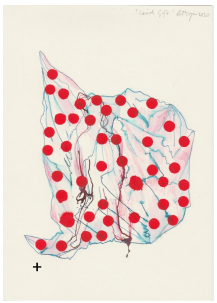
> It's so unexpected. 2020 and then 2021 produce a life of bad surprises that keep coming back. Meet 2020, the pandemic year that's back with us again a year later. We arrive at lockdown after three or four months of international and personal disbelief. By mid-year it feels like perpetual winter. Harsh lockdowns or strict home quarantine. Inside

> torn contour lines two figures entwine; they are all stripped down in unhappy coexistence, masked figures threatening each other. Have they been wrapped up?

No sign of landscape and not much space here except sprawling figures of a bestial order. It's a lockdown world in conflict, unhappy flux, stitched together in Jon Cattapan's mind across a mental film-strip sequence on his kitchen table (can't go to the studio, Chief Health Officer orders) made from what's at hand, snatched at the studio on the dark evening stay-at-home orders cut sharply in.

No authority nor order in the drawings' coordinates, odd given this artist's vast, luminous paintings which confidently map fluid ebb and flow. Instead, here, with more charm than his Hobbesian subjects deserve, the glimpses of 2020 are insistently scrappy but not at all random or uncertain—not the product of confined work but metaphorically as well as deliberately scrappy and so argumentatively gorgeous. His lockdown drawings are portraits of unhappy family, images that will be, like most family snapshots, seen as a collection, as a family album.



They herald a return to three decades ago, to the mainstay of his art during the long-ago Dinosaur-Design 1980s, a daily routine of intimate notations on paper, a typology of tension bookended by the Department of Health's knock on the door checking that Cattapan is still locked down in isolation.

So simultaneously glum and gorgeous that we know more is going on: lockdown art and an interim taking stock, the subjects of this essay. First, what is life in the studio like? Second, how did the practices of making art change in the year that the wars at home arrived for whitefella Australia? Like many artists who have studios separate from their home, Cattapan's industrial park workplace becomes a forbidden zone: unlike elite sports training centres, creative arts studios are not authorized workplaces for performers or dancers or painters alike in Victoria. While Federal and state government emergency measures mostly ignore visual artists, all research shows the arts help people to reconnect, develop empathy and deepen appreciation of social diversity.

We know arriving in repeated lockdown is nothing compared with being mortally sick, with dispossession, with invasion, with being abandoned outside Kabul airport. So what commentary might cloistered artists offer on the war at home that we are all living through? What does our explanation of making art amidst family disruption and home schooling offer when compared to the massive hardships, internal forced migrations and loss of life in India for example? From there our friends, many who become seriously ill, send us grainy, blurry images every few days via WhatsApp of emergency clinics built on steep, forested hillsides in Himachal Pradesh or enormous field hospitals thrown up in suburban South Delhi and in Mumbai, erected and staffed completely by community-based philanthropy while the governments there go missing in action. And even within Australia there would be no single narrative in response to COVID-19's strictures. Tasmania and West Australia, for example, see rare real restrictions thus far, but live in ever more heightened isolation with very strict entry and exit controls in place. the communication of ideas that emerge online. Real and rapid innovation both in art education and broader art world platforms were in evidence everywhere. And the big surprise for melancholics was that mostly the art world and the art market did not collapse. The equally big surprise for workaholic knowledge-gatherers and purveyors was how easy it suddenly was to invite people from everywhere to speak without scouring grant funds for airfares to bring them here.

securing grant funds for artists to bring them here.

Thinking about art from a time of pandemic is an interesting notion, because not only is there a pandemic that has changed so much of how we behave, how we look at the world, how we associate with people and how we live our lives. But other crises seemed fairly definitively to lie underneath this one. One of them, for certain, was the social and racial justice crisis that was clearly set off in its current form with the refusal of The Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017).[1]

And then there was the equally large crisis of climate warming borne out of a war on nature; we all saw that while fires ravaged the nation as 2020 started. All of this unfinished business was entwined with the impact of the arrival of COVID-19 as the pandemic ravaged Europe, then the USA, then India.

The notion of a war at home is not new. We need look no further than First Nations Australians enduring and surviving long struggles beginning with Invasion and then the Frontier Wars. For whitefella Australians, there is palpable shock, even anger, as our way of life shifts under the stress of isolation, quarantine, hard interstate borders and repeated lockdowns to stave off COVID-19. Brown and Green, living and working in regional Victoria, quickly combine compulsive listening to the State Premiers' long news conference updates with a simultaneously hyper-vigilant but slightly benumbed turning inwards inside the walls of their workspace even though, for them, the limitations on movement are way less ferocious in regional Australia and they can walk along nearby ridges over rocky outcrops and watch a whole season's wildflowers change for the first time in decades, with no travel and no commuting.

At the time of writing, Australia offered no sign to its citizens when travel overseas for family or work would resume nor would there be any guarantee that Australian residents overseas would be able to return any time soon. The impact, however subtle that might be, would surely have played into the art made in 2020 and 2021 through, first, the constrictions of manufacture then, second, in the postponement or cancellation of exhibitions but, third, in new, expanded possibilities for

wondering about this national self-regard profoundly bent out of shape by catastrophic crises abroad and at home that disrupt such national stories through the ongoing, never-ending crises of climate warming, Indigenous reconciliation, immigration and asylum-seeking. In the process we produced for mid-2020 a book, *Afterstorm: Gardens, Art and Conflict*: ../page.php?id=91 , compiled from many voices.[2]

What surfaces from the debris of our artists' minds, in regional Victoria and in mid-suburban Melbourne, is that we see Australian culture once again facing its deepest, most debilitating problems: the survival of the past into the present and specifically the survival of long wars and refusal of long perspectives into the present. This is why we all felt such intent anticipation of the major Australian art exhibition of 2020, NIRIN: https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/biennale/22nd-biennale-of-sydney-2020/ , the epochal 22nd Biennale of Sydney curated by Brook Andrew that so few of us eventually saw. We three artists had been focusing on two themes, portraying, first, the great tension between Australia's vision of itself profoundly shaped by wars starting 100 years ago—Imperial wars fought by colonials in foreign lands, often in the unacknowledged company of First Nations volunteers—and, second,

At the start of 2020, we are faced with problems at the grand, double scale of climate warming's clear arrival and a global pandemic. Both surpass the nation-state's puny, porous borders; they are both post-national and national. Both problems are linked in the minds of artists and experts on counterinsurgency. They unfold within the glum, divisive, disruptive logic that wars at home usually exhibit. They pushed Brown and Green back home to Australia in early February with three hours' notice at Singapore airport as the first of several journeys abroad were gradually cancelled. The foundation they are visiting in north India texts them to not proceed; they just can't guarantee safety. The peripatetic travel schedules typical of the last couple of decades for all of us in the art world—and especially those of us involved in thinking about biennales—begin at first provisionally then hesitantly and finally definitively to end from late March 2020, when they cancel their flight to Sydney the night before NIRIN's vernissage because the writing is on the wall.

In those first couple of months, the impact of COVID-19 for us artists initially meant accepting change: staying home, not travelling, working out Zoom protocol and backgrounds, checking in on family, getting tested. But we know we are tiny pieces inside big pictures. Brown and Green start on three large lockdown paintings to finish by the end of

cosmopolitanism amid turbulence: mysticism, protest, wars on terror and even science. Within the details might lie a masterclass in the artistic use of cultural hybridity but something else too—can they find peace out of lockdown instability—so that is the unifying question of the first of their three big Lockdown paintings, *Into the Light* (2020). A compendium like that is the product of stay-at-home. They both design the composition, select the images; take on the painstaking work with fine new Japanese brushes from Hiroshima. But this is the uncontrolled expenditure of labour amidst evaporating schedules and dread.

We three artists—Jon Cattapan, and Lyndell Brown and Charles Green (though Green/Brown are always one artist)—are all painters. We are accustomed to working long periods alone in our studios, Cattapan in an industrial zone in bayside Melbourne; Brown and Green at a hilltop home in regional Victoria. Working in a purposeful, solitary routine is not the same as working through an enforced lockdown. Cattapan finds himself drawing on a kitchen table in the space between meals whereas Green works between ever-more ubiquitous Zoom sessions. All of this leads at first to starting and stopping. The first few months of COVID pass in a hit and run rhythm of provisional work just as COVID-19 paralyzed the arts and cultural industries in general for an extended but defined period. Slowly the pandemic moment appears to be precipitating new methods of art practice, pedagogy and exhibitions in a period already in crisis but these things are still very much at a formative stage as of mid-2021.

So we meet together online and conclude we expect a sharper version of what was already unfolding in the arts: scarcity of resources and funding; the collapse of traditional publishing; fewer, smaller biennales; fewer, scantily-funded international links and networks, all much as the Art Basel/UBS project of late-2020 shows. Washington DC-based Brookings Institution estimates that between April 1 and July 31 2020, the art and performing arts industries lose 1.4 million jobs and $US42.5 billion in sales. Even before 2020, the impacts of climate change, racial injustice and social inequality provoke wide consternation and intense questioning across the global art world. For instance, regional and remote artists participating in the 2020 Biennale of Sydney hesitated to visit Sydney in March 2020 on account of vast East Coast bushfires. Despite stupendous wealth at the tiny top end of the international art world, despite the efflorescence of artist initiatives and art centres at its wide base, artists' lives (like workers in music, dance and theatre) had

become precarious and casualised. Decades of effort by art historians and curators to recognise marginalised groups and women, the rage of Black Lives Matter and #MeToo showed too little had really changed across the art world.

And then the pandemic. Borders were closed. The geo-political chasms that open up between China and the West and between liberal democracies, further contribute to global turbulence. The 2020 rise in nationalist sentiment in the Chinese art world and the growth in almost exclusively Chinese domestic art fairs and art institutions occur in tandem with President Xi's post-COVID inward-looking China. Australia's regional areas are imperilled by climate change, forced migration and blocked borders, even as pandemics cause knowledge workers and young families to relocate to regional areas across Australia. Maybe, next, a greening of the economy sees an economic and cultural surge in select regions outside major cities. Coronavirus closes businesses, confining millions to homes. Big city art museums, galleries and studios must shut but many regional and remote regions and their galleries remained open –a refuge until winter 2021 when they, too, were intermittently shuttered.

Solutions to grand problems usually centre on accepting change. They pivot around facing up to the survival of the present into the future. Though conflict across the world has been perpetual and relentless, comprehending the pivot of big change proves hard for Australia and the world to accept, as populist debates about national climate policy have amply demonstrated. For example, 10% of Australians reported being directly threatened by the 2019-20 bushfires; about 1.8 million people were forced to evacuate homes.

The country town where Green and Brown live is ringed by forested hills; a few years ago, on a hot night they watch one lighting strike after another ignite fires in a great, real-time video-game southward arc towards Daylesford. The causal relation between human settlement, ecological disruption and pandemics is long-accepted. So, in the face of this, our hope of surviving and thriving is predicated, as it has always been, on imagining the future before it arrives and positively influencing how it is shaped. Australia has a vast scientific, political and pedagogical task, but also as yet uncharted tasks for artists and art museums. If we are to creatively respond and adapt to the current cascade of catastrophic turbulence, we must advocate the emotional vision that culture and art awakens and fixes. For art vividly communicates to people the survival of the present into the future.

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→Notes

Links & Info

Author/s: Charles Green: https://artandaustralia.com/profiles/Charles_Green & Jon Cattapan: https://artandaustralia.com/profiles/Jon_Cattapan