

art Monthly

AUSTRALIA



249 MAY 2012



1/ Jayne Dyer, *City of Dreams*, 2012; installation view (detail) of work in progress; image courtesy the artist and China Art Projects, Beijing/Hong Kong; photo by Jayne Dyer

2/ Panying Mick, *Papapakani* (Take flight), 2011, (installation detail), raffia, mimosa grass, plastic sake, wool, wood, polyester fibre, 45 x 30 x 140cm. Image courtesy the artist, Tiapo Desert Weavers, and NPY Women's Council; photo by Mick Bradley, shown as part of *Deadly: In-Between Heaven and Hell*, Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, 26 February to 8 April 2012.

Twin towers

I'm caught between two worlds this month, with my feet on Australian, or rather Aboriginal soil and my head in a Hong Kong highrise. This month sees the National Gallery of Australia's long-awaited second National Indigenous Art Triennial, curated by Carly Lane, open 10 May, its *unDiscovered* thematic promising a cache of politicised, exceptional work from twenty leading Indigenous Australian artists¹. Later in the month the 5th edition of Hong Kong International Art Fair (ART HK 12) also gets into swing with a swagger of Australian galleries and artists enhancing the mix.

In this month's cover image I have gone with ART HK 12, with an image of a work in progress, an installation by Beijing/Sydney-based Australian artist Jayne Dyer which will premiere at this increasingly prestigious event. Dyer's presence at ART HK 12 through her *City of Dreams* installation is testament to an active career in this city, within China generally and the broader Asia region. This presence, following on from last year's ART HK 11 which featured her major site-specific commission, the *Butterfly Effect* series (first born, the artist tells me, from a residency at Elizabeth Bay Museum in Sydney²), is also testament to the growing importance of ART HK to Australian interests. At least thirteen Australian galleries will show this year and many more Australian artists, along with Australian collectors, curators and other arts professionals – possibly curious to see how the event has changed now that its under the wing of Art Basel but inevitably to partake of its consistently lavish feast of contemporary art, duly served from a uniquely post-colonial-Asian-internationalist brew.

Dyer's *City of Dreams* is the subject of my own article this month, gleaned from my recent stay in Beijing where Dyer was at the time completing the installation. As the article suggests, being privy to Dyer's art-making process, particularly with this work – so loaded and expressively rendered – was a rare privilege for me; something curators, dealers and collectors must constantly experience, and cherish. It's a bitter-sweet irony to write on it knowing it's unlikely I'll get to Hong Kong mid-May to see its ultimate realisation. Somehow this only seems to add to its intrigue and I'm certain *City of Dreams*, with its virtuoso visual wit and weaponry, will do more than stop Fair-goers in their tracks.

This issue's feet on Aboriginal soil sets off with John McPhee and his authoritative, highly eloquent account of seminal Kaiaidilt artist Sally Gabori, who will be showing in *unDiscovered*. McPhee not only retraces the history of the Gulf of Carpentaria region and details salient aspects of Gabori's culture and



homeland on Bentinck Island; he immerses us in the dense meaning, resolutions and rippling effect of her art as a painter.

There are a number of articles this month intended to ripple along with the National Indigenous Art Triennial: Eve Sullivan on Dion Mundine's recent curatorial forays into 'Aboriginality, Masculinity, and Vanity'; Christine Nicholls on *Deadly: In-Between Heaven and Hell*, Tandanya National Aboriginal Institute's recent Adelaide Festival offering; Angela Philp on a cogent collusion of Indigenous women's art exhibitions at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Sydney; and Danni Zuvela on Noosa's *Floating Land 2011*, which featured GhostNets Australia, including artists from Moa Island in the Torres Strait. As well, there's an echo of last month's cover, with Gonkar Gyatso's *Thor Rains* received by Louise Martin-Chew, and a critical detour through FotoFreo, Frank Watters, Fashion (the 2012 L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival) and *New Frontier* (part of the Sundance Film Festival). Or, as John Conomos entreates, the prospect of a stroll with Walter Benjamin in Paris.

Yours (country bound),

Maurice

1. The artists to feature in *unDiscovered* include: Tony Albert, Vernon Ah Kee, Bob Burruwal, Michael Cook, Lorraine Connolly-Northey, Nici Campton, Fiona Foley, Mindidingkingthi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, Ganyi Ganambarr, Julie Gough, Lindsay Harris, Jonathan Jones, Danie Mellor, Naata Nungurrayi, Maria Joseette Orto, Daniel Walbidi, Christian Bumbarra Thompson, Alick Tipoti, Lena Yarikura and Nyapanyapa Yanyingine. The exhibition runs 11 May to 22 July 2012.

2. In 2007 Dyer was an artist-resident at Sydney's historic Elizabeth Bay House museum with part of her site-specific work there resuscitating the entomology collection (with its focus on moths and butterflies) of Alexander Macleay, Colonial Secretary of NSW and the house's original owner/builder.

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are those of the authors and not
necessarily those of the publisher
and editor. Readers are invited to
make up their own minds on issues
debated in *Art Monthly Australia*.

Letters welcome.



Jayme Dyer, *City of Dreams*, 2012, sand, plaster,
thread, plastic, dimensions variable; installation
view (detail) of work in progress as the feature
artist for China Art Projects in the Asia One section
of the Hong Kong International Art Fair 2012, 17
to 20 May. Image courtesy the artist and China Art
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1/ *City of Dreams*: 8, 2012, objects, plant fibres, plexiglass, 60 x 26 x 25cm



2/ *City of Dreams* (detail), 2012, card, plaster, thread, plastic, dimensions variable



3/ *Utopia*, 2010, plywood, 850 x 150cm; installation view (detail), as part of *postEDEN*, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China
All images this article of work by Jayne Dyer; images courtesy the artist and China Art Projects, Beijing/Hong Kong; photos by Jayne Dyer

Afterglow: Jayne Dyer's *City of Dreams*

MAURICE O'RIORDAN

Turning and turning in the widening gyre.
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Merge anarchy is loosed upon the world

(William Butler Yeats, *The Second Coming*, 1919)

'Don't forget the clock ticking,' I write to myself, taking notes with Jayne Dyer in her Beijing apartment/studio earlier this year. At this point of the interview I am struggling to take all factual details in against the tide of fascination invoked by the work I have been invited to see in progress. It's not often I am offered studio access mid-production though whether Dyer's installation, *City of Dreams*, was then mid or near completion is hard to call. This was my second visit in the space of a month and the later work showed new material relationships and whole new components which, though Dyer had mapped in terms of her allocated space (for the 2012 Hong Kong International Art Fair, ART HK12) – with some elements custom-built – were gathering force and materiality along with the installation's subtle conceptual shifts. 'Conceptually,' says Dyer, 'I like the frame to be clear', though she also admits to liking the 'edges to fray'; this 'fraying' is clearly fundamental to her conceptual framework, and why it's hard to pin down a final image of the installation as I write.

Melbourne-born Dyer, a late '80s RMIT painting graduate, has, after postgraduate studies at RMIT, maintained a solid practice over three decades which has benefited from exposure to a broad international arena. How Dyer comes to be a resident in Beijing for part of the year (with regular stints in Australia), since 2007 is not part of any great plan, she admits, though there are key precedents, such as her 1995 AsiaLink residency in Beijing, and her evident love of travel and curiosity for the world at large. Dyer's curiosity is hardly naive though she still aspires to a kind of wonder with her work – as a densely

wrought often politicised space for speculation and revelation. The installation medium, a prominent aspect of Dyer's broad-ranging practice, is particularly well suited to this essentially theatric suspension. There are parts of *City of Dreams* for example salvaged from previous installations, like trusty props recast for new productions. Much more than props, these re-cast sculptural elements also channel her interest in process and memory and the particular knowledge that can only be gained through hands-on practice, in the hearth of the studio.

The making of *City of Dreams* is for Dyer something to revel in. Amidst her other much larger-scaled installation and collaborative public art commissions, it is like a return to solitary painting; the allowance and expansion of a more immediate expressive freedom. It's on a much smaller scale, say, than Dyer's installation for ART HK11, the *Butterfly Effect* series, one of the Fair's featured public art projects last year comprising thousands of black paper cut-out butterflies colonising the venue's Level 3 main entrance. *City of Dreams* bears echoes of her *Utopia* series in the *post Eden* exhibition at Beijing's Today Art Museum in 2010. The focus on city and architectural icons in this earlier show manifest as a monolithic 8.5 metre sculpture, an abstracted skyscraper form (in plywood) which takes on totemic qualities, particularly in the building's spires which cut a less determinable shape compared to the succession of sandstone-looking blocks supporting them. *Utopia* included another installation comprising twenty cardboard scale-replicas of iconic contemporary and historical monuments (including the Petronas Towers, Empire State Building, London's House of Parliament and Jin Mao Tower) surprisingly inverted from the Museum's ceiling. Some of these, such as the 'Leaning Tower of Pisa', also make an appearance in *City of Dreams*, albeit much transformed.



1/ *Utopia*, 2010, 20 contemporary and historical iconic architectural models, inverted, card, paper, 30 to 50cm height; installation view (detail), as part of *postEDEN*, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China

2/ *City of Dreams*: 7 (detail), 2012, bamboo, object, plant fibre, glass cabinet, 222 x 55 x 49cm.



'Let there be questions', says Dyer, of her installation, and of a process centred more wholly on the peripheral: 'to see the peripheral before the centre' is an integral part of her visual mantra. This may be seen in the way the installation has changed between my visits; the way the buildings on the work's central (draftsman's-like) table have been shaped and transformed with the addition of new materials such as plastic wrapped in layers with white string, giving them a ghostly appearance, like remnants from a post-nuclear mausoleum. Some of the buildings now also have more organic accents in the tufts of coconut husk which sprout from under edges and through apertures. The colour and texture of the husk, reminiscent in parts of pubic tangle, evoke a sensuous decay, the inside (internal matter) oozing and spilling beyond the architectural skin.

Dyer's *City of Dreams* seems perfectly placed for Hong Kong, a fast-paced 24/7 city of dense skyscraper clusters and constant development in which ART HK looms as a potent blend of art and commerce. This kind of critical site-specificity is typical of Dyer's work which has increasingly become part of urban renewal and architectural projects through public art commissions and interventions in a range of gallery and other built environments.¹ That Dyer is frequently in Beijing and the installation is made here is also significant. Like Hong Kong, Beijing is a 21st century mega-city of sharp contrasts, a rapidly evolving, ever-scaffolded landscape of steel, concrete and glass where multi-storey monoliths seem to push up overnight and ever higher into a thinning sky. Since her move to Beijing Dyer has been able to place herself and her work more firmly in the region. Since 2007, she has exhibited in numerous venues and contexts in China (Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Hangzhou), Taiwan (Taipei, Kinmen Island), and Korea (Seoul), as well as in The Netherlands (Amsterdam), Turkey (Istanbul), and Germany (Berlin). During this time she has also consistently shown in Australia, principally (with her dealer galleries Anna Pappas Gallery, Richmond, and King Street Gallery, Newtown). When an artist such as Dyer can feature so prominently in prestigious international art fairs (including this year's *Art Bosphorus Contemporary Art Fair*, Istanbul, Turkey in March), and in exhibitions at leading museums in the region (Seoul's Museum of Contemporary Art and National Art Centre, China's Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, and Taiwan's Kaundou Museum of Fine Arts, Taipei, for example), and yet bypasses the same level of public art museum interest or visibility in Australia, it would seem her home country has not kept pace with her career.

One of the pragmatic advantages of being based in Beijing is the easier access to labour and materials which is more evident when Dyer is working on larger-scale work. *City of Dreams* is mostly by her own hand – indeed, the installation's near-obsessive quality of hand-laboured construction is central to its intense aura and affect. Some of the installation's objects are found. On my first visit to Dyer's studio I noticed a model deer head in the corner, sitting on the floor with its antlers, unscrewed, placed nearby. Dyer picked up the antlers, explaining how she'd chanced across the head in a second-hand market in Beijing, and how she had to unscrew the antlers to fit the find in a bag. We conferred that the deer head appealed more as sculpture with the antlers detached and when, as Dyer suggested, the head was placed on the floor rather than trophy-like on the wall. Emerging from the floor, the deer might be a resurgent voice from the grave, a beast of haunting conscience, she alluded. Dyer had already ordered a custom-made glass cabinet for the deer head, as one of two discreet cabinets to be placed around the installation's central 'work'-table supporting her iconoclastic buildings. She was still making and formulating other elements to inhabit this cabinet and so the deer head and its antlers were then purely liminal, lying in wait in the periphery of her studio.



1/ Jayne Dyer, *City of Dreams*, 2012, card, plaster, thread, plastic, dimensions variable; installation view (detail) of work in progress

2/ *The Butterfly Effect*: Istanbul, 2012, 10,000 black butterflies, die-cut, laminated, dimensions variable; shown as a site-specific installation at the Haliç Congress Centre for ARTBosphorus Contemporary Art Fair, Istanbul, Turkey, 15 to 18 March 2012. Dyer has also exhibited versions of *The Butterfly Effect* series in Hong Kong, Melbourne, Taipei, Hangzhou and Macau

City of Dreams is a portentous work. In concept and materiality, Dyer's installation evokes the work of fellow Australian installation artists Mikala Dwyer and Janet Laurence who are similarly tuned into the ecological dilemmas of our age. In subject *City of Dreams* partly recalls the 'utopian city of the future' of US artist Mike Kelley's major work, *Kander Cen* (2000), shown as part of the 7th Shanghai Biennale, 'Translocation', in 2008. Both Kelly and Dyer unveil a more dystopian picture overall but Dyer's 'city' at least still allows space for dreaming, regeneration and reflection including her crystal ball, atop a lower-story plinth and echoing the base of the nearby tower that supports the installation's veiled crusader. It's not Dyer's personal crystal ball but one gathered in her mercurial, bower-birding ways, and placed as much as a visual ploy (telescoping, upside-down, the view around it) as a crystal-deft and solid sign of the pervasive allure of glass in contemporary cities.

The clock ticking' was not my cue to end the interview; Dyer makes a spirited conversationalist. In her willingness to share and open up her artistic process to enquiry, it's easy to see her in her occasional assessor's role for post-graduate visual arts students at RMIT in Australia and Hong Kong. Having worked closely with a wide range of creative professionals around the world Dyer is well seasoned in the art of articulating her work, and with the clarity that such broad collaborations require. The ticking clock is in fact a small round clock, face towards the sky, at another end of Dyer's monumental strata, which will be set on Hong Kong time during the life of the installation. In ecological terms, as Dyer reminds us, the 'clock' for our toxic, earth-choking dreams of the city is soundly ticking.

1. Dyer currently has commissioned corporate works in-development in Perth and Beijing. She has previously produced public art commissions (often using recycled elements) for a range of hotels, malls, and urban planning projects, mostly in Hong Kong but also in Macau and Melbourne. She has also exhibited ephemeral, site-specific work for Taipei's City Urban Redevelopment Office (2011), ROC Centennial Peace Day, Kinmen Island, Taiwan (2011); *E-Cx design* – Sanbo Creativity and Innovation Festival, Hangzhou (2011), and Elizabeth Bay House Museum, Sydney (2007), among other sites.

Jayne Dyer is showing *City of Dreams* as the feature artist for China Art Projects (Beijing, Hong Kong) in the Asia One section of the Hong Kong International Art Fair 2012, 17 to 20 May, www.chinaartprojects.com www.hongkongartfair.com/eng

