



## Community artist and gallery artist

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### EMMA CLARK GRATTON

Peter Day's large-scale public artworks have influenced his more gallery-friendly pieces.



Most artists tend to focus on one or two media: illustration, watercolours, sculpture. But Peter Day, Artistic Director of Peter Day - Environmental Art and Design, has worked across a wide variety of media over his career, from painting to printmaking, ceramics and mosaics to sculpture.

Working as both a public artist and a gallery artist, Day's eye-catching and sensitive works have appeared on the sides of buildings for local councils, in schools and in the private collections of art enthusiasts in Australia and overseas. 'Doing both suits me well, I get socialisation in the public realm and

seclusion in the studio. It's a relief to concentrate on smaller less demanding and relatively less responsible work,' said Day. 'And I don't have to satisfy anyone else!'

Day's current exhibition, *The Valley and Tableaux* is showing at Gauge Gallery in Glebe from October 11 to 23. The show features a mix of older works which have never been shown and newer pieces, including several 'bloody heavy!' bronze sculptures. The sculptural works engage with the idea of using readymade objects as art. 'The usage of the casting of real objects with only small modifications is taking the idea of 'the readymade' one stage further: in transposing the media, one is emphasizing the formal qualities of the object including its use and demanding it be seen as sculpture and is also part of the process of the artist accepting the readymade as a sculpture in its own right,' said Day.

As the creative director of Peter Day - Environmental Art and Design, Day works with a team of artisans and practitioners to create artworks. 'I can do a little bit of everything, but I get other people to do the things I can't,' he said. For the bronze sculptures in his latest exhibition, Day created moulds which he then sent to a foundry to be cast in bronze.



*Afternoon Coffee Ca Va Peter Day, 2014*

The community consultation Day undertakes as part of the public art projects often impacts his private artworks. He was recently commissioned to design and build a public art piece titled 'Greetings' for a new Stocklands development in Merrylands. 'We did a huge amount of community consultation and came up with concepts about the rituals people have around crossing thresholds and visiting each others homes. We built three bronze tableaux highlighting rituals from various continents.'

Creating the bronzes for the Greetings project directly impacted the works in Day's current exhibition. 'The pieces in the show are heavily influenced by the experience of creating the bronzes for the threshold pieces. The idea of casting real objects raises all sorts of notions about who do these objects belong to, where did they come from and how they are used.'

Creating personal artworks for private collection is a different process to making public art – I can use my own intuition. Where as Day believes extensive community consultation is the key to making public art that engages and responds to its environment. 'Personally, I believe that a work should relate to not only the environment, but also to the community, and the history and issues of the area. A public artwork has a job to do, which can be well defined, through thorough community engagement.

We were one of the first people to do such thorough community engagement and have been doing it for 35 years or more, including when it wasn't fashionable.'

While Day works in a range of media, of special importance is the dry fresco mural technique, which gives his work very high durability as well as distinctive aesthetic attributes including a soft velvety matt surface and earthy colours. The technique involves using paints made from ground minerals from the earth and water glass, which binds permanently to the dry plaster surface. This style of fresco will last for hundreds of years. 'All the murals in Europe are made like this,' said Day. 'There isn't as much demand in Australia though, unfortunately.' Though he hopes the possible refurbishment of his gigantic thirty year old, King George V' mural at the Rocks may rectify this.

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