

My space Tanmaya Bingham



THE complex and intricate works of Tanmaya Bingham emerge from an inner-city studio that is stripped bare of all but the essentials of artistic production. Propped against otherwise bare walls, her pencil-drawn images combine self and family portraits with the symbols and mementoes of a life's journey that began in Santa Fe. After meeting her Australia-born husband while studying at the Australian National University in Canberra, Bingham moved to Melbourne, where she combines a disciplined 9-5 artistic schedule with her role as a life coach and sometime poet. The sole hint of clutter inside her minimalist "sanctuary" is a toy horse, which neighs at the press of a button. All other distractions — including visitors — are shunned.

Why is privacy so important to your work process?

It's about seeing the works as a child that's growing in the mum. When it's in that really vulnerable state inside the body and all its vital organs are being created, it's a really important time and the baby isn't part of the world yet. I think of my work as being very similar to that. After all that stuff is done and has come together, that's when it births into the world, essentially. And it's also for me about really being in tune with my own intuitions about what I need to do, rather

than having people come in and say: "Did you think about this?" I really want to nut it out myself.

And the quiet is part of that?

I like to work with no noise and, typically, I wear earplugs. It's really how I tune in to what needs to come next. When I have a lot of noise and distraction, I don't feel as centred. When I feel really peaceful is when I can really tune in to what needs to happen visually on the surface that I'm working on. Even being in this environment where other artists were working, they'd be playing their music and I'd just want quiet. So I actually moved home for a little while and tried working in my garage and that was OK, but the body of work that I'm working on now is so big that I need a lot of wall space. So I ended up back here.

There's a lot of building work happening around you; how has that impacted on you?

I really like my studio to be my sanctuary, a place that I can come away from my house to rest and create and just to power it, as I like to say. Since they've been building all this stuff outside the studio, I've lost my view of the city and it's not only noisy but I feel very enclosed now. Before, it was nice because I felt that airiness.

So even though your works are very internal, the surrounds still impact on you?

Yes. I come from Santa Fe, New Mexico, which has, I think, 100,000 people. I grew up in the country, I'm very used to space and quiet, so it's been a huge adjustment for me.

Why do you burn sage here?

It's a cleanser. Where I come from there are a lot of native Americans, and it's something that I've always used, just to clear space energetically. If there's any spirits that you don't want in here, it cleanses the space and prepares it for a new day.

Why does the toy horse get in here and very little else?

I really like horses. It wasn't like a girly fetish — I hated horses when I was growing up — but as I've become an adult, I started really liking them.

What does this space say about you?

I'm focused. No bullshit. I don't mean that rudely, it's like, I don't want any clutter to get in my way, I just want to get on my train and go. I think that often times, if there's a lot of things around us, we allow them to become excuses for not doing. Before I start a project, I know exactly what I want to do. I lay it all out and then just come in here and crank. I trust that whenever I come into my space, the passion and the energy will be there, so it's like, you know, you just show up. That's why I have a set schedule, because if I was waiting for my passion to arise, I would probably never get to

work, so it's allowing myself to get to work first and then trusting that the rest will follow.

How has the move to Australia impacted on the internal journey your works are mapping?

Hugely. It has impacted me in terms of my distance from my family. It feels strange for me to be in a country where I don't have any family. I'm really interested in genealogy and in patterns, certain trends, whether it's physical features or illnesses like depression or cancer. I'm interested in how these things happen or don't happen along the way. I'll have a lot of really significant symbols within the work that relate to my personal life. The *Amalgamation* show is kind of like a memoir from when I was a baby to the present. In each image the face is an amalgamation of all three stages up to that point — from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. Primarily, I believe that when we are that adult, we are also that child and vice versa. We're always this amalgamation of different aspects of ourselves.

INTERVIEW: LINDY PERCIVAL

PICTURE: RODGER CUMMINS

Amalgamation is at Anita Traverso Gallery, 7 Albert Street, Richmond, until February 27. anitatraversogallery.com.au; tanmaya.net
A multimedia presentation on Tanmaya Bingham appears at nationaltimes.com.au next week.

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