

Editorial: When time Stands Still

Cornelis Martin Renes

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“When I’m actually developing my imagery, time stands still, I truly exist in that moment” (Pamela Johnston in Caroline Ambrus’s book *The Unseen Art Scene: 32 Australian women artists* (Irrepressible Press, 1995).

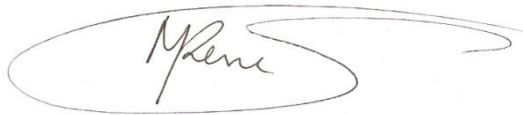
My friend and colleague Dr Janie Conway-Herron had an intimate and long-standing relationship with Dr Pamela Dahl-Helm Johnston,¹ so close that elaborating this commemorative issue was both a necessary and taxing task for her. Pam and Janie became sisters by adoption at their acceptance into Ruby Langford-Ginibi’s kinship circle. They also shared a deeply-felt friendship and a commitment with feminism and Indigenous Australia which they expressed foremost through their professional and creative activity: Pamela in her visual art initiatives, exhibitions and academic performance in the field of Aboriginal Studies and the Creative Arts; Janie in her involvement with music, Rock Against Racism and in her practice as a novelist and university lecturer in Creative Writing. For personal and professional reasons, Janie was keen for me to meet Pam. It was never to happen.

When Ruby Langford Ginibi passed away in 2011, Janie was invited by Dr Sue Ballyn, Coolabah editor, Founder and Co-Director of the University of Barcelona Australian Studies Centre and good friend of Ruby’s, to work on a special edition to commemorate Ruby’s life and work. Janie gracefully accepted and naturally turned to Pamela to co-write a monographic piece in dialogic form. This structure intimately reflected the border-crossing nature of their contact, which had already delivered other pieces of a similar collaborative shape in their academic life and attended to the issues of Indigeneity and Australianness, which also included contributions by the late Dr Lorraine Johnson Riordan.

As various writers and artists dwelling in the less traditional margins of Indigenous Australian identity have experienced, both Janie’s and Pamela’s identities (as well as their adoptive mother’s, Ruby Langford Ginibi’s) have been the object of public scrutiny over the years and affirmed by some and questioned by others. Whereas Janie’s family history nevertheless appears to point towards a connection with the Roma people in the UK as she describes in her novel *Beneath the Grace of Clouds* (Cockatoo Books 2010) and a recent *Text* journal interview (April 2014), Pamela’s origins have always been located in suburban Aboriginality. Pamela’s art work and academic writing have been an ongoing comment on the nettles and outs of non-traditional Indigenous Australian belonging (see Conway’s, Conroy-Wood’s and C.Moore’s pieces in this *Coolabah* issue in particular). Her work makes an eloquent claim, be

it in image or word, for in-between spaces of identity which acknowledge the multi-faceted character of any sense of home in contemporary Australia. Many observers would concur that any kind of belonging is much more complex than black and white definitions of identity can encompass.

When Pamela herself died unexpectedly and prematurely in February last year, once again Sue Ballyn asked Janie Conway if she were interested in preparing a memorial issue, now for her deceased friend and sister in arms. After due contemplation Janie decided to accept and found several members from Pam's circle of family, friends and colleagues willing to contribute to this volume. The result is an eclectic variety of pieces, representative of Pam's complex, inspiring personality, which left no-one indifferent. Pamela Dahl-Helm Johnston passed away as the consequence of a motorcycle accident while she was enjoying a hobby she had taken increasing pleasure in with her partner, James Singleton Hooper, and which had occupied an ever-growing space in her life. Thus, "She went down in a blaze of glory," her obituary in the Sydney Morning Herald of 28 February 2013 read. Although her time may stand still, we hope that this tribute will contribute to keeping her fire alive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Renes', enclosed within a large, horizontal, hand-drawn oval shape.

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ⁱ Pam was known variously as Pam Johnston Dahl Helm, Pam Dal-Helm Johnston and just Pam Johnston. For general usage we have used the name she commonly used which was Pam Dahl-Helm Johnston but at other times when artworks and publications are attributed to either Johnston or Johnston Dahl Helm we have used that nomenclature.