

# Onespace

## *Transcript of Interview:*

### **LOUIS LIM & BETH JACKSON, Artists**

**Subject:** PIVOT (exhibition of artists' books and wall-based works),  
Onespace Gallery, 13a Gladstone Road  
Highgate Hill Q 4101

14 June – 27 July 2019

**Interviewer:** Louise Martin-Chew

**Place:** Onespace Gallery, 13a Gladstone Road  
Highgate Hill Q 4101

**Interview:** 17 May 2019

LMC: Pivot is about artists' who pivot from the 2D practice to create artists' books. So, as John Stafford has written, sometimes this hinge is quite logical but it could be poetic or metaphorical. We're interested in your angle on the relationship between your 2D prints and your book, to better understand how you conceive and configure the relationship? It's interesting because there are two of you.

LL: Well the project is kind of a conversation between Beth and me. And it involves elements that change based on the conversation itself. And so this 2D art work is mostly just photographs and the book was developed over a long time through discussions with Beth and her writing about grief. And then the book came about because of this discussion and so each design element was drawn from our conversation and so on.

LMC: And so what's it called?

LL: The book is called "...there is no end". It's a little bit of a complicated narrative that we navigate through. The first part of the story was of a close relation of mine that had been imprisoned in a prison for four years and three months. I made this [photographic] work after his release and I shared the work with Beth. And so we had a lot of discussion through that.

BJ: And the work was exhibited.

LL: It was in POP Gallery, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, and then it was presented in the Churchie National Emerging Art Prize at QUT Art Museum.

BJ: Well, then Louis got an opportunity to attend an artist's book making workshop in Japan. And so Louis had the photographic series and he said I want to make this series into a book, and I want more content for this book, and then he thought that I could contribute by contributing text to the book. He knew that I had recently had a bereavement through the loss of my partner. And so he thought that there might be a nice parallel between our journeys of grief or experiences of grief. And so he made a very open invitation and it was about a year after my loss experience, but it was

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still very fresh to me. I chose to create a poem. I've written poetry since I was young but I've never had poetry published. Well, not really. So I produced this text and gave it to Louis. It was all I could really do to process the request so I gave him what I had and anyway – I didn't know if you'd [Louis] find it suitable or not – but yes. So he took it off to Japan.

- LL: Yeah, and I think it was just before Japan when I received the text. The text was quite stark and it's quite, it's very powerful work I think. And so I responded by creating images of skies and there's a lot of coincidences that we didn't really think about before. There is the first poem which has ten parts and when I asked Beth how many days was her partner, Michael Foley, in hospital, and it turns out to be 11 days in the hospital. And so I ended up making many images of skies but we selected eleven that are representative of 11 days that had gone by.
- BJ: And it's a strange thing because there is more to this relationship in a way because the sky images are made by this
- LL: Reclaimed Polaroid process.
- BJ: So Louis has developed this way of creating a negative from the positive of Polaroid. So you have these crazy blending edges. And so yeah, so we have worked on a project previously which was about peace with artists Elizabeth Woods and Kevin Leong. I interviewed people who had experienced war, asking them about what peace means to them. There were a series of questions about peace, the peace interviews and Louis came in at the end of my interview process. He took a photo of each of the interviewees using this particular photographic method and we created this little gallery in the middle of their installation of these prints, photographic prints quite large and the interviews in text as books paired with the images.
- LL: So we already had that relationship from that experience and and also had this kind of photographic process. I was really fascinated by these photos. So that was part of the conversation as well as like well, how about I use this photographic process with something really gentle like an image of sky. For a long time I've been taking images of skies. And so they became a beautiful partner with the poems and they are a gentle aesthetic.
- BJ: Also Michael Foley, my partner, he would have loved images of skies. When he passed away, I was aware that he made little watercolors, but I had no idea of the extent of these watercolors. There were hundreds of these watercolors that he'd made of journeys made on his boat. And most of them are just paintings of seas and skies. So I told Louis this and then we decided to reproduce some of Michael's paintings as images in the book as well. So the book started growing. I wrote a little bit of text, which I thought we might have to edit down and wasn't really suitable and didn't really go with Louis's original photographic series and then all of a sudden, he comes back with this. Because the other thing that Louis did well, yeah when he went to the workshop in Japan was to turn, each phrase or each line of poem into a

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page. Each line of the poem traces the photographic emulsion, as a metaphorical shoreline around the edge of the images.

LL: And the idea for this was to extend and stretch time when you read the book, so it takes a lot longer time to look through and the idea is that with grief and bereavement you don't know how long it takes or it potentially never goes away. This thinking is reflected in other little elements such as the paper. The paper is very delicate, it is a very thin paper, 52 gsm paper. Which means you have to be quite gentle when you flip through the pages and then you read their words that are quite stark but then there's this touch of the paper itself. This was a two-sided paper where one side is smooth, the other side is rough. The thinking here was that grief is sometimes sweet, but it's also sometimes rough. And so when you touch it you have this double-edge feeling to the paper itself. So those are the processes that take place when all these things kind of appear and accidents happen and then they kind of work with the work itself. So that's how we kind of maneuvered through and created the book. There's a lot of fine tuning with this.

BJ: Well, yes because, the people that Louis worked with in Japan have been serious stakeholders in the making of this book, mentoring him through the book making process. And there have been so many iterations now. I just told him the other day that it's been two years, since I wrote the poem that we've been working on. Well, he's been working really. I feel like my contribution is quite minimal in some ways. It's just been an endless refining process that has gone on and every detail thought of.

LL: We're nearly nearly there, just a few more things and we are about to finish.

BJ: Every detail has been thought of and if ever you thought that making an artists' book was a trivial exercise. It is not, not with these people.

LL: So the story that I told earlier, my original series of photographs, it's been made into a concertina book. A concertina book read from right to left – just to hold onto the Asian reading patterns. And these mirror pages hold a portrait underneath that you can just see. So it's a mirror film with a portrait underneath, so that when you look at the mirror, firstly you are looking at yourself and then slowly you realise there is someone else underneath. There's only two of these pages to help you identify what the person belonging to these stories could look like. Though you can never really tell. And so this is the idea of faded memory.

LMC: So obviously this work is really deeply felt.

BJ: Yes

LL: Yes

LMC: And it is a highly personal project. Another question is, within your practice, why do you make an artist book? Have you made other artists books?

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- LL: I made another artists' book but this has invested a lot of time and energy, thinking too. I think this artists' book in particular is a part of the healing process for us. And so in the process of making this work when things reveal themselves and things kind of clicked. I think that that both of us have benefited from the process of making it.
- BJ: It is incredible. When something devastating happens, to be able to turn it into a positive is the only way out. Sometimes it is just the salvation because there's no getting around it. It filters everything, colours your whole life. So to be able to find the positive path through that experience is just a godsend. And it can't be understated. Healing is a good word, but I don't know. It was a big loss and it's not like you will be able to get over it really. But, to be able to make something positive from that experience is just the greatest thing. It's just like well, if that hadn't happened then I wouldn't have done this or this wouldn't have happened and you can finally be kind of almost, not grateful that it happened, but at least you know that the life goes on in a good way.
- LMC: And so is this book a single edition?
- LL: It will be published in the near future but it will be a handmade edition of 51 editions. Each one of them will be hand done and hand printed. I think part of me is wanting that as well because the process makes so much sense and also the delicacy of handling these stories. Having the handmade element adds to the value of the book. So that's what we've agreed upon.
- BJ: It is amazing that Louis has negotiated this publishing deal with one of the advisors from Japan. They have agreed to support the book, distribute and try to sell it. Also the book was accepted into the Libris Award at Artspace Mackay and they acquired it for their collection. We're incredibly proud. It's astonishing but it's a testimony to the intense collaborative effort between us, and with the people invested as well.
- LL: Yeah.
- LMC: Clearly it's a kind of once in a lifetime kind of the project really.
- BJ: I think so, yeah. Well yes, and probably one that's going to change your practice Louis.
- LL: It's going to change quite a lot in my practice I think. There's a lot of things that I've never thought of, especially talking about *Pivot*, when you work with 2D works on the wall. The thinking is quite different because in the book process you have this chronological timeline that you're trying to figure out. When the present is, when the past is, when the future is, when you're looking through the book. Those thought processes become quite interesting and then there's this idea that you can look at either side of the book and how do you then navigate through this process as a viewer and as well as a creator. So those sorts of elements I never really thought about when you're working on the wall space. You work with the space of course, there's another idea in the gallery space, but I think the thinking process is quite different.

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- BJ: And it's the intimacy of holding something, isn't it?.
- LL: That's right. Yes.
- BJ: The texture of the materiality becomes quite obsessive.
- LL: Yes. Very obsessive. Usually you'll read a book in your own pace and that's through intimacy. In the gallery space you always feel like you're being watched. And so there are these little elements that I like about books more and more because of the subtle nuances that, as a viewer, you're able to experience at your own pace, your own time. And as a creator, you are able to layer things more and more into this one element and it can also travel far and wide quite easily. That's the thing.
- BJ: And you can make something a slow reveal kind because you know the reader will come back.
- LL: That's right. Exactly.
- BJ: So you want to reward them for returning. So that investment in detail is really worth it, you know, you are not just doing something because you're a crazy obsessive. You're doing something because somebody is going to have this possession and flick through hopefully many times and really appreciate it.
- LL: And each time something else would come to the surface.
- LMC: Okay. Are you're thinking about returning to wall-based work? Do you have something that's leading you back to that?
- LL: I think because I'm a photographic artist and documentary photography is so often distilled down to a very simple element that's easy to translate into wall based work. As far as I think with the book process, there's a lot of meaning that needs to be packed into the work and, as a viewer, then needs to be unpacked. And so for me, it's a very different process and I think, now that I have learned all these methods of making a book, processes take much much longer . As for the wall-based work, sometimes it's easier but I think that the reward is quite different.
- LMC: Yes.
- BJ: Yeah, because Louis works as a photographer commercially as well. So he photo documents exhibitions and art works. And so I think there is a spectrum isn't there, within the photography.
- LL: And I also do commercial work, events and for organizations so it's a myriad of different things that comes through constantly.
- BJ: Yeah and varying levels of creative input, depending on what the commission is. But one of the things that he asked me recently was whether Michael had any cotton shirts as apparently Louis has found out a way to make paper from cloth. And then he said even sheets could be fine and I just went, 'Oh I have sheets'. Just an amazing

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thought that our sheets could become paper. And yes, I don't know where that will lead.

LMC: And that's a materiality but also, you know as a documentary photographer often, you're documenting other people's reality. The way this project turns inward must have required a lot of different skills.

LL: Yeah, I would say so but I suppose a lot of the time my work extends out from conversations.

BJ: I think of Louis with that original photographic series, taking his photography into that relationship was his way of life, his way of reconnecting and way of saying 'this is who I am. This is what I can bring to our space.' Which is quite gentle. But at the same time not. I guess it would have been confronting in a way?

LL: It was quite confronting. Because I don't like having my photograph taken. A lot of my work is based on pretty confronting situations for instance. I think some of the stories are quite full-on. I also work with the children's hospital where working on projects with organs and organ transplant recipients, and some of the stories that come to light. These are little kids and I think over time I've developed this sensitivity to deal with people and a lot of it was just listening. I think part of that project was just listening to what the other people have to say and then me trying to find a way to very gently translate that. With the Peace project we've got the words, but I think images need to settle with the viewer, just to sink in. So it's a very gentle portrait, minimal, but then you get all these swirls that go around the edges that talks about something else psychologically, physically.

LMC: So in terms of what is next for you, are there other creative projects in your near future?

BJ: I hope so but it's almost to me like this project was an accident. I keep thinking one day I'll take poetry seriously and I will do it properly. One of those retirement fantasies I think. At the moment there's no time to really invest. Well that's a naughty thing to say because I could make time. So yeah, I'm still dancing around that problem.

LMC: Is there anything else we haven't spoken about that's important?

LL: It's huge to encapsulate in half an hour.

BJ: The book may be launched in Japan.

LL: It may be launched in July but there's still little touches and I have to physically make the book. So let's see how it goes. We ideally want to launch it in July at Tokyo Art Book Fair.