

Art Collector



ARTIST INTERVIEW: HIROMI TANGO

By Camilla Wagstaff
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Tell us a bit about what you have in store for your coming exhibition *Fluorescence* at Sullivan+Strumpf?

Fluorescence continues a deeply personal series of works exploring ideas around memory, brain, heart function and intergenerational relationships. As my solo practice has continued to evolve, I have used materials and processes to delve into ideas around the brain, heart, intellectual and emotional development and recovery.

Your work explores memory, trauma and healing through therapeutic techniques of wrapping and weaving to create your intricate works – what compels you to explore these deeply personal experiences?

Both my solo practice and community-engaged practice have been driven by a desire to realise the potential for arts engagement and practice to achieve benefits for emotional and physical wellbeing. Certainly in the community engagement space, we have repeatedly seen the benefit of arts engagement, both in terms of strengthening social and emotional wellbeing, as well as with regard to therapeutic benefits for people who have experienced traumatic injuries or degenerative conditions including dementia. I am fascinated by the science that underpins these benefits, and the potential for art making to effect recovery and healing, as well as to preserve brain function.

My personal journey includes both a desire to improve my own health and wellbeing, as well as a process of coming to terms with seeing my father struggles with age-related decline in cognitive function, memory and emotional resiliency. As a parent myself now, intergenerational cycles are becoming increasingly important to me.

How do ideas around nature and nurture play in to your new work?

There continues to be a tension around these ideas – oftentimes scientific discovery seems to provide mixed messages that there are so many things that are hard-coded into our DNA that define who we are, which seems to sit in conflict with discoveries around neuroplasticity and our ability to influence our development through environment and intentional actions.

The gap between theory and practice – the reality that as much as we try to adopt positive and healthy behaviours, there are still so many aspects of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual selves that refuse to cooperate – these are the questions that I continue to grapple with in the work.

An incorporation of vibrant neon has become an intrinsic part of your practice – what is the intention behind this?

Fluorescence fascinates me: how vibrant colour evokes an immediate response in people, changes in brain function and perception, the use of light such as argon in medical therapies and applications for brain discovery such as in the differentiation of minutely detailed brain structures in brain imaging. I have been experimenting over time with different sensory experiences in my work including sound, aromatherapy and touch, so my interest in the application of light is a natural continuation of how arts engagement might trigger different effects in terms of cognitive and emotional function.

You use the term *Art Magic* to describe your practice. Can you explain a little further what you mean by this?

Art Magic refers to a process that I developed through my community engagement practice – bringing together purposeful art making techniques that are known to improve and preserve certain types of brain function with the benefits of social connectedness that happens when people come together for workshops and creative activities. Over time I have developed many specific ways of working that have been shared with other artists, facilitators and community members, leading to the creation of a trademarked process called Art Magic. I have created many education resources for art and community organisations, including publications and films, along with hands-on activities to teach the principles and methods of Art Magic. Over time it has evolved through consultation with health professionals, and has been used in a broad range of community-engaged projects across Australia and internationally.

In recent years, your art magic has been applied to communities suffering a variety of problems – has this been a part of the new work and if so, can you tell us a bit about it?

As mentioned above, my personal practice delves deeply into concerns around health, memory and cognition, particularly with regard to the experience of witnessing the impact of aging on my father. While there is of course an essence of Art Magic in my practice since the techniques were developed through my long-term interest in brain development and health with relation to art-making, the celebratory nature of Art Magic in community projects gives way to a more melancholic sense of questioning in my private practice and personal experience. Perhaps it is easier to feel the optimism of witnessing some improvement that vulnerable communities experience through arts engagement – which has been demonstrated time and time again – whereas my private practice is a space where I continue to question and explore ideas, pushing at boundaries and experimenting.

Over the past 18 months, your art magic has gone global. Why do you think the ideas you deal with have such a universal appeal?

There are many themes that are explored through the work that extend across cultural, linguistic and geographical boundaries, such as the impacts of aging and the desire to understand the complexities of the heart and mind. I think we are all searching for explanations, ways of understanding our world and our lived experience. We are constantly overloaded every day with new information about our bodies and minds, with little time to filter or distil this information in a meaningful way. Artwork that provides a way of exploring concepts that may be quite abstract and creating sensory experiences through the use of colour, light, texture, movement and even scent, allows people to unpack some of these ideas, I hope.

Fluorescence will show at Sullivan+Strumpf from 1 – 22 August 2015