

Studio Wars

Curated by Lara Merrett

17 May – 11 June 2016

Sally Anderson, Lucas Davidson, Jonny Niesche, John Nicholson, Lara Merrett, Gemma Smith and Alexandra Standen

It's been said that people in Sydney only talk about two things: how busy they are and real estate. It's a dig with a grain of truth; as anyone who's tried to keep afloat in central Sydney knows you've got to keep busy and keep fighting for space or lose out, especially if you're an artist. *Studio Wars* takes up this fight, exhibiting the work of a group of artists working at Birmingham Street Studios in Sydney's Alexandria, an inner city, light industrial suburb currently undergoing significant development and inevitably, the dreaded gentrification.

The show's curator and artist Lara Merrett is quick to note that, "It's not wars with each other, it's the way we have to fight to have a studio in Sydney. I think most artists can identify with this, the feeling that the space could be taken away from us at any time. What we desire is not just the physical space to work from, but working together under one roof". There is a camaraderie and mutual respect that is palatable in Birmingham Street, a sense that permeates both the show and the studio space itself. "We decided to keep a physical openness amongst the studio spaces, to allow for multiple interactions in the work space."

Although the practices of the group are diverse, what binds them is a sense of community, shared space, and a commitment to their practices. The constant threat of eviction is both a hindrance and a motivator for the group, some of who have known each other for more than 20 years. "There's always the understanding that this could be our last month in the space. I never take it for granted. I really appreciate that we are recording this moment by making this show and having an exhibition that marks us together at this point in time."

Studio Wars offers a glimpse into this communal space, this world without doors. The future of the space may be precarious but, as *Studio Wars* artist John Nicholson points out, for artists "risk is just part of the job". *Studio Wars* presents work from artists at Birmingham Street Studios – the output of artists at the frontline of the battle for space, the battle against the seemingly endless gentrification of urban centres that forces artists ever outwards. In the face of this however, Lara and *Studio Wars* seem to assure us, whether in Birmingham Street or elsewhere, art will find a way.

But not without a fight.

Kate Britton - 2016