

Interview

FELTspace

Back from Stockholm to Write a New Chapter

*Artist-run initiative FELTspace has been busy, with a trip to Stockholm and plans for an exciting interdisciplinary project that will bring arts practitioners nationwide to Adelaide. **By Naomi Gall.***



Matt Huppatz with Lynne Sanderson, Monte Masi and Corpse Club. FELTspace 'SOFT CORN (Installation view)' December 2010. Photo by Matt Huppatz.

Going overseas to find that what you're doing is as good as anyone else's stuff is always going to be a good feeling. More than 6000 people visited Supermarket, an "independent art fair" held in Stockholm in February this year. According to James Marshall, a committee member for Adelaide artist-run initiative (ARI) FELTspace, which attended the fair, that's "probably more than the unique viewers of FELTspace over the five years we've been there... that was probably the highlight." FELTspace was established in 2008 and is the only artist-run initiative to have a permanent home in Adelaide's city centre. Marshall says that involvement in the international artist-run art fair

“happened really quickly”, with the ARI only receiving word of funding the Friday afternoon prior to their Saturday morning flight to Stockholm.

Another highlight, Marshall says, was the discovery that, while experimental video work might not be to everyone’s taste in Adelaide, in Stockholm this was enquired about the most. With the aim of expanding their audience, FELTspace realised “what we’re doing is on the same level as everywhere else and everyone deals with the same problems”. It was this sense of community that has remained months after the end of the fair, with the ARI currently working on projects with some of the galleries they met at Supermarket.

Another focus of the fair for the ARI was the promotion of FELTspace Gold, a publication that had been produced the previous year and presents a survey of emerging South Australian artists who had shown at or been involved with the space. These catalogues were distributed to collectors, curators and other galleries throughout the fair; one thing Marshall hadn’t counted on, however, was dealing with customs. “We had 70 books that had a price printed on them... so convincing customs we weren’t selling this huge box of books was something we hadn’t thought about,” he says.

FELTspace was the only Australian ARI represented at Stockholm – among 81 galleries from 30 countries – but Marshall insists this didn’t make them anxious; however, the size of the event was something they hadn’t expected: “we didn’t have any expectations going into it [and] just the scale of it was pretty impressive and daunting – but that’s why I think it paid off.”

With the aim of attending Co/Lab Art Fair in Los Angeles in September this year and perhaps Supermarket again next year, FELTspace have a dynamic program ahead. That’s building on the confidence and reassurance they gained at Supermarket “that we are doing something important”, Marshall says. Due to the cost of the international visit they had been understandably nervous whether it would all be worthwhile, but “coming back, and looking back on [our experiences], it definitely was”, says Marshall.



FELTspace exterior view, image courtesy of the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia.

Now, FELTspace is adopting a new challenge, one that coordinator Polly Dance is very excited about. Set to launch in June, The Writing Project is an interdisciplinary art project that will, according to Dance, encourage practitioners to “work outside their comfort zones – we want people to really push boundaries.” Still largely in its planning stages, The Writing Project will encompass four distinct projects, where each project will be the work of four practitioners: an artist, a designer, a writer and a curator. Dance recognises that individuals already often work across several media but hopes that they will identify an area they are “really strong in” and embrace the idea that their practice “is totally valid and that it can contribute across different art forms and to other practices”. With the idea of encouraging people to “own their practice”, Dance believes this is a chance for “shared ideas, shared thinking and shared outcomes.”

The projects will develop from July 2012 to April 2013 with the outcomes shown around Adelaide or within FELTspace itself. Dance says projects should be as self-initiated and self-driven as possible and, while there are no boundaries put in place concerning what applicants can produce, there is a deadline of 30 June and a limited budget to adhere to. For those who wish to get involved, applications should be made by the nominated contact person of each group and outline the premise of the project as well as include examples of previous work.

Dance’s obvious passion for The Writing Project steams from her background in publishing and her belief that “critical dialogue within Adelaide is something that needs development and [which] constantly gets left by the wayside.” The Writing Project is a nationwide initiative and the little ARI that could is looking forward to developing relationships with galleries and practitioners across the country. “Lots is happening and we’d like to be a base for people to develop some really exciting projects,” Dance says.



Tony Garifalakis, James Marshall, Takeshi Murata, Christian Tedeschi 'Hollywood Forever (Installation view)' 2011. Photo by Sofia Calado.

Collaboration lies at the heart of The Writing Project as often artists don't get to experience working with other arts practitioners. Even within a gallery context an artist may work with a curator and the curator may work with a designer but rarely do the four disciplines – artist, curator, designer and writer – join forces on a common idea and make it work. It's this "dynamic environment" and opportunity to skill-share that Dance feels is important, commenting, "there is something special about sharing your passion with someone else, your passion for art, your passion for writing, your passion for design, your passion for curating."

At the culmination of the four separate projects FELTspace is hoping to produce a major collective publication that will document each project from its inception to its conclusion. Ideally Dance would love for this publication to be distributed to artist-run initiatives nationally but is aware of the financial implications of such an endeavour, laughing as she comments, "that's what I would really like to do, that's the dream."

Between participating in Supermarket in February to the upcoming Writers Project, it would seem FELTspace has its hands full. With the Writers Project hoping to highlight Adelaide as a player at a national level and to "push the box of what the art world knows and sees regularly", FELTspace is heading into unfamiliar waters. However, after speaking with Marshall and Dance one thing is clear – their overwhelming passion is sure to help them chart the way.