

The Fortnight 2011 (detail), graphite on rag paper, 90 x 280cm

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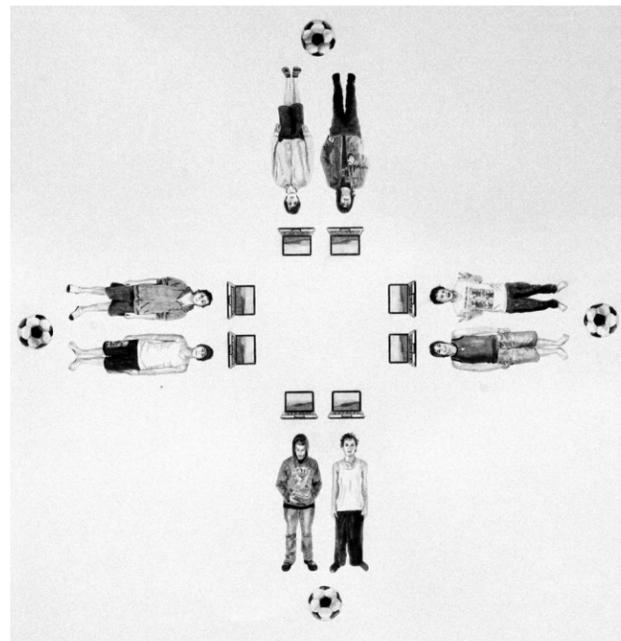
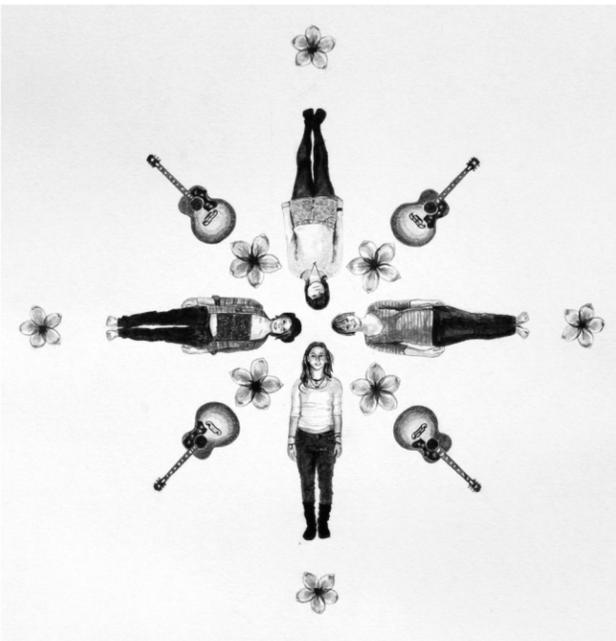
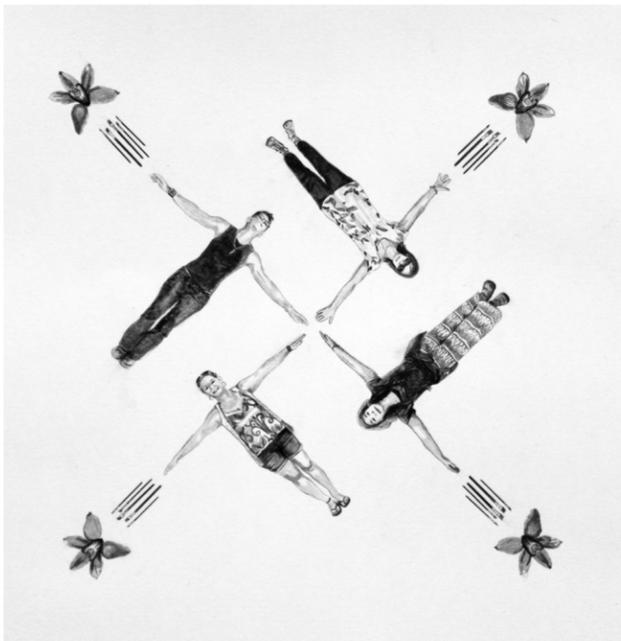
Communities
arts nsw

OKSANA WATERFALL PERSONAL GEOMETRY

4 FEBRUARY – 18 MARCH, 2012



LISMORE
REGIONAL
GALLERY



Teen Girls 2011 (detail)
graphite on rag paper, 57 x 57cm
Teen Boys 2011 (detail)
graphite on rag paper, 57 x 57cm
Tapestry 2011 (detail)
graphite on rag paper, 57 x 77cm

OKSANA WATERFALL - PERSONAL GEOMETRY

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Mothers 2011 (detail)
Fathers 2011 (detail)
graphite on rag paper, 57 x 57cm

'Whether a piece be elaborately finished or a quick, conceptual sketch, a drawing provides a unique insight into the way an artist thinks. In a drawing the relationship between hand, eye and brain is laid bare...' John McDonald, *Lines of Poetry*, Sydney Morning Herald, 10 December 2011.

This exhibition entitled *Personal Geometry* by emerging artist Oksana Waterfall comprises a series of detailed drawings. Each work demonstrates Oksana's adept and talented hand and simultaneously provides the viewer with a certain privilege - a gentle insight into the way the artist thinks about the relationships in her life.

Oksana Waterfall is blessed with a magic name. Even without further enquiry it's memorable enough to conjure up some fascinating images.

In the artist's case, it's the name she acquired on birth, the daughter of a Ukrainian mother and an Australian father of English descent. Oksana began her artistic career in Melbourne. Following in the footsteps of her artist mother she began working in ceramics and later moved into graphic design. After having children her family moved north, hoping to provide her offspring with a place to grow - somewhere with a strong sense of community and all the good connotations the term implies - safe, harmonious and friendly. Around five years ago they settled in the eclectic town of Mullumbimby on the NSW north coast, a small village once advertised as the 'biggest little town in Australia' but with a population generally known for its more worldly concerns. The geographical change this move provided has, perhaps, influenced Oksana's current artistic

practice more than she might have guessed.

Personal Geometry is Oksana's first solo exhibition after graduating with an Advanced Diploma of Fine Arts from Lismore TAFE. The exhibition comprises seven drawings all done in graphite on large sheets of rag paper each with a distinct theme.

In works like *Mothers* and *Fathers* the artist's influence has derived from the patterning and repetition found in the geometric shapes of traditional Islamic art. These pictures are full of symmetry, balance and harmony. Oksana has drawn her friends, children and family alongside their 'favourite things'. The designs radiate from the centre or the heart of the pattern. In contrast to more traditional Islamic work Oksana's patterns use human figures as their main subject. The

further away you view the drawings, the stronger the sense of pattern becomes evident. Imagine these miniature portrait drawings as decorative tiles on the floor or walls of a temple. This is where the portraits merge into the realm of the abstract and become something 'other' than what they appear up close.

Oksana's human figures are diminutive. She quietly admits that she is a very neat person and that working small with lots of detail suits her personality. By drawing intricate pictures, the artist has created a deliberate and absorbing paradox. In her largest drawing for this show entitled *The Fortnight* Oksana documented every person with whom she had a meaningful connection during a period of two weeks. The work represents a collection of suspended moments in time. Across

the centre of a large sheet of white paper the tiny drawings of her neighbours, children, friends, the family dog and others she has come across in the everyday, are laced with such incredible detail it is impossible to see the intricacies without moving closer. *Tapestry* tells a similar story of extended family through both its subjects and the title, although this time the pattern of figures repeats itself in several lines across the paper. As the viewer is drawn physically to these works the point becomes obvious. These are not just figures of ordinary people - they are those with whom the artist has had a relationship, each of them with an important role to play in the home, the community and in a larger global world.

Well-known Australian songwriter Paul Kelly writes songs about people in everyday situations -

one of the reasons why his songs have such broad appeal and staying power. A reporter once asked Kelly about whether he thought his work spoke to the 'ordinary people' of Australia. He apparently responded, "I don't know any ordinary people, do you?" By drawing 'ordinary' people and working with tiny figures, Oksana has elevated her subjects into the extraordinary. We live in a world where celebrities are marketed for their stardom and fame often without any underlying distinction or respect. Oksana's subjects are valued as they are. They don't need fame or media attention because regard as an important individual is sufficient.

Friends of the artist's children begged to be included in *Teen Girls* and *Teen Boys*. By drawing them in everyday clothes alongside familiar teen 'icons' Oksana has validated their significance and

role within the group and in the broader field. Over time the drawings will become documents of social history.

Oksana's work also delves into another modern dilemma. Today our connections are not what they once were - we work, shop and socialise online and as a result many of us don't know our neighbours. The people in Oksana's drawings know each other in a communal way. Of course in a small town, the word 'community' doesn't always stand for good. It can also mean small-mindedness, intolerance and exclusivity. But we all have our worthy virtues and as is evident from the drawings, for which the artist used photographs as studies, the subjects of these portraits are generally showing their best side.

Oksana considers herself a shy person so even the act of requesting a photograph proved a confronting task. In the end she says that this became one of the most enjoyable parts of the process. New and interesting relationships developed as a result of the drawing project and people were very happy to pose for a photo. No doubt Oksana will have a large and enthusiastic local audience for the opening of her exhibition serving to reinforce the community value of her work.

Although Oksana Waterfall may not have begun her artistic career in drawing, it appears from *Personal Geometry* that she has certainly found a comfortable niche in the form.

Sharne Wolff