

Matthew Bryant, Cheryl Gilge and Lisa Tucker meet for a conversation about their work and new collaborative project showing at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions from August 29 to September 9, 2007. The interview takes place on August 18, 2007 using Yahoo!Messenger.

Matthew Bryant: Ok, I think we are all in?

Cheryl Gilge: yes

Lisa Tucker: yep

MB: excellent

LT: grin

MB: finally got this to work (wipes forehead)

LT: hm... can't really find the conversation history

MB: yeah..still looking at how to do this here...of course it sounds like Macs are harder to do...

LT: yeah, as usual. it's a pc world

MB: ok, yeah, looks like we will have to cut and paste at the end. Mac users screwed once again! of course if anyone crashes and logs back in the history is gone....

LT: but we have macs... they never crash (grin)

CG: anyway- my safari crashed as I was sitting here.

MB: bloody brilliant. You'd think with all the wire tapping frenzy this would be a breeze

CG: how should we start?

LT: it might be nice to talk about meeting or first impressions, etc?

CG: ok- Lisa- how did you and matt meet?

LT: i think we met at a UC, Digital Art Network conference. didn't amir introduce us?

MB: Yeah, that was it...at UC, Riverside....we met during the break. Yes, Amir did the intro.

I think we were both there for a variety of common interests

CG: were you presenting lisa?

LT: nod, i think we had a panel. yes, now I remember. it was our foodie group from studio art and the arts, computation and engineering program at uci.

MB: I was only there one day, but it was great. Lots of interesting panels about the interweaving of art, technology, academia, etc

CG: and you guys just kept in touch-or was there another event that allowed your paths to cross?

MB: We ran into each other again at some point, and we chatted some more, then began to talk about common interests and the possibility of collaboration. and of course compared notes about being in grad school.

LT: i think we knew some of the same people, since i went to ucr as an undergrad... i remember going to your thesis show and really being drawn to your, and matt's, work.

CG: so- after we went to your thesis exhibition- your came to see our show at the sweeney- and came back out for matt's panel

LT: yes, i was really surprised that you would come all the way out to uci for the show. we are pretty used to being ignored behind the orange curtain.

MB: yeah, and we all seem to have connections and interest in other interdisciplinary artists and efforts

LT: indeed

CG: orange curtain and the curtain of smog. two schools of isolation...

LT: laugh, yeah

MB: Cheryl, I know that you have an interest and tendency toward interdisciplinary work and ideas, how did you come to this collaboration?

CG: well- I was impressed with the level of commitment and thoroughness/thoughtfulness of Lisa's portion of the exhibition- and since you and I have such a long history, Matt, when you asked if I would be interested, I of course said yes. the urban fabric is my muse. and any kind of urban intervention/investigation is great- and it seemed like, theoretically speaking, I had a lot to offer to the group, given my reading background.

LT: talk a little more about that...

CG: about my reading?

LT: your background... yeah

CG: well, i have had a long interest in the urban, er, condition, for lack of a better word. it started out as simply documenting moments in the world that raised questions for me- either about how space was being used (pos or neg). but as I started reading about the suburban condition- and having grown up in a town that was under the influence of suburbanization

LT: did you do that primarily through photography at the time?

CG: yes- photos

MB: funny, we all seem to have come from a photo background

LT: and none of us are doing it now.

MB: then what happened? Ha!

CG: it was such a strange moment to attempt to understand the draw of the suburban "dream" and from there- my investigations became more ambivalent, ambiguous, in my point of you- but offering items up for conversation/contemplation

MB: point of you...that is great

CG: but i read urban planning theory/arch theory now- and make work that responds to the concepts/theories that have caused the mess we're in

CG: yeah, well.... view you stew drew. view know what i mean.

MB: how about you, Lisa, how did you end up doing the interesting, socially and politically engaged projects that you have done?

LT: i'm with cheryl in wondering what feeds the mess we've developed. i began at a more personal place... and then moved out to the community. also, looking at who makes the decisions, who has the power, why... those old questions. anyway, i am really interested in how communities are structured. not just the physical environment, but the social networks. that led to the investigation of food production and distribution.

MB: I am scared of everything I eat now, I think

LT: how it's all compartmentalized by big business

MB: so many things are compartmentalized and dominated and controlled....

LT: i really love this film by ariana gerstein and monty mccollum about milk. you wouldn't believe the story behind milk... it's nuts.

MB: Funny, it seems like our similar and overlapping interests (all three of us) could be sort of mapped out from the center, say a person, to all of the varying power structures, social structures, etc, that radiate from there, all of the complex networks and flows...

CG: there is definitely an overlap between your interests, matt, and lisa. how things are mediated or controlled and the access the individual has...

LT: yes, i'm very interested in what an individual has access to or doesn't have access to

LT: so matt, tell us about what drew you to this collaboration.

MB: Well, as Cheryl, mentioned, she and I have a long history and have many shared interests and concerns....so after you and I met and started talking it was a no-brainer for me to want to include her, and I knew that you and her would have a lot to share. I also started with the personal...looking at my own position and progression in the world...literally, physically, socially, mentally.... and then started to look at what kinds of systems I fit into....and then branched out from there.

LT: it was funny, because i saw cheryl's work at the sweeney and wanted to invite her to join us, but it seemed to be too early. i'm glad you two are friends. that made it really easy.

MB: yeah, it was fate!

LT: smile

CG: aw, shucks

MB: This collaboration seemed like a great way to bring our shared interests and sensibilities together in an interesting way....and the situating of the project in a complex, rich, public site was perfect.

CG: so with the current project Lisa- what were your strongest desires/concerns going into it- and how did they change once you started the process of beginning a new project post-grad school?

LT: I wanted to know more about what people thought about their neighborhood changing and how it would be changing, etc. the meeting we all went to at the mta was enlightening. i believe it was structured for urban planners. i learned a lot.

CG: yeah, there is a tendency with people coming in, surveying a site and giving the grand gesture cure-all suggestion, with little thought given to how the space is used by inhabitants. it's usually generated from formulas that worked in other places.

LT: yep, and the formulas usually fails in some significant way. i mean, concepts work, but they need to be tailored for the people who actually live there. like, i think high density housing is a great idea, but there's more to it than just building a lot of expensive condos or luxury apartments. in hollywood, many of the people who now live there can't afford the new condos and luxury apts. it's the same old story again and again....

CG: looks great on papers and in renderings though. Lol

MB: that is a good point. How do ideas translate from one medium to another...and how much to certain interests "drive" the direction of development and anti-development. and funny, even though the story is the same, why does it continue?

CG: yeah, it comes down to conditions- and the issues. if a developer doesn't investment himself in learning those- or doesn't care- it's easy for the same thing to be repeated ad infinitum.

LT: that is what i'm really interested in. same with the history of science and the scientific method... it's old, it's worn out... many times it is a hindrance to understanding, but we keep following it. why?

MB: I get the sense that people many times feel that things just "happen" to them or around them, that they are not active participants in what happens. same with politics, etc

CG: and big luxury condos sell because la ain't got no more room for the shift

MB: I get sick when I see the condo ads in the NYTimes Magazine or Dwell for that matter

CG: yeah, i have a difficult relationship with dwell

MB: maybe there is something revealing in the term "gentrify"

CG: yeah, it's not a zero sum game. they are in it for money- and granite countertops sell

over affordable housing.

LT: ok, this is getting depressing

MB: Yes, I need another drink. So, what do you think this current project reveals, or suggests, or....

CG: so with the current project- we all quickly realized that hollywood was a handful- and the best we could hope to do was understand the conditions of the site- and come to an understanding of the concerns or the issues that are at stake

MB: current issues as in political, etc?

CG: issues as in issues. all things are political. where did I just read that?

MB: like when artists say they do not make political art.

CG: exactly

LT: I was interested in the new building going on in the area.

MB: the new development: like the new 'W' hotel, etc?

LT: the new developments, the old buildings, how people relate to their environment. what the memories in those structures hold. i think in l.a. there's this feeling of, tear down the old, dirty buildings and get those spanking new condos up, with a Whole Foods Market on the ground level.

MB: so often with new development the only memory invoked is calling something after the thing that was destroyed. funny how the memories overlap and come and go...when the average age of resident is 60-70...and the buildings....longer? shorter?

CG: i think the depreciation of a building is 40 years.

MB: like the repeating of history...how one generation can forget what just happened in the last (war, civil rights, etc)...

CG: accounting standards... but back to the tear down and build anew

MB: I have even been guilty of looking at a new development and standing there trying hard to remember what was there before

CG: it's astonishing to think of how much landfill is generated by construction. it's wasteful

LT: we are really good at not looking at the whole picture

MB: is it sort of like a theory of mass displacement...one thing moving to make room for something else?

CG: yeah- or energy.

MB: you know, how mass never disappears but just gets moved around and distorted

CG: new building displaces the previous tenants- and they are left to the left desirable places. it's like a weird version of the trickle down theory.

MB: I wonder if people ever think of how they fit into the flow....into the flux of changes in the spaces they inhabit? Especially when we live in a world of constant distraction and consumption?

CG: is that a rhetorical question?

MB: Yes and no. Its the kind of question that I would love to spend months asking people on the street.

CG: it's a tough question. and it would require people being honest with themselves and embracing things that as a society we are programmed to ignore/dismiss/etc. it's un-american to question such things.

MB: being honest. yes, that seems to be very difficult indeed

LT: so we've gone from the personal to americana at large

MB: yes, in less than an hour!

LT: and it's a bit like our project in lace... many viewpoints

CG: aha- scale!

LT: laugh

MB: I think we have all felt a bit at odds with the challenges of coming into a project, and a location, like this as "artists", as "outsiders". Are you still wrestling with that?

LT: oh, definitely.

MB: I know I still do, it is inherently part of the work, and I guess makes it more rich and challenging.

CG: it's also part of the process. understanding the site and some of the conditions

MB: yeah, like any art "project", really

CG: speculating on what the possible scenarios are... allowing that to unfold.

LT: i think we are all very analytical in our personal art practices.

MB: definitely.

CG: it's funny- i joked with matt that we have three years to make a body of work- and then after grad school we have a month to come up with the next project- and have the expectations that it will be as thorough as the first...

MB: That is like Elvis Costello's famous line....they give you 26 years to make your first album, and six months to make the second.

LT: laugh.

CG: yep- i can never remember who said that.

LT: when initially considering our collaboration at lace, i looked at it as just a beginning.

MB: I definitely feel that...a way to open up a conversation, literally and conceptually, that we can carry over to other projects and continue to expand upon.

CG: agreed. otherwise we'd be developers and not artists.

MB: we are like developers, but socio-conceptual ones! Maybe we could start a business that did that!

LT: i hear a lot of criticism about artists doing work that is "issue driven", therefore not "art."

MB: yes

LT: everyone wanting to relegate art or activism to it's tidy, little box.

MB: too serious, too political, over and done. Now we should just play and go back to traditions

CG: just make perdy things and be happy, you know?

MB: it is a challenge, though....making art and being politically active...trying to figure out how to mesh the two, or relegate your time, money, and energy

LT: that is the most challenging part. how to fit it all in?