

SUPERPOSITION: Equilibrium & Engagement

a good neighbour

A series of billboards featuring photographs teamed with provocative questions installed across 12 sites in Ashfield, Carnes Hill, Hoxton Park, Liverpool, Marrickville, Newtown, Parramatta and Rozelle for the 21st Biennale of Sydney

21st Biennale

of Sydney

***Is a good
neighbour
someone
who just
moved in?***

#agoodneighbour #istanbulbiennial
#biennaleofsydney #ausliverpool



a good neighbour

an international billboard project initiated by Elmgreen & Dragset for the 15th Istanbul Biennial (2017)

Designer: Rupert Smyth

Photographer: Lukas Wassmann

This artwork, an integral part of the 15th Istanbul Biennial (2017) *a good neighbour*, curated by artist collaborators Elmgreen and Dragset, is a series of billboards that have been shown around the world. Taking over public space usually reserved for advertising, they ask a simple question and pose a range of answers, thereby starting a conversation in the community – and across the globe – about what makes a good neighbour. For the duration of the 21st Biennale of Sydney, the billboards will be visible in several areas of Sydney in and around the inner west, Parramatta and Liverpool.

By framing a set of images with this question, they set up a relationship between people within the images; and between people and urban space. As viewers we try to identify locations and social relations, and we imagine ourselves within the frame, in our homes and neighbourhoods. We might ask: am I a good neighbour? The conversation also takes place on social media.

As a work that directly addresses the idea of society, we can respond creatively by thinking about our own neighbourhood and how we might define a good neighbour. What do we know about where we live? What this project can bring into focus is how we see each other and how well we know each other.

Questions for Discussion

1. Find someone in your group you don't know very well – ask them about their family history. When did someone in their family first come to Australia? Where did they come from? Why did they leave?
2. What are the architectural features of your area? Are there colonial buildings? Is there a park? A museum or gallery? If so, how long have they been there? What sort of plants are in the park? What kind of objects or artworks are in the museum?
3. How does combining image and text guide our interpretation of the content of the picture? Use the billboard texts and juxtapose them with a set of images you have collected. How does this change what they mean?
4. Come up with 10 answers to the question: what is a good neighbour?

Reference Points

Key to understanding this artwork is the idea that it produces discourse. The discussion it generates can be considered part of the work in addition to the circulation of its visual and material form.

It also exists in dialogue with a creative practice of billboards by artists notable since the 1970s. These artists might include past Biennale of Sydney participants, listed here alongside the years of their participation: Felix Gonzales-Torres (1996), Jonathan Barnbrook (2010), Jenny Holzer (1984, 1988, 1990) and Maria Kozic (1982). There is also a tradition of using the language of advertising that dates back to Dada and Pop Art from Andy Warhol (1988) to Barbara Kruger (1984, 1988). In Australia, we might look back to the BUGA-UP artist activism of the 1980s, and to artists like Robert McPherson (1979, 1990, 1998, 2002, 2010) who worked with Australian vernacular text as an integral part of his practice, or Tracey Moffatt (1992, 1996, 2000, 2008 with Gary Hillberg), who juxtaposed images and text in her series *Scarred for life*, 1974.

Practices and Processes

In order to make a body of work in response to this project, we might think about the questions the artists were exploring, and translate that into our own personal context. While this is an international artwork that takes place in different countries, to understand the implication of this reflection on society there are several things to take into account: global concerns, local history, and our personal relationships.

We also need to take into account the site of display for the work, and consider how we interact with an artwork outside of a gallery context. Then we can consider how we express these ideas visually: through combinations of image and text; working with photography; and communicating through social media.

Text

Devise your own phrases and questions that you feel are relevant to

your local communities. Present them in different type styles – how does the style of the text change the tone? From serious to playful, from futuristic to retro, from hand-drawn to newsprint to printed type.

Photography

Find a place in your neighbourhood that is important to you and take a series of photographs. Is it an urban space or a green space? Can you photograph reflections of things in shop windows? Can you take photographs from different points of view – either from low to the ground looking up, or from a high vantage point looking down? What happens when you photograph something from close up – is it still recognisable? Are there people in the frame? (Note: always ask people if you can photograph them.)

When you look at the photographs you have taken, you may want to focus on a particular aspect of the

image. What happens when you crop the photograph and make the viewer focus on a detail?

Billboard

Working collaboratively, make your own billboard. Start with combining some of your photographs and type work – critically review these combinations and edit your work. Make a new work based on these experiments.

Social media

If you have access to social media, search for the hashtag #agoodneighbour and survey how others have responded from different places in the world.

Cultural frame:
globalisation, society,
politics

Structural frame:
language, semiotics,
communication