

KIRSTEN LAVERS

interview with Mark Caffrey

*Kirsten, you've been here throughout the five days of **NRLA** with your **SAFE display**, your project taking place as interventions in various spaces around the Arches. Could you describe the nature of the project?*

Yes. **Safe** is a revisiting of a piece that I made twenty years ago for **NRLA** called **A Safe Place**. **Safe** exists in two modes. It exists literally as a grey box safe, very tantalisingly locked up, which holds a sound piece an assemblage of conversations and text spoken by a computer voice. I've had reports from people who have actually managed to break the combination and look in! The second mode of **Safe** is discussions with various interested audience members about what the idea of safety means to them now.

*How has the idea of safety changed for you since presenting **A Safe Place** at the **NRLA** twenty years ago?*

The idea (or the ideal) of safety has become more and more ambiguous and contentious – largely to do with the way that health and safety affects our creativity as artists, but also the kinds of things that are done in response to 9/11 and the war on terror. Actions are taken in the name of safety that actually risk a great deal.

How do you engage your audience with the ambiguous ideas around the concept of safety?

At certain times I've been 'playing safe' with people – a game of my own invention – and that has been about releasing conversations around individual responses to the idea of safety, and how we arrive at our own decisions about whether a context or a situation is safe for us or not.

...and have the responses differed widely?

Well, what has been interesting are the very different individual positions that are taken as a result of our experiences, our associations, our memories, our political standpoints etc. It's been fascinating to revisit this work twenty years on and to share it with people in the context of the idea of safety – particularly at **NRLA** where artists are challenging boundaries. I've had some fantastic conversations, which is very much what my practice is about now. Twenty years ago I was making object-based installations and now I'm creating contexts for conversation and interaction, a more informal performance style.

*You've been moving through various spaces in the Arches. How have those different spaces affected the work, or the level of people's involvement in the **Safe** project?*

It has been something I've become more aware of as this year's **NRLA** developed. For example, yesterday I was in the **Basement Corridor** and the pressure in that corridor with so many different queues forming for different pieces! The crowds meant that for the first time there was one particular conversational performance period in which people were entering and dipping in and out of the conversation. This is a very different experience to being in the **Casbah** with the **Trace Collective** later the same afternoon where the environment allowed people to commit to the shape of the conversation. It has been interesting to see how the mood and the different contexts of the Arches have affected people's ability to stay within the zone of conversation that I was creating.

*Did your piece enter into a dialogue with the other mobile pieces then, for example the invisible one-to-one performances by **Sam Rose** or **Kate Stannard's** endurance cycle event taking place in various venues?*

There have been nice exchanges with **Kate Stannard's** piece. As she moved around we found ourselves swapping and sharing spaces. I've enjoyed that – and because my work is generally site-specific it's been nice to be able to bring that approach to **NRLA** and explore how the work has been affected by the different contexts in the Arches.

*I understand the **Safe** box will remain at the Arches after you leave?*

Yes. The **Safe** box will stay here and it has now been left opened for the first time, so people will now be able to see the remnants of a safe place. The glasshouse has now been utterly shattered by the process – kind of reflecting my shattered relation to the idea of safety.

...a negative relationship?

No, I don't see it in a negative way – I'm actually pleased that I have a more complex relationship to the idea of safety than I did twenty years ago.

Thinking about the conversations you've had with audience members over the last four days – have they once again changed your relationship to the concept of safety?

In some ways it has been restored. The conclusion of every conversational game playing has been people choosing whether they wish to wear a badge that says "I played safe and won" or "I played safe and lost", and that provided a fascinating moment of closure at the end of each conversation. By playing safe you often miss out or lose opportunities to explore the potential of taking a risk or taking a gamble – moving out of your comfort zone – but then it's also it's been intriguing to have people argue to me that they feel very positive about playing safe. Those that choose to say "I've played safe and won" view the clarity and control in playing safe as an achievement. So, I think I'm leaving **NRLA** with a richer sense of my relationship to safety. I've really enjoyed sharing those ideas with people, and the surprises when a particular card combination has revealed such radically different associations and meanings for the assembled group in the conversation.

*Finally Kirsten, what has been your experience of **NRLA30**, and have you had the opportunity to see much of the work?*

Thinking about **Claire MacDonald's** text that was read at the **Early Bird 'Remembering Performance' talk** this morning, I would like to acknowledge some of the friendships that I've revisited and that have grown as a result of being here this year– that's been enormously rewarding. I guess the piece that stands out for me has been **Geraldine Pilgrim's 'Not Waving but Drowning'**. I found it personally very evocative and there was a sense that in her piece you were able to share a moment of silence over the telephone. For me, that begins to talk about the space between us as artists, and also the importance the **NRLA** has had for each of us in our practice – marking that with a moment of reflection has been very important. Yes, Geraldine's piece felt like it had a good conversation with what I was doing in a very different way.

This interview was conducted on 21st March, 2010. For more on **Kirsten Lavers**, visit www.kirstenlavers.net

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