

Laura Woodward

Recipient of the Freedman Foundation Travelling Scholarship in 2007

ArtsCareer: Can you tell us a bit about your practice?

Laura Woodward: I have created kinetic, sculptural installations for the past five years. The works vary in scale from small, intimate pieces to larger installations. They incorporate materials such as stainless steel, formed plastics, fasteners, motors, pumps and other electronic parts, with recent works utilising water as a means of eliciting motion.

These 'machines' and their prosthetic connotations are powerful symbols for exploring humankind's relationship with technology, and technology's potential to both extend and destroy the body. Whilst recognisable forms or readings may be derived from the work, I attempt to create pieces that remain ambiguous, leaving the mind to fill in the 'gaps'. This attempt to understand, and the bodily shift that can occur when seeing an entity in motion, is crucial to the work.

AC: What was the reason for applying to this particular grant scheme and what do you look for when applying for other schemes? How is the process meaningful to your practice?

LW: At the time of applying for the Freedman Foundation Travelling Scholarship, my work was focused on participation and interactivity. I felt that the scholarship would enable me to visit particular museums and institutions and access high calibre artworks of international relevance in this field.

When applying for grant schemes I look for opportunities that feel suited to the stage I am at in my career. However, this does not preclude applying for opportunities that seem like a big leap – ambition is important, and so is the practice one gains by preparing applications.

Though putting together applications is time-consuming, it can be a good chance to clarify and consolidate what is happening in one's practice. Exploring ways of getting a selection panel interested in and excited about one's work is a good challenge. I find that doing regular applications really helps to resolve some ideas and thinking. And occasionally, there's the bonus of submitting a successful application!

AC: How did you approach your application for the Freedman Foundation Travelling Scholarship?

LW: In order to propose a very specific research trip to select institutions, I undertook research to clarify the relevance of each and the exhibitions that would be on at the time. I also asked other artists and some lecturers for advice on places to travel, which helped to define my plans.

AC: What previous experience helped you with the application?

LW: Previously, I had unsuccessfully applied for travelling scholarships, for which I had always proposed generic research trips. From this experience, I decided to propose a far more specific outline of where I planned to go and how I felt it would contribute to my work at the time.

AC: How do you approach the writing?

LW: I attempt to write short, succinct applications that convey my ideas clearly and simply. This usually involves writing a fair bit then editing back to uncover the essentials of the idea. I avoid using negative language or terminology, often restructuring sentences to remove negative terms such as "doesn't", "can't" etc. I also avoid any jargon or terminology that may not be easily understood by most people, in order to help the reader make a connection to my ideas.

The idea itself should be clear, understandable and generate excitement within the first sentence or two – if you haven't caught your reader's imagination by this stage there's a risk they'll lose interest. I usually give a visual description first and then begin to discuss the conceptual or theoretical aspects of the work, so that the reader has an image in their mind as they read through the proposal.

Finally, I always ask someone to proof read to ensure the writing makes sense.

AC: How do you select your support material?

LW: I select images that are relevant to the proposal being undertaken. I try to use images that contribute individually to the application, yet show a solid and active practice when seen together.

The images should be high quality, informative, interesting and present a clear documentation of the work. I noticed a significant increase in successful applications when I began having my work photographed by a friend who had more experience in this area.

I have a couple of 'hero' shots, which I nearly always use – strong images that make the work look great! In a series of images, one of these will go at the start of the sequence and one at the end, to engage viewers quickly and to leave a good impression.

AC: What did the grant help you to do?

LW: The grant enabled me to undertake an eight-week research trip to Europe and Japan. I visited more than thirty galleries and museums, as well as several specialist libraries. I saw the *Art Machine: Machine Art* exhibition at the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, which showcased several artworks that create art themselves. I also spent time at the NTT Inter Communication Centre in Tokyo, which has a great collection of interactive and technology-based work.

This uninterrupted period of reflection on my work and its position in relation to other similar art practices was invaluable. It allowed me the time and mental space to clarify considerations in regards to my own work, and in particular to focus on the project I was undertaking at the time. By the culmination of the trip I had envisaged the concepts for several pieces, which then formed the basis of my first large solo exhibition six months later.

AC: Tell us what you are doing now and how the grant contributed to your professional career?

LW: I am currently undertaking a PhD, focusing on kinetic sculpture, at the Victorian College of the Arts. I also run Ironside Studios in Kensington, Melbourne. The Freedman Foundation Travelling Scholarship was the most significant award that I had received at that point in time, and so was a great boost to my practice and my confidence in pursuing further opportunities.

AC: Other than the money (which is an obvious plus!) – have any grants you've applied for had a positive influence on your work in any way?

LW: The Freedman Foundation Travelling Scholarship definitely influenced my work, as it enabled me to experience so many different artworks and spend significant time reflecting on my own work. I was lucky enough to receive an Australia Council Emerging Artist New Work Grant last year, which allowed me to make a large kinetic installation at Linden Gallery. The development undertaken towards this installation directly altered the course of my work and has influenced my practice since. In both instances, the grants encouraged me to undertake things that may have not happened otherwise.

AC: Give us your top tips for grant writing:

LW:

- Be excited and convincing – if you're not convinced, nobody else will be!
- Be clear and succinct – get the idea across as quickly and simply as possible.
- Be specific about your idea, but be careful not to lock it down too much – leave room for the reader to bring their own imagination to your proposal.

AC: What should be avoided?

LW:

- Statements that you can't justify or uphold, particularly grand sweeping statements, which can suggest a level of naivety.
- Long, rambling descriptions or discussions. The reader won't have time to read or absorb them. Leave the reader with a clear idea of what you're proposing, so that they can imagine and get excited about its possibilities.