

# Art Collector

Q&A WITH DEL KATHRYN BARTON: WHAT IS ART FOR?



Del Kathryn Barton.

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Acclaimed Sydney-based artist Del Kathryn Barton joined philosopher and art historian John Armstrong at The School of Life in Melbourne last week at a special In conversation event, asking What is Art For?. We spoke to Del about the direction of her new works, the purpose of art and why she couldn't live without it.

**Your self-referential works signal the degree to which your experiences guide your practice. What role does art play in your daily life?** I am an artist that is moved to make art as a direct experience of life. The work however is not autobiographical in nature. My creative practice is my constant companion – waking and sleeping, she haunts me constantly and is the core energy informing and motivating my existence.

**You've spoken openly about how art has helped you overcome various challenges throughout your life. What was the most significant challenge?** It's hard to identify the most significant challenge, but I do believe that being encouraged as a child to draw when I was experiencing an episode of extreme anxiety offered me therapeutic foundations to cope. The act of drawing demanded that I be very present in my physical and sensory body in ways that helped take the fear away.

**You showed a series of text-based works at Roslyn Oxley9 late last year. What compelled you to transition to text-based works?** I have truly enjoyed the transition into pure text works. I feel that they are a very natural extension of, in particular, my drawing practice. This considered juxtaposition of text and iconography is something that I have thought a lot about over the years. I feel that in isolating the text and honouring it completely within the pictorial space that it really becomes a compelling, trembling force. The narratives are open, alone and exposed. The very painterly mark is, for me, inherent to these visceral, tender and at times funny ruminations and swellings up of self.

**What are you working on at the moment? Is there anything in particular that you're looking forward to?** I have a very exciting year coming up. A three-year animation project will have its Australian premier here in Sydney as part of the inaugural Spectrum Now festival in March. I am currently working on a new moving image work and writing a crazy feature film, and developing five new bronze works, a large series of text works, and new paintings and drawings for two solo shows at the end of the year, one at Roslyn Oxley9 and the other with my new gallerist Matthias Arndt in Singapore.

**How important do you think it is that an artist challenges their audience to question the meaning of art?** Questioning the meaning of art is something that has never motivated my practice, perhaps because I mostly work within fairly traditional modalities. When it comes to the meaning of individual works though, I just give all that I am to the process of making and hope that the final product will engage an audience.

**Why do you believe art is fundamentally important to society?**

Oh, such a big question! I believe art feeds the life-blood of our culture across all histories and traditions. Perhaps I am biased though – art is my religion.

Emily Cones-Browne, February 2015

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