

## Weekend Immendorff

in association with David M Thomas  
present Sub Urban Mystic  
Director Suzanne Howard  
Featuring special appearances by  
Bridie Gillman and Queena Grot  
Script Erika Scott  
Costume design Rebecca Ross  
Score Weekend Immendorff  
featuring Callum Galletly  
Special thanks to Perides Art Projects,  
Gail King and Kirralee Robinson.

@Outerspace 27 August - 1 October 2022,  
opening Saturday 27 August 2022 4-6pm

Erika Scott interviewed David M Thomas' in his home studio, to discuss the exhibition Sub Urban Mystic, in Wynnum, a Suburb of Meanjin, 16 July 2022.

Erika Scott: I've got eight questions in one.

David M Thomas: go-on.

E S: I'm going straight into Suzanne. I remember you saying, after meeting Suzanne, that she'd influenced the nature of how you made work, not entirely in an expanded way, as I know that you were already doing band stuff, cerebral sound collaborative stuff, but I think your sculptural practice, I can't remember the word you used, but you said it changed. And then coming full circle, like Suzanne did so many different creative things. She was doing things in the community, directing video, she was directly involved in your practice, but she would never, she didn't exhibit paintings, you know? They're not her works, but it's like she's having a painting show.

D M T: Yes. That's right.

E S: You're concretizing Suzanne in capital letters, as like an artist, straight simple.

D M T: I mean, I think there is a very definite statement to this exhibition that you pick up on right away. That is, we're kind of continuing this idea of our shared practice, but this exhibition foregrounds these enlargements of her drawings that she made near the end of her life. She started doing them around the time of her residency that she did in Penang, an Asia Link residency. For Suzanne, that residency was really, really significant because it was the first time she was acknowledged as a solo artist in her own right. Suzanne was diagnosed with cancer in 2013. Then she had periods, good periods where things were okay. She got this residency, she went to Penang in 2015. That's when she started making these drawings. I think that they were somewhat influenced by her interest in Buckminster Fuller, but they have this uncanny resemblance to Hilma af Klint's painting. I'm not sure how seriously she took these drawings and she also saw herself as I think a part of what you're describing here is she saw herself as a kind of support person. Also, she came from a community of people that saw the idea of woman becoming artists as problematic. I think she was culturally (professionally) disadvantaged because of the community that she came from. I think she aspired to be an artist. That is my motivation here is to value, and to add to the work that she made. There's not a huge body of these drawings which I could find, there's about 20 or 30 of them. And I'm selecting the ones that I like.

E S: That to speak to you.

D M T: That speak to me.

E S: How long was the residency?

D M T: About three months.

E S: Oh, okay. Great.

D M T: What's really weird, one of the other people that's helping me with this exhibition, Bridie Gilman. She also did a residency in Penang in that same year.

E S: It's interesting that you say, in your statement, that you're interested in what's in-between what you do, and who you are, and working outside of those labels. I can see you are more interested in weaving in-between shared and collaborative spaces. Suzanne also liked to move in these spaces. What is it inside these spaces that's interesting to you? Is it just outside language?

D M T: There is a relationship between personhood, selfhood and authorship and how all those ideas are problematised by life, relationships, and how we consume information. We significant relationships in our lives where you are really bouncing ideas off each other all the time, and I'm realising this as I'm making these big works. I'm looking at other works of mine on the magazine rack, that have similar formal elements to ones in Suzanne drawings, you know? The movement goes back and forth round and round and continues. This is why I wanted to call the exhibition at the beginning, Perpetual Motion (Dis)order. Because it's the kind of constant movement.

E S: Thinking dichotomy's, I've noticed there's been these big splits in your work, like your Boxcopy show in 2012, you split the room completely, horizontally, at my eye line. You left the gallery above, and created a basement below, where performances and stuff would happen. There was a real hardline between formal and informal, and at the time that felt quite aggressive.

D M T: That show?

E S: Just spatially, and the lighting, and by creating that separation. Now I think things have changed. I feel you're still doing those room dividing spaces, but it's so different.

D M T: I think the first time I did this it was in Canberra Contemporary ArtSpace (1996), where I actually had the luxury of having a large space and a small space. I thought 'how cool it is to be able to work with these twospaces'. Some of this I think, relates to this kind of Cartesian dualistic notion of consciousness for those people interested in philosophy, the Cartesian maxim that starts his system of thought is 'I think, therefore I am', and it presents this dualism between the "I" that thinks and the "I" that is, so presents a consciousness in dialogue with itself. That proves its own existence through that internal dialogue. The interesting thing happens when you consider and accept the fact that other people exist and you are in actual dialogue with other consciousnesses and that's the exhibition in a nutshell. With the shelving I'm creating a space within the white box, within the outer space-space.

E S: Who's collaborating?

D M T: Bridie Gillman is helping me. I had seen her ceramics in another exhibition and I thought, well, I've made this space from these shelves, and what can I put on the shelves, I also knew that there is a desire from the Outerspace itself to incorporate the broader community in some way. As I have done this in my practice before I thought I can curate other people's objects into these shelves. It's not then just about my consciousness and just not about, yes, I'm making selections, but then by making these things it also makes the space, like maybe it's a shop. Maybe it's a gallery, or who knows what it is. Which I like that confusing part of it.

E S: Like Antiques Road Show. (laughs)

D M T: So ceramics with Bridie, also I really like Queena Grot's (Pam Rosel's) lamps that I had seen in exhibition in the last couple of years. I thought wouldn't it be cool to incorporate those lamps into the show. These objects have this informal spooky quality, which I thought would contrast particularly well with the reasonable, formal modernist style of the furniture. It's a contrasting dynamic. Another collaborator in the show will be Rebecca Ross.

E S: Oh great.

D M T: Rebecca has been someone who I have bounced ideas around with and knew Suzanne very well, so maintaining life relationships around making work. Who else? Kirralee Robinson is helping with one of the ideas that came out of a discussion with Bridie, which was to use this couch, a Vico Magistretti Carimate couch. We will have the base upholstered and cushions added to it, and that will take the place of the gallery minding desk. The volunteers need a desk, but I want people minding the space to have a comfortable couch that they can sit on or lie down on. Somebody can come along and sit next to them and just hang out comfortably in the space without it being like an office or a place of work.

E S: I don't know. I find it a weird way to commemorate (Suzanne), to make paintings of someone else's paintings. It's kind of nice.

D M T: This goes back to the thing about authorship. I was in the process of making new works, and before I put in this application I was hitting my stride. For some reason, this idea came to me... I came up with this idea, I suppose, of making the whole show my work, but then my persona kind of isn't in there, apart from the making of the show. One of the things that came up you know when I went in there yesterday and had a very impromptu meeting with Georgia and Hamish. As I was leaving, I said, "I think there is a weird dynamic between the universal to the very, very personal." Hamish was like, "Oh we could see that in what you wrote." I said, "that's interesting. Because I'm only aware of that now." So this is a weird thing that is happening. Like with Bridie and Suzanne, both being on a residency in the same place, Suzanne's aesthetic similarity to Hilma af Klint, all this cosmic, mystical thing that's happening.

E S: It's a good line. "How can I know what I think until I see what I say". I can't remember who said it, but I like that. What's the Suburban Mystic?

D M T: I never know what to say. When people ask me, what is it that I do. What kind of work do you make? I remember saying to somebody at Metro arts, I'm a Sensual urban Mystic. I also remember a friend of mine referring to me as a mystic, and from recently reading a biography on Susan Sontag. She was into this thing called Gnosticism, a conflation of mind and body, conflating the Cartesian dualism. Because essentially what we are in this plane is one thing. That we see these distinctions between mind and body and this creates a whole lot of problems. An over dependence on language also really helps us do this.

David thanks Outer Space, the IMA and the Judith Wright Centre.

Sub Urban Mystic is Dedicated to the loving memory of Suzanne Howard.  
Image credit Suzanne Howard, Untitled, 2017 acrylic and collage on paper, 21 x 29.7cm used for the production of the work, It's Not Suppose to be that Way, 2022 2.7 x 3.7m