SPEECH for CHAPTER TWO

30 Years of Adelaide Central School of Art: Gilles Street 1989-1993

Good evening everyone and I would like to say that I feel immensely honoured to have been asked to open this exhibition. Chapter 2, the Gilles Street years 1989-1993. Gilles Street has a very special place in my heart, as I’m sure it does in many peoples.

In 1989 the school moved to Gilles Street so that the owner could develop the Bloor Court site; it became a car park. I moved there with the school as a student. You entered the Gilles Street building through a decrepit dark and spooky concrete car park, which was distinctly seedy. There was a defunct industrial lift and some little rooms deep at the back full of rubbish; a dossers haven and a great location for a horror movie. Up an open rickety wooden staircase into a magnificent whare house, with a large room on the right hand side, the width of the building, with great light, this became the main classroom, outside that, a cavernous space dotted with jarrah posts at the far end, which became the studios and later also a gallery. The floor above was really a giant pigeon loft full of pigeon poo and probably a health hazard. We had a party up there one year, with white tablecloths and candle light, flamenco entertainment and we danced. It was a tremendous environment.

Rod said that it was a very stressful time when we first moved because the rent increased significantly, but the enrolments grew and the studio spaces were in demand so it was apparent that it was going to succeed.

We started there with Rod teaching his core subjects and Rita Hall a well known and successful painter and print maker, giving print making classes. The
following year in 1990 when Anna Platten went to Paris to the Cite de Beaux Arts on a scholarship I took over her studio space, this was next to Rod Taylor’s, and here he very generously mentored me. At that stage there was no administration, if the phone rang Rod answered it, there were no rules or regulations, it was fun, free and easy but serious.

The ENROLMENTS went up and Rod had more easels made to add to the tiny group rather lost in the much larger teaching space. The phone was ringing more often now, and I remember Rod offering me the job of answering it.

I recall that Chris Orchard, a studio artist recently returned from a studio in London was the first to help Rod teach and he created two new courses to add to the core subjects taught by Rod, drawing and concept and painting and concept, and Rod said that he had an idea for something called visual language.

Anna returned from Paris and Rod said that he needed her to help him teach. Then Rod, having seen Johnny Dady’s drawings at an exhibition of his offered Johnny teaching work. Later Rod asked Johnnie to set up a sculpture course, with no money; which he did, downstairs, using his own tools. Sauntering out to lunch through the car park, you would see students with clay up to their armpits by a clawfoot bath. I had my first solo exhibition in the little gallery space we had created and Rod offered me a job at dinner that night. In those days we always used to go out together after openings.

Now the school really needed an administrator and Rod had a knack for spotting potential in people and just the right person for the new jobs that became necessary and Marianne Stamatakis, who had just graduated from university was hired as full time office and business administrator, she was wonderful and essential as the school developed.

Either Rod would spot the potential in someone, be introduced to someone or the right person would just turn up, like Bill Anschutz, a lovely generous man. Bill was a retired businessman with a love of art, who enrolled as a student and was
so impressed by Rod’s integrity of purpose and the whole atelier thing that when he was approached to help with the business side of things he was delighted. He set the school up as a private company with a board and meetings and Bill was the first chairman of the board. Sadly Bill died at the end of 2012 after the most courageous battle.

The school now had shareholders who invested capital and this was crucial to the next stage, which was accreditation. By the time the school moved to Norwood you could study for a certificate, a diploma and an advanced diploma.

Anyway back to 1992 or was it 1991, the next important person to arrive was Sue Tweddle. Sue was working for a gallery in Adelaide and started attending classes. The gallery in the City closed and Rod invited Sue to develop our little gallery, develop without any money. I have a clear visual memory of the elegant Sue in elegant jeans, sanding the jarrah floorboards with a hired sander, no mean feat this. I once tried to drill a hole in one of the jarrah posts in my studio space, the bit became red hot and there was a smell of burning. I remember the Gallery was much enlarged during the run of my exhibition, but this is how things were, constantly changing, evolving, moving, it was a breathtaking ride. Any profits from gallery sales were used to develop the place, such as putting up a hanging system or some more lights. Sue also became a board member and shareholder. We were all utterly committed and passionate about what was happening.

I must also mention here the contribution from Dianne Longely and Geoff Gibbons to the success of the school and also David Johnson, a friend of Rod’s who gave a lot of help and advice and some useful introductions.

There were about twenty studio members and Rory Richardson, Anna Platten, Rod Taylor and Chris Orchard were in the studios from the beginning. Rory painting huge paintings, so huge I’m not sure how he got them out, he is represented here by two smaller works and a small sculpture. Dee Jones enrolled as a student and Rod offered her a studio space. Dee was a studio member for many years and shared a studio with me and Anna in Norwood. The studios had
a core of steady serious artists and a floating population who would come and go. A few of these people were art teachers, often really keen to work in their spaces but the day job took up too much time and they would leave. That is why Rod insisted that we were only to teach a certain amount per week so that we had time for our own art practice, because Rod only employed working artists who taught in their field of expertise. When someone left we all shifted about until we got the space we wanted. It took me two moves to get a space on the edge with a window next door to my dear friend Anna.

The school, studios and gallery, which operated independently from each other, were a great resource for the students to see how art worked in the real world, to see people making art, to see it installed in a gallery but not necessarily sold.

It’s almost 25 years ago now and when I started to think about what happened in Gilles Street and tried to remember the chronological order of things, what struck me most was that we were only there four years, it seemed so much longer and I suppose that is the measure of how much was happening and at such exhilarating speed. It was a wonderful time and I am sure no one will be surprised to find that this really good old building is now a car park.

Lastly a thank you to Ingrid and Gloria for a beautiful hang of this lovely nostalgic show.

Thank you Maureen Gordon, history lecturer extrordinaire, I have mined your delightful Short History of ACSA shamelessly to aid my faulty memory.

And lastly thank you Rod Taylor for this wonderful school and giving so many people opportunities to not only survive in the art world but also to thrive.

Thank you.

Lisa Young. 01.04 2014