

Changing the direction of your arts practice – when, why and how?

Three artists at different career stages speak on what it means to change the direction of their arts practice.

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ArtsHub speaks with three artists at different stages of their careers about what it means to change the direction of an arts practice, whether a distinct style still matters and practical tips on the transition.

Jazmina Cininas: giving yourself permission

Jazmina Cininas is most widely known for her printmaking practice focusing on the female werewolf. This was also the topic of her PhD at RMIT University in 2014 where she now lectures in the Bachelor of Fine Art program.

Recently and unbeknown to many, Cininas has shifted gears towards performance and sculptural installations. She tells *ArtsHub* that the change emerged predominantly out of practical considerations.

‘Linocuts are a really physically demanding process – I’m committing to 600 hours to get an edition finished,’ says Cininas. ‘In terms of being strategic or working towards exhibitions, it’s just really hard to do.’

Her interest in performance and installations came out of an engagement with a Lithuanian folk singing group, which manifested into a collaborative work using **lagerphones** from Cininas’ own collection.

‘The lagerphones acknowledge the Australian side of our cultural heritage and, because I’m such a hoarder, I happened to have a whole bunch lying around. I quite enjoyed the process of making something relatively quickly and non-precious, but then I started thinking about the motifs of the songs and how the lagerphones could start to work as visual props,’ explains Cininas.

After being convinced to have an exhibition with these completed works, Cininas realised that the pieces created a new gateway for her creative practice.

Another consideration was the environmental footprint of her existing printmaking practice, which has tended to be resource heavy in terms of the amount of paper and ink required.

She says: ‘I still have a soft spot for the female werewolf (it began from my Lithuanian Australian heritage) and a lot of people still expect that to be my practice, but I think it’s about giving myself permission *not* to make work about it too. It’s quite daunting, and you make yourself very vulnerable to alienating your previous support base.’

Like So, Cininas also sees common threads between her printmaking and newer sculptural works. 'The lagerphones also deal with that Lithuanian cultural identity and narratives of migration, reinvention and cultural hybridity. That's the thing that runs through all my works, even though they are quite disparate.'

When it comes to art students developing a distinct style, Cininas believes it can be 'a double-edged sword'. She explains: 'People who come into art school with a particular style already are usually not very good students. They are so hung up on maintaining their style that they are not prepared to take as many chances and end up making work that is very similar to when they started.'

'In terms of establishing a professional reputation, it can be a lot easier if people recognise your work... But you don't want that to end up being a prison that stops you from trying, if all you're doing is treading water and not pushing yourself. I find that I end up stagnating, which is not very healthy or fulfilling.'



Jazmina Cininas, 'Autumn scene', 2021-22. Photo: Andrius Lipšys.

And changing direction? 'The hardest thing is giving yourself permission to do that,' says Cininas, 'particularly if you're well-established in something else.'

She echoes Keenan's advice 'not to change for the sake of change; there needs to be a reason for it, something that is informed or drives you.'

'The practicalities not only include being prepared for your practice, but also thinking where you are going to show. You may need to consider galleries or spaces you wouldn't have thought about previously, and be more open to testing out something new. But it also opens up opportunities to spaces that would have been closed to you before.'

Cininas concludes: 'I think being around other artists is a really good touchstone. See what they are doing, take chances and think laterally. That's really helpful...'

'Practices evolve and, if these opportunities present themselves, give yourself permission to take them.'