



THE GOLD BEHIND THE GLITTER

Interview by Fiona Munro

Tucked away behind the glitter of the Gold Coast, Rabbit + Cocoon is a not-for-profit initiative providing artists with affordable workspace rent and incredible opportunities to connect, collaborate, market and show their artwork. Fiona Munro talks with Creative Directors Emma Milikins, Jolie Hertzberg and Mariam Arcilla.

FM:How did you develop the idea of a creative precinct?

EM:The precinct idea is ever evolving and the idea of what the space is and will be is always changing. It began with one of the directors being offered the physical space by a friend, who then came on as a mentor and an investor. The three co-directors then came together to start nutting out what the coast was missing or lacking and to start working towards a common goal, this was to create the Gold Coast's first arts precinct. This began two years ago, we are currently still in council town planning to make this official. The space is already a living breathing arts precinct but we would just like to make it legal.

FM:How would you describe the creative workspaces?

JH:The workspaces at Rabbit + Cocoon predominantly follow a co-working format, with 80-100 sqm open plan studios housing several creatives within each. A great example of co-working in motion is our 'Studio 3', which houses a film-maker, graphic designer, roadcase builder, band manager and graphic design intern sharing a communal office space and a fully kitted out photographic studio. We also have individual 30sqm offices for organisations working within our precinct, retail spaces, a cafe,

casual hire rooms, a soundproof band rehearsal room and the recently launched independent radio station, Rabbit Radio.

FM:What is the most challenging aspect of coordinating so many people and facets of your business.

JH:One of the most challenging aspects of coordinating all the people and facets of our business is prioritising projects as we grow. It's a wonderful and unique situation to have such an amazing blank canvas but balancing our infinite freedom, ideas and passion with limited and self-started funding means that sometimes we have to forego the fun projects for the sake of our long term sustainability.

FM:How were you able to establish funding to enable your success with a voluntary based project?

EM:The project has not received any operational funding and all of the directors work other positions to live. We have also been extremely fortunate to have an investor who is the landlord and has injected capital into the project as well as subsidising the rent.

FM:Is the cultural aspect of the Gold Coast

changing?

MA:I believe the Gold Coast is witnessing a new wave of creative energy fueled by independent, motivated people who have strong visions for creating a better cultural climate for our city through social and entrepreneurial change. We are still a regional city, and in comparison to big cities, still have a lot to prove in terms of our cultural maturity.

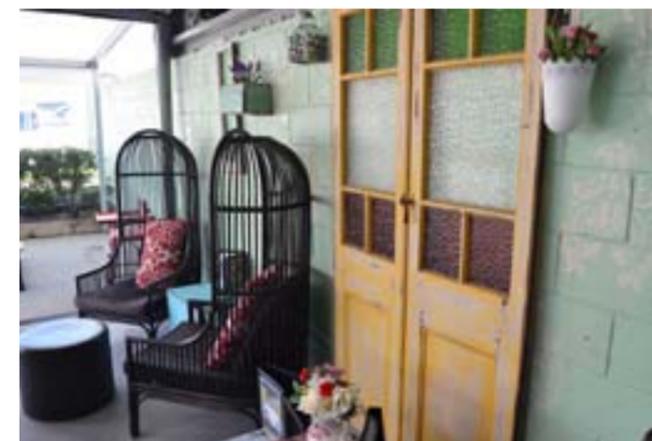
FM:What do you love most about living on the Gold Coast?

MA:The relaxed lifestyle and close proximity to the Hinterlands.

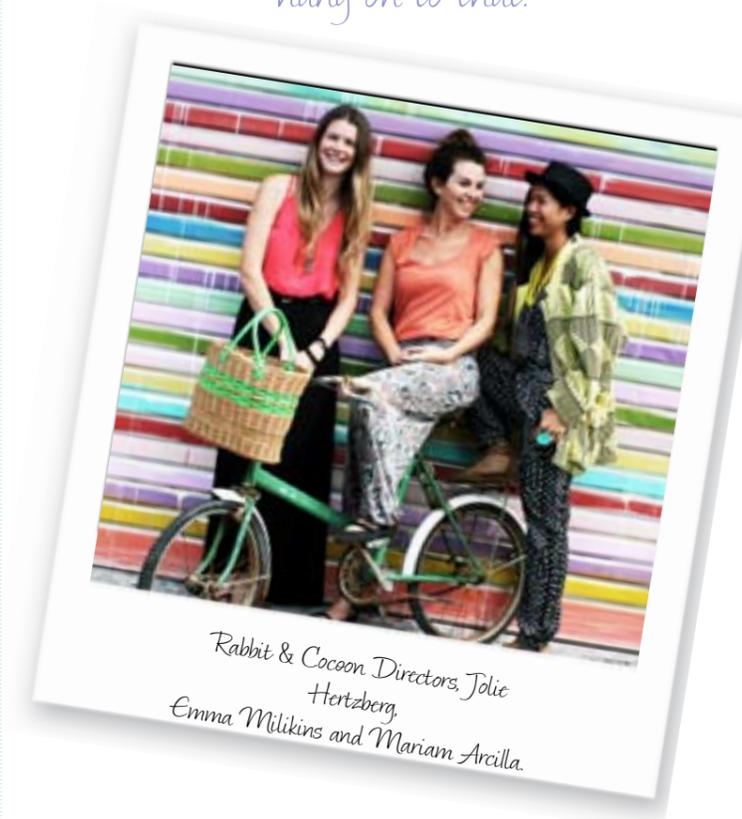
FM:Are you involved in education and cultural/community programs?

JH:We regularly host programs and events at our space like: free National Youth Week workshops, art forums, community workshops, film nights, book launches and networking evenings. If you come to Rabbit+Cocoon on any night of the week you will find a bevy of workshops including: African dancing, drumming and kids theatre in Studio 10. We aim to build our space to a level where people from the Northern NSW/South East Qld region will be able to enjoy workshops and forums that have previously only been delivered in larger cities.

FM:Do you have Indigenous artists involved in



We are creative people first and foremost, and we want to hang on to that.



Rabbit & Cocoon Directors, Jolie Hertzberg, Emma Milikins and Mariam Arcilla.



Rabbit & Cocoon?

JH: We work with a very broad cross section of the community and resident artists and organisations within Rabbit+Cocoon have facilitated a broad variety of inclusive workshops and exhibitions. Resident organisation, Inter Urban Arts, regularly hosts specific workshops for the indigenous community and we're really excited to see these kinds of programs develop and flourish within the space.

FM: What does sustainability mean to you?

JH: Sustainability is more than just a fuzzy feeling and a buzz word for us. We are dedicated to developing practices that are environmentally, financially and culturally sustainable for the Gold Coast. We are in a great position to set a strong example for our peers and the younger generations that engage in our programs and we want to ensure we take this on as not just an opportunity but a responsibility. Sustainable practice for us involves some of the most basic steps: advocate for fair pay of artists, keep business and products local, recycle and reuse whenever possible and support the wider ecology of the arts industry through collaborations and peer promotion. We're all in this together.

FM: How important is new media to your marketing and brand?

JH: As a not-for-profit initiative we find that new media marketing has proven to be incredibly valuable in terms of wider community reach and social impact. Most of our audiences are savvy with social media. They prefer to get news instantly and conveniently, and tend to share information with their networks, which is great for us when promoting our creative endeavours and public events.

FM: Do you find time to continue your own creative practice?

MA: I recently exhibited my stop-motion films at Swell sculpture festival and am writing for a few publications. However, I admit it's been tricky to find time for personal creative pursuits amidst day jobs and administrative work. Rabbit + Cocoon is an artist-run initiative, so for us it's still important that we remain actively connected and relative to our industry, which means creating things. The three of us are artworkers by default, but we are creative people first and foremost and we want to hang on to that.

FM: Do you have a dream project?

MA: A dream project would be if Rabbit+Cocoon was to reach a level where it becomes recognised as a leading independent creative precinct in Australia. A precinct that is able to foster the careers of thousands of creative people on the Gold Coast on a much bigger level. If our programs and studio spaces are enough to encourage talented people to either remain on the Gold Coast, or to move here - then we have done our job!

Rabbit + Cocoon
www.rabbitandcocoon.com

featured artist

MANIPULATING

Sharon Leaney interviews Lucille Martin

Award-winning Australian artist Lucille Martin inspires awareness about the environment, social justice, political and women's issues

Working with word, textile, installation and recycled materials, Lucille Martin is a nationally recognised contemporary artist who has been exhibiting and curating for more than twenty years.

Lucille's work moves audiences and stimulates strong emotional response and she is often asked to speak about the issues raised. Lucille Martin is a communicator using visual dialogue to take the viewer on an intimate journey that will resonate strongly with them for a long time to come.

SL: Are you still based in Perth and Byron Bay Hinterland, and why?

LM: Originally from Perth and spend time in both places for my work. I am also working as a facilitator to assist and educate emerging artists to present themselves for grants and folio presentations to launching their career in new ways.

SL: At what stage did you feel art was your passion and could become your life's work?

LM: Very early... I still have my drawings from about seven years onward particularly my studies of birds, however I didn't really understand where my love

"Isn't it true you only need one voice to believe in you... it's whether you are open to receiving"

