The Firings of Floating Land

Dr Tamsin Kerr describes this biennial event facilitated by Quixotica in Queensland
The firings of Floating Land have, in two short cycles, established themselves as a celebration of Australia’s Sunshine Coast region and its community. Their effectiveness in evoking both art and place has rapidly made them an expected and anticipated ritual.

There are always disappointments, frustrations and administrative chaos, in managing a vast 10 day environmental art event with hundreds of participants; but these final firings more than balance the scale. Held in mid-winter on Dunn’s beach at Lake Cootharaba with smoke, fire, water and sunset. All edge places: places powerful in spirit.

Hundreds of people arrive on the beach – some with chairs, champagne, picnics; others with bare feet and excited children. And magically, the process stills and calms the large crowd. Amidst muted whispers of conversation, we are entranced. Lyndon Davis and the Gubbi Gubbi dancers welcome us to country. They rub and blow fire into life. Ceremoniously, Ellen Appleby takes their fire to light the last clay cone floating on the lake. Most of the kilns have been lit for hours, smoke billowing and the lickings of flame emerging from their volcanic mouths.

But then Kari in black performance dress of the West joins Lyndon in feathers and patterned body and they walk amongst the smoke. At one point Kari’s clarinet and Lyndon’s didgeridoo are held in exactly the same position, so that each could have been superimposed upon the other. Here is true power and wisdom, stemming from cross-cultural exchange, from moments of ceremonial time which appear both too brief and eternal. Kari says to me later that, in amidst the smoke and the flames, wading through the water, everything faded away and it was only she and Lyndon playing. She says she wished everyone could have experienced the sacredness of that moment: ‘the dawn of time’. I smile, and say, perhaps we got an inkling. We have collaborated in a communal worship of this lake, this place, this land and the creativity of its inhabitants.

Floating Land is an environmental art event held every two years in the Noosa Biosphere. It includes international and local artists, sculptors, potters, photographers, and writers. The 2009 theme was on climate change and included inhabitants of threatened smaller islands such as Tuvalu.
people. We are more connected through our geography. In the midst of our individual aspirations, of our mediated lives, our private enclosed houses, we have emerged to find ourselves a strong community.

The firings also present a strong moral message about our world. Our human effects on climate change are writ small in the kiln’s smoke that drifts across the sky. This is a process to be both revered and feared, to be both managed and celebrated. This ceremony of connection is also a warning from the future. A future that looks to us to ensure that the water’s edge remains a place to play, rather than an encroaching threat.

We have the potters of Quixotica to thank, who devised the kilns and event so as to fire their pots – thereby making the practice (more so than the product) of the artist into the main event. It is a wisdom born of the love of the barely controlled process of firing. It is a partaking of the long hours spent in feeding and celebrating every low-fired kiln firing. And it is this understanding of the ceremony in the process that has been so generously shared.

The crowd is calm as some drift away to eat together at the pub, to drive home with sleeping children, to walk back to houses at Boreen Point. Others stay sitting on the beach, soaking in the senses of this event. The last reds of the sunset have faded away, but the kilns continue to burn into the depth of night. At the edge of this lake, twilight, art, and magic have descended.

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