

Ruth Fleishman
Residency at the John David Mooney Foundation, Chicago, USA
Meeting at Location One, New York , USA
February- March 2007

I spent three weeks at the John David Mooney Foundation on a residency. JDMF is a center that aims to facilitate the dialogue that can occur between art, architecture and community. The residency culminated in an exhibition and the results of the exhibition will be documented in a text to be published next year. Themes for the residency revolved around interpretations of utopian concepts in architecture, art and futurism.

In addition I met with - Sebastien Sanz de Santamaria - creative/technical coordinator at Location One in New York City- an art residency centre devoted to the convergence between visual, performing and digital arts.

What I particularly enjoyed was the intensity that only a residency can allow. The routine of making art all day without the interruption of work/family/commitments of any type was truly a joy! The flow that arose was very fulfilling. I did the residency with two other Melbourne artists and three Scottish artists. While the studio and exhibition space could not have been more professional and accommodating, the living space was very small. We were extremely lucky in that we all got along superbly, we all lived together well and we all took the project on with full presence and seriousness. I can honestly say that I think none of us could have worked harder. We were lucky in that we all had a fair amount in common socially and creatively. This is not to say that there was not space for healthy difference.

I was amazed at the generosity of spirit, ideas and equipment from the Edinburgh side. It was pretty contagious and fairly soon, we were all shopping for one another, sharing all the equipment and helping out with technical and physical challenges in the works.

One of the interesting differences between us was the difference in priority or hierarchies when assessing art. The Melbourne people put more emphasis on a thorough understanding of works, we all talked about our work in a broad context and understanding of our own process and influences. The Edinburgh emphasis was more on refining or distilling an idea. I think they also had an extremely sharp sense of the entire exhibition and how the works would look together. I enjoyed and learnt a lot from their input when the art was finally made. The other strength I think they all shared was the ability to let go and begin new ideas and methods on new projects with little attachment.

This environment and intensity fueled me to try doing works in public- on the streets of Chicago, which I don't think I would have in Melbourne. I also used materials that I have not used before. Besides a laptop, I did not bring any of my usual materials and this forced me to reassess my working processes, which was very useful.

Usually I would believe that I like to work alone and in quiet but I have to say I enjoyed the spontaneous chatter while we worked. It meant that ideas could be verbalized and resolved continually. The intensity of working in a group, seeded ideas that will last for at least the next year or two. This "vacuum sealed, think tank" way of working had intensely positive benefits for me.

Before I got to Chicago, I went to investigate Location One. It is in a lovely part of Soho, and they have an interesting set up. The exhibition space is large and accommodating, while the artist studio area resembled a bunker! A windy corridor, with low ceilings, off-shooting windowless artists spaces.

The residency program is generous in time and I would say that the program's strength is clearly in their network. A residency at Location One would allow contact and connection with New York's vibrant new media scene, its facilitators and curators. The staff seemed to support their artists generously in this way. While there are limited technical facilities, I have no doubt that regardless of what your practice needed, Sebastien Sanz de Santamaria - Creative/Technical coordinator, would track it down for you.

It was a really fantastic opportunity to be able to see their residency program, before I committed to a four or six month residency. I got to see if their program accommodated my needs. It's often hard to tell from a web site.

All in all, my time in the USA was remarkable and fruitful. It has had a big impact on not only the work I am doing, but also *how* I work.