

**THE RED ROOM
COMPANY**
&
ARTAND

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PRESENT

OUR STORY BEGINS:
PRUDENCE FLINT
& ELIZABETH CAMPBELL
JENNY WATSON
& KEN BOLTON

AN ART AND POETRY COLLABORATION

OUR STORY BEGINS: PRUDENCE FLINT AND ELIZABETH CAMPBELL

Introduction by Johanna Featherstone

The Red Room Company creates unusual and useful projects that transform expectations of and experiences with poetry. Supporting the work of young and emerging writers, we are the pre-eminent commissioner of contemporary Australian poetry, developing imaginative contexts in which it can be creatively and critically explored. We try to make poetry accessible to all.

This is the first time The Red Room Company has joined forces with *ARTAND Australia*. Inviting poets and artists to swap words and pictures with one another to create new works, the brief was broad. The only definite was the result – publication in *ARTAND Australia* and a public performance, to be held at this year's Sydney Writers' Festival.

Together we selected poets whose personal experience and body of work are already in dialogue with the visual arts. Poet and critic Ken Bolton runs the Australian Experimental Art Foundation bookshop in Adelaide, and makes collages, his own books and drawings. Elizabeth Campbell's poems are laced with references to the visual arts and include, as their subjects, artworks and personae from paintings. We chose artists whose work has a relationship with text, whether it is conceptually or physically incorporated into their practice.

Most poets see their poems in their heads: moving images where metaphor takes on a physical body. Poems are already visual artworks – lettering and shapes that pattern a white page with spaces, line breaks, straight or slant, left or right. Using the eye to enlarge the fields of verbal meaning.

Could this project revolutionise the traditional illustration of words? Would it help each artist to see themselves and their work anew, breaking open previous ways of cross-form collaboration to reveal a totally original genre of poetry-and-art pairings? And might we read the poems as artworks and the artworks as poems?

Or does this project allow the artists, Prudence Flint and Jenny Watson, to make

something that balances the power of the word with the potential of the image delicately enough so that both forms might be viewed as perfect alone or complete in each other's company? An image that sits, as Prudence said of her painting, 'quite simply', beside the writing.

Sydney Writers' Festival, Walsh Bay and other venues, 19–25 May 2014.

Prudence & Elizabeth

The speed of our known world recedes and we pause ... to listen to the bristles on unseen teeth, feel the soap before it slips, refresh on cool tiles before the bath is drawn. We're lured into a crystalline moment of very quiet thinking and doing. We need to be fearless to enter the ambivalent space of the female body, and the bathroom, crossing boundaries of beauty and reflection, of privacy and being 'sprung'.

Elizabeth's poem is similar – a slow but active layering of narrative. 'Tooth' is a graceful procession of three-line stanzas with a storyteller who may be the poet, the tooth fairy, or the tooth guiding us through these spaces and domestic rituals.

Prudence's painting possesses an astute formality; a seriousness shapes the flesh and materials that we float, struggle and pause in, on the brink of opening a mouth and screaming, or spitting. The space is spookily still, almost silent.

But the poem offers us a way to speak through the shyness of the woman. Elizabeth's phrases are evocative and explorative, sometimes even haughty, presenting possibilities for play rather than a direct positioning of the scene.

Of the collaboration, Elizabeth and Prudence tell me theirs was a perfect match. Two autonomous artists energised by the chance to dip into each other's practice, conscious not to lose their own voice in the process of poems painting pictures or pictures painting poems. And perhaps it is through this sharing of voice and vision that the work shapes its own story.

Prudence Flint, *Toothbrush*, 2013, detail
Oil on linen, 107 x 91.5 cm
Courtesy the artist, Australian Galleries, Melbourne
and Sydney, and Bett Gallery, Hobart

TOOTH

ELIZABETH CAMPBELL

The great drain of the house
is a centre without clothes
where the eye deeps the mirror, a fished-
out lake.

There is a signpost on the sea,
at the apex of Cape Leeuwin: one way
Southern Ocean,
the other Indian. You can continue with
your eyes

its line dividing handless sea.
Who owns herself, the self she caused
carefully all day? The hand

must travel a long way
around its corner to the face which
watches as the hand approaches.
The dream-book says that when you dream

a house you dream your mind.
You dream rooms they are divisions in
your mind.
When you dream your body

it means rooms full of people.
What can you say of her? that she was prone
to apprehension

of a largeness when brushing
against another person – something like
the parting
of curtains or clouds and then

the doors of the wind would close, leaving
her looking at a face with one.
Who sees her self, the self that earns

its rest and is unwound
by dreams, her life the racing bobbin her
frozen foot
chases down till the last inch leaps free?

Teeth dissolve in the dream like a cliff-edge
and your body's falling image stamps
the eyes of the horrified tourists.

Dream dissolves in light but there she is
in the mirror you rent with the house.
It's wrong to say you see yourself:

both eyes look at one eye and then
they swap.



JENNY WATSON AND KEN BOLTON

Jenny & Ken

Ken and Jenny knew each other a little before this project began. To give Jenny a taste of his work, Ken posted her a package consisting of several envelopes, each containing a new poem, and each listing the images/ideas/moods held within the corresponding poem.

It is a nerve-racking thing for a poet to do – post little bits of their soul in envelopes.

Jenny was travelling through Japan during the course of the project, and so, in return, two postcards arrived at Ken's place bearing Jenny's illustrations. Small traces of the directions she was to take Ken's poems in.

The next arrival for Ken was ten finished artworks. His poems, then, were written blind to new images but rich with his knowledge of Jenny's previous work, along with all the other artistic associations that buzz in his mind and poems. These poems chat along, collecting characters, conversations, recollections and jokes. A collection that constitutes the poet. Ken as a kid, as a 1960s rock'n'roller. Ken as a husband, dad, master of a dog. Ken welcomes you in, to know his moods, his melodies.

Ken's poems are also mini-critiques of art and poetry. What is a relaxed yak about the alleyways of Ancient Greece is also a thoughtful meditation on the fragility of language and manhood. They take on the body of their subject, lifting language out of the confines of letters into works of art themselves. Ken has said:

I particularly like the way they often look assembled, & involve collage or quotation, & often have semi-discrete passages or areas. This is compatible with my own way of writing. Most often my poems do a bit of thinking & looking & remembering & factor in a good deal of distraction.

Portable and pocket sized, affectionate and alert also describe the images Jenny has created in response to Ken's poems. On small notepaper she has joined Ken in his playfulness. Her works capture Ken's cool and make the poems calmer, taking away some of the anxiety and angst of the writing read alone. Jenny's watercolours do not incorporate the actual text of Ken's poems, but rather drink in Ken's stories, and accompany them on their journeys.



Beginning At Basheer's Coffee Shop
Ken Bolton

I talk to Basheer briefly
How-did-the-launch-go?
etcetera.

The anarchists enter
—at least, three guys with beards,
glasses, one steel-rimmed, tech
teachers, I think.

They always sit there.
I sit here, or here.

The women
from the Arts Dept sit *there*, always
but their numbers
require it

a deal is stitched up
much laughter.

I read the poems
Tranter has sent.
I like them, tho I know
nothing

of the sources
I think I've never read Ern Malley
even,

in his entirety
or Biggles

Lyn! I hear
John call out,
he has really read nothing except
Frank O'Hara!

"And Ted Berrigan, John,"
Lyn's moderating tones
"and you, & Pam, & Forbes & Laurie."

Sometimes I
wonder, I hear John subsiding.

It's true tho,
isn't it?

Joyce I am reading at the moment,
playing catch-up.

Am I taking it in?

“My point
entirely,” I hear John again,
an imaginary John

Are all my friends imaginary?

The women
laugh again, loudly.

My vision of John is cartoon

John stands by
a pool

back to me, pretty much

— chinos? not
cargo pants! —

a striped shirt,

sipping a daiquiri

watching the

pool cleaner chug back & forth

against the tiles

dreaming of a machine that would write the
terminals for him (*The Terminals*)

automatically.

“Automatically”

it’s beginning to seem a word
you don’t hear anymore

the past’s dream of the
future

—we’re there *now*—

like my dream of JT

tho *do* they happen automatically

— like everything else
these days?

so it “goes without saying”? —

The real John I saw

a few weeks ago

and now I have his book

where

Biggles meets Ern Malley

as does Louisa May Alcott

“They spoke so frankly in the past” — is one effect
via John’s coupling of the texts

or “lingos”

if I may

permit myself an Australianism

I guess I am an Australian?

& a wistful, unrepentant modernist

‘of some stripe or order’

with the old-fashioned ideas of modernity

(tail fins?)

the anarchists,

I reflect,

resemble the Marx Brothers

as, bearded, they

arrive in America

with identical long

beards

— I remember a beard coming unstuck
as Chico or Harpo drinks water—

this is not quite modernity

or it’s the joke

of one part catching up with the other:

Europe

—Eastern Europe—

(smelly, bearded, un-cool

unsophisticated)

arriving in America

the ‘New’ world, ha ha

America &

‘the Other’

& here my essay begins

the Lars von Trier

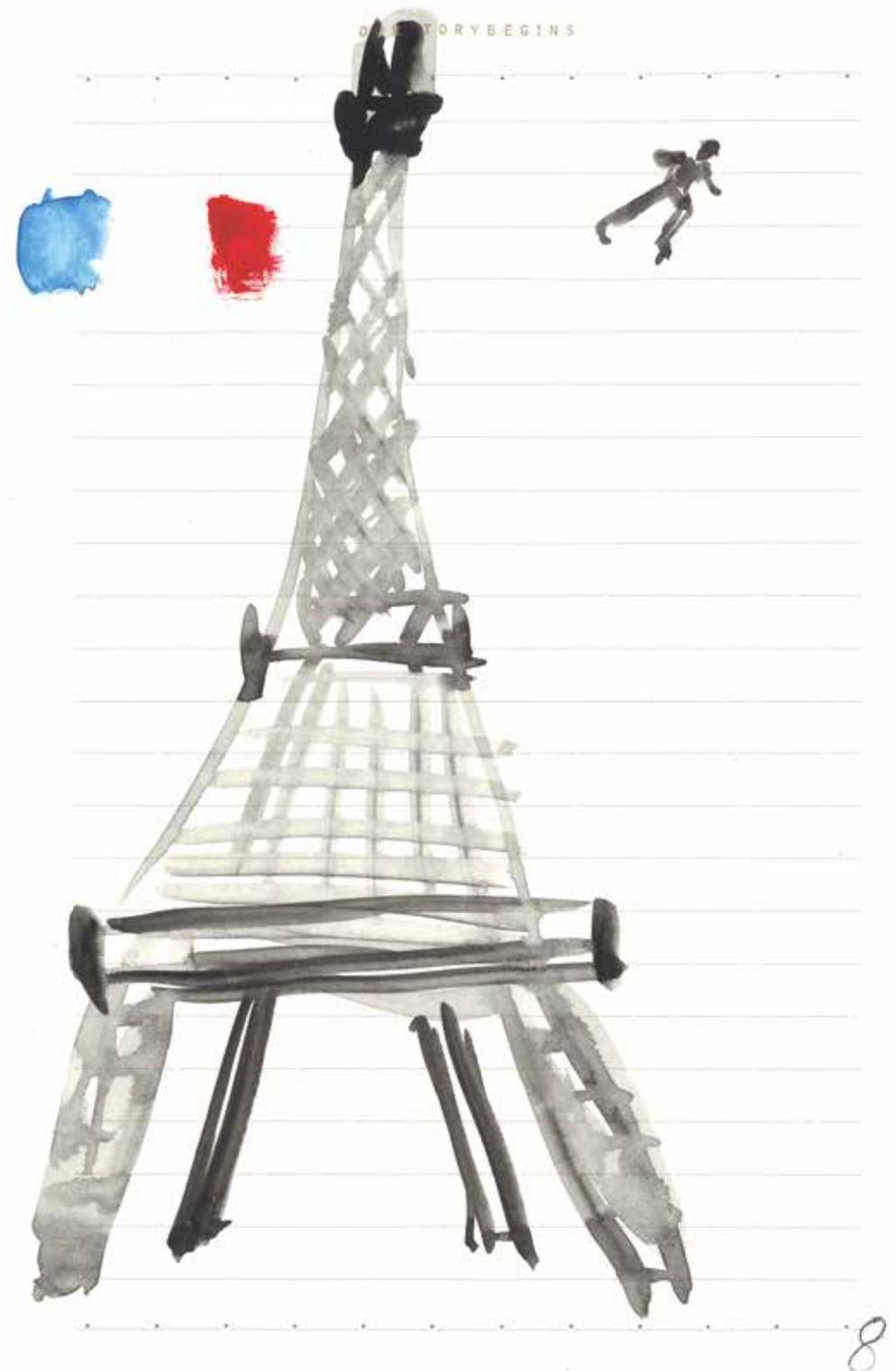
vision

Padgettwise
Ken Bolton

“Vorwartz!” — General Blutcher

Ron Padgettwise,
a manner Ron Padgett
himself never had
to affect,
is sometimes
the best way out of here
where ‘here’ is
ich macht right nowen,
mit und pigfoot &
a bottle of beer
 (“A double, barkeep!”),
or so I find.
Standing on
‘the shoulders of a giant’—
with my head into the wind
my scarf blowing
cigarette held
that continental way,
pinched between
forefinger & thumb—
you can do it—
& the beer, which
you’ve had,
imbibed,
why,
the spirit soars you’ll notice—
to the mind’s applause—
a bit, a fraction—
& you step off the tower Eiffel,
or some tower,
in Potsdammerplatz—
or *off the gutter*
merely—safe, because

Padgettwise;
‘safe’ really because
Stacey & Gabe detect
your inner Kirchner
your inner Beckmann
(beer & cigarette,
respectively)
& are at hand,
& the
sophisticated Walter Brennan
(the Padgett aura),
running interference—
a warning device.
In any case you are
On The Other Side
—of the road merely—
‘merely’—but that’s all that
counts, you got where
you wanted to—
alive—in the next
phase of your life
(which will resemble very much
the last, as one cigarette,
inevitably
resembles very much
another: ideally, too)
& light up—
& order another, for
this is Germany,
& carry on
in orderly fashion,
Padgettwise. I
recommend it.





At the lights (Les Temps)

Ken Bolton

Childcare?
*Hmm, I tell her,
 I'd get out
 of that.*
 Well, she is.
 Well out.
 Lost her job
 & looking
 for factory work
 or maybe cleaning.
 The lights
 change. We walk
 together further up
 the street.
 One factory doesn't
 train you for another:
 it's not an industry,
 I say. I wonder if
 I'm right. We talk
 politics a bit. (The
 government has changed
 hands—
 not good for the
 childcare business.

*You don't happen
 to own a coalmine?—*
 But I don't ask her that.)
 She asks about
 my employment history
 —bookshop, the arts.
 'Adult' bookshop?
 We laugh. Well, *for
 grown-ups*
 I tell her, but no &
 I describe our specialties
 She says she could have
 guessed
 arts—you look an arty
 sort of guy. We laugh
 Well I've been hanging
 round with them
 a long long time. 1982?!
 I was *born* just then.
 So she's 31.

Thirty years in one job
 it's not very usual
 anymore.
 I tell her Yes,
 I've hung on.
 I wish her luck
 with the job we
 part & I go & have
 coffee read there
 these essays on
 Frank O'Hara
 —the step, prosody,
 thought—
 not finding them
 a lot of fun. My
 mood. Read
 an old letter from
 Sylvia Esposito someone
 I knew in Rome
 the letter living
 all these years in
 the pages of this book
 I wonder where
 Sylvia is living now?
 It was a new apartment
 maybe she is there still.
 A letter from Yumiko
 evidently I placed
 both letters here,
 at the same time, tho
 the Yumiko one is from
 1998—Sylvia's
 from 02. Time.
 The David Herd article
 —time, prosody
 —thought.

I feel
 a little down. Tho
 there are reasons for that
 —aside from what
 I was thinking a moment
 ago
 was the reason—a
 worry I put behind me

in a practiced way
 What, *me* worry?
 tired might be it:
 finishing after twelve
 last night. Tired
 but calm. I never
 remember
 when O'Hara *died*—
 except I know he heard
 the Beatles, was 'around'
 then—
 tho whether he'd care
 about them I don't know—
 1964? 65? more in
 to Rachmaninoff,
 Poulenc—two
 romantic words
 for me, Frank's—
 that have terrific
 pace to them, weight
 #
 It all passes.
 #
 Hindley Street even,
 changed.
 #

I like
 the continental flavour of
The Boulevard—a little
 world,
 changeless, briefly—but
 prefer it here
 at *Tempo*
 —that name!—
 where no comfort
 is given, no
 meaning, nothing.
 Bleak? I'm
 up for it. A
 small bird,
 near my feet,
 eating crumbs.
 Then we leave.

At the Penang
Ken Bolton

eating

Asian food alone
I often feel
like a spy or
detective—mid-
century, on
my day off or
perhaps between cases.
Still, nice
to have a job—
& nothing much to
do. I pull
the envelope out
with the plan
for the next few readings—
names scribbled, scribbled-
out, reinstated, moved
around from week to
week. I wonder
how Lee Marvin
organised readings—
gun on the table,
hat upturned
on the floor,
flicking lit matches
into it? And then?
The names in the hat
that had burned
were in? out?
or just prominent

& suggestive & then,
like me, he grabbed
an envelope from
the desk (beside the bed
in his hotel room)
& scrawled them down. May
be?

I saw Marvin once,
at the *Malay* restaurant
near Central station where I usually
had the laksa—where
I *first* had laksa.

He was sitting with another man
& wearing a white
linen suit, quietly
in a corner. Not
much talk. He was
here, I think,
for Marlin fishing.

I'm here
for an hour
eating, reading, then
back to work—
where I pour some drinks,
(turn on the lights), check
the mike & soon the
poets drift in
& we do the reading.



Ken Bolton

is a poet and critic. His 2009 book *Art Writing: Art in Adelaide in the 1990s and 2000s* was published by the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia. He works at the Australian Experimental Art Foundation bookshop in Adelaide.

Elizabeth Campbell

lives in Melbourne. Her two collections of poetry, *Letters to the Tremulous Hand* (2007) and *Error* (2011), were published by John Leonard Press. Elizabeth is a teacher and education consultant on poetry.

Johanna Featherstone

established The Red Room Company in 2003. She is an Honorary Associate of the University of Sydney's School of Letters, Arts and Media, and her chapbook *Felt* was released in 2010 by Vagabond Press.

Prudence Flint

was a finalist in the 2013 Archibald Prize. She has previously won the 2009 Portia Geach Memorial Award and the 2004 Doug Moran National Portrait Prize, and her work is held in public and private collections.

Jenny Watson

has exhibited extensively since 1973, representing Australia at the 1993 Venice Biennale. Recent exhibitions include 'Jenny Watson: Here, There and Everywhere', at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne, and 'Other Lives' at Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo, both in 2012.

IMAGE 9

Jenny Watson, *3 tech teachers*, 2014
Sakura watercolour on notebook
paper, 21 x 13.5 cm

IMAGE 8

Jenny Watson, *Man jumping off
Eiffel Tower*, 2014
Sakura watercolour on notebook
paper, 21 x 13.5 cm

IMAGE 4

Jenny Watson, *Bird eating crumbs in
front of a foot*, 2014
Sakura watercolour on notebook
paper, 21 x 13.5 cm

IMAGE 2

Jenny Watson, *Man with a cigarette
and a beer*, 2014
Sakura watercolour on notebook
paper, 21 x 13.5 cm

IMAGE 10

Jenny Watson, *Poet reading*, 2014
Sakura watercolour on notebook
paper, 21 x 13.5 cm

All images courtesy the artist
and Anna Schwartz Gallery,
Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide,
and Roslyn Oxleyg Gallery, Sydney

NOTE

Ken Bolton's poem 'Beginning
At Basheer's Coffee Shop' appears
here in excerpted form.

