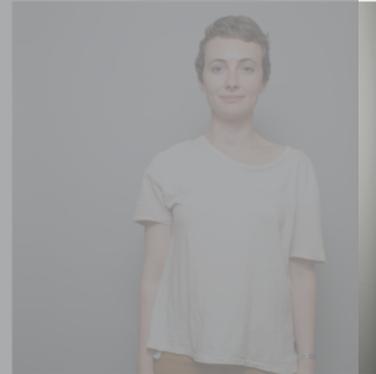
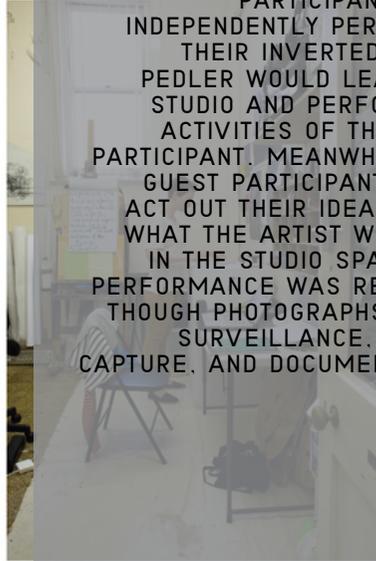


IN THIS EXPERIMENTAL
PERFORMATIVE WORK,
ELIZABETH PEDLER INVITED
COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS
TO EXCHANGE IDENTITIES.
PARTICIPANTS VISITED PEDLER'S
STUDIO, SWAPPED CLOTHES AND
BELONGINGS, AND ASSUMED
EACH OTHER'S PLACES.

PARTICIPANTS THEN
INDEPENDENTLY PERFORMED
THEIR INVERTED ROLES.
PEDLER WOULD LEAVE THE
STUDIO AND PERFORM THE
ACTIVITIES OF THE GUEST
PARTICIPANT. MEANWHILE, THE
GUEST PARTICIPANT WOULD
ACT OUT THEIR IDEAS ABOUT
WHAT THE ARTIST WOULD DO
IN THE STUDIO SPACE. THE
PERFORMANCE WAS RECORDED
THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEO
SURVEILLANCE, SCREEN
CAPTURE, AND DOCUMENTATION.

ELIZABETH PEDLER: IMPOSTER SYNDROME

12 DECEMBER 2015 - 21 JANUARY 2016



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exhibition at Moana Project Space in
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Designed by DB

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PROJECT SPACE



Elizabeth Pedler *Imposter at Work #1* 2015
giclée print on noritsu paper

Elizabeth Pedler *Imposter Syndrome: Clothes Swap #1* 2015
giclée print on noritsu paper

INTERVIEW 26/11/15

Artist Elizabeth Pedler in conversation with *Imposter Syndrome* participants Golnar Nabizadeh and Lucas Marie.

Elizabeth Pedler: I was just saying to Golnar, the reason for the catalogue text being an interview, was that I like the idea of with the exhibition of giving credit where credit's due to the participants. So having a conversation with a couple of people who've been participants I thought was a way of showing a bit more than just the exhibition being this thing that I did, it's a way of demonstrating that it's as much their work that contributed to making it happen.

Golnar Nabizadeh: I was just thinking, and I do understand the point that you just made that whatever people did, that there's a material product at the end that makes up the work as well to some extent. But I signed off as you. I drew something and signed "Liz Pedler".

EP: But without participants, it wouldn't be a work, it would just be a concept. It would be this interesting idea for how to engage with people. So the participants do make the work happen, even if it is that they allow for it to follow through. I might have an idea, but until it's carried out, it's nothing more than that idea. It's just this model that I've come up with.

GN: That makes a lot of sense.

Lucas Marie: It's interesting to think about. Because we're a part of it as well. Everyone was probably asking you: "what do I have to do?" And you're open to suggestions, but as a participant you feel that Liz is control of this thing, and I'm along for the ride, because she's set up the parameters. And even though you haven't sat there and calculated the parameters, you've set up the timeframe, where we meet, all that sort of stuff. So it feels organised, even though maybe for you it's not.

EP: Yeah, for me it's quite unknown what people are going to do, but there are a lot of controls on it. I was quite interested in with leaving it to a degree up to the participants, and people often saying "I don't know what to do, I'm not artistic." I have those self-doubts a lot of the time. "I don't have any ideas, what am I going to do?"

GN: That's really interesting, because from the outside people's

perceptions can be so different. You can assume that: "You know Liz, of course she knows what she's doing, and of course she's got these brilliant ideas. Because she's an artist." And so you're right, the imposter thing is really interesting. I think. The title; *Imposter Syndrome*. It's like "I'm in Liz's studio space, but I am not an artist," so what could I do?

EP: But to me it was pretty clear that everyone who for a couple of hours was me, was perfectly capable of independently having an artistic practice. Every single person carried out work that was valuable. No one did stuff that I would have thought was time wasting or pure procrastination or anything like that. Everyone did either quite valuable research or brainstorming or actually making something. I think part of it might be the devaluing of what artistic work is, to think that that's not actual work. It's part of the problem of people asking artists to work for free because it's their passion, or it's not really work if you like doing it. And that also plays into the whole perception: "I couldn't do the artwork; because what I'm doing isn't a valuable contribution (if I'm doing it)." I think it's tied up in the lack of recognition for what work is when it comes to being an artist.

GN: And something else that Liz and I spoke about earlier was the bounds of privacy.

LM: That seems to be common, privacy seems to be a common concern.

GN: For example; I had access to Liz's emails, and her Facebook account was open, and stuff. But I couldn't bring myself to look through anything basically. Except for scrolling down the Facebook page it was on.

LM: I was snooping all around actually. I got more confident as time went on. But I feel like I just tried to talk to people and did things that I knew already.

EP: It was something that I was conscious of when I was on people's phones, I tried not to respond to people, unless they'd either specifically given me permission to respond to a certain person, or it was someone that I knew so I could gauge how they would probably respond to that person.

LM: When I just put on your clothes and do art, it's such a relational thing. We all have relations, and that's what kind of makes us the person we are. Interacting with Andrew¹ felt more like I was doing Liz's stuff than doing Liz's work. So even

1. EP's partner. He engaged with several imposters by text message, sometimes unaware of their identity.

though it might be valuable to you, the process for me was more; when I'm talking to Andrew, and sending him rental listings, that's a way more Liz thing, like I'm really playing the game here, compared to just writing a manifesto.

GN: I think that's a really good point Lucas made, about the relational thing. Because for example, I didn't engage with anyone on your behalf. Messaging Andrew is a really interesting idea.

LM: I was really worried actually, I messaged Andrew and I was like "Hey babe" and all this sort of stuff, and I thought, would Liz get mad? I was thinking, I don't think she would, but ... that sort of doubt.

EP: It was pretty obvious for Andrew, I don't think I've ever used the term "babe".

LM: That was purposeful.

EP: So that was like a "Lucas-as-Liz" moment rather than imposter-Liz.

LM: It would have been more creepy if I'd tried to be you.

EP: That's interesting. If you had really tried to be me, in my relationships, that would have been creepy; whereas being a fake, playing at it, then that's ok. So the performance isn't creepy, because everyone is in on it. With a wink and a nod, and everyone knows that it's a performance. Whereas genuinely trying to impersonate someone ...

GN: I feel like I was even more old-school. Thou shalt not message Liz's boyfriend. But I really like that whole performative thing. When you make it obvious that you're playing at being Liz, then that's where I got a lot of my pleasure from, actually.

EP: It's dress-ups.

LM: Thinking about it anthropologically, it would be interesting to find out where the participants and yourself draw the boundaries between what they could and couldn't do; and finding where those boundaries sit. I know that we know they're fuzzy for people, but there were some very clear ones that I feel like we would probably agree with. Something about privacy. Where we couldn't go. I felt more uncomfortable going on your phone because it wasn't open, I actually had to unlock it, whereas going on Facebook it was just sitting there. And when you're nervous about the task, you just do what's in front of you.



2. EP was in the process of moving house during the project, and many participants spent time searching for rental properties on her behalf. She has now moved into a house in Daqlish.



GN: And I was conscious of that too. I thought "what happens if someone messages and says something ... really private?"

EP: This is a question for either of you: if my phone was ringing, and it said "Mum", would you have picked up?

LM: Maybe not in the first ten minutes, but at the end, I was pretty committed.

GN: To be honest, I don't know. I don't know if I'd answer the phone and go "Hi, this is Golnar pretending to be Liz" thus completely breaking character. I wouldn't have been able to go "Hi Mum". Because I don't sound like you. And it would just feel absolutely ... I couldn't do that.

EP: So that would feel like an invasion.

GN: I couldn't do it. If it was a random number, a marketer or something unimportant, I'd be much more comfortable picking up.

EP: So you as an imposter could carry out things that aren't very important. But your ability to carry it out is on a sliding scale, an inverse relationship.

GN: And it would be an exponential inverse. Because I would not feel comfortable giving myself the responsibility, and the power, if you like, to determine.

LM: I didn't feel that empowered. I felt really restricted. because I didn't know what I could do, in a way, and I didn't know what you would want me to do as you.

EP: Well I think that does play into the idea of what *Imposter Syndrome* is. In terms of people not feeling that they are qualified, or that they are not an appropriate person for their role.

GN: So you actually restrict yourself. For example, if I'm writing something, and I feel like, "I'm not a writer" immediately that's cutting into my ability to undertake that task.

EP: I agree with what you're saying about "I'm not a writer" and I certainly can recognise that feeling with people in the task they're doing. Any one of the people who participated has the capability of being an artist but every one of them doubted that capability. And they felt what they did wasn't really work. Everyone who participated ultimately wasn't very far from what I would have been doing.

LM: I thought it would be interesting if I was somewhere where people were calling me Liz a lot, then that would reaffirm the identity. Because when you're alone in a room for an hour, you're just Lucas again.

EP: When I was the other people, I tried really hard to not break character. I tried hard to think about what they would be doing in that situation, whether it was just walking down the street or whether it was driving. I tried to think about how their face would look, how their body would move ... And yet, so much of the stuff that I was doing, it wasn't identity specific. And I could have been doing that as Lucas, or I could have been doing that as Liz. And it wasn't contingent on that identity. It made me realise how much what makes us "us" isn't really particularly dependent on our perception of what ourselves are. Our self-definition.

GN: That's really good. I think that's right, and I think Lucas's point about that relational thing, things being relational, and that's what defines you.

EP: Having yourself reflected back at you.

GN: I found it quite enjoyable to continue, to expand, to relax into being Liz. And I found that really helpful. I put on music and I started to draw, and then I wasn't consciously thinking "I'm Liz. I'm Liz. I'm Liz." But nor was I thinking, "I'm Golnar". I was just in a, not no-man's-land..

EP: Loose.

GN: Loose. And that was probably the most pleasurable hour for me.

EP: That was how I felt when I was driving people's cars. Because that's something that I didn't truly need to be them, but I wasn't being reminded of being myself. I felt a sense of competency in what they would be doing, but I didn't have to consciously think about how they would be doing it.

LM: I think that's what activities do. Like the art stuff as well. It gives us a place where, if we get into a groove, we might be like, "Oh, this is what it feels like".

EP: My experience was quite different to the participants, because I did it so many times - it's not just a one-off. I felt like it really loosened the screws on what my definition of "me" is, in terms of inhabiting other identities. It made me realise that I am my relationships, but I am also a collection of tasks that I do on a regular basis, and I'm also the clothes that I'm wearing.

LM: But that's a relationship. A relationship to tasks, it's the same.

EP: It's funny, the tasks I gave people as well, weren't urgent. I never gave anyone the instruction "this needs to be done, in this way, by this time." And so, in a sense, the instructions I was giving weren't exactly in line with what "I" would do, because I made sure to do those things outside of the exchange.

LM: But it would have been really nice, to have felt like I was useful. Like I did something and I saved you somehow. I would have felt like I really achieved "Liz".

EP: Well I felt that the participants were, by making themselves available, they were giving me something, giving me the work, and that I had to repay them in some way. So it felt really good when I went to one participant's house and I did her washing for her, and I made her bed for her. It felt like some kind of small repayment for what she was doing for me by taking part.

LM: And that matters about the space, because if you're at my home, it's like my phone, it's personal. Whereas my daily tasks are not personal as much.

EP: So much of the stuff I did was really not contingent on their individual identity. Getting Mortein, or filling up the car with petrol, or dropping off clothes to Good Sammy's, those things aren't restricted to that person's identity. Where I felt incompetent was when I was studying for someone else's medical exams. He'd given me a list of things that he wanted to research, and to even look for those things I had to wikipedia what the terms were that he was using. I felt like I learned something, but I didn't feel like I was doing a service because the learning was only for me. So there's limitations on what I could do for people that was of value to them, and I felt it important that it was of value to them, not of value to me for the work.

LM: Yeah, it's funny when we start talking about value. Is the value the experience of that shift, or is the value what ends up happening? Because there was this idea that other people did "art", so I had to output something, but the experience was also the output.

EP: In planning the work, for me the output was the experience that each person had. The artwork was the performance of it, that exchange-based performance. But when reflecting on it with people, the consensus of what the work was, was actually the things that we did and achieved. And so that's a dissonance, or a discordant aspect, of the idea of what the work was. Was it trying to be someone else, or was it the stuff that you did or didn't achieve?

LM: And that's what I feel. Every time I've interacted with people that have done it, they go, "What did you do?" That's the question right? Not, "how was it?"

EP: For me the more pertinent questions are "How did you feel?" or "did you pass?" If I felt a sense of success, it was when I felt like I was inhabiting them, for at least a little moment. It didn't need to be for the whole time, but if at one point I lost myself in their identity; I stopped being conscious of me impersonating them.



Lucas Marie is a PhD Candidate and sessional tutor at the School of Social Sciences, Curtin University, studying anthropology.

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Imposter Syndrome installation view