

ALL
FOR
ART

Waratah Lahy talks Paris

Olivia Welch

At the end of 2012 Waratah Lahy spent three months at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris.

OLIVIA WELCH: Paris is a city filled with many galleries, museums and artistic avenues. Were there any exhibitions in particular that you found inspirational or intriguing in terms of your own practice?

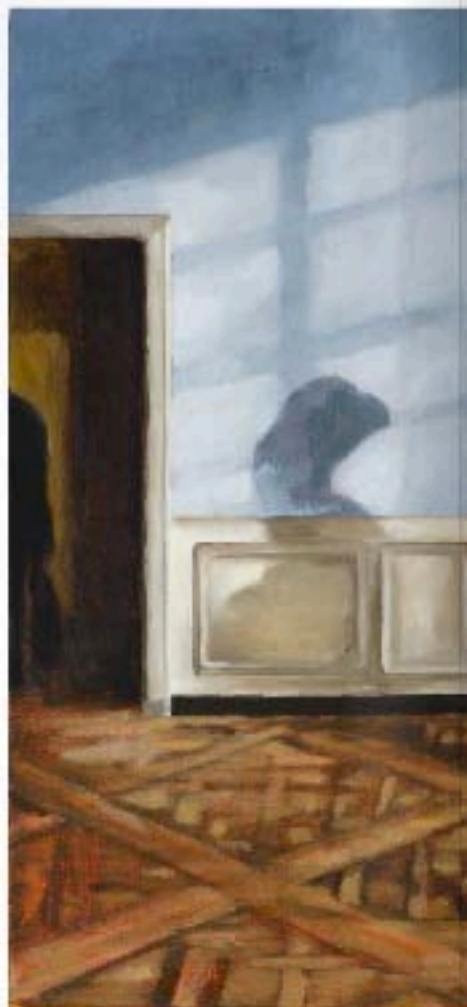
WARATAH LAHY: I saw so many museums and galleries while I was in Paris – I think my count was up around 70 when I left! Most of the museums had amazing collections and I saw a lot of fantastic artwork. I especially appreciated being able to experience work that is historically important and which has contributed to the development of art (and painting) as we know it. Favourite exhibitions would have to include Edward Hopper at the Grand Palais and Gerhard Richter at the Pompidou. My favourite museums were the Musée

Carnavalet, Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature and some of the collections at the Musée d'Orsay, the Musée du Louvre and the National Gallery in London.

Some paintings were so good I had to keep going back to visit them – my favourite is Still Life: Quarter of Beef (Nature morte : le quartier de viande vers) by Monet. Also paintings by Millet, Courbet, Vuillard and Corot.

I was less impressed by the contemporary art I saw around Paris and in terms of exhibitions have seen much more engaging work here in Australia. On several occasions residents at the Cité would have open studios and the work I saw there was much better than what I saw in the galleries.

O: Your oeuvre has thus far been concerned with the act of looking. How has the work that you completed during your stay at the Cité Internationale des Arts either continued or extended this fascination?





Arvix, 35 x 33cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Emerita May Gallery

W: I'm still processing the experience but I think my residency at the Cité had a definite impact on my work and I can imagine it will influence me for a long time to come. The experience of being able to see incredible art works that I've only known through reproductions was mind-blowing and I feel like I earned a whole new visual arts degree through just looking. It was wonderful to be able to see the colours properly, the brushstrokes, the texture of the paint and the real size of the works. I was also able to engage with the materiality of paint in a way that wouldn't have been possible without being there.

I'm still interested in the act of looking and I think my time in Paris has changed the way I engage with the act of looking and observing. I'm still figuring it out, but I think perhaps that up until now the way I've been looking at people and places

has been very much as an observer. I've been involved in what I see but I've also kept a distance. I think a shift has occurred in that now I feel much more involved in what I'm seeing, and I guess it's evident through the amount of information I'm including in my paintings. I'm not isolating specific figures or details, I'm trying to describe a whole scene and have started using paint in a way that suggests the feeling of the place rather than just a physical description. I've been enjoying the shift to painting on canvas because it poses new problems, but I'm also keen to see how I can incorporate what I've been learning with my fascination for painting on glass and other objects

O: Whilst completing your residency, what was a highlight for you artistically?

W: The highlight of the residency was definitely the

opportunity to see so much art! I met a lot of other artists from all over the world and it was interesting to see who people responded to being in Paris. Some artists spent very little time looking at museums and galleries and instead stayed working in their studios but I was very much in the contingent that wanted to see as much as possible!

O: How has this experience at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris influenced your practice since returning home to Canberra?

W: I think the experience has given me a lot of new direction and has shown me how much I want to learn about painting. There's so much to learn! It's given me a different kind of confidence in my practice – if I'd had the opportunity to spend time in Paris earlier I'm not sure if I would have been ready to engage with art in the way that I have. I was able to see more because I've had time to develop my own way of working, and I think now that I'm back the memories of what I saw will keep informing my approach.

O: You were in Paris for a couple of months during the residency, are there any Parisian idiosyncrasies that you found humorous, confronting or perhaps influential?

W: I was in Paris for three months and I have to say everyone I met was very friendly and helpful.

I tried learning French before I left but it was minimal. People in Paris were very patient with my attempts and would correct my pronunciation - it definitely helped to always try speaking in French! I was very pleased to be able to conduct my entire transaction at the food markets in French and thought it was hilarious when the Vietnamese stall-holder (who could speak fluently) told me in perfect English how well I'd done!

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