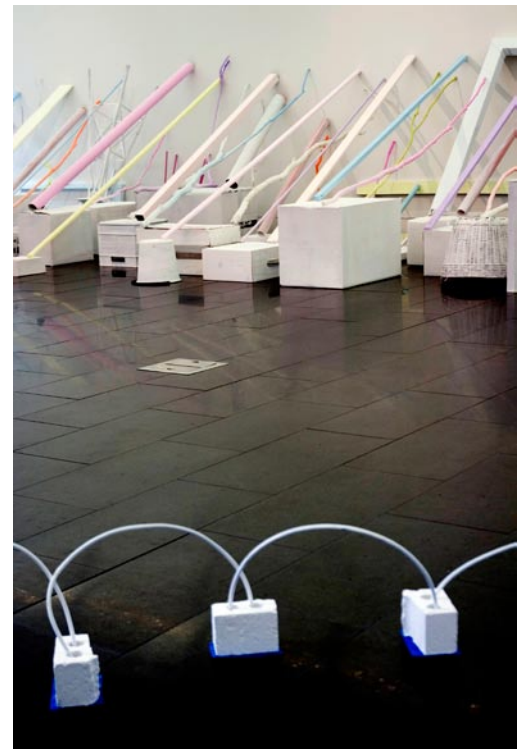


*A Town Called Makeshift
and other monumental misunderstanding*

Mary Louise Edwards



Mary Louise Edwards, 2007, Detail of installation, *10 degrees, 5pm*: watercolour painting with gum tree, dam and dwelling found objects, scenic paint dimensions variable



#13

I walk around the block almost every day. Sometimes I walk around the suburb. I pick up lots of stuff from the nature strip, the railway line, the back of shops. I do this in the early morning or on sunset when the light is soft and not many people are around. I haven't been living in this place long, only 5-6 months, but the majority of this exhibition has been made in this house. It's only 8 k's out of town but it's as far out of Melbourne as I've lived since moving from the north. I really love this area and would like to stay awhile. The yard is almost all concrete which means it doesn't need mowing. There is a plum tree and a fig tree that don't seem to mind cement. I imagine previous tenants planted the ginger. I hope the rocket keeps growing. The concrete also means the yard is great for laying out work to see what's going on. My studio is at home.

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I think I like these urban environments because I was born when my parents lived above a shop in an inner suburb of Sydney. Although I don't remember it, I slept in the top drawer of the dressing table.

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The first place I do remember is the house my parents bought in a new fibro suburb on the fringe of Sydney. We had what I think was a huge yard. My parents built us a sand pit and a cubby house and a fence from demolished timber. They planted a garden that had rocks in it where we used to look out for trap door spiders. We played a lot in what we called the park across the road. We could see all the way to the Georges River and I remember seeing the banks of the river on fire. I also remember the frosts spread out across the park when the water froze in the taps of our house. We didn't know then that the park was a retired tip. I'd never heard of landfill. I haven't been back there for years. When sewerage pipes finally came to the area we had fun in the backyard while dad and the cousins dug the trenches. Apparently they dug the whole backyard up twice. I think someone got the plans mixed up which meant the trench was heading in the wrong direction at first.

on the road

The move to Brisbane was exciting. We all fitted into the car and drove the whole way. My family tease me to this day because when we hit a hail storm I started singing something from The Sound Of Music. I thought it would help us all take our minds off the fact that we couldn't see the road.

11

The house we lived in had a hibiscus tree in the front yard like all the houses in that area. It always looked thirsty. I wondered why no one had planted anything else to keep it company. The light was so hard it hurt my eyes. We did have a Canna Lily in the backyard and mum told us stories about the strings of beads she once made out of the little black seeds.

26

Our next house was old and on stilts and had a big under-the-house. It also had a huge fig tree in the backyard where we would climb up and swing on the branches and pretend to be in a ship. We made friends with families on the Brisbane River and my parents helped them out when the floods came one year and covered most of the suburb. The mud stank and people went to the shops in rowboats. Our neighbours helped us when the tornado came and blew our roof off. We collected old things from some of the demolished, abandoned houses. We also went on holidays to Brunswick Heads and I remember rowing and fishing and crabbing.

#13

My parents built a house in the outer suburbs again. It was near a creek surrounded by lots of what we called bush. Apparently it was an old dairy farm that lay undeveloped for years. It was not far from the highway that went to the Gold Coast, so we went to the beach a lot. There wasn't much else around and we went feral. I don't remember wearing shoes much, even to school. Our school was 100 years old and it still had the first classroom, a bark hut, in the school grounds. We used to jump up and hang from the log rafters. We also played a lot of sport. We made a lot of friends and we weren't the only big family in the area. A couple of our friends in the softball team lived with all of their cousins down the road.

I started to go to art classes after school. I loved drawing and painting landscapes. I didn't think till later that they were landscapes I'd never been to. I liked Streeton, McCubbin and Sydney Long. I saw the colour plates in art books that my Grandmother gave me and I tried to make my paintings look like theirs. My art teacher, Mrs Roberts, talked to me about art and artists for the almost 10 years that I went to her classes. She also told me stories about the Dreamtime. I learnt about fire trees and canoes and we had grown-up discussions about whether there was one god or lots of gods.

I spent a lot of time on the NSW coast as a teenager. Staring out to sea from the headland made me reconsider everything I'd been taught about mixing colour. There was a midden at the base of the rock that I now believe is behind a fenced off area. Dad had his sights on moving us all to a commune or a lettuce farm but he subscribed to Grass Roots Magazine instead and studied anthropology. We used to talk about whether we'd head to the mountains or the sea, come the revolution.

(... then 10 more no's I can't recall ...) then,

#'s 10, 27, 42, 375, 100, 69, 74, 13 ...

I now consider Melbourne my home, although I have the old habit of thinking everywhere else on the east coast is down from where I live. People in Brisbane go down to Sydney, for example. I forget that people in Melbourne go up to Sydney, for example. In Melbourne we refer to Sydney as the north, whereas I still think of it as a place in the south. I wonder if I'll ever get it right. I had this confusion even when I was overseas.