

Charlie Sofo

I wander

17 April - 25 July 2010





Biography

Charlie Sofo was born in 1983 in Melbourne and currently lives in Melbourne. He completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Hons) at the Australian National University School of Art, Australian Capital Territory, in 2005. Solo exhibitions include *FACTS*, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2009; *Particular Particles*, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney, 2008; *Something like a Human*, Australian National Capital Artists (ANCA), Canberra, 2007; *Containers*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space (Manuka), Canberra, ACT.

Selected group exhibitions include *Kinmont*, Van Hout, Patterson, Sofo, at Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney 2010; *I'm worst at what I do best*, Parramatta Artists Studios, Sydney, 2009; *Soft Glue* – Charlie Sofo and Mary Macdougall, Black & Blue Gallery, Redfern, Sydney, 2009; *New World Records*, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 2009; and *The Ergas Collection*, Gallery 9, Sydney, 2008. His work is held in the collections of the Gallery of Modern Art/Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; and Artbank, Sydney.

Charlie Sofo is represented by Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.

Acknowledgements

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List of works

Me & You 2005
laser print on paper

Actions and events that have happened here and there 2005
laser print on paper

Birds 2008
DVD duration 1.29 minutes

Drumstick 2008
DVD duration 2.07 minutes

Charlie Sofo (with Tim Metherall)
I wander 2010
DVD ten minute duration

Charlie Sofo (with friends)
Balls 2010
found objects, paper, wool,
electrical tape, foil, wood, stone

All works are courtesy of the artist
and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.

Charlie Sofo

I wander

*Lately, it feels like I've been making a conscious decision to wander, and through that, discover.*¹

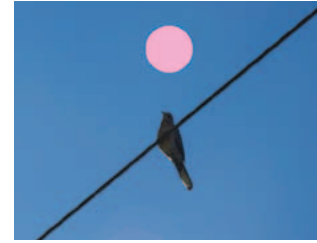
Charlie Sofo's works often arise from wandering through neighbourhood streets. Stepping out from his studio, on either casual or more pre-planned walks, he observes and collects life's incidental details, finding meaning in simple processes, materials and actions. Walking is important to Sofo's art as a means of 'searching and finding, as a ritual or observation'. After all, he says, 'You need to get ideas from somewhere and you can't just do it by sitting around; it is good to get out!'

His video, sculptural and text works in this exhibition seek to map or index his encounters with the world, not in systematic ways but as an intuitive and poetic expression of the artist's self. For him, art is something discovered, described or brought to light through his daily interactions. His statement 'I wander', the title of his project for Heide, is less an expression of 'wanderlust' in the great romantic tradition of art, than a factual description of his existence, akin to 'I breathe', 'I sleep', 'I eat', 'I make art'. Describing himself as 'averse to the spectacular or overly grand', Sofo chooses to focus on 'the mundane and the familiar', on places he knows well, and on 'traversing these places over and over again until they yield some idea or realisation'.

The video *I wander* (2010), made in collaboration with filmmaker and friend Tim Metherall, is based on a particular walk around the artist's own suburb. Sofo describes it as 'an observational piece and performance' that aspires to 'map out a landscape' and convey 'a sense of place in an emotional way'. In it, he takes an unorthodox route, incorporating his own shortcuts and byways, moving between the tidy streets of Northcote, its light-industrial areas and the

remnants of surrounding bushland by the creek—the kind of landscape that gives urban dwellers the illusion of being in the country. We see him, for example, follow a well-trodden but unlaidd path down to Merri Creek, mount the embankment that borders the railway track, clamber precariously across a rock face, stop to play with a soccer ball found under a bridge, climb a tree and scale a fence. There are moments of private reverie, as when Sofo dances to a tune on the transistor, or sits on the grass listening to bird sounds which mingle with the hum of traffic or, in the video's final scene, discovers a quaintly decorated backyard and pauses momentarily to consider its charms.

A sense of connection to people and places is quite differently expressed in *Balls* (2010), a sculptural work that offers a material index to his world in the form of a constellation of spheres. Varying in size, scale and texture, the balls are dispersed across the surface of a table setting up chance relationships. Some are found objects—a tennis ball discovered while walking, a blue ball lying around the studio—but most have been made by the artist from materials he has gathered or received as gifts from friends. Initially the materials for making the balls were collected at Heide, such as 'wrapping paper found in the carpark, wood from the creek, a round fruit found in the garden', while other items were gathered on his walk to the railway station to catch the train home. The collection of balls grew as friends and fellow artists began contributing materials and objects, so that 'the work became a point of connection with people' and the balls became 'objects of exchange and a medium of dialogue'. While the origins of the materials (including chocolate wrappers, electrical tape, pieces of wool, used Post-it notes) remain as traces in the work, these ordinary, incidental things have been given a new abstract and poetic dimension.



They are transformed by the artist's act of making (using simple methods like rolling, sticking and papier maché) and by the associative qualities of spheres, which for Sofo evoke ideas of 'language and notation...The balls are like letters, notes or objects in the landscape', he says.

Coloured dots appear hovering above the heads of the birds in *Birds* (2008), an earlier video work that connects with the idea of notation, specifically of the musical kind. Structured as an animated sequence of photographs, the video shows a series of birds sitting on power lines—a sight familiar to any wanderer. The dots mark each bird's position on the wire. By transposing this configuration to an arrangement of notes on a music staff, Sofo creates a simple piano composition, which becomes the video's quirky soundtrack.

A related video, *Drumstick* (2008), shows one of Sofo's friends walking down the street, noisily trailing a drumstick across the fences he passes, an activity recalling a mischievous childhood pastime. A range of startling percussive patterns arise as the stick hits the fences, the materials from which they are made—metal, wood, stone or brush—registering as clattering, staccato bursts of sound. The editing together of short, sharp video-takes heightens the piece's rhythmic qualities. Using straightforward, low-tech methods to record aspects of the environment, Sofo uncovers an unexpected lyricism in both *Birds* and *Drumstick*, as he activates the latent music of the suburbs.

Sofo's artist's book *Actions and events that have happened here and there*, an ongoing project begun in 2005, further explores art's relationship to the everyday. A statement on each page describes a simple gesture or action carried out by the artist, several of which involve walking. One such action is a walk tracing a specific route: 'I walk the entire perimeter of Northcote (3.5 hours).

Another leads to a personal encounter and a seemingly random act of generosity: 'From my house I walk until I find three native flowers: grevillea, bottlebrush and wattle. I then give them to someone as a present'. Other examples include a walk that mildly disrupts routine: 'I go to Coles Supermarket and stand perfectly still in the middle of an aisle with my eyes closed (2 mins)', and one that transgresses the boundaries of private space: 'I walk through the front gate of a random house and stand in the front yard'. Who knows what consequences might arise from these small interventions into ordinary life? Sofo's whimsical activities gain meaning through their context as art, and they offer us a view of art as being integrally intertwined with life.

Another textual work is *Me & You* (2005), a devotional love poem in the form of a two-part musical score, one part for 'me' and the other for 'you'. The silence of the first part, implied by repeated pauses on the page of sheet music, alongside the clamour of notes on the second page, graphically expresses the intensity of one person's feelings for another. A work at once personal and universal in its theme, *Me & You* uncovers a quietly romantic sensibility running through Sofo's art and his wanderer's quest for meaning in ordinary activities and things. Perhaps, in setting out on his walks, Sofo has more in common than one might think with artists who take their sketchbooks on drawing excursions out-of-doors. Like the sketches these artists produce, Sofo's video, sculptural and text works notate what he sees and offer ways of registering experience.

Sue Cramer, Curator
Heide Museum of Modern Art

1. All quotes are from the artist, taken from conversations and email correspondence with Sue Cramer February – April 2010.

Front and back cover:
Charlie Sofo (with friends)
Balls (detail) 2010
Photographer: John Brash

Inside front cover:
Charlie Sofo
(with Tim Metherall)
I wander 2010
video stills

Left: Charlie Sofo
Birds 2008
video still

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