

Euan Heng, Associate Professor/Senior Research Fellow in Fine Art at Monash University, Melbourne, in conversation with Greer Honeywill about the making of her intimate and responsive sound environment, *Secrets (and lies)*.

GH: Through this work I examine the human need to create secrets or lies as a means of negotiating life. Secrets frequently emanate from our patterns of daily existence; they can be innocent, protective, even humorous, or alternatively, powerful and disturbing. I've gathered into the fabric of this work secrets contributed by anonymous donors. The donors voice some of these secrets, and actors voice others. In the gallery I continue to ask, *do you have a secret*, inviting the audience to extend their experience of the work by writing a secret and posting it in the box provided. Desk, seat, lamp, paper and pencils are all located within the physical environment of the work. At intervals during the exhibition these secrets will be gathered from the box and voiced by actors. The new secrets will then be added to the constantly changing sound loop. Between each secret there is a brief sound collage, a conjecture about where the secret may have been told; in a café, sheltering from rain, walking in a park, in a theatre foyer, a hairdresser and so on. The secrets and collages are threaded together like different coloured beads.

EH: This is like a 'confessional' or, hearing confessions – the idea of the box and the curtain and the adjacent table for writing the secret – this is ritual like that of lighting a candle but this work is secular, therefore, who hears the confession? Then there is the 'couch' and the unloading of burdens. The work brings up lots of associations.

GH: The work is not so much about confession in exchange for absolution or forgiveness but rather it centres on the human need to communicate to another living being. The value of storytelling to the human psyche becomes apparent. Consider what you would do if you had a troubling or embarrassing secret. Would you tell a friend, a stranger, or keep it to yourself? This is the dilemma. In the past people stoically kept the secret hidden but in recent times we've come to embrace the assumption that revealing secrets is morally superior to keeping them and that it is healing to reveal a secret. In *Secrets (and lies)* I explore the validity of this belief.

EH: I'm thinking of the lies we all tell to keep a secret. In the mid to late 1950's, I would've been eleven or twelve at the time, I used to fish for trout in a beautiful creek. I very rarely saw anyone else fishing, it was close to paradise in my spot and it was my secret. If I did see someone the fisherman would always ask to see my catch, which I would display proudly. But when asked where I had caught the fish I would give an incorrect answer.

GH: Your boyhood deception points to our shared human capacity to fabricate far more disturbing secrets or lies in order to conceal. With deception in mind I've created a dimly lit, physical environment in which no more than two people at a time can sit and listen to the audio loop. The materials of the structure have been chosen to evoke a range of responses. The chequer plate steel on the outer walls of the booth is rigidly patterned, industrial, reflective and brutal while the black velvet curtain at the entrance to the booth speaks of temptation and excess. When you enter the booth you pass momentarily into a different world.

EH: The choice of materials is interesting, black velvet is sensuous, however, as the entrance and exit to a steel box it could also be slightly sinister, almost bunker-like.

GH: It could be read that way. Inside the booth the participant puts on the headphones and sits on a bench seat facing a wall of dimly lit mirror that captures their shadowy reflection. At that moment they are part of the work.

EH: In your previous works, even in installations such as the ephemeral, illuminated birdcages, there is often a powerful poetic after-image. With this work I'm wondering what 'after image' will remain or, even if that is desirable.

GH: This is a strongly psychological piece and therefore it is the thought, the memory or the linkage to a shared secret that will linger in the mind rather than the poetic after-image you speak of.

EH: I like the idea of the work being completed only when it enters the mind and memory of anonymous others so, you are engaged in gifting – a strange almost aberrant gift, but a gift never the less and one that will live on. Does *Secrets (and lies)* have an after life or does it terminate when the exhibition closes?

GH: I recently set up a blog www.secretsandlies.com.au to enable people to participate in the work. In doing so I have inadvertently moved into a much larger space. My first response to the blog was a secret from South Georgia, USA. Slowly it is dawning on me that this project has a life beyond the initial exhibition. I find it fascinating that written secrets take on a literary character that differs from the spontaneous self-voiced secrets and yet both forms of contribution are valid. The layers coming together to build an unsettling amalgam of fiction and reality in a never ending loop.