

# 4αXY

Lisa Corsi interviews Dr Dick Quan \*

LC: Can you talk about the artists you have included in this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary exhibition and their relevance to this particular exhibition?

DQ: I want to show works that represent the 10-year span of my involvement and I particularly want to discuss the future. The aesthetic climate change that I see is a really interesting world that we can't fear. We have to give it a really big smooch!

One of the things that really interests me is generational change. We can't get stuck on the aesthetics we know. The most exciting thing about art is that it is always about the boundary which ushers in the next aesthetic.

I'd like to share what I think the future may look like. They may not be the dominant things but they could be challenging things.

The 'naughties' ushered in a startling aesthetic evolution. In the 90's, the emergence of Post Mao Pop, cynical realist artists from China and cute works of Murakami [Kawaii] in Japan has morphed into the current **Asia Pacific Post Kawaii** works on show. I want to anchor it with artists shown at this year's 2007 Venice Biennale: Shaun Gladwell and Angelo Filomeno, because the biennale is the 'world's fair' of art - where culture tries to identify cultural allies and display it.

So showing the reference points for what is current in the world against what is happening in our cultural neighbourhood is important in this exhibition. This show aims to create a context for Australian art so people can see that we have artists just as strong and vibrant as the ones based overseas. For us **not** to know who our artists are is a shame. If I can show more Australian artists and show how relevant they are in the face of other great artists, I'll be a very happy man.

I just want to talk a little about the **Asia Pacific Post Kawaii** work.

In the 90's we had a spate of good work: Chinese cynical realism, German neo-objective photography, the YBAs in the UK, and Murakami and Nara's *Kawaii* in Japan. Simultaneously, we had, and continue to have, a popular culture world full of manufactured products. The two have clashed and melded Post Millennium. I'm interested in how we have responded to being told that we live in a more menacing world amidst climate change and how art has responded in an **aesthetic climate change**. So the things I've been collecting are works by artists who reinterpret the product, the changing environment and capturing the response.

I coined the word: **Post Kawaii** – or what exists after *kawaii*, the Japanese word for 'cute'. It is a counterpoint to the cool European photography, objectivity and good taste. Post Kawaii is a flawed and human rather than a precisely manufactured object. The imperfect versus the contrived. I can always manage to find beauty in the imperfect. Multiple simultaneous viewpoints rather than monoculture.

LC: Yes, but you have to go a certain way before you can see the beauty.

DQ: Yes, it is about being educated to see it. This exhibition is called 4 (alpha) XY. 4a stands for 'gallery 4a' and alpha denote leading artists. 'XY' in doctor's terms stands for male and XY can also stand for 'generation X' and 'generation Y' and also '10<sup>th</sup> year'. You may interpret it any and many ways and so we must look at the world in a multi layered way and not ask, "Is it this? Or "Is it that?" **It's everything all at once.**

LC: Remediation becomes so much more interesting when you realise that the remediation is based on a history and it is that history that gives the future substance.

DQ: I do think we need to re-investigate history because for many years historical imperialism has been applied to art. We need to re-examine, to reinvigorate, to add new thought rather than trying to simplify. We need not be fearful of complexity, just try to understand that there are things that you will never know. There is no right answer. There is no right or wrong. What is the right answer one day might be the wrong answer the next day. We can't get stuck and to me art is about getting 'un-stuck'.

If it resonates deeply within our culture we'll embrace it and if not, it'll need 10 or 20 years for people to get it. I want to show things that could be all of this. I don't mind if people really dislike it, but I want to challenge people's sense of what they think art is. Often people will ask me "Why did you buy that?" and I say, "I bought it because I don't understand it". I much prefer to collect art I don't understand so that I can examine it further. I want to find out what it is that I'm intrigued by. I'm far more interested in what I don't understand than what I know so I'm not very interested in a pastoral landscape. It would be great if more people put up their hands and said "I don't understand it" or "I think it is horrible but I like it".

LC: The fantastic thing about that approach is that it gives rise to debate. So what you're proposing therefore is crucial as it offers people a freedom of expression through debate.

DQ: I've always said that democracy is not about giving someone a vote but it is about giving him or her the ability to express an opinion and be heard. We live in a predominately Judeo Christian Anglo-Saxon culture, which tries to turn everything into a yes/no binary.

Through the art I collect and the activities I get involved in, I'm trying to I-Ching it! Give thoughts more possibility so that people don't feel they have to be reduced to the yes/no, black/white, fat/thin binary. It doesn't matter if it's one thing or a thousand different feelings all at the same time. In fact the best works that I've seen are simultaneously beautiful and ugly as well as a thousand mixed emotions. There is nothing wrong with being fearful or confused. It is not a bad state to be in -to be constantly thinking and revising ideas. I'm not stuck on being 'stuck'. I want to celebrate the movement and change. I hope that people can see the show and feel that life is changing. Art is like that.

I remember seeing a Mariko Mori video in the 1997 Venice Biennale and I had no idea what I was looking at, but I knew

that my life had changed by a Zen moment, and I want more people to experience it. Sport is about 'rules' and art has 'no rules' so we must not be fearful of aesthetic change.

LC: Can you share your interpretation of what philanthropy is?

DQ: Philanthropy is to give. Some people just don't have any time so the simplest way you can do this is by giving some money and I don't belittle that in anyway.

A philosopher once said 'the best way to help someone is to help them in a way so they never ask for help again'.

For me I really love art and I love how art stirs new thoughts, how art gives me something more than the medicine I practice. I listen to people's problems all day and when I look at art it solves lots of problems and poses new and interesting questions that help me understand the thoughts of others.

Philanthropy is something I want to do in everyway. I can do it by sharing interesting ideas, sharing thoughts, sharing artwork, which I own, or others own. I give a percentage of my earnings to art.

At work in medicine recently, we're supporting a village in Southern Kenya where we plan to help buy 6,000 mosquito nets and to empower the village so they can sustain themselves. Holdsworth House Medical Practice (HHMP), my medical practice, and I - we give to Kenya Aid and I personally give to art. HHMP gives to HIV research, virological research and to sustain life in Africa amongst the poorest people. So for me that is what philanthropy is: GIVING ANYWAY I CAN by making a difference to lives of others.

I would like to keep Gallery 4a alive. It is about keeping the minnows alive amongst the giants. To develop relationships between artists who have never had an opportunity to show; to show Australian artists overseas and vice versa. Another aim is to use the newest technology so that the gallery is no longer confined to a physical space. Technology and the Internet will allow art works to be seen by a world with similar passions and thoughts. But we can't do this without a few more people sharing this view. 4a is the Rabbits of Sydney art and they need more philanthropists to be involved.

LC: I'm interested in you as a person because you are after all quite important in all of this ...

DQ: I'm one of many ...

LC: Yes, and your contribution is important. Can you share which particular moment in your life sparked this urge to "give".

DQ: I don't think there is a particular moment but rather a deep felt personal need. Growing up in Australia I felt that there should be greater balanced in artistic cultural life. Art affects everything and makes me more whole by supporting it. I want to support diversity and debate through the medium of art.

We as a nation need to give more. We've forgotten how to give. People are always thinking about "what do I get?" or their return on investment. Art doesn't work that way. I think about what I can do to make a difference and if one person in ten gets it, then I'm happy. I'm happier if nine out of ten get it but I know that not everyone will.

If anyone can say, "I can grow my art horizons from this 10<sup>th</sup> Year anniversary exhibition", I'll be very happy

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This is an edited transcript of an interview between Dr Dick Quan and Lisa Corsi. The full interview is available from the Gallery