

“Artist Communities: Louise Blyton”
By Milisa Galazzi / May 14, 2015



Artist Louise Blyton at work

Milisa Galazzi: Louise, thank you so much for agreeing to partner with me to contribute to this issue of ProWax Journal. In the past, I have focused my Artists and Communities column on interviewing folks who have attended artist residencies. Last issue, I interviewed an artist who explores themes of community in her work. Continuing now to push the definition of ‘artist community’ I am virtually reaching out to you in Australia. After perusing your website, I am struck by how many countries in which you have lived and worked: Australia, China, France, Portugal, England, the United States—to name just a few places! Please talk briefly about how you define your ‘artistic community’ as you have lived and worked in so many places across the globe?

Louise Blyton: Thank you Milisa for asking a question that is so important to me yet, is rarely asked! From a young age, I knew I wanted two things; to become an artist and to travel. I grew up in a very white, Anglo town near the beach in Australia. My longing for history and culture was so strong that at the age of twenty, I ran off for a few months to India. I wanted to see what was outside of my country. I then came back to Australia, finished my degree, and promptly left again for Europe. I didn’t return to my native country for three years. This long trip greatly displaced me. I didn’t know where I “belonged.” As I finally found my voice as an artist, I realized I still needed to travel to feel connected. Australia has a very small history of non-objective art (although this is changing very quickly right now). For this reason, as a young artist, I looked to European and American artists to find a community of like-minded creators. Connecting to other artists outside of Australia gave me a sense that I wasn’t alone and that I was part of a greater visual language. Now through social media, I am able to connect with my contemporaries all over the world. When I went to New York to take part in a two-month residency at PointB in Williamsburg, I arrived at a ready-made “artistic community.” When I got to New York, I felt like I had finally met my



Sugarland Exhibition

MG: You talk about ‘travel’ as a way for you as an artist to feel more ‘connected.’ Could you talk a little bit more about that?

LB: I feel very strongly about the benefits of travel. I think traveling should be compulsory for those artists who are able. Through the journey, we begin to understand the world around us. As an artist, I enjoy the adventure of travel as well as the ability to conduct visual research. Through my travels, I am able to connect with art that I’ve studied for years in books and on-line and yet have never seen in person. Studying these pieces in person makes my connections to them far more meaningful.

MG: Please share a little more about how you as an artist use social media to connect with your contemporaries all over the world?

LB: Social media has become a large part of my life as an artist. I use social media to showcase what I do. In this way, the digital connection acts like a calling card. This way of connecting works very well for me, and I can honestly say that I wouldn’t have been in any of the many overseas shows without the ability to connect via social media. Building relationships with contemporaries is so important. We are privileged to live in a time that this type of community building can be done all over the world and not just in your own country. The beauty of social media is that you can banter with other artists in a casual format no matter where you live. You can show them a snippet of your life and engage with them on a more personal level. In this way, social media is unlike a website which showcases purely your professional life and can be very static.

MG: As an artist living and working in Australia, you traveled half way across the globe to spend time in New York for a two month residency at PointB. In what ways did that experience influence you as an artist and how did your work grow as a result of spending eight weeks living and working in another country?

LB: Gosh, I could write a book on this question but will keep it short. I'd only been to New York once before and that was purely as a tourist. I fell head-over-heels in love with the place! The amount of art and the number of galleries and museums was astounding to me. Many of my friends had taken part in this residency at PointB and I was very eager to take advantage of this opportunity. I have a very busy life in Australia and didn't know how on earth I could fit a residency into my already full schedule. My former residency partner from Beijing, Cat Poliski, put her foot down and said, "That's it. We're going!" Once accepted, I settled quickly into the Brooklyn neighborhood of Williamsburg that felt immediately like home (in fact it's almost a clone of my neighborhood in Melbourne). The wonderful thing about a residency is that you can submerge yourself purely in your artistic interests with no other distractions outside of your art life. My main goal was to make contact with artists whom I had met through social media. I also made many studio visits that allowed me to meet some wonderful people. I also attended many gallery openings and I generally took part in the art community. You ask, "How did this influence on my work?" Well, that's something that is still slowly evolving! I became obsessed with videotaping the water on the East River. I became fascinated with the memories that this river holds. I took over eighty videos and I'm still working with them. This is a long-term project that will find me back in New York again, I hope!

MG: What else would you like to share with our readers about this topic of Artist Communities?

LB: As an artist locked away in my studio, I can feel extremely isolated. It's important for me to know that I am part of a larger community of artists, and a very supportive one, at that. Being part of a global artist community has been a great way for me to learn about other artists and their individual studio practices. I'm always amazed at the generosity of the artists I have met overseas and on-line. I truly look forward to these relationships maturing over time.