rest of the world. Partnership between a friend of mine, Patsy Bradbury and I, and the contribution of each of us of the core of the library, which we bought overseas and through the mail, allow us to lend this material to subscribers who pay \$10 a year. If you don't have the money to subscribe, you can come to the library and look, read, and once we have the photocopier, you can photocopy the information. The \$10 allows us to continue by subscribing to magazines, to keep the library current. There is no art information of any real value in Perth. Most of the libraries are in the schools or state institutions," and they cannot specialize like an alternative space interested in visual arts can."

To do all this, Media-Space has received a grant of \$4000 from the Visual Arts Board to publish work. In the beginning they used offset to reproduce photographs and drawings to send through the mail to a mailing list that they acquired via various means, sent as a gift to the people around the world. But only this year did exchange material start to come in.

Allan foresees a way of creating a catalog of things made by people outside the art tradition, things available from Perth even including audiotapes, that would reach out to people all over the world, "mail art through the mail", which would serve as a more accessible way of trading information.

Right now Media-Space sends out all kinds of work, but mostly documents, ideas, concepts, information, which contain mistakes, tape marks, fingerprints. "The sense of the process is always included in the offset process which I really like"