

CHECKPOINT

Statement of your work process at Can Serrat:

At Can Serrat, I worked on a fourth (or fifth?) draft of my second novel, *Beauty and Menace*. I took out an entire main character, remodelled the trajectory so it became a story told from the artist's PoV and wove in counter PoV's in other ways. In between I: visited Barcelona, did yoga & tai chi classes, wove in a community weaving project, participated in a journal writing & clay-making workshop, contributed to a Fanzine, visited another residency in a nearby town, learned the basics of print-making, practiced my Spanish, drank cheap & delicious red wine, listened and learned from artists coming from over ten countries from many varied practices, prepared meals with them, ate together, read together, laughed together, danced together.

Project description:

Beauty and Menace is inspired by a true story which happened in Perth, Australia, 30 years ago, in the late 1990s.

About a young mother's battle to defend herself, on legal, social and moral grounds when she's arrested after taking nude photographs of her son for her final year art project and charged with indecently recording a child under the age of 13.

She'd planned to put a contemporary spin on classical art images from famous artists by merging photography and painting, using her son as a subject.

I've shifted the novel from the late 1990s into a digital age, so that I can pull together discussions *happening now* about the role social media plays in shaping the lines that divide art from pornography/child sex abuse.

And also to consider things like:

- Consent and
- The protection of children within a social media landscape
- Revenge porn

And explore how these discussions influence age-old arguments around:

- Censorship and freedom of speech
- How we see the world and the dominating influence of the male gaze
- Naked or nude?

The artist in my novel (Cara) is from a Sicilian background where family is important, and so she faces a moral and artistic conundrum.

I'd like it to be a novel that invites the reader to think more deeply about:

- When does art become pornography or child sex abuse?
- How far is too far?
- Who decides what offends?
- How do images become sexualised?

The photographs Cara posted were interpreted in ways she never intended and after her arrest she is challenged to rethink her position as a mother and an artist.

In the end (spoiler alert), she is found 'not guilty' in an Australian law court. But despite being proven innocent, in the court of public opinion, Cara feels the jury's still out and she struggles to pursue her art, unable to take even the most innocent photographs of her children.

Sample text:

Cara's working on a new set of works, showing reinvented images of children created as more socially acceptable images, not from reality, but from the artist's imagination that better fit to the current social and environmental desires and needs. At the moment, her work is terrible; her sketchbook is riddled with superficiality, but she doesn't care. Doubt gets her to the core of things. She picks at the edges looking for a loose thread. Her grown-up self has given permission to the child within to play again. She's learnt from her boys that when humans forget how to play, life becomes dull. Instead, time in the studio is both tormenting and adventurous; humiliating and satisfying. A microcosm of the mess of life itself. She's speaking without saying a word. She's composting ideas, throwing random things together and following an intuition. Sometimes the things cohere and become interesting to her. At other times, they crash and burn. When she finishes what she is working on, she knows she won't fully understand it. It might feel contained. Or it may continue to unfold – and, once out of the studio, gather meaning beyond her intention. There are endless interpretations, just like creativity itself. That's a given. Some days the thought of Oglowie being free in the world, and might one day come for her, immobilises her with fear. It's all too scary. Then her studio gathers dust. But life keeps on nudging her and somehow, amidst the noise, she finds her voice and listens until, finally, she is there, swaddled in the warm, red glow of the developing room. Or opening the garage watching the unrelenting Australian light wash across the floor and walls. It's like stepping off a cliff and it reminds her that although the reality of her "yes" could be far worse than her fear, she has no choice. She will always be an artist.