



Rest Area

S.J Norman

Festival of Live Art

Arts House North Melbourne Town Hall Naarm

Wed 14- Sun 18 March, 2018

Artist Statement

I first performed this work on a night in early summer in Sydney, in 2007. I dragged my own mattress and sheets off my bed and loaded them into the back of a 1 tonne baby Pantec, and parked it discreetly in a side-street in Darlington, outside the former Eveleigh Carriageworks. At the time, the building was in the early stages of its re-establishment as a performing arts venue, and home of the recently relocated Performance Space. It was hot and raining heavily. The truck leaked.

I gave a few of my friends the task of discreetly handing out handwritten notes to randomly selected audience members who were milling in the foyer. The note said:

Now that I've found you, this is all I want from you. I've come a long way for this one thing. I want you to come in, I want you to lie down, I want you to hold me, just for a minute, just for you and just for me, just long enough to feel your breath on the back of my neck. The stars are out and the keys are in the ignition.

On the reverse side was an invitation and a set of directions to where the truck was parked. I waited for a long time in that leaky truck before people started showing up one at a time. They didn't know what was going to happen when they entered, and neither did I.

This work started out as a small gesture, and a means of satisfying my own curiosities and desires. It was the first thing I ever made as a solo artist. It was an experiment, a confession, and a personal enquiry into my own loneliness and sense of recent loss

I was 22 years old and had recently returned to my former home city, after 2 years overseas. In leaving Australia, I had left behind a significant relationship. Her and I had spoken almost every day when I was gone, and I went to sleep at night with an aching absence where her arm should have been. It was a surprise to both of us to discover upon my return, that our relationship was over. That it had been for a while. There was a 16 year age gap between us, a space that apparently only grew with time, to the point where that big love was stretched too thin between our lives divergent courses.

She was the one who stood at the door of the truck that night, in the pissing rain, opening and closing the door for a steady stream of bewildered strangers to enter.

We had done a lot of long drives together. We had stopped at a lot of Rest Areas. We were both still broken but we did it together, without much aforethought. Afterwards she dropped me off at my house on Enmore Rd, and I dragged my mattress back upstairs and slept alone.

I'm now the same age that she was when we first met. I had no idea that I would still be performing this work more than a decade later.

Rest Area (2007-present)

Creator: S.J Norman

Production: Frances d'Ath, S.J Norman

Performers: V. Barratt, Isabelle Basher, Kai Bradley, Onyx B. Carmine, Marisa Carnesky, Frances d'Ath, Carly Sheppard.

Acknowledgements, thanks and dedication:

I've parked-up all over the world in the course of my 11 years performing this work. This is the first time I have performed it in Naarm, as a recent arrival and guest on unceded Wurundjeri lands. I wish to pay my respects and offer deep thanks to the Old People, Elders and community of this Country. To any Mob who show up to see this work, my special thanks for your support and hospitality.

In this latest iteration of what has hitherto been a solo performance, I'm joined by a cast of 7 other bodies, who have given themselves to this task with total trust and generosity. My deepest thanks go to them, and likewise to my production manager, collaborator, and sister, Frances d'Ath. My thanks to Olivia, Josh, Tony and Blair from the Artshouse team for commissioning and supporting the work so generously. Last but not least, thank you to my wife, Kiesia Carmine, for everything you do and are, every day.

The first time I performed this work was in a former rail yard, in a now heavily gentrified inner city suburb of Sydney, about 300 meters from the (now demolished) terrace house where my mother was born, next door to the pub where the man we think was my grandfather used to work and drink, just off Wilson street where my grandmother was and has been present for the first time and every subsequent version of the work, and like most things I make Rest Area remains obliquely dedicated to her. As well as to my former partner, poet Keri Glastonbury, who was its direct inspiration and also my first Door Bitch.

