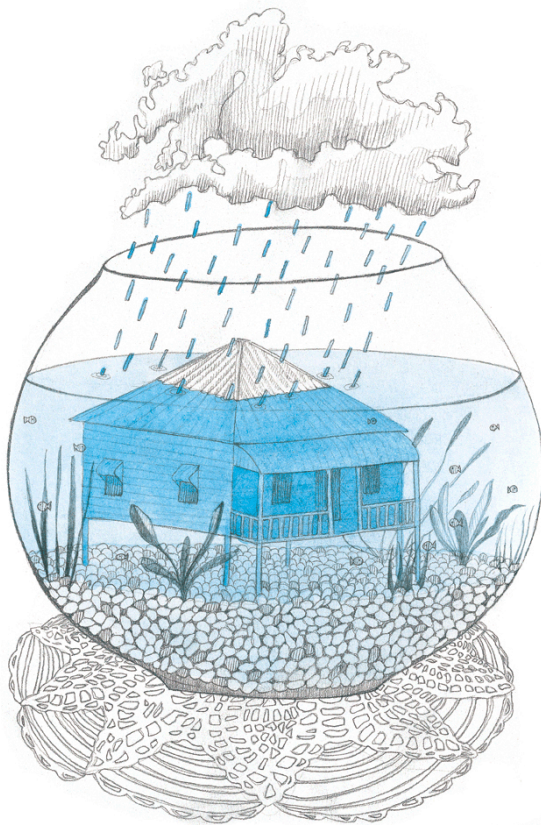


## Issue #46, Fall 2012

### Moments of magic

#### An interview with Camille Serisier

Robyn Jodlowski



*Camille Serisier, whose work is featured in issue #46, is an Australian artist currently living in Brisbane. Her work investigates the relationship between human beings and the natural world by exploring differing representations of nature in Australian culture. She does this through a close reading of environmental narratives in a range of cultural sites, such as theater, early childhood education, and various cultural mythologies. her work has shown in galleries all throughout Australia.*

*For more, please [visit her website](#).*

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**Artists who collaborate with Creative Nonfiction generally read the essays first, then come up with their illustrations. How did this process work for you?**

I have never done illustrations for a literary magazine before and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I often base bodies of work on articles or books, so I found the project fit well with my natural way of working.

**Did certain phrases or ideas stick out? Do you have a favorite essay in this issue?**

My favorite essay was definitely “After the Flood on Harte Street” by Kirsten Fogg. I live in Brisbane, close to the area that Fogg describes. Reading her essay made me remember the intense experience of packing up our own home and waiting to be evacuated. Thankfully the water did not come for us.

My fiancé and I were relatively new to Brisbane, and I felt a strong connection with the way Fogg described the sense of community that sprang up. We helped neighbors prepare and recover, we saw people lose everything, then pick themselves up and start again. I will never forget it and I felt Fogg captured the essence of what it was like to live through that time.

**What similarities do you see between the creation of literary and visual works of art?**

My fiancé is a talented writer and we often talk about the similarities between a literary and visual practice. At the end of the day, I believe hard work and dedication form the basis of any creative practice regardless of medium.

**What’s your creative process usually like? If you had to give it a label (something like evolving doodles, energetic emission) what would it be?**

I have quite a methodical creative process. I start with an idea and work through lots of images trying to find the right way to express it. This process begins with loose pencil sketches and watercolor drawings. I use these sketches as designs for three-dimensional sets, complete with props and performers. Photographs of these dramatizations become source material for more considered drawings or paintings.

I guess it’s quite a traditional approach, in that there’s a lot of planning and

preparation. However, I view each stage as important, not just the final painted work.

**In six words, give us your artist statement, world view, or life's story.**

Don't get in your own way.

**What initially drew you to watercolor?**

I have always been obsessed with drawing. It is satisfyingly direct and immediate. Watercolor paints provide the opportunity to introduce more complicated compositional color elements into a drawing, so it was hard to resist the temptation.

**What got you started mixing people with paintings in your photograph series?**

In addition to my art school studies, I trained and worked as a scenic painter for theatre, opera and ballet. This had a big impact on my practice. The mixture of painting, photography and drawing bring together the different elements of my training. I always enjoyed working on sets, but the best part was watching them come alive onstage. That's why I started to work between media.

**Where does your affinity for nature come from?**

I grew up on the south coast of New South Wales in Australia. It is a very beautiful part of the world. My holidays were spent swimming, climbing trees and bike riding. I think being outside in beautiful scenery and weather becomes a bit of an addictive lifestyle. It's hard not to develop a respect for that beauty. It is even harder to ignore its boundaries.

**What book or work of art do you find yourself returning to?**

There is a painting in the National Gallery of London by Hippolyte Paul Delaroche titled The Execution of Lady Jane Grey. My family took a trip to London when I was a little girl and I was so taken by this image that my

father bought me a postcard of it, which sat on my wall for many years. I think that was my first true art love. I recently visited it in London again. As I grow older, its meaning changes for me, but it hasn't lost its power.

Another work is Piero Della Francesca's *Il Battesimo Di Cristo*. My first trip to Italy I almost fell over every time I saw a Piero Della Francesca, but I think this one is my favorite. Everyone should climb the little hill to visit his pregnant Madonna.

As for books definitely *The Passion of the Western Mind* by Richard Tarnas. It is a love and hate relationship.

**Everyone has different qualifications for what makes a piece of art great. What are yours?**

The right time and the right mindset.

**In what ways do you think Australians and Americans view art differently?**

I consulted an American mate about this question. From what I can gather, Americans view art in a similar way to Australians. However, I might be bold and say that I think it is less about the viewer and more about the artist. Although interpretation is obviously important, I do think cultural heritage is evident in an artist's work, and that Australian and American artists make identifiably different art.

**Of your own work, what's your favorite piece? Why?**

When I look back at past works, I tend to prefer those that marked a moment of progress and shift in my practice.

Recently I made a series of portraits called *Last in Worst Dressed*, which brought together different media and ideas that I had been trying to unite for some time. It was very satisfying and I have used the images as a reference for new works since.



### **How can visual art tell viewers a story?**

In my work I try to tell stories by using cultural symbols. I believe everyone shares a type of overlapping cultural heritage, although it may differ from place to place, which is embedded in narrative. In the same way a particular word can have a series of meanings to an author and audience, combining a series of symbols paints a picture of great complexity.

### **Do most of your art pieces have stories behind them or do you start creating and see what happens?**

My works have stories and preconceived intent. I play with many ways of representing each story, but have an agenda from the outset.

### **And finally, what art forms or artists do you wish more people knew about?**

Rather than suggest people knew more about particular artists, I would prefer people engaged with the arts more freely—whether with fiction, or non-fiction, paintings, photography, theatre, or whatever else. I would like

everyone to discover art that speaks to the soul and brings moments of magic to life.