Iteration: Again: 13 Public Art Projects across Tasmania

Marco Marcon

Published by Punctum Books

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Lucy Bleach
Homing

Wk 1
18 September, Sunday 6.15am, Dawn Service. 19 – 23 September, Daily, Clothes Donation.
24 September, Saturday 6.00am, Dawn Service.
24 September, Saturday 10am – 12pm, Sewing Circle in Save the Children Fund second-hand clothing shop, Criterion Street, Hobart.

Wk 2
26 – 30 September, Daily, 10am – 4pm, Sewing Circle in Save the Children Fund second-hand clothing shop, Criterion St, Hobart.
1 October, Saturday 6.15am, Dawn Lament in Mathers Lane, Hobart.

Wk 3
2 October, Sunday 9.30am, Lament.
3 October, Monday 10am, Lament.
4 October, Tuesday 11.30am, Lament.
5 October, Wednesday 12.30pm, Lament.
6 October, Thursday 2pm, Lament.
7 October, Friday 4pm, Lament.
8 October, Saturday 6.30pm, Dusk Lament.

Wk 4
9 – 14 October, Daily, Posters.
15 October, Saturday 4.45pm, Pigeon Release.

All events in Mathers Lane, Hobart (unless otherwise noted).

Curator
David Cross

Lucy Bleach, B. 1968, Sydney, Australia. Lives and works in Tasmania, Australia.
www.lucybleach.com
Taking the complex permutations of our attachment to place as her starting point, Lucy Bleach’s *Homing* investigated four distinct thematic threads around spatial longing and attachment, all of which were played out in a small laneway off Criterion Street in central Hobart. Beginning with a dawn performance where a modest neon sign of a pigeon was illuminated in the laneway, the artist then had a concrete set of steps deposited in the middle of the laneway just as the sun was coming up. Following in quick succession, another truck delivered a recycled clothing bin on top of the concrete steps and for the rest of that week the bin was an unmarked and quietly iconic fixture of the site.

The sophomore week began when the unusual pop-up charity depository was opened to reveal a full bounty of donated clothing. The material was then put to use in a temporary sewing workshop installed in the Save the Children store fronting the lane. This was run by an expert seamstress, and Bleach herself, for recently arrived immigrant women. Together they worked on making colourful segments of fabric that expanded in the shop window over the course of the week. During this time the steps were bare until at the end of the second week its purpose was again reconfigured.

At dawn in the beginning of the third week, a powerful and unaccompanied voice filled the empty streets of the CBD with a yearning lament. The performer proceeded to sing two songs of lament in English and Spanish standing atop the steps. She wore a cloak decorated with a piece of the hanging fabric and the sound echoed through the surrounding streets was extraordinary. Each day for that week she performed two laments, one of which was always ‘Llorando’, the cloak growing in colour and form over this time. The week concluded with the performer, accompanied by a large trailing audience, finally shedding the cloak at the end of a shopping arcade a short walk from the steps.

The final week began with the laneway at first seemingly empty, though over the course of a few days black and white bill posters appear of birds. These pictures are on closer inspection all pigeons and, true to the reproductive power of the species, more and more accumulated in the laneway as the week and the work itself drew to a close. On the final day a curious object in the form of a compartmentalised trailer sat unattended until at dusk a crowd begins to form and the artist herself appeared. With the help of another she opened the trailer doors and released hundreds of pigeons into the sky, a brief visual cacophony of flapping wings and dodging spectators. In a moment they collectively arc for the sky and make for home.
Critical Response
Lucy Rollins

**Early morning rising.** Ripped from sleep by the alarm, struggling to remember Lucy Bleach’s directions to the right street. Through bleary eyes, I drive on a frigid Saturday morning to the little laneway, a small nook down a side street in Hobart’s CBD. I arrive to find a couple of people waiting with the artist. We gather at the side of Mathers Lane, familiar faces huddled together, largely passive witnesses to events Bleach has set in motion.

As the appreciative crowd of the Hobart art community grows, Bleach flicks a switch and a neon pigeon is illuminated, hovering over the lane. Delighted murmurs rise at this abstract symbol; then concrete reality, as a big truck pulls up – silver bulldog on the front contrasting with the pigeon. It backs up close to the nook, bringing a set of concrete steps into view. Instead of dawn silence (neon bird in flight), the lane is filled with the raucous noise of the truck’s mechanisms, reversing lights and creaking hydraulics as the driver hooks the steps to the crane, lifting and rotating them. For moments they become a stairway to heaven spinning slowly on an invisible axis in time and space. Lowered to the ground, the steps become a portal to a newly created space that feels somehow sacred. A monument – but to what is as yet unrevealed.

A second truck grumbles up the lane. A gavotte ensues as Truck One leaves and Truck Two repeats the process, this time placing a Vinnie’s clothing donation bin at the top of the steps. Prewarned, I’ve brought my own donation and run up the steps, ceremonially opening the shaft of the bin; in they go, my offerings to this new temporary/permanent place. Others do the same, then it’s time to disperse before breakfast to begin our day. I reflect on this dreamlike encounter all day. The simplicity of this monumental piece of work. The shared early morning experience charged with the excitement of coming to see a new art work being made.

The following Saturday I rise early (again) and watch another truck pull up. Bleach unlocks the belly of the bin, and I am delighted as the rainbow of contents spill out into the lane; the invitation to donate has been fruitful, and I offer my services to help relieve the bin of these gifts. The lane is lined with bags and piles of clothing as the driver lifts the bin back onto the truck and drives it away, its role in this unfolding drama over.

Only a ring of soil remains on top of the steps, remnants of a plant offering left by a passerby earlier in the week. The end of this first part of the work. The stairs remain. The pigeon remains.
The second part begins with Bleach emptying the donated items into the front window of Save the Children fund second-hand children’s clothing shop that fronts the laneway.

Bleach and a costume designer, Roz Wren, spread out a large section of mossy green material (some old curtains, I think), and map out sections to be torn up and re-stitched to form a cloak. The cloak is to be worn by an unnamed Hollywood diva who will be coming to Hobart soon to sing/lament about loss and notions of home.

I return many times that week. Bleach and Wren are working on the garment, a multi-coloured patchwork of our collective memories – the sentimental attachments we have, threads of material removed and reconfigured – now gifted as important components of this evolving piece of costuming. The shade of the cloak begins in purple, a piece of a top here, a bra and sock there. Then red, orange, yellow, until it turns green and finally blue. The colours represent the shades of skylight, from dawn to dusk. Divided into sections, the cloak is displayed in the windows of the shop for passers-by to admire, while Bleach and Wren work on Singer sewing machines, sewing for our singer.

Bleach has also invited a group of women to come work with her, the ladies of ‘Stitch’, a sewing group for newly arrived refugee women; it’s an opportunity for them to begin to feel comfortable in their new home. Those who donate clothing let go of a tiny part of themselves, small reminders of past experiences. These women have let go of many things. The cloak holds all of these stories.

Recycled clothes, recycled opportunities. We await the singer, whom we now know is Rebekah Del Rio, famous for her version of ‘Llorando’ in David Lynch’s Mullholland Drive. She is our storyteller. A new dawn service awaits us cloak and all.

At sunrise on Saturday morning Del Rio laments to us, singing about loss and notions of home. She begins, standing on the concrete steps wearing the cloak created for her in the previous iteration. Just the hood on the first day, but at each performance over the week the cloak grows. Gradually, it cocoons her. A new panel added each day, matching the colour of the natural light over the course of the day from dawn to dusk. The singing times during the week echo these transitions.

Bleach’s intentions for Homing were to explore what public space can be and how we engage with it. These fragmented moments begin as intimate early morning performances for the audience. As they take place later and later into the day, there are increasing minor disturbances, the background noise of people walking through the laneway, traffic roaring past. These effects only add to the experience. Something about Del Rio’s voice transcends the space. And these uncontrollable noises give us a reality check – yes, we are still in the real world. I focus on how the passers-by interact with the work. Some stop, some don’t. I guess even the beauty
of Del Rio’s *a cappella* singing cannot pierce the internal monologues of some people’s minds.

However, for those who do stop, the audience shares the raw emotion created by Del Rio’s voice. There’s something magical about this space and what happens in these moments. Overwhelmed, a number of people have tears in their eyes. Perhaps it’s the choice of songs? Indeed, the common thread that runs through each performance is ‘Llorando’, a Spanish version of Roy Orbison’s ‘Crying’:

*Yes, now you’re gone and from this moment on*

*I’ll be crying over you.*

What makes these moments so special is the choice of site and the people who unknowingly contribute to the work. During her final performance, a dusk lament, there’s a moment when Del Rio leaves the laneway and walks across the road to sing in the arcade, the crowd following at a distance. The acoustics project her voice into the space, drawing people out of the shops. Some drunks leave The Oasis, a local pub and gambling venue, and begin to holler at her. Unfazed, Del Rio makes her way to the end of the arcade and in a flash sheds the cloak and is gone.

For those of us who were expecting her, and those who weren’t, Mathers Lane has become imbued with the memory and resonance of the encounter. Marked by this iteration, I wait to see what will become of it next.

**The final day of Homing** arrives. I return for the last time to the little area off Criterion Street that has become so infused with expectation and meaning. The time is 4:45pm – fitting, not long till dusk. Nature is changing gear for the night. But there is the usual disconnected bustle from shoppers and workers returning home. I wait, transfixed, pondering the precise time (why not 5pm?), for Bleach to orchestrate the final event, the final ‘happening’ of *Homing*. Just the word, ‘final’ has already evoked in me that feeling of loss so potently explored by Del Rio’s laments – ‘Llorando’ – ‘you’re gone and now I’m crying …’

Throughout the week following Del Río’s departure, Bleach taped up big black and white prints of pigeons, photos taken by pigeon fanciers of their trophies and homing paraphernalia. This display, introducing yet another different community with its own shared experience and associations, has grown incrementally on the laneway wall to which the neon pigeon sign is attached. Lucy said she wanted it to look like guano. This makes me consider the ambivalence of pigeons. They are creatures that typically live in public spaces. Children often delight in feeding them. But others find them pests, fouling areas humans wish to claim as their own. Diversity of perspective tends to polarise judgement.
One hundred and twenty homing pigeons have been in cages, in a trailer parked in the laneway, all day. Bleach rigged a microphone in the centre of the trailer so the sound of their cooing was amplified eerily and sweetly throughout the public space.

At 4.45pm Lucy Bleach and David Cross release all 120 birds. With a loud clamour they rush out of their cages, fly straight towards the crowd and then up over our heads. I watch them stream off into the dusk. Bleach later told me that they all arrived home within nine minutes! Then I understood the significance of the precise time. By 5pm the pigeons were all in their homes, and we were returning to ours.

Bleach’s last act was to turn off the neon pigeon on the wall; no longer the ‘abstract’ symbol it had seemed at the outset of Homing; now infused with the flight of the birds as they headed for home. I wonder now if ‘home’ is really what I thought it was, before Iteration:Again ...