

Interview: Wendy Grace Allen Artist, Palmerston North

Wendy Grace Allen is a visual and performance artist participating in the forthcoming Chrysalis Seed group show (9 March - 2 April). She has a Master of Visual Arts degree (University of South Australia), a Diploma of Fine Arts (Otago Polytechnic) and a Graduate Diploma in Teaching [Secondary] (Massey University). After an academic arts career, lecturing and tutoring at tertiary level (in Nelson and Adelaide, as well as with online students in 1998) and studying to teach art at secondary level, she returned to her native Palmerston North to commit to a full-time arts career. Allen operates out of her Remarque Studio in the Square Edge Creative Centre, Palmerston North. She started Remarque Studio in 2004 utilising the French word 'Remarque' that has two meanings: to "remark" or to make a comment (equivalent to the English meaning of the word), and to make a "remarque" or a small mark or sketch engraved in the margin of a plate to indicate its stage of development prior to

How did you find tutoring and lecturing at tertiary level?

"My experience of working within tertiary education was quite different at the university in Australia from working in the polytechnic environment in Nelson. In Adelaide I taught about 700 students art, architecture and design, history and theory over several levels over a two-year period. There was quite a cross over of subjects. I enjoyed interacting with the students and tutoring has taught me a lot. Nelson was different; I covered a different range of subjects. I was lecturing and writing up the three-year degree programme in my subject area amongst other roles in a small art school, whereas, in Adelaide I was one tutor in a team of many, at a large and well resourced art school (maybe 300 students), and as part of a team at the school of architecture and design."

Could you comment on how you came to choose your medium as being sculptural installations?

"I enjoy exploring the processes of making art with a diverse range of art materials. I have used everything from long-term materials such as bronze and resin, to short-term materials such as chocolate, lard and seaweed to create my work. Installations are an obvious way to work with these materials; in relationship to light, space and within the context of the chosen site. I use materials that I feel best suit the ideas I am working with, so this includes painting, bookbinding and photography."

What is the relationship for you between your writing on art and making art? How do the two feed into one another?

"Several years ago I was studying for my Masters degree in Visual Arts in Australia, I was training to be a Gallery Guide at the Art Gallery of South Australia (one day a week) and also tutoring in various subjects including the History and Theory of Art, Architecture and Design at the University. The combination of researching, seeing, writing about art, and the making of art was fairly interconnected and fluid for me at that time. For example my research into notions of 'The Other', cultural difference, postcolonial theory and art in the Asia Pacific region feed back into the art I created. This was where I really began writing about art AND enjoying it. God has a sense of humour because I ended up writing a couple of theses and marking about 5000 student essays in a couple of years; prior to this I had avoided writing like the plague! It is more difficult to see how the making of my work informs my art writing but there are definitely strong connections. Sometimes I need to 'put aside' the intellectual art history/theory part of my brain so I can start creating art, because I have analysed and critiqued everything I've created before I've even started making it!"

John Stringer



(At right) *Blind 3. 9pm. (Process 5.2) (detail)*, 2005, Wendy Grace Allen, acrylic paint and mixed media on Holland Blind with attachments, 2100 x 1800mm.



completion. A "remarque" is also a print or proof from a plate carrying such a mark. "I really like the process of art, so I enjoy both those meanings coming together; the processes of art to make a comment."

How does your visual and performance art contrast?

"There is quite a lot of cross over. It's mostly conceptually based. The performance work I do has an idea I'm wanting to realise, but in a more interactive way. My performance work is often also collaborative, such as my work with Nelson composer Ian McDonald. That work involved a performance that was a response to a Colin McCahon painting; I wrote (and read) the text of a poem and Ian wrote an original composition to accompany it. It was a more traditional style of performance, rather than incorporating visual lighting and movement as with a more conventional contemporary performance. Performance is an additional way of working with visual ideas. I come from a sculpture/installation background - it's a natural extension of that, rather than a drama, which I have no training in."