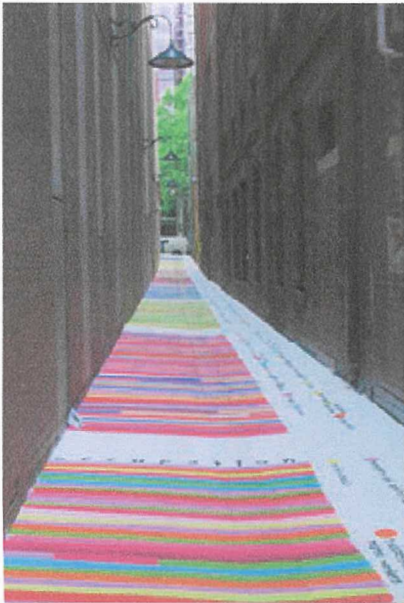


## In the realm of the census - Louisa Bufardecì

It's statistically likely that you'll enjoy the art of Louisa Bufardecì, writes Nick Dent



In the late 1990s Louisa Bufardecì was living the typical existence of the newly minted Melbourne art grad - making art, teaching, volunteering at a gallery, babysitting, and pulling in about \$150 a week. At that time the Australian Bureau of Statistics asked her to participate in a series of monthly surveys on employment and income. "Every time the guy called me to ask about my situation I wasn't fitting into any of the categories," Bufardecì recalls. "It was really frustrating. I became concerned that the information going into public policy wasn't going to be representative of people like myself."

The experience got Bufardecì to thinking about statistics as a mode of representing people. When we think of social realism in art we think of works like Gustave Courbet's mid-19th century paintings of peasants, or of Depression-era poverty as captured by the great American documentary photographers. Bufardecì's approach takes a broader view, condensing masses of facts and figures to create pictures of the world that look like hard-edged abstraction.

In 2001 Bufardecì was commissioned to decorate a Melbourne laneway. She painted the pavement with bar graphs conveying information about the city's inhabitants. Called 'There Are a Few Facts I Think You Ought to Know....' the work will be recreated for Bufardecì's show at the MCA this winter, utilising statistics about Sydney. "I like using statistics that have a lot of categories," she says. "The one I'm really keen on is religion because there are so many different religions in the Sydney census. I get a lot of pleasure knowing it's okay in this society to have different religions."

Another work, 'Team Joy' (2004), involves 200 striped sticks propping up colourful angled walls. The sticks stand for international agencies that provide funding for people in need, such as AIDS sufferers in Kenya; the number of colours on each stick represents the number of countries helping support that particular cause. This candy-coloured temple to human kindness looks like it could come tumbling down at any moment.

A series of world flags in the show, meanwhile, posits an alternative kind of nationalism. "Instead of having ideological or historical symbols on flags I've replaced them with shapes representing very ordinary information about the people in those countries, like how many cigarettes they smoke or how many cars they own."

Now based in Connecticut, Bufardecì is showing as part of the MCA's ongoing series of Australian artists paired with an international artist of their choosing. "It's always somebody with whom the artist feels there is a dialogue to be had," explains MCA curator Rachel Kent. Bufardecì will show alongside Japanese artist Zon Ito, whose colourful embroidered paintings depict his love of the natural landscapes around Kyoto. "Zon Ito's work isn't political, it's much more personal," Kent says. "Conceptually they're poles apart, but spatial concerns and colour are things that link their work."

Bufardecì sources information from places such as the CIA World Factbook, crunches the numbers in Microsoft Excel, then turns the relative figures into colours and graphs in Adobe Illustrator. "It's really boring work," she admits. "It's kind of odd that my key medium these days is Excel spreadsheets." Mind you, the ABS would be glad to hear she's at least improving her office skills.

*[Louisa Bufardecì and Zon Ito](#) exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art, 28 Jul-25 Oct.*

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