

## Margareteditfinal@170.mp3

[00:00:00] Welcome to the Inner West Library Speaker series and our art series. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the custodians of the land, the Gadigal and Wongal people of the Eora nation and pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging. For this series, we have asked three local artists to choose an item from our Art book collection and talk about their choice and how it relates to their practice. The podcast today is related directly to the art book collection at Marrickville Library. Marrickville Library holds an impressive and historic art book collection ranging from Indigenous art to the impressionists and beyond. Today's podcast will be with local contemporary artist Margaret Roberts of the articulate Project Space. Margaret runs an artist run initiative called Articulate Project Space, which is run by a group of artists who work with installation and other special art practices. Margaret started of the Sydney College of the Arts and is currently teaching at the National Art School. She has shown in numerous international and national exhibitions and spaces. Today, Margaret will speak about her choice of a book called The Avant Garde in Exhibition New Art in the 20th Century by Bruce Alschuler and her own practice. In discussion with Margaret she mentioned the work of an artist called Sophie Taeuber - Arp, an artist involved with Dada. Robert's recent works, Sophie's Dances 2020 shown in the Frolic Freeze show includes Robert's interacting and exploring through Taeuber's work. Welcome, Margaret. Can you tell us a little about your practice and what interests you?

[00:01:46] I guess my art practice is generally called installation, it comes from, though, a background in sculpture, so sort of three dimensionality and interest in material and form, et cetera, and how that can communicate content. People sometimes talk about those sort of things as as being somehow contentless. But on the contrary, I like to think of the way in which the materiality, the emphasis on materiality, the emphasis on the actual space and location means that those sort of things are being communicated as important. Another thing is, in the last five or so years, I've also been working with with sort of the remaking of works that were made earlier in the centuries, in the century, 20th century, in the sense of starting them again from scratch and not finishing them. It's a sort of an initially thinking of them as a type of time travel, I guess, you know, sort of meeting the artist back then. But it's that interesting time that I realized is connected to the interest in space or place that's getting to be doing that.

[00:02:54] Some people don't understand installation as art. What's your perception of that?

[00:03:01] I guess that's very funny. Well, of course, there are all sorts of ideas about what art is, and I would go for a very broad one. I'm also very interested in the whole idea of cross disciplinary. So where the different disciplines like painting, drawing, sculpture, film printmaking, ceramics, etc., you know, they can they have their own.

[00:03:24] They weren't always separate, but they have been separate for the last few centuries. And so in the 20th century, they started to join up. Installation is a little bit like that. It doesn't have to be linked to sculpture. You know, you had the installation made by people trained as painters, and that'll tend to look a bit different in how is it not how is it art? What a funny question. It's art in the same way as the paintings are art.

[00:03:49] You know, a painting uses the materials of a canvas and paint usually, and installation uses the materials of the physical space and something else. Some other things, you know, could be they could use it could be paint as well. It could be objects. It could be movement of people. It could be sound. You know, basically installation is simply artwork that includes things that are located in space in such a way that the space is like a material or an element of work.

[00:04:26] That sounds really great, actually Margaret, can you tell us a little bit about your process or your work practice?

[00:04:31] Yes, well, I sort of felt like I I'm doing installation because that's the only thing I can sort of do. I don't know how to make work without taking regard for the context. So I realized after I left art school, the key part of the process is to actually find the place, or sometimes you'll be often asked to make a work in a particular place. So the first task is to go to that place and see what it needs or see what it's like, see what your response is and so that the work is made in response to the place rather than making a work in advance and then finding a place to put it. Mm hmm. And of course, you have various processes sometimes to do a thing. We wouldn't allow that if it's if it's a show overseas or something. And so then it's a challenge to try and find a users space such as making it life sized, for example, as a way of doing that or using the gravity, you know, things that will actually be in that other place as well.

[00:05:37] Very interesting. So the library has a large collection of art books. What drove you to select the title that you did?

[00:05:44] Yes, I spent a lot of time looking. There's a lot to pick from and very hard to make that decision. But I did come across this book, which I had seen before by I don't really know how to pronounce your surname. Bruce Altshuler, I presume it is the Avant Garde in Exhibition, the Avant Garde in exhibition. And the reason that was it appealed to me is because it's a history of. The I guess what he calls Avant Garde work in the 20th century, but it's all framed around the exhibitions that they were in. So and the exhibitions, it seems to me, are like installations. You know, it's like the the literal physical context of the different types of work that he's talking about. So, you know, so it starts with it starts with the salons, the salons that they used to have an early 20th century, 1910 or so with the Fauves and the Cubists. Mm hmm. And also, you know, Marcel Duchamp's.

[00:06:52] So in a way, they're not the first and they're probably perhaps amongst the first installations anyway, the way he he constructed a place where he hung bags off the ceilings and had a light, had a sort of garbage, a sort of a certain sort of garbage bin in the middle. And the electricity didn't work, apparently. So he gave people torches. So, yeah. So that's an early installation, which was actually an exhibition, but it's like an early form of installation. And then and that book goes to it's only the 70 years or 60 years of the 20th century. It ends in 1970. We see when attitudes become form exhibition, the big exhibition that was had American and European artists. From the time you know it and sort of marked a very I don't know, it's a very important turning point or stage, I guess. And and the interesting thing about that show is that it was also remade again in Venice and as part of the Venice Biennale in 2013, which I saw. And so that whole which is then part of that whole thing, which which sort of gets called appropriation or did in the 80s. But people do it now and similar but slightly different way. And so this was the whole exhibition remade again. So I guess that's what appealed to me, that the way he organized all that information around 10 or 15 or so different exhibitions.

[00:08:21] Hmm.

[00:08:22] So the Venice Biennale, you went in 2013? I was there in 2015. My first time there, actually, I was very impressed by, you know, seeing a whole variety of works from major artists all around the world. What was your feeling of the Biennale in 2013?

[00:08:40] Well, I have to say that I've been to a few of them, and so I confuse them a little. But I think the 2013 one, as well as having this, the remake of *When Attitudes Become Form*, which was just fantastic. I just love that sort of thing. And before I go on it, but before I finished with that, one of the wonderful things about that remake of that exhibition was that they they reconstructed the actual building, or at least as it seen from inside inside the old building. That was the place where the exhibition was made in Venice. So you walk in there and you not only see the work, the same work sitting on the floor or hanging on the wall, whatever you also get the the freshly made walls, because the building that it was in in in Switzerland in 69 is a newer building were actually constructed. You know, you walk into a room and there's a wall across it, you know, so it was the way the old building was placed in the new building was almost just as important as the the works on the ground or as they usually were or on the wall. So the other work that I remember, though, from I think it was a 2013 Venice Biennale in particular, was the Romanian what's the word thing, Pavilion.

[00:09:57] They call them Pavilion Pavilion in the Giardini. And that was amazing because you go into the room quite a large, long room and you have various actors, you know, say the 12 actors or 12 people obviously doing something. And you have to figure out what they're doing. And so they they move around and then sort of stand in different angles and sit on top of each other, sometimes doing various things. And then they then they stop that and separate and then they do something else again. And it took me a little while to realize that what they were doing was sort of drawing with their bodies the structure of previous artworks that had been in the Venice Biennale, since the Biennale began, which is quite a long time ago, and so it was only when I recognized one work an obvious work that I realized what they were doing. And then I went and had a look at the text and I thought, oh, yeah, this is fantastic. So they they're remaking earlier works just by representing them through using their bodies as sort of lines and shapes like a vein and everything like shapes that that represent these other artworks. So I just thought that was fantastic.

[00:11:16] So interesting. It looks sort of seems like a bit like a tableau.

[00:11:20] That's right. Exactly. That's exactly right. And you just and and they did actually, I realized later announced the name of the work with a little performance.

[00:11:30] Margaret, can you tell me a little bit more about your choice of book and how that's reflective of your practice?

[00:11:39] Well, I guess it's because the book is presenting exhibitions as installations as a whole thing. I suppose I could talk here about Articulate Project Space, which is a sort of another part of my art practice. So Articulate Project Space is a place as an artist run initiative. And Ari, as we call them, run by a group of artists who each of us work with installation in various ways, you know, there's someone who works with sound installation of someone who works sort of his photography and installations photography in space, someone else who works with the form of architecture

[00:12:22] I guess, and and whatever I do, which at the moment is some sort of this remaking of works from certain artists from the early 20th century who are who I regard as sort of forebears as well. And we've had other people working there, too. So we all have different practices, but we all regard the place in which works are shown as significant. The wall is not there or the floor of the building. The whole building is not there just to hold the works up. The work is a physical and material language that we develop. It seems necessary if we think to to try to construct it in such a way that it acknowledges the physical and material and spatial nature of its location so that that relationship is a key part of it. It's not always that, of course, the only part, but a key part. And so and so when we do a program, we Installation, where they do one work in the whole space where there's a relationship is much more likely to form between the work and the and the space, but also we often do group shows and and with those group shows. And sometimes they are they are sort of organized by the artist. And sometimes we organize them. And they also need to have a connection with each other, because once work at work starts getting put into a place, then the place sort of changes.

[00:13:55] And so the artwork needs to connect and with each other and also with the place. And so we sort of regard all the exhibitions as to some extent a form of installation. And so that's why I was thinking of Altschuler book. So he was doing the

same sort of thing. Even though these shows are not necessarily thought of as installations, he's presenting them in that way. And of course, it is also true that whenever anyone makes an exhibition. Printmaker, anyone they are used to having regard for the place, of course, because they're very careful that they're located in the place and in relation to each other, the wall etc so that they the work is shown to its best advantage, I guess, is what's usually done in that case. But that is also a form of installation. And in fact, that's the term that's used, you know, an installation shop, they'll say, for a group of paintings.

[00:14:53] So you've talked about group shows in general. Can you talk a little about your work called We went to school here?

[00:15:02] I say, OK, well, that's very appropriate to talk about in relation to a group show, because in a sense, the work is invisible. But if it was the only work in the place in the gallery, it would be it's the invisibility would be sort of visible.

[00:15:20] It's not entirely this that there are black lines on the floor, but it's also in an exhibition with something like 10 or 12 other works that have a very strong physical presence. I think most of them, if not all of them, have a very strong visually and sort of in terms of the space they take up. So mine did take up a lot of space. It was all the space of nearly of the whole floor of the gallery. But there isn't anything there to see because the thing that I was trying to exhibit is a thing that's no longer there, which is the building that was there before the gallery was there. So the gallery is currently part of the Cultural Centre in Katoomba. And so before that, I discovered after being invited to be in it and doing a little bit of research with the curator, did most of it because she knew about it.

[00:16:12] So in that block. So it's quite a big block and the gallery is just part of it. But in that block, previously had been an old school. It had been a school which was opened in around about 1919 and it was, I think, pulled down around about 2000.

[00:16:29] It was a very two storey, quite imposing building, very prominent in Katoomba, particularly because a lot of people went to it, would have gone to it was still there or their parents did. What I was trying to do there is try to see if I could get people to realize that they could stand in a place and be in two places at once. Because you

stand on the floor of the gallery, you can see you're in a gallery. But if you went to school there, which somebody did once and they could and they could stand in that place and not only see this gallery, but also see in their mind's eye, in their memory, they could see the building as well because they were inside it. And in fact, I ended up having a lot of contact with or some contact with people who ex-students through Facebook page. But also some did come because some of those students have left Katoomba now, but some came as well. And so by but what I was able to do using photos and the architect's plans of the current place is over is work out exactly where on that floor the footprint of the old building would have been or would be, because obviously it's there in a sense, even though there's perhaps no physical remnants.

[00:17:58] And it's a funny coincidence that the old school was located in exactly the same spot in that much bigger block as the gallery was. So the gallery is within, as I said, a Cultural Centre that has other things, like a library and a coffee shop and administrative offices and stuff. So it was I think if that hadn't have happened, I probably wouldn't have made that work. But it may by drawing what I did was use black tape and to draw the shape of the old building on the floor so that people who could remember the old building, who had had the image of the old building in their minds, could work out where to stand in relation to something so they could stand somewhere pointing in a certain direction. And they could remember that the room or the stairs or whatever it was that they remembered from that from being a student there.

[00:18:51] It's fascinating. It's also almost like a memory of the old building being captured.

[00:18:57] Yeah, that's what I was trying to do. And I was trying to I guess I was trying really to emphasize the value of place by sort of having it there twice in a sense. You know, you've got two places there, the current one place and the old place. And we usually refer to a place, existing place like that as a place. But I also want to think of the place as the place that has multiple places within it. So, you know, before it was a school, it was also a colonial house was built on that on that same block, slightly different part of the block. And before that, of course, it was what is gets described some way as a sort of the spur on the edge of a mountain, which then got flattened for the first house and then flattened progressively to to have these other buildings put on them. So I want people I'm trying to present the idea to that, that in a sense, this is all

one place. It just has multiple occupations. And so I'm sort of trying to contribute to that as well.

[00:20:03] There's one artist in particular, her name's Sophie Taeuber. She seems to be a recurring theme in some of your work. What is it about her work that you find so appealing?

[00:20:16] To talk about Sophie Taeuber's work really requires me to go back a couple of steps very quickly, which is to say that at a certain point, I think I've already mentioned, I started remaking other artists work, and I did that first with an artist, a Polish artist of the same sort of generation, Katarzyna Kobro who made sculpture and whose works suggest within themselves that they could be made or unmade even though they were welded together. And so technically you couldn't. But that was a few years I worked with her. And then at a certain point, for some reason, I remembered this wonderful painting that I'd seen of Sophie Taeuber's, which was in the exhibition that Terrence Maloon curated in 2010 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, which was called Paths to Abstraction. And it was doing with it was covering work from the first from about eighteen sixty seven to nineteen seventeen, the beginning of what's called modernity, modernism, I should say, in art. And so at a certain point, which I can't really recall any more about at the moment, I thought I could just remake that. It's a sort of funny decision because I normally wouldn't see any reason to remake a painting because I tend to do installation and sculpture and things. And but at the same time, it seemed to invite the possibility of putting space into the work a little bit like cardiogenic.

[00:21:43] Kobro had also done the same thing. She talked about her work as well as being going into space and space, coming into her work and Taeuber's little painting that I saw, which is actually perhaps one of the most beautiful paintings. It's from nineteen sixteen. And she called it composition vertical horizontal, which is the sort of trifles she would give her work. It was actually composed of a lot of squares and rectangles and it was around about 30 centimetres square. So quite a small, very intense jewel, like a little painting. And so I, I decided to remake that by cutting all the squares cut out in a much enlarged form. So each square was around about 20 centimetres square. And so then you could remake it and unmake it all the time. So you lay it out on the floor. The whole square then became about one point two metres square. And you could see as you lay it out that there was some sort of system that she



had in making that work and deciding on the different colours. And she also had black. So she had black at about five other colours. And so you could see there was some sort of interesting system, which I still can't really articulate what it is.

[00:23:00] But you can see it when you lay it out, according to her, her sort of system that at each stage when there's was just the black on the floor, always the black and the pink on the floor and the various colours, that in a way the work works at each of those stages, that was my first venture, if you like, into Sophie's work. And then I also remade her a number of other works. And then it was then I finally came to one of her works, which has got a similar sort of title, but is from nineteen twenty eight, which is also made of similar sorts of shapes. But you know, not so many in the in the painting was a much more of an oblong painting. And so when I cut those out and lay them out in large on the floor, you could also I also remembered the the way in which people who write about and talk about who are people who are art historians, etc. about Sophie's work always emphasize the way in which she was firstly a dancer. And I had discovered when I remade that first work that I'm just talking about in a drawing form in a gallery in Paris, a drawing form which was just with string and nails on the wall also enlarged.

[00:24:11] There was someone who came in and was very enthusiastic about it, and he couldn't speak any more English than I could speak French. But somehow or other, we managed to understand. I managed to understand. He was talking about this man called Rudolf Laban. And Laban was one of the sort of leaders, I guess, of the experimental dancing that was happening with dance that was happening that Sophie Taeuber was work was involved in.

[00:24:35] And if anyone's interested in this, you can see when you if you see you can see images. There are photos of Sophie Taeuber dressed in her Dada dance performance costume in a place called Ascona in Switzerland. And I understand that's where that's when she was young and she was doing a lot of dance. And so she's working with Laban. And then I realized in talking to some artists here that Labanotation is, is this the the the score or notation form that has developed for for the notation of dance, which it was amazing to me because I simply didn't know about it.

[00:25:14] So it's like the notation. As you have with music, and it's, of course, a different form because it's a different type of movement, and so I realized that that

particular work, that 1928 painting composition, vertical, horizontal, really obviously has the shapes of particular shapes that are used in dance notation.

[00:25:35] And so from understanding that, you can see that a lot of her other paintings and works or paintings in particular are also a form of could also be connected at least to that sort of notation.

[00:25:47] So it just seems to me that her work was was sort of had had within it an interest or a type of direction to move.

[00:25:57] And so my initial interest in remaking her work, like Katarzyna Kobro's work, was to sort of undo them, to insert real space back into them and to go back a couple of steps so that they're not actually finished yet. So it's like they're still alive. They still have physical space and time to be finished or to be done again within them. And so I'm still working with her work, although also others as well. So the thing is, too, that with Sophie Taeuber's work, although that's the main my main interest at the moment, I also have been working, remaking the work of other artists. And so one of those and I should say the work of other artists whose work invites this sort of thing they have within them, within the painting or the sculpture, they have a sort of way in which they can be unmade and remade, which seems to me to be implying to incorporate time, if you like, in time and live space within them. And so one is so Katarzyna Kobro's husband who's Władysław Strzemiński, and so he he made works during the same period of the first 20s and 30s in the 1920s and 30s when he made a series called Architectural Compositions, which are paintings which are made of two parts. So they're very simple. So it's as if they're addressing the old or the problem. Wouldn't wasn't so old back then of figure and ground the relationship between an object and the background in a picture. And so he he is designing his or making his works his painting so that there's no there's no one you can't tell which is the figure, which is the ground basically.

[00:27:45] And so remaking I have remade several of his and so I'm remaking another one of his, which is Architectural Composition number one, which is going to be at Articulate Project Space in the the next show next. So coming up at one after that, which is the end of year show that Articulate has every year.

[00:28:05] So so I'm going to make one half hanging in the air. This is my plan. And the other half will be in white titanium oxide on the wall. So the painting will be broken in half again and expanded. So it's another example of the same sort of process.

[00:28:21] Really, really fascinating. Margaret's very fascinating concept. In terms of your artwork and being an artist, what would you say to young artists just starting out? What advice would you give them?

[00:28:36] The first thing was to would be to not try to make art. Not try to make up that you think now is art or other people think is art, but rather to use that incredible freedom that you've got as an artist and the space of art is quite an open sort of space. Use that to find out something that you're interested in. That's what I would say to people. I mean, I I started myself with life drawing. There's nothing wrong with doing learning all the old traditions. And it's probably a good place to sort of start because that gives you time to sort of see to sort of see the landscape, so to speak, to see what it is that you want to do. But but to try to not waste too much time trying to make something that will look like art. Or and the other thing, of course, is to remember that as you go into making art, you get further and further away from people who, you know, like family or friends or whatever, who are not engaged in the same way as you. And so to sort of just be patient with them, because you do make you move a lot like this, a big area to move into in art. And other people don't necessarily understand what you're doing, but that's that's understandable. It's like, you know, they don't have to learn about art. I don't want to have to learn about football. And so, you know, you don't have to do it. You don't have to learn. Everyone doesn't have to know about art.

[00:30:02] The final question really has to do with working in the library and reading. I'm very much an avid reader. I read a lot. What are you reading at the moment?

[00:30:12] I think or watching or listening just now, I'm reading, I'm just pausing because I can never remember the names of things. Names always seem to be such arbitrary things you remember them is as a different thing, as a sort of a body of ideas or a physical thing or something. It's Dark Emu that I am reading at the moment, which is an amazing book. And everyone, everyone should read it.

[00:30:39] It's a sort of the all quite different to the idea of saying not everyone has to learn about art, but I think this is Dark Emu

[00:30:45] is telling people in Australia, particularly non Aboriginal people, that something really important about Aboriginal culture in this continent before colonisation and end, in a sense, it's still continuing. It's just that in true colonisation, a lot of those lot of the practices, the agricultural land and water, maritime sort of practices that he talks about can't exist now because those resources are being used in other ways.

[00:31:18] So that's that's an excellent book. It's fantastic. It's someone just sort of forced it upon me and said, you've got to read it, take it. It'll take you two days to read, which would be true, but I'm spreading it out because I like it so much.

[00:31:30] So is the author Indigenous or not?

[00:31:33] Yes, he's an Aboriginal artist. Bruce.

[00:31:36] Yes. Yeah. Bruce Pascoe, I'm sorry. Your very well known he's very famous. That's right.

[00:31:42] That's right. And so I just think it's one of those books that everyone in Australia should read. And it's very easy, very easy to read. And I gather he's also written a children's version of it as well. Right. Because it is so important for the next generation.

[00:31:58] It's so important that we all learn about indigenous cultures because, you know, that is it is a country. Yes. And they have so much to offer.

[00:32:09] Absolutely. Absolutely. And it's such a delight to think now after reading Dark Emu you think differently about the land that we're living on, even though it doesn't really make any difference. You know, it's still dreadful to have stolen the land and, and tried to destroy the culture, regardless of whether Aboriginal people are nomadic as was earlier thought, or more settled and agricultural people as this book presents it, whatever, whichever it is, it's it's not good. But to also to also know more about the way

Aboriginal people lived on the land, I guess is what I'm getting. It is it's just really nice. Makes the makes this country feel so different.

[00:32:58] Look, Margaret, thank you so much for your time today.

[00:33:00] Ok, thanks very much.

[00:33:02] Articulate Project Space is located at Leichhardt. And if you would like to go and visit Margaret and her group, please go to the website, which is articulate four nine seven dot blogspot dot com. And please also come and visit Marrickville Library to explore the amazing art book collection and our online resources. Thank you so much for listening and look out for upcoming digital content through the NSW Library, What's On and social media channels.