



ALEXANDER SETON

Story Owen Craven
Photography Daniel Shipp

You studied Art History and Theory at College of Fine Arts (COFA), Sydney. Can you tell me about your background, how you started there and how you've come to be where you are today working with stone?

I was that kid who played in the sandpit. I really did like making objects. It was always part of me. When I first went to COFA I had little idea what shape my practice would take. I knew I wanted to be an artist, not a theorist. I knew I didn't know enough about what had gone before, what had been made. What I found was I was drawn to interaction. I started making objects that could be interacted with. Then that drew me very slowly back to an idea of playing with materials that already had expectations—a loaded story. I went to the mother of all materials—marble. It is so loaded, so endowed with implications of empire and wealth. To me, it spoke of the very act of what it is to make an object—to embody an idea and convey that to an audience.

So there was a desire to carve and sculpt because of the material?

Yes and I realised that I'd always carved. It was an act I enjoyed. Sculpture enabled the quiet reflection I was drawn to. That's what I look for now in an artwork. I create that reflective moment, the idea of quiet contemplation—coming back to a work again and again and have it give you more.

I'd like to know about your process. Can you take me through how you get from a big block to a finished object?

Depending on what the artwork is, it will dictate the process to me. So from conception in a drawing book—I sketch it out—then the idea dictates what will come. I do a lot of drawing first and foremost. And photography. And a lot of reading. There's a lot of internal work. I have a small notebook and will jot down just a word that captures my imagination—something that relates to an idea.



I will look at what [stone] material I have—find something with the right colour, texture. I have a lot of the models [in and around the studio] that will be sometimes reference points. I will use them to observe but I will rarely need to pull them into the sculpture studio, into the dust box. I carve from memory. I use a variety of methods from hand chisels to power tools depending on what stage of the process I'm at.

What is that element that you think draws people back again and again? Is it the illusion of reality?

Well, actually, there is a part of me that wants to subvert that. There is something in my work that wants to show that what is actually solid is not solid. The transformation of material has a rich history in art. In that cathartic moment of discovery you can reset questions of perception—what am I looking at and why am I looking at it? That reset can be far more effective than simply banging someone across the head with insult or shock. There is a delight in discovery. I hope that all my work will inspire curiosity more than anything else—even if it seems to be as little as 'this seems absurd; what is this?'

So playing with contradiction plays a big part in your art making?

When you have a transformation of materials—I'm making soft objects as hard objects – you can actually embody the idea of contradiction itself. You can throw up questions of its nature and say it is both a sculpture and not a sculpture, both what it purports to be and not what it purports to be. It's also often about a marriage of different materials. I like to break the illusion of the stone by adding things like hair ties or something like a razor blade. This breaks the sense of monument. I'm not interested in the hierarchy of medium that is so inbuilt and welded to it. It's got to be personable, as in speak directly to the desire to touch—not to feel it is hands-off.



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Your work is theme-based. You respond to ideas and objects in contemporary society. Can you tell me a bit about this?

I like the idea of telling stories of my life, borne of my curiosity and stories around me—and to make it for people here and now. [As an artist], I have that wonderful privilege of being able to express my ideas of curiosity and capture them in the medium of marble. Using everyday objects such as t-shirts I'm able to reach into elements of pop, elements of personal, elements of physical and elements of the everyday manufactured world. I use them as a canvas on which I can draw out tales. I use these everyday objects as a place for story telling because they're related and accessible. They're common enough to have them even removed once, in terms of context, but still throw up questions of 'what am I looking at?'

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The audience seems to be an important driver in your practice as an artist. Their physical experience and interaction is a significant element of the artworks?

Yes, first and foremost, it should be an engagement with the world around us with questions of the here and now. I think there is potency in the new mediums of digital age, and they extend our perception, but to have that analogue experience sets it in the here and now. Not having to view the world through a small camera window, not viewing the world but being reliant on our fragile human form and sculpture provides that genuine physical experience. ■

Alexander Seton is represented by Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney, and Jan Murphy Gallery, Brisbane.
www.sffa.com.au
www.janmurphygallery.com.au
www.alexanderseton.com

EXHIBITIONS
 Infinitely Near
 8 June - 27 June 2010
 Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, 44 Gurner Street, Paddington, Sydney

ART HK – Hong Kong International Art Fair
 27 May - 30 May 2010
www.hongkongartfair.com

01 **Viva La Republica!**, 2009, Bianca marble, resin inlay and stainless steel, 80 x 56 x 8cm

02 **Mr Squishy**, 2009, Wombeyan and Bianca marble 28 x 24 x 30cm

03 **Cumulus-911 Carrera Airbag**, 2009, Yass black and Bianca marble, plastic strap, 30 x 30 x 30cm

04 **An Island in the Sun**, 2010, Bianca marble and rubber stoppers, 65 x 38 x 38cm

Images courtesy of artist, Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney, and Jan Murphy Gallery, Brisbane.