



Moving Forward

Lisa Waup

Gunditjmara, Torres Strait Islander, Italian

Interviewed by Tabitha Lean

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I rang Lisa on a Sunday afternoon for this interview, and we began the conversation with what I think is the most common starter for everyone in lockdown: “How are you coping?” Lisa’s response was positive and upbeat: “Not too bad actually.” That’s not to say things have been easy, but I learned very quickly that Lisa has a wonderful way of shining a light alongside every path of darkness. “It was my dream to go back to university to study, so while there has been great challenges being a uni student this year because I haven’t been able access my studio and have limited access to materials, it has also been a great thing.” Lisa tells me that the isolation of Covid has transformed her creative practice, as she makes do with using her phone for photography, and sharing a studio space at home with her daughter.

This idea of bringing light to darkness is reflected in Lisa’s artwork. She tells me of her process of repurposing and bringing back to life found objects. Whether it is something that is seemingly insignificant like a feather or something that is discarded like a bottle top, Lisa collects and breathes life back into objects. She then gives it another purpose, be that aesthetic or functional, and it has a chance at another life. I reflect on the importance of the message in Lisa’s work and its relevance during lockdown: the idea of not dwelling in the melancholy of the moment, but resting in that stillness while seeking other spaces and ways to move forward. “I’m never bored. I’ve never got nothing to do. My head is always ticking a thousand times a minute,” Lisa says. “Besides, this time will soon pass.”

Lisa is grateful to be an artist during these times: “Creative people are able to see things in a different way,” she says. Her strength is drawn from her ability to reimagine moments and recalibrate what could be perceived a restriction or an obstacle into something to draw joy from. Although a self-confessed ‘home body’, Lisa relished being the designated person to do the shopping. She would go to the supermarket and just sit in her vehicle in the car park for some time, enjoying the quiet – just enjoying doing nothing and being in the space: “You have to take peace where you can find it,” she



says. “I just stopped time for a bit.” While Lisa was able to find solace in those moments, she also reflected on what it must be like for people in detention centres who can’t leave and have had every human right stripped from them. “We’re doing okay,” Lisa says, reflecting on our current privilege even in the middle of a pandemic.

As an artist, Lisa is adaptable, and in life she has also learnt to survive. Having not grown up on Country, and feeling detached from culture, Lisa uses her art to weave a connection with family, knowledge, culture and Country. Much of her work centres on family and notions of belonging. Lisa describes her work as being guided by the materials and by her ancestors. Having not grown up with culture, Lisa draws on what rests within her and what she has inherited in her DNA, and weaves a story to heal herself and release what has been “swirling around” her head for a very long time: “While my hands are doing the work and I am telling the story, I am just a vehicle for the story that needs to be told.” It is so important during these times of forced isolation to feel connected. “How would everyone have survived lockdown without the work of artists?” Lisa asks. She reminds me that artists give so much to the world, and hopes people have reflected on that: “People have listened to music, watched movies, read books ... all of this wouldn’t be available without artists!” Lisa laments that the arts industry has been disregarded and overlooked in so many ways, from lack of financial support in Covid aid packages, to reductions in government funding.

While this year was supposed to be a time for Lisa to try out a new medium, to play and to develop new styles, Covid has hindered that somewhat. However, in every dark cloud is the proverbial silver lining, and Lisa seeks out opportunities and moments to be creative even while doing day-to-day tasks. When taking her son to work in the mornings, she makes a conscious effort to absorb everything about the outing. She shares the joy of pulling over to the side of the road and using the opportunity to snap some pictures on her phone for her university work. Lisa reminds me that there are still great exhibitions happening, including art markets, with many now online. This reflects the adaptability of artists and art centres: finding creative solutions, and breathing life into a community. Lisa’s work and her approach to life are inspiring, and a reminder that while we might need to stand still during this time, we can also find beauty and moments of joy to keep us connected and moving forward.

Lisa is an artist and curator of Gunditjmara, Torres Strait Islander and Italian heritage. She has developed a distinctive weaving practice, and her



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work usually features many layers that symbolise reattaching and reconnecting history and stories to her heritage. Lisa was a finalist in the 2016, 2017 and 2018 Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Awards. In 2017, she was a finalist in the Victorian Craft Awards, and her designs were featured during the 2017 Melbourne Fashion Week, 2019 Melbourne Fashion Week, Country to Couture (DAAFF-Darwin), 2020 finalist in the National Indigenous Fashion Awards.

Lisa has exhibited at ACCA, NGV, Fremantle Art Centre, Art Gallery of South Australia, and ReDot Gallery in Singapore. Her work has also been displayed at the Vivien Anderson Gallery and the National Trust of Victoria, and she produced a commissioned woven piece for the Koorie Heritage Trust. Lisa's work has been acquired by the NGV, Mornington Peninsula Shire, and numerous councils and collections, nationally and internationally.