



## CAMILLE SERISIER

Camille Serisier is a visual artist based in Brisbane, Australia. Using vivid scenery she creates playful photographs and films that investigate the relationship between human beings and the natural world.

Words by Mel Fletcher

Serisier has been an artist in residence at the Kings School Canterbury, received numerous grants, including the NAVA Australian Artist Grant and recently been a finalist in the highly competitive NAB Private Wealth Emerging Artist Award.

In this interview Serisier talks of her role in Australian society as both a female and an environmentalist. And for a limited time only the artist has released an exclusive link to her film piece 'A trip to Oz'.

MF: The style of your film work is very flamboyant and comical like that of a silent movie. Typically this historical way of filming is shot in black and white, so compared with your wonderfully coloured stage set it brings forth a refreshing homage. Why have you chosen to film in this theatrical style?

CS: I used to work as a scenic painter for Theatre, Opera and Ballet. The experiences and skills I acquired have had a significant influence on my studio practice. As a result I make large-scale tableau vivants, or living pictures. These are life size sets that I occupy with costumed performers. Silent films and early cinema have always fascinated me. I love the low fi special effects and exaggerated acting. It reminds me of theatrical performances and stage illusions. It seemed a natural fit to make my own film work in this style.

I am a particular fan of the early French filmmaker Georges Méliès. His works are charming and filled with light-hearted humour, however, they also broach very serious subject matter. My most recent film work 'A Trip to Oz' pays homage to Méliès famous 1902 masterpiece 'A Trip to the Moon'.

MF: What is it that draws you to the history and culture of Australia that it has become the theme of your work?

CS: As an Australian female and environmentalist I am interested in representations of women and the environment in Australian culture. Curiously both seem to have been historically abused, the first through sexism and the later through environmental destruction entailed in European settlement and more recently industrial modernity. These forms of domination are often depicted in Australia's cultural record right up to the present day. I am interested in exploring the way such representations contribute to and potentially perpetuate this historical treatment. My broader aim is to see what impact this has on how women and the environment are treated in contemporary Australian society.

It is very difficult to talk about the environment without talking about the Australian Landscape. The film 'A Trip to Oz' is part of a larger series of works titled 'The Wonderful Land of Oz' that explore the complex environmental, spiritual, political and personal issues entwined with the Australian Landscape via the people who inhabit it. This work is a personal journey to untangle the links between identity and place. I am a fifth generation Australian.

One of my ancestors helped found Dubbo, a regional centre in New South Wales about 5 hours from Sydney. He was a French traveller, who one day got off a boat and decided to stay.

I would like to believe he treated women, the environment and any people he encountered with respect. However, that seems like a contemporary Australian fantasy – one that I tried to address through parody and metaphor in this series of works.

MF: I'm interested in who the people are in your films. Are they close friends, professional actors?

CS: I invite friends, artists, writers and curators to perform in the photographic and film works I shoot in the studio. I thoroughly enjoy shoot days. It is exciting to see the work come to life when the performer steps on set.

For the most part, as I design a work a particular person will come to mind. I think it's important to work with people from my own community because essentially the works are about my personal perspective on the world. I also like the honest and playful performances provided by untrained actors. All the people I have worked with have been extremely generous and thrown themselves into their roles with wholehearted enthusiasm. I really feel that comes through in the work and gives it a sense of authentic playfulness.

Yes these people are standing in paper landscapes wearing silly costumes and making pretend, but they are taking it seriously. There is something very beautiful in that irony.

MF: What is the process behind your art? Where does it begin and end?

CS: I start with small watercolour on paper idea drawings. I make multiple versions of these until I have an image that I feel is strongly composed and conceptually resolved. This becomes the design for life size scenery, props and costumes that I use for still photographic images, films and installations.

Sometimes I make large performative installations for exhibition. These are exciting when considering the 'end' of a piece. For the most part these installations are interactive and the audience is invited to participate in the work. Many people document this experience and share it on social media. I love this form of engagement because it really democratizes the piece. The audience becomes performer and in some ways author of their own photographic engagement with the work.

MF: Do you have any upcoming projects we should look out for?

CS: In 2015 I will launch an ambitious online Australian History project. People can follow me on instagram @camilleserisier. Hope to catch you there.

Interview by Mel Fletcher

Text by Mel Fletcher 2015

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