

Five Minute Manifesto

Read aloud at Vitalstatistix, for Adhocracy 2016

I have been remembering my grandparents. I find myself drifting nightly back to their warm, overcrowded house where the walls were thick with drawings. To them, art was a serious and playful undertaking. My grandfather and I would draw each other every time I slept over. Our bodies changed in inverse tandem: I filled out and he shrank. We did this until he died - me in my late twenties him in his early eighties – he was tiny by that point.

It was in my grandparent's house that I first understood the potential of art in personal relationships, that is, as intrinsic to being in the world together and making sense (and nonsense) of our experiences. My grandfather wasn't a professional artist but he had a pivotal experience that carried him forward. He was in his late teens during the Second World War. When war was declared he went to the home his family had made in India. He had the wrong passport for that home and so he spent four years in an internment camp. These would have been his university years. He was lucky to be interned with an artist who became a friend. Together they scavenged materials to make objects that became parts of stories. They connected and delighted people by imagining worlds outside the camp and beyond the unending, nerve-racking boredom of wartime. My grandparents taught me that art is not diversion: art is survival.

Art is a thing of the world but simultaneously apart from it. It drifts through the experience of everyday as another strata: unpredictable, slippery and engrossing. It resists stillness and finitude. It can be delightful, both the stuff of intellectual play and of sensuous abandon. Art has the potential to take us anywhere, to take us elsewhere, to transport us without telling us where we were headed. It takes everyone, somewhere, else. Art is essential. It is the possibility of thinking and being otherwise. I make art every day and yet I struggle to communicate its value. People sometimes ask me - how can you justify this self-indulgent pursuit when there is global warming? When refugees drown at sea? As capitalism eats the land and take up all the time? While there is war? - and when there is war, I think about my grandparents.