

To : The Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

12 February 2004

Submission to Australian Expatriates Inquiry

Dear Sir/Madam,

This submission is in response to the invitation for public comment as part of the Senate's Inquiry into Australia's expatriate residents.

I left Australia in 1983 in order to experience European culture for some months. I decided to stay on in England at the end of that year in order to do a special training in speech and drama. After this five year training, I stayed in England another three years working in this field, as an actress and coordinator of a semi-professional theatre company, and as a teacher of speech formation.

I came to Austria in 1991 because my partner was Austrian. I could not speak German and this was one reason why I returned to my earlier profession in the visual arts (sculpture/painting/drawing). I also began working as a part time speech and art therapist for people in need of special care.

When my relationship ended in 1993, I returned to Australia with the question whether I was returning to stay. I decided to come back to Austria. I felt if I stayed in Australia I would lose my connection to Europe whereas if I stayed in Austria I would never lose my connection to Australia. As an artist working in Australia there is a lot of competition; it is a very creative country. In Austria, I am really extremely unusual especially

because I am living in Upper Austria (between Linz and Prague, on the Chekien border). The only other Australians I've met here, apart from the very seldom personal visit, are the members of the Queensland Aboriginal Dance and art group Jama Dreaming, who said "they feel at home in Austria". I have only one English speaking friend here (USA). In England, it was irrelevant that I was Australian; it never came up as an issue. For Austrians, it is very interesting that I am in Austria (particularly since I am not in Vienna.) Austrians love Australia; in fact, it is every second Austrian's dream to go to Australia. So, a movement in the other direction is a bit of a mystery.

In 2003, I was awarded with dual citizenship. Despite all the difficulties of living here as a foreigner, I would never have given up my Australian passport. After ten years, one is allowed to apply for Austrian citizenship. When I applied, the new law enabling me from the Australian side to keep my Australian nationality if I had two nationalities, was already through. I did not know of the praiseworthy efforts of the Southern Cross Group in furthering this act whilst applying. It was simply good timing.

From the Austrian side, however, dual citizenship was not straight forward. The first official to whom I spoke with said there was no chance. After six months of putting together a packet on the subject, I was awarded with the Austrian passport and allowed to keep my Australian one on the grounds of my role as a working artist in the area of cultural exchange between Austria/European Union and Australia. I wrote some thoughts on this in the Austrian - Australian Society newsletter:

"The event of dual citizenship caused me to re-examine my aims. As an Austrian/EU citizen, I am happy to work and present my work here. I also enjoy the depth of the German language. As an Australian citizen, the "Walking Together" of Aboriginal and Australian people is of utmost importance to me, and I love to speak a flowing English. As a citizen of the Earth, it is the incredible creations of nature with whom I am learning to speak".

Since I never planned to leave Australia (I don't think I could have, I love it far too much), I left without asking any advice on how to live in another country. England was no problem. Austria, however, has been full of problems which I have had to meet one after the other, year after year. It's like continually hitting a brick wall. The last of these was when I received a brooch from my father for my birthday and had to pay an enormous sum of money for customs etc. The Embassy in Vienna gave some advice and I managed to reduce it to a minimum, although it was still far too much for a birthday present. Other things were being asked to leave my part time job from one day to the next because of work permit problems. The first two

times were because of not knowing and not understanding the laws. The third time was after coming back from a trip to Australia to look after my ill mother. I had organised everything with the job, but they also didn't understand the laws of what unpaid holiday meant. Considering that my main work is art with this part time job as a measure of stability, being thrown out on to the street like that was very serious. However, in Austria it is often possible to improvise. In the third case, the job paid me for six weeks while I waited for things to be sorted out.

There were so many other bad things which happened as a result of being a foreigner that I could not list them all. I did not know, for example, that the foreign police can check up on you when they feel like it. The old custom in this area is that people knock and walk in. They don't always wait for the "come in". I was really shocked the first time the foreign police were standing in my living room.

At the "ending celebration" of my exhibition in Pregarten, Upper Austria 2002, I tried to explain why I am living in Austria. This is a question which I am continually asked. As regards my art work it has to do with a certain "inner room" which Austria provides. Within this inner room, and it takes transformation and care to establish and nurture this, it is possible to bring forms, new forms, into existence also particular colour relationships etc and it is possible to be connected in a spiritual way with Australia. At any rate, my work contains Australian elements. I never felt this spiritual connection *with Australia* in England.

My first impression of Austria was that the clock had been turned back about fifty years. Austria is a bit old fashioned. It still contains remnants of the empire in its thinking. It is narrow. There is no sense of freedom here. It is a crash landing. One is working with the opposite of all this in Australia which is young, free and wide. It is full of possibilities and movement. So, if you are someone who has trouble landing at all, living in Austria can be quite useful. Experiencing the narrow has enabled me to go through processes and find sources for creative work which was not possible in Australia (what with the beach and all - what I mean is that Australia is a land of many possibilities). In Australia, creative energies are given through the nature. In Austria, I have been able to carry them further. The hindrances in Austria can act as a kind of positive resistance whereby one can meet the self in a particular way. Of course, this takes enormous flexibility to turn it around like this.

I noticed, however, that as soon as I had the Austrian passport, my impulse was to return to Australia! After letting this feeling settle for a while, I realized my future plan is to establish much more between these two countries. Although I still wish to base myself in Austria, I hope this will

include more time in Australia. However, this can only happen over my art work.

How can this happen over my work?

I need support, not only to show my work, but also for particular projects, for example, "Art for Peace, Vukovar, Croatia". In 1999, just as I was realizing I would have to give up eating ( a problem most artists in all countries face some time in their career), I won a sculpture prize which took me to Zagreb for its presentation. There, the director of the Vukovar Museum in Croatia invited me to visit Vukovar, the city where the war in Yugoslavia broke out. This meeting was the beginning of "Art for peace, Vukovar, Croatia". In Australia 2001 I received a bit of sponsorship towards this from The Gavemer Foundation, Sydney; The Eileen McPherson Trust, Melbourne; Podravka International Pty Ltd, Sydney. There was much idealistic interest expressed by various people ranging from the Croatian Embassies in Melbourne and Sydney to private individuals and organisations. My efforts since, in Austria, to find a much larger sum of money needed to enlarge and cast one of my sculptures in bronze which is to be placed in the garden of the Vukovar Museum as the opening phase of a much larger and ongoing project, have not yet been successful. I have put an enormous amount of work into this, over the last four years, both in communications and in my atelier. I ask myself why support is not forthcoming? One thing is sure; the interest from Australia is non existent when I am not in Australia. Also, here, my contacts are not as many as in Australia. There is a missing link and I need help. It is not the sort of thing you can do alone. There is no Arts Council for expatriots. I need above all, a moral interest in my creative gifts and the appropriate financial support in order for these gifts to radiate their messages into the world. I am in an incredible position to represent Australia culturally, not only through my art work, but through my ability to present myself and Australia well, due to my training in speech and drama. I also have the added advantage of being able to speak German.

The selection of press and invitation to exhibition openings, which are a part of this response to your enquiry, and I invite you to read them in detail, will show you the extent to which I already represent Australia. Australia is present in every aspect of my work in public here. It always goes under the heading "Australian artist who lives and works in Austria".

You will also note that, when I organise an exhibition for myself, I draw in extra Australian events, for example, an Aboriginal didgeridoo performance, the local choir sings Australian bush ballads, or an Australian buffet with Australian wine is served etc.

Even if Austria were eventually to fund the first phase of "Art for Peace, Vukovar, Croatia", Australia would benefit as it would come across as an Australian event. The problem is if it is not funded. Australia (not to mention

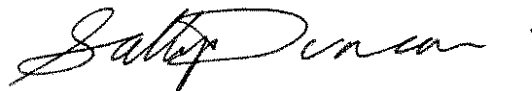
other parties), will have missed out on making a unique statement towards world peace in a place where the spotlight on peace is very bright.

Apart from my professional work, I have also spoken to up to one thousand children in schools in my district on Australia (1999 - 2003). I not only speak and show pictures of the Sydney Opera House and the beach etc but I also bring things - tea tree oil, banksias men, shells, you name it. The lesson starts with a bullroarer and end with an aboriginal ritual for children (thanks to David Mowljarlai). We also dance kangaroo, snake and eagle. Austrian children have very big ears for all things Australian, especially for the nature and for our Aboriginal people.

I help Aboriginal people here where I can. In 1995, I exhibited a small collection of desert painting in Baden Baden, Germany and gave an accompanying lecture at the opening. In 2001-2, I organized some performances for Jama Dreaming Aboriginal Dance Group.

The question of how Australia might be better able to make members of its diaspora feel more connected with Australia has begun to be answered by the Southern Cross Group. They are putting light where there was simply no consciousness. My story was, unfortunately, too late for the publication date for their book "Expatriates Short Stories" and is published in their web site under the title "Changing the Stone". I invite you to read it!

Yours sincerely  
Sally Duncan



PS I would be grateful for the return of the press folder etc when you are finished with it.