

- **This work is about a multifarious dog, a ball, and a malformed but evolving girl - ascending in ambiguous states of progression and regression. Is Dag Girl choosing not to deal with VC Aqua Mutt's orange ball by detaching and ascending; or is she trying to get a better perspective - from Godog? The presentation format suggests a comic version of some religious theme.**
- In these next 10 minutes I am grateful to share with you some of the thinking around this work – particularly in the context of tonight's dinner conversation: State & self-censorship: Who's voice?
- I am interested in themes of misunderstanding & miscommunication; and this work is largely about the things one can't talk about. The easy-access display format is a will to bring an outside chaos into a manageable structure.
- I have a fondness for outsider art, the shiny surfaces of water puppets and the ephemeral votive objects of Southeast Asia . The Little Red Hen, and Waiting for Godot have probably informed this work.
- My multifarious characters of VC Aqua Mutt & Dag Girl, and Godog, do not want to scare people away with anything dark or ponderous but beg for love and yearn to give joy. There is a will to entertain and a longing to simplify.
- However is this “dumbing-down” a form of disrespect towards the viewer by assuming to relate to the lowest common denominator? Am I being cynical, copping out, or simply circumventing the main issue.
- All my dogs are forms of mongrels. The mongrel for me represents that space where things don't fit.
- These VC Aqua Mutts (a sub-species of the original Aqua Mutt) are protégés of Pho Dog, here deified as Godog. Naturally, VC Aqua Mutts are more flawed in character than Pho Dogs, which might have something to do with their relationship with Dag Girl – my guess is that it might also have something to do with their willful deification of Pho Dog. Godog appears aloof and inaccessible, and is perhaps just an irresponsible culprit.
- Are the VC Aqua Mutts friends of Dag Girl; enemies of Dag Girl? Or harmless apparitions?
 - Dag Girl ascending maintains a simpleton-like and blissful expression on her multiple faces; can she not commit to any one view? Or is she maintaining some 24-7 wariness?
- VC Aqua Mutt and Dag Girl cojoined in The Offering can suggest that essentially “us” and “other” are the same; Is it also about copulation and the question of violence or affection.

- Dag Girl has a black circle on her head and around her scalp spirals text asking Mary to “pray for us sinners, now & at the hour of our death”. What has Dag Girl done wrong?
- The black and white charcoal drawings downstairs were all done after the 3D work. Giving the characters life in another medium seems to prove to me that I’m not just imagining it.
- There is much that is baffling about the world today; life is like a vomit of snippets of perceptions here and there with everything completely disjointed. One value system continuously cancels out another, resulting in lack of clarity about anything. It is good to find something safe, like the magic of childhood, neat definitions, a nice religion.
- Sometimes when something is painful but precious to you, you want to talk about it to alleviate its weight, and yet talking about it makes it silly and worthless. But if you don’t talk about it, how can you know if it is real?
- What is Voice. Without Voice does one face annihilation of self and history. How do we decide who gets to speak and who doesn’t. How can anyone argue against the legitimacy of a war-induced trauma. Why does this matter at all? Why can’t one stay within “*this*” cultural space; and detach from “*that*” cultural space?
- What is orange?
 - A good source of Vitamin C?
 - A colour of Buddhism?
 - A colour arrived at when mixing red+yellow - colours shared by both Vietnam flags:
The current Socialist Republic of Vietnam; and the former Republic of Vietnam
 - Orange is my personal grey, my personal black
 - Is an orange dog better than a “black dog”
 - Orange is Agent Orange and the pain of war and knowing somehow that it’s my fault. It’s all our faults – isn’t it? It’s been more than 33 years and yet it was yesterday...but who’s yesterday?
 - Orange is a groovy colour
- Godog provides no answers. On Godog’s skin float and merge faces of sometimes or would be heroes but no reassurance of meaning. Whilst the text is here and there decipherable, it only offers a nonsensical nursery rhyme, a tale about a dog, and a love song about judgment obscured by passion.
- Passion is the stuff of life and living; but passion can obscure one’s vision.
- When in May I decided to self-censor my Pho Dog installation – part of the I Love Pho exhibition in Perth - a large part of my motivation was the impact upon the

Curator resulting from the negative viewpoints steadily expressed through community radio and other media – and a threat of protest. It took its' toll. The call was “too much suffering already”.

- Even after self-censoring I was still directly confronted by a certain NSW community leader - who was asked to call me by a certain WA community leader – who explained that he was a lawyer: *younger and more Australian than me*. I was accused of knowing nothing about Australia, of knowing nothing about Vietnamese people or history, of irresponsibly inflicting pain on others, of being a bad role model for the younger generation; I was asked no less than 10 times to physically remove the object, as covering up was not good enough. I took it all on board.
- Being invited to participate in the “I Love Pho” exhibition was great – reconnecting with the Vietnamese-Australian in me allowed certain boxed up associations, thoughts, and memories to seep back into my art. The strong reaction against it was surreal; and explained to me so much about the unspoken.
- In progressing the Godog work I know I was dealing with a different cultural space, a different audience. It seemed too surreal that a similar experience might occur, however it was something we had to consider...I considered it almost daily.
- When the Curator's home was vandalized, and I was again faced with the question of self-censorship – by painting over certain imagery or removing certain objects from this exhibition, and from my website - I just could not do it.
- To have no Voice is to shut down part of yourself; to be trapped in an empty disconnected world. A part of you dies. There are doors but you cannot find them.
- The balls in mouths are indicative of playfulness; or are they a form of gag; the orange Dag Girls have no mouths – but they can see.
- The blue ball is of the Aqua of peace, seeing water and oceans not as that which separates us, but that which joins us.
- For every Voice spoken there will be one unspoken.
- The skin on all the objects were mach-ed with Telstra phonebooks – the ones Telstra drops outside inner city flats every year; and are left for weeks uncollected.

- The black and white grid at the back that I have called The Cross represents for me a structure that can be deconstructed, and reconfigured any way you like, contradicting the black and white contained within it.
- The central object below The Cross is The Fantasy of Dag Girl for an orange reunion, an impossible bliss.
- The matches in dog bowls invite you to burn; what if we burnt all the papier mache objects in this room; we can all go to the dogs if we choose.
- In sharing with others what happened in Perth in relation to Godog I had to consider the following:
 - Being seen to ride the Asian-Australian ticket for convenience; But is it a ticket or a condemnation?
 - Being seen to ride a censorship issue as a convenient media ploy
 - Over-sensationalizing and over-simplification of the issues if repeated out of context
 - Inadvertently perpetuating unhelpful stereotypes about the Vietnamese Community
 - Feeling I was being a traitor to my own brothers
 - Fear of a kind of “excommunication” despite numerous reassurances that I was being supported
 - Was I biting the hand that fed me?
- Why have I chosen to talk about Pho Dog in relation to Godog?
 - Although I tried to “ignore” it, the Pho Dog Blackout has affected this work
 - I want to stand up to the fear & paranoia in my head
 - I’d like to understand this better; to invite a broader dialogue
 - I’d like to open up more doors for discussion surrounding ideas of the Asian-Australian, and, ironically – or rather “of course” - that is what the curatorial premise of the exhibition that gave birth to Pho Dog was all about in the first place. And where is the Curator now?
 - ➔ Are the various brands of Asian-Australian each a safe construct for performing monkeys where the Voice that is heard is the one that makes Australia feel most comfortable about itself at a given point in time?
 - ➔ Instead of dismissing the Asian-Australian construct I embrace it; But what I am looking for is that more doors be opened within the space of Asian-Australian; and that Asian-Australian in itself does not become another mono-cultural framework
- The painted decoration on the skin of the VC Aqua Mutts was made by randomly pulling pages from 15 different language newspapers collected from my local newsagents and just copying what caught my distracted eye.

- The bastardized text becomes meaningless decoration devoid of context, and a social camouflage that in turn makes them incapable of individual expression through processes of self-censorship, and a comfortable acceptance of absence.
- To understand anything out of context is simply dangerous and misleading. But how can we find the right facts of any Truth. How do we recognize our own blind spots? And what do we do when we find them?
- We cannot possibly all have Voice – so who gets gagged next; and who decides? What is the bigger picture? And can we afford to care?

