
Thanks mum, paintings by Anne Kearney. Blair Trethowan

Blair asks his Mum to do paintings for him.

There are a few things that come to mind.

The first is Pedro Almodovar's film *All About My Mother*. In it Esteban asks his mother, Manuela, if she would prostitute herself to protect him. It's hypothetical, of course, but Manuela replies that she has already done almost everything a mother could do for him. The movie unfolds and Esteban dies. The hypothesis – perhaps Manuela did do all that she could... except tell Esteban about his father, who happens to be a HIV-positive transsexual prostitute.

Secondly – a longer, personal anecdote:

My mother always hated art, primarily because she thought it was about being a good drawer and she wasn't. She thought that she couldn't understand it – that it all went above her head. I suppose I kind of used to think the same thing.

Anyway, my mother dies, and you have to clean a whole lot of shit up. Which is hard 'cause you find things that you didn't know about. And then you have to throw stuff out, which is harder because you've already lost the person they belong to and throwing their possessions out is like negating their existence – even when you know, theoretically, this isn't true – that you have memory and all of that.

Anyway, I kept this book that mum made.

She was sick for a long time and watched a lot of TV. The lounge-room was filled with videocassettes of the programs she couldn't watch when broadcast because the show was on at 4.30 in the morning or at the same time as another. I went around there on Sunday's - we watched telly and instead of talking about the obvious, we got on to doing crosswords together. We both liked trivia and quizzes and, probably more so, we liked competing against each other (not that this was ever said). Like the obsessive-compulsive she was, crosswords came to occupy much of her time.

The book – it has a turquoise hard cover and is spiral bound in black, the pages within are lined... basically its your standard A5 notebook that you can buy from Officeworks for approximately 4 bucks. Each page in the book is filled with information – a page per TV show, about 60 in all. By no means is it a comprehensive guide to pop culture, but it's reasonably extensive.

For each TV show the director, producer, shooting location and casts are listed. There is information crossed out and written over, various pens have been used and her handwriting changes in size – it was added to on a regular basis. I suppose the book is like a self-compiled dictionary or encyclopedia. The order was determined as the information came



Blair Trethowan, *Coast and the big flower*, acrylic on canvas, 40cm x 50cm 2004. Image courtesy of the artist and Uplands gallery, Melbourne.

to hand, not alphabetically or chronologically. Mum had no access to the Internet or reference books. Basically the book sat beside her on the couch and as she read something, watched something or found the answers to last week's crossword; the information was systematically entered into the book. Occasionally, when I was visiting, she would quiz me and my answers would be added. But the book, which had kind of started off as ours, became hers. The pages are well worn and although it seems there is no apparent order, she knew where all the answers were when needed. Inside the book there are also snippets – hand-written notes, clippings from magazines and newspapers with information underlined, waiting to be catalogued.

I had always wanted to do a series of drawings based on this book – like an illustrated dictionary I guess – not as a kind of tribute but more like my addition to the information, the part I could've played I suppose – kind of daggy and sentimental (I know). I haven't though, and doubt that I will. The value in this book, I suppose, is that it is like evidence of an experience. As personal as this is, somehow it transgresses just my own experience. I've shown it to other people (much to her dislike – she used to say to me, already embarrassed "I bet you show this to your friends"), and they see a value in it as well – maybe this is because they know me – I like thinking that it's not.

It's funny – the book is filled with errors, it's not perfect, it doesn't tell you things you really need to know or information you can't find out somewhere else, so in a way its kind of wrong and in the greater scheme of things it's not a significant artwork. But it feels like one.

Just before she died, I was trying to do a crossword with her to keep her awake, I was asking her the



questions and filling in the blanks, she looked up at me from her dozy state and said, "Are you stupid or something?"

Maybe I am.

Thirdly – the book *Vernon God Little*, written by Peter Findlay under his nickname of DBC Pierre. Vernon has been wrongly accused of a high school massacre. His mother, Doris, refuses to mention and acknowledge that he has been arrested for murder at any point during the novel – the hypothesis: families don't talk about shit – it's all somehow encoded in Doris' persistent questioning – "Are you eating well?" "What did you have for dinner?"

Lastly – Sophia Coppola's *Lost in Translation*. Bob Harris whispers something into Charlotte's ear. In the tender gesture, the audience is given the power to make up and interpret the meaning of the unheard words.

"Surrounded by voices of dubious authority we should practice being blind and silent." Elizabeth Newman quoted it from Eden Liddelov and sent it to Geoff, Geoff sent it to Blair, and then Blair sent it to me. Perhaps Liz is right. But... perhaps... we shouldn't be too blind and too silent.

Maybe.

Lisa is living in Kyoto for the time being.

Blair Trethowan, *Coast and the big flower*, acrylic on canvas, 40cm x 50cm 2004. Image courtesy of the artist and Uplands gallery, Melbourne.

Sometimes she makes pictures, sometimes she writes things. She used to work in Melbourne and help out with the artist run gallery TCB, she used to work with the collaborative group DAMP. Now she is teaching English and trying to find a place where she can sell her knickers – she has been told they are worth a few Yen.