



INTERIORS



In Jemma Daisy Culley's Tamarama home, the doors are always open. It is here that the artist has nightly kitchen dance parties with her family. Drinking wine, eating cheese, letting her eight-year-old, Lucien, choose the music off his own Spotify account while she prepares dinner, the ingredients of which may or may not come from her own garden. It is her favourite place to be. "I can spend like afternoons on end in my bed reading books, and I love my tiny little garden, it means the world to me to be able to have a little place to go for things to eat and to sit, but the kitchen is where we have so much fun in the evening." She shares. "My most nostalgic self is with my mum dancing in the kitchen cooking, she invented the kitchen dance party for me, with her far out 70s dance moves waving a ladle around. So cooking is like party time in our house."

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For Culley, food is what grounds her in a space. "If I enter my studio or home, I can't start making any work in the studio until I've made a coffee or a cup of tea. I feel like I haven't entered that space unless it's through the kitchen." Culley says, "It's like in the evening, I get home and I open the fridge and start eating vegetables and cheese and drinking wine just to feel like I've landed somewhere."

This sentiment is in-part the basis of her new show, *And Your Mother's Psychic Spaghetti River*, a response to a near-death experience Culley had during the floods in March, where she and her two children were involved in a rescue boat mission gone wrong on the Colo River. *And Your Mother's Psychic Spaghetti River*, while not being the singular theme of the work – as she explains to me over the phone – is grounded in the comforts that domesticity has brought herself and her family as they move through the emotions of what happened.

"What I was doing with the works, was taking a tragic experience that happened to me and my kids and finding a place for the aftermath to have a new life in a domestic setting." Culley says. "Spaghetti is probably my son's favourite thing and so I'm taking that analogy and being able to transcend the intensity of the feelings that were connected to the river and have them have a more domesticated, comforting experience in our kitchen with our family."

Her practice is not exclusive to this single note, though. She explains that she feels female artists are often pigeonholed into referencing autobiographical experiences, a tactic which she finds, frankly, a lazy go-to when there is so much to be explored. "For



WHERE THE HEALING HAPPENS

Jemma Daisy Culley on her new show *And Your Mother's Psychic Spaghetti River* and being grounded in domesticity.

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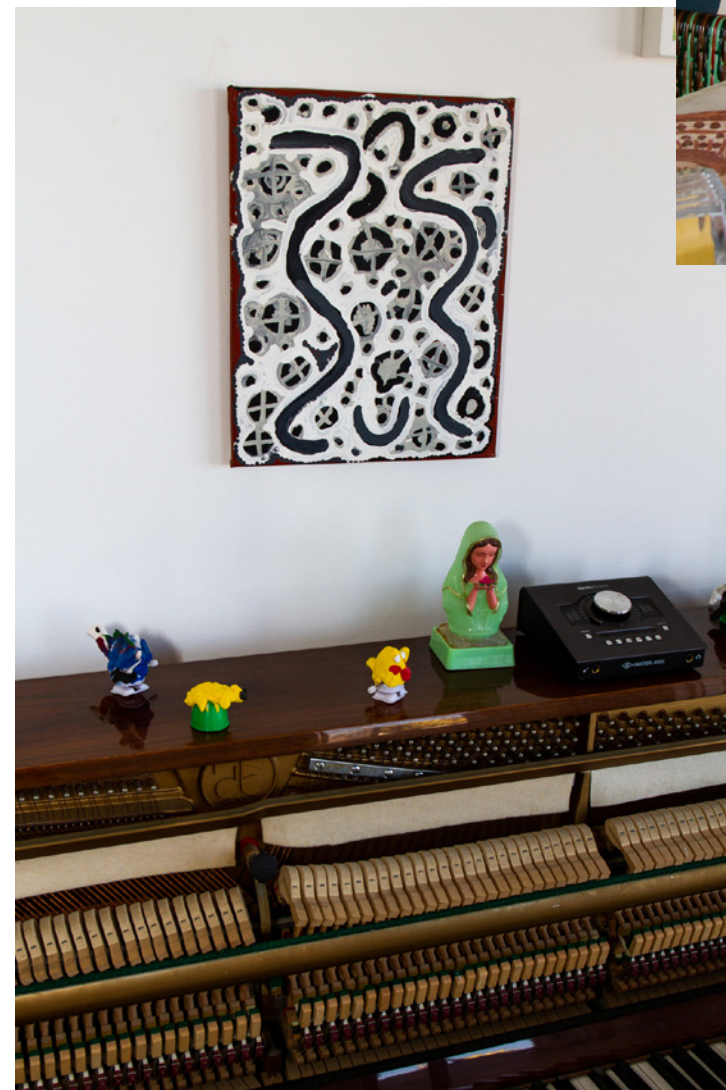
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me with this work, this experience will infiltrate its way into my practice for many more shows to come in many different regards, as the process is long and forever changing, but it will also incorporate other aspects of my life along the way," she says. "So that line, whether I'm talking exactly about this, will start to become more and more blurred as time passes. But it was impossible for me to not respond in some way to what was happening, and I don't necessarily make a particular choice to document or respond to how I'm feeling or what's happening, it's just what starts to find its way out. Then I can start to decide which aspects of what's coming out I want to continue to explore, and which aspects I'm not willing to share."

Some aspects of which, are allowing Culley to take up space in new ways, like the purchasing of a pocketknife to make her feel safer. "I realised that only you will save yourself. When I realised that, it was a huge lesson for me, and a very alone experience," she reflects. "It sounds heartbreaking, but it's actually really empowering, because you realise that you have an unbelievable amount of strength when you're put to the test." In other ways, it is in the comforts of home, of routine, and of making fun within the walls of safety, especially in lockdown; which is when this was shot. "I'm not usually a very much of a routine person, but I'm just trying to make sure that the kids get through their own anxieties and struggles with what happened, by knowing that they feel safe so that they can process their feelings in their own way," she shares. And the fun part? "We've been doing dress up dinners. Everybody has to go get dressed up and then they have to maintain character the whole way through dinner." 🐾



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