

MAKING HISTORY PRESENT

Cut and Paste is more than a family exhibition. Utilising the unfinished gouaches of the late Hal Hattam; prints and collages of his daughter Katherine Hattam; unfinished drawings, paintings and collages by her son Will Mackinnon and her daughter Harriet Morgan; the exhibition is based on a premise of collaboration. The initial concept proposed that certain unfinished or uncertain works of each artist would be exchanged, allowing such pieces to become palimpsestuous surfaces to be worked with, or over. This complex exchange both across and within generations, between father and daughter; mother and offspring; and between siblings, could be described as autobiographical and biographical, the retelling of a unique story of a gifted family of artists. However, this would be a misreading of intention and outcome. Rather, what is at stake in this exhibition is the possibility of re-thinking the universal influence process and the way an artist responds to tradition. *Cut and Paste*, then, is a prescient exhibition, not only for the family in question. It is also an investigation of a lateral strategy of making which embraces the obvious anxieties of influence and openly negotiates the problem of history.

This show is also markedly different from other examples of collaborative ventures, as the process took place across a massive physical divide. Will was undertaking an internship at the Chinati Foundation, a contemporary art museum founded and created by Donald Judd, for the months of April and May, during which much of the exchange of works between mother and son took place. Works were sent between Texas and Canberra where Katherine Hattam was completing a six-week residency in the painting department of the Australian National University. Harriet Morgan was completing her third year of Visual Arts at the Victoria College of Arts, Melbourne at the time. Therefore the spoken dialogue that would normally accompany such an exchange is displaced completely by the act of making. On another level, this separation not only discourages a complementary verbal dialogue, but it also disables the possibility of visualising the other's work in progress. I propose that this distance actually functioned productively, allowing for a less anxious space of experiment for Will and Katherine to work in. The exchange that took place between countries has much to do with Harriet's greeting cards and interest in the etiquette of communication and gift giving. The works travelled as transatlantic gifts, dramatising the act of giving and receiving. Will commented to me its no accident I'm living and working in Texas and out of Australia-while there the artist Wilhelm Sasnal, who was there as artist in residence, was critical of Donald Judd's work for leaving no room for mistakes. This attitude of Sasnal's, in turn influenced Will to keep the good mistakes-thus levels on many underlining the significance of influence beyond the family and emphasising its universal relevance.

During a conversation with Katherine Hattam, she mentioned in passing a pencil drawing that her son Will had sent her as part of the collaborative exchange for the present exhibition. It was a self-portrait based on a photograph of himself, his brother and his grandfather that he had made while in Marfa. Katherine left it as is and framed it, expressing that she saw something that he didn't.¹ Choosing not to include it in the show, she kept it aside for herself, in what could be seen as a maternal gesture of pride. However, her reason for doing so was that she observed a formal articulation in the drawing, a precision of rendering in a fellow artists work (rather than an image by her son) that was too complete, to which she 'couldn't add anything'.² The drawing, not present in the exhibition, but a potent transaction nonetheless, requires a mention to understand the complexity of the task that this family had set themselves when devising this show.

Cut and Paste follows on, though not logically, from *Line*, a family exhibition in 2002 that brought together the work of the late Hal Hattam, a highly regarded Australian modernist painter, his daughter Katherine and her son Will Mackinnon. In a sense, *Line* was the preliminary show for the present exhibition, the first stage in an investigation of intergenerational influence. Will had wanted to unearth some of his grandfather's work, allowing them to be viewed by two succeeding generations, effectively broadening the audience of Hal Hattam's paintings. In Will's work, *Second Take*, we are witness to a replay of the *Line* exhibition. He has created a spatial replica of an old family beach house. A reproduction of his own work hangs on the wall between a copy of his mother's work on the left and a photograph of his grandfather's on the right, casting himself as the mediator between generations. Such a sentiment was confirmed by Katherine, the next generation has a more relaxed approach to the past, Will is much more generous with his grandfather's work, whereas I'm more conscientious to steer clear.³

The fourth participant, Harriet Morgan was asked by her brother Will and her mother Katherine to collaborate in the exhibition. Being faced with her family of artistic forerunners, one couldn't imagine a more pressurized situation for a young art student. However, Harriet made the choice not to physically work with the art of her brother, mother or grandfather or to offer up her own works in exchange. It speaks of the different way we deal with things and that's fine, I wanted my work to be an afterthought . . . I just don't work in that way, she said.⁴ This decision is in itself an action in the collaborative process, a tangential form of collaboration. Harriet's presence is subtle, but only in terms of a quantitative contribution. She chose to include two of her own works, *Birthday Wishes* and *My Diary*. The misspelt birthday card from her grandmother combined with her use of ribbons and bows appear as indexical references to gifts or to a symbolic exchange of good wishes, even if they are tinged with irony. Harriet found the diary in her grandmother's house. With its faux-leopard edging, it refers to an undisclosed personal, written history, an unpublished and very private teenage autobiography. Thus,

although she chose not to directly engage with the family's works, her paintings still collaborate in the act of making history present, by literally inserting these pieces of her past through the medium of collage. As a result, a process that could have potentially ignited a display of sibling rivalry is displaced by a productive artistic relationship indicating that there is also a place for the profoundly personal within a collective exhibition. It is not only a family tie that they all share, but also a working relationship - and a functional one at that.

These works seem to offer the viewer a condensed family history, but the ease of mapping out a clear family narrative through the work is thwarted. Katherine incorporates fragments of landscapes from both her son and her father, making it difficult to distinguish with whom the exchange has taken place. This is less so for Will, indicating perhaps the obvious differences between his mother's and his grandfather's works. However, in his work too, such as 'Shower' and 'Three Shampoo Bottles', rather than not being able to locate the author of the work, it is hard to even locate the presence of the others. This tendency to continue with his own aesthetic enquiries including only a subtle trace such as the soap holder snippet from his mother's gouache, highlights the range of involvement that collaboration can foster, from a small nod to a full embrace of another's work.

The surface as palimpsest is nothing new to Katherine Hattam. Much of her recent work has used her mother's books as material support for her work. In this way Katherine returns to the historical purpose of a palimpsest, a recycling of material rather than stretching a new canvas or using a clean piece of paper. Indeed, we see this again in the dense work 'Anxious', in the way that she has used her father's gouaches, taking great delight in the way the paint re-emulsifies, allowing for the literal re-use of twenty-five year old paint, re-applying it to her father's stiff, aged paper of the highest quality. In this work and in 'Anxiety Blue', she has taken a piece of Will's imagery, his regularly employed car frame. In the latter she has used it as an armature together with a stencil pattern of Will's which functions as a filter through which to view a distant and diluted landscape of her father's. The stencil, resembling wallpaper designs incorporated in early synthetic Cubist collages, was found by Will in a timber yard. He too has sprayed this pattern over a print of his mother's, using the stencil as a means of working over and blotting out parts of the work beneath, while still allowing the image to be present.

In their collaboration, both artists explore Will's imagery of the enclosure of the car and the possible perspectives offered from within the vehicle. In Katherine's work, the view selected is from the front passenger seat, looking left out the window into a dense, evening landscape. This offers a productive comparison with two of Will's pieces, 'Rear View' and 'The Collaborators', which are subtle self-portraits. The inclusion of the artist's own brow in the rear-view mirror leads the viewer to assume that he is in the driver's seat. Yet Will

has compressed the area inside the car so as to create an ambiguous pictorial space. Thus, the viewer is at once in the driver's seat, yet also in the back passenger seat, looking out at a classic Australian bush landscape painted by Hal Hattam. In 'Rear View', given the absence of the steering wheel it seems plausible that the view is through the rear windscreen, literally looking back on a view that will persistently recede into the distance. The interior of the car is constructed with a black and white chair etchings of his mother's, padding out a protective maternal space from which to view the outside, again situating himself as a mediator between generations and literally interposing himself by his addition of perspex and woodgrain contact between gouache and etching.

In a review in 1999, Drusilla Modjeska wrote that it is through Katherine's 'recurring use of chairs that the artist makes inheritance a subject of her painting'.⁵

This exhibition then, marks a shift in both content and subject for Katherine. Notably, tables have now replaced the familiar chairs. In some of her previous works, Katherine has set the table with breakfast scenes. Here, however, her tables become desks, surfaces of work upon which rest a pair of scissors, the main tool for a collage artist, placed in proximity to the cut-out fragments of text and book titles. The desk is simultaneously a place of study and literary inspiration, piled high with the well-loved and yellowed books of her late mother, celebrating her mother's love of literature. The scattered mugs remind one less of a family breakfast than a coffee break between bursts of creativity, and the pegs borrowed from the washing line could find a better purpose in hanging a work so its glue can dry. With this shift, Katherine has moved away from the seated position of analysis and,⁶ the chair indicative of the speaking subject; instead, she stands before her working surface, as in the case of 'Sense and Nonsense in Psychology' and 'Books on a table'. A personal space of making has been found which is very different from the busy shared interiors in which the artist was one in a large family of three girls and a boy, a private space located even as she utilises her son and father's work: integral pieces in her new collages, embracing a position of artist, daughter and mother. There has been something functional in this exercise.

The current exhibition is historic in more ways than one. In the history of collaborative ventures there is little evidence of a lateral, ahistorical shift of positions that takes place within a single family.⁷ The idea of a family of artists finds its origins in a history of craftsmanship, apprenticeship and training. Taken one step further, it structurally revolves around a situation of discipleship. Joan Copjec describes the relationship of disciple to master as 'the relationship which (problematically) founds a society, the individual subject coming into being and assuming an unsure identity in an antagonistic struggle with the master society which pre-exists and

excludes the subject'.⁸ If this is the relationship upon which society is founded, the effect is then excruciating if the master artist happens to be the father and grandfather. However, remarkably, the works by Katherine, Will and Harriet, and the show as a whole seems to sidestep this potentially overbearing 'anxiety of influence'. This phrase describing a broader theory of the process of literary influence was coined by Harold Bloom, a scholar of poetry, who emphasised that 'influence anxiety does not so much concern the forerunner but rather is an anxiety achieved in and by the story,⁹ or in this case, the art work.

However, neither the sense of anxiety nor the antagonistic struggles are revealed in these works. This may be due to the playful nature of the collaboration. Sigmund Freud cites an example of the father who climbs down to the floor to join in a children's game, stating that 'there is little that gives children greater pleasure than when a grown-up lets himself down to their level, renounces their superiority and plays with them as an equal'.¹⁰ The adult as well as the child can experience this pleasure, according to Freud. There is a levelling-out of positions, each are equals in the shared game. The process embraced by Katherine, Will, Harriet, and unwittingly, Hal Hattam, in making these works is one of interchangeable positions in what was previously a historical and artistic family hierarchy. The work of each artist, from grandfather to granddaughter becomes a surface of equal value, a mere material. As a result, the artists involved through their exchange enact an anti-hierarchical resistance to the patriarchal patterns of genealogy and influence. I would propose that in the deliberate and timed exchange of these works and the professionalism which came with working together to realise this exhibition, the artists are collaborating less as family members and more as peers, thus creating a lateral artistic environment. The anxiety of influence is counteracted by the enjoyment that comes with levelling out the playing field and creates a functional way of making history present.

Leigh Robb

Leigh Robb studied Art History and Psychology at the University of Queensland, Brisbane. She has worked in Venice for four years at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. Having recently completed a Masters degree in Art History at the Courtauld Institute of Art, she has just started working for the Thomas Dane Gallery in London.