

You meet some of the best people on the dance floor!

Everybody SoundSystem artists Josephine Cachemaille, Gabby O'Connor and Eve Armstrong and Enjoy Contemporary Art Space staff Claire Harris and Liang Cui, Friday 5 August 2022.

CLAIRE: How's the day been? How's the week been?

JOSE: Such an undulating process, isn't it?

GABBY: Of loveliness.

JOSE: We've been here since... is this day six? Really different energy on different days. Liang noticed it.

LIANG: Yeah, today feels quiet.

EVE: Intense.

CLAIRE: Not intense, 'intent'. Everyone was very focused.

GABBY: Yes, measured. It's been really fascinating and pleasurable. We haven't worked like this before, so recognising our boundaries, knowing where those corridors of generosity are, all those pathways that are happening. It's just quite nice to see it work as we'd imagined.

JOSE: Gabs from the get-go described it as a high-trust model for working. Experiencing trusting a process, and trusting people, and trusting materials and trusting a shared past. It's a really unusual way to work for me, I'm a studio-based artist, I don't often collaborate, I've wanted to for years.

CLAIRE: This is a first-time collaboration for the three of you? Oh wow!

EVE: We've worked together on my project The Trading Table in Sydney. Gabs and Jose didn't know each other, but I knew they'd love each other.... and have the personality, skills and ability to facilitate projects like this, in terms of making something from nothing.

GABBY: The three of us had this kind of shared experience of doing installation work for dance events...using really weird spaces, using cheap materials. We have a shared language, as well as a shared experience, our installation practices stem from developing those languages...

CLAIRE: What were your respective introductions to dance culture or the idea of music, dance and visual art being a single experience?

JOSE: I'd lived in Australia after university, and gone to some really big, grubby raves in the true sense of the word there and been really excited by it. Just overwhelmed by the kind of sense of huge, big spaces, sound systems that just altered you physically in your body and just the energy and possibility.

When I was back in Nelson I started helping put on parties... the thing that I really loved about dance parties and developing that culture was decorating spaces, I didn't even think about it as making art. I thought about it as decoration, like how can I make this place feel and look different. What can I do with this space to make it be lovely for the people, or surprising, or pleasurable, or funny.

I went to art school in Nelson and at that time, the early 90s, it was about painting. Concept was not king in Nelson, and conceptual art was mysterious to me. I was desperate for a kind of conceptual practice so that's what I sort of ended up peeling off and trying to pursue, but it didn't occur to me that it could be about sound and changing spaces. That just made itself known in my art practice, slowly and has just kept on cropping up again and again... I've been making a lot of dance party-like spaces in my installations for years, cubby holes, hideys, things to touch, things to crawl through. Things to make you feel *in* your body, rather than in your head.

GABBY: I was in the sculpture department at the VCA in Melbourne and it was a very kind of old-school sculpture department. We all learnt how to cast metal and wore steel-caps and overalls. It was very, very almost engineering based Installation was almost a dirty word.

I started working with paper doing these installation things and at the same time working in a nightclub doing decor where we would have to design and set up decor within a half an hour period, transforming neutral black box space really quickly.

I think even in my own practice where I make installations it's about challenging the ways we navigate the experience of space as well—putting disruptions in, or changing the lighting so there's a visceral experience of the space as well as whatever the work is about.

EVE: I think I come to dance party culture more as a dancer—the first on the floor, the last on the floor...

GABBY: Yeah me too.

EVE: The first dance party that I went to and I think I was probably 15... it was in this big industrial yard ... all these subcultures came together in this one place. It was a really transformative experience for me. I was an inner-hippie, yet I had a whole lot of goth friends, punk friends, skater friends and it just felt like a space where all those people could be and they were having the best time.

And then came the huge warehouse parties on the waterfront and then the outdoor parties down south where it felt like you'd travelled back in time but also to a future planet. It was hippy and spacey all at the same time.

LIANG I have some other questions, more about this project in general. For me dancing is also about memories ...I wonder how important is the role of dance in building connection and attracting attachment between people....

EVE: The dance floor connections that you make can lead to lifelong friendships. You meet some of the best people on the dance floor!

GABBY: My best friend from high school, the only person I still keep in touch with, we used to go out dancing, and that was our secret thing that we did, no one else! And then you hear that music and that brings it all back up again. How music can make your body tingle! The sonic vibrations, of the sound and the light and the people not standing on each other's feet most of the time

EVE: You're in a space together, relating, having a good time, becoming familiar with each other but not having to have awkward conversations with someone you don't know. For me that was a massive part of why I loved it. It's so easy socially you know? You've got your own space, doing your own thing yet you're sharing a big space with others, so you're connected to everyone else.

GABBY: The way people danced was a joyous part of parties because people do great crazy things with their bodies and you just loved them for it!

CLAIRE: I'm also really interested in the non-utopian side of things—genre policing, sucking all the fun out of it, which is something I've been talking about with my older sister...in my mind my big sister was unassailably cool, but her actual memories of dance parties in the late 90s/2000s were of feeling very uncool and like she didn't know enough to be a part of those scenes

JOSE: I think a lot of the reasons people were doing it in the first place—connectedness and generosity, the utopian weekend idealism, which for some people was actually their lives—instead there was “no I don't have to apply a political lens on this, I'm just having a really lovely time”. As it grew in numbers, more and more people wanted to go to parties and like anything, like any culture, when people try to cherry-pick the clothes, language, the messaging, the sense of being together just dissipates.

CLAIRE: I noticed the word 'decor' or 'decorate'. And that's very loaded with ideas about the 'decorative arts' and about what parts of a scene or a subculture or an event are worthy?

GABBY: The club that I worked at was almost like a mini, revolving dance party, each night of the week had a different genre of music and its own look...

We'd buy like hundreds of blow-up lips and little candle votive things, cut out different shapes and hang lots of tulle, do projections and whatever was required. We were paid to do that, and they just called it decor. I know that's not an art word at all but thinking how can we radically transform a space so it doesn't look like two nights before or two nights after... that is very much a language. Reusing that kind of skill and way of seeing a space, as a space of possibilities, transformed with hardly anything.

JOSE: I think too, no one was self-identifying as having any particular skill sets, I don't remember anyone being an artist. If you were capable of slapping some UV paint on to something and rendering a mushroom you were away. So there was kind of a democracy to: it...like I remember we talked about it at the time and it was like "this is an us, it's an us".

EVE: I guess you're not thinking about it as art, you're thinking about it as a temporary solution ... for this place, and space, and time.

GABBY: And to look good in the dark... So the way that you actually made things may have been a bit rough and ready as well, like nothing was made for seeing in the day... unless it was sad eyes, tired eyes.

CLAIRE I think I'm zeroing in on décor/decoration because of the assumptions from art history that decoration is something superfluous, something that's added afterwards whereas you're discussing it as the necessary precondition to the event happening and to the event working.

JOSE: It's a good time to think about it, art historically, we're in a time at the moment, this material turn, when everyone is trying to have this deep and intimate porous relationship with objects and non-human things. You know I can theorise it now, but we used to just do it.

GABBY: It's pretty scary to walk into an empty gallery and go, actually we don't know what it's going to look like in two weeks, but we know it will be here. And we don't know how we'll work together, but we trust we've got enough of a friendship, and commonality between us.

JOSE: it's fast growth, it forces you to grow really fast, even if it feels freaky. I know this will change my art practice, I know it will. It's a long time coming...

EVE: For me as well, right now, thinking about two children, not being able to make art for the past three years...The way we've designed this fits with our lives as parents, as artists who also have to work. How can I make shows now, at this time in my life?

GABBY: It's not sustainable making art in terms of the time costs and the financial cost, the cost of familyand so how can we do it in a way that is full of that care? I know a lot of the reading that has really resonated with me is around the feminist ethics of care, how all those connections and relationships are attended to. So nothing is feeling too strained, or stressful, or wasted,

EVE: I think that was part of the ethos of this project as well, carving out that space in our lives where we could make, and where we could dance, because those are the things that...

GABBY: ...make us feel good.