

FRESH 'N FRUITY SUMMER RESIDENCY 2015

Christian McNab



The Fresh 'n Fruity' summer resident show was a project undertaken in January and February 2015, finishing with an event on Friday 6 March and open for viewing on 7 and 8 March. Nikki Cain and I brought our respective creative practices together to design and construct wearable garments and to create an installation within the gallery space of Fresh 'n Fruity. To actively engage in the tensions set up between art, design, craft and installation practices, we worked in the Fresh 'n Fruity studios and gallery where we would eventually exhibit in downtown Dunedin. Equipped with industrial sewing machines and a large open space, we completed much of the construction and installation work in the studio, while the screenprinting work was done offsite in my home studio. On the opening night, friends dressed in our garments mingled with the crowd to demonstrate the artistic and practical elements of the pieces. The models created a buzzing atmosphere, and gallery visitors could both observe and interact with them.

Exploring the realm of fashion design and the crossover within a studio-based arts practice was a core element of the residency. Having both studied textiles and printmaking at the Dunedin School of Art and fashion studies at the Otago Polytechnic Design School, the residency presented the opportunity to utilise our skills outside of these institutions. The show was our first experience of creating work to exhibit post art school. Many of the techniques and processes used in the garments we produced drew elements from our separate artistic backgrounds. Mixing crisp screenprints with more personal hand-drawn and painted designs on fabrics, the finished garments reflected our desire to create unique and individual pieces, removed from the constraints of commercial fashion design.

Nikki and I had planned to do some collaborative work for some time. Bouncing ideas between each other from mid-2014, we used tools such as Pinterest and Facebook to share and link things we were interested in. Although we had initially not planned to do a show, we talked and built momentum for a future project. When any creative project is started, there is an initial period of uncertainty about the direction it will take. We began visiting the space we would be working in at the Fresh 'n Fruity Gallery to get a sense of what would resonate there.



During this initial period, Nikki had a dream in which she saw me accepting an award at a ceremony. She dreamed of dressing up in a dazzling garment to attend my prizegiving. The dream struck me as suitable material with which to begin our collaboration. It raised some interesting ideas about the act of collaborating in itself. How is the process guided? What are the differences between conceptual collaboration and material collaboration? In what way do ideas become relevant to a collaboration with a particular group or person? The dream also made us consider the differences in the ways we present ourselves in personal and public spaces. We created the dress envisioned in the dream to become part of the installation in the gallery space alongside the other pieces.



Technically, our skill sets are different. I have had more experience in patternmaking and the construction of garments, while drawing and painting have always been Nikki's strengths. Complemented by my technical skills, Nikki's interest in the hand-drawn and expressive mark extended our range of outcomes. Often ideas about a piece would be bounced back and forth, with each of us adding our own touch before it reached a conclusion. In some cases, we would swap roles or work on something simultaneously. Informing these conversations was the research done prior to the residency.

The installation itself was an important process for resolving the work. Through spending a period of time around the gallery and studios, a dialogue between ourselves and the exhibition space informed our choices about what we decided to exhibit in the Fresh 'n Fruity summer resident show. One of the standout works was the mural which we created near the end of our residency. Having decided to paint a self portrait of the two of us intertwined, we painted it together after Nikki had drafted the design onto the wall.

We used this residency as an opportunity to create work together and share our creative vision in one space. Collaborating on this exhibition was incredibly rewarding, opening up new methodologies of working and thinking. In any relationship, people bring different elements that together form a whole. In this residency, our friendship enabled us to create something much stronger and more open than anything that we could have achieved as individuals.

Christian McNab and **Nikki Cain** both completed Bachelors of Visual Arts from the Dunedin School of Art (in 2012 and 2014 respectively) and also studied at the Otago Polytechnic School of Design for the Certificate of Fashion Studies (2014). Previous collaborations include *Windowshopper – A Fashion Showcase* at the Robertson Library's V-Space in Dunedin (2014). Opened in 2014, Fresh 'n Fruity is an artist-run space comprising a gallery and separate studios, located at 140 George Street, Dunedin (upstairs).

i For information on the Fresh 'n Fruity Collective, see Severine Costa's artist's page in this issue.