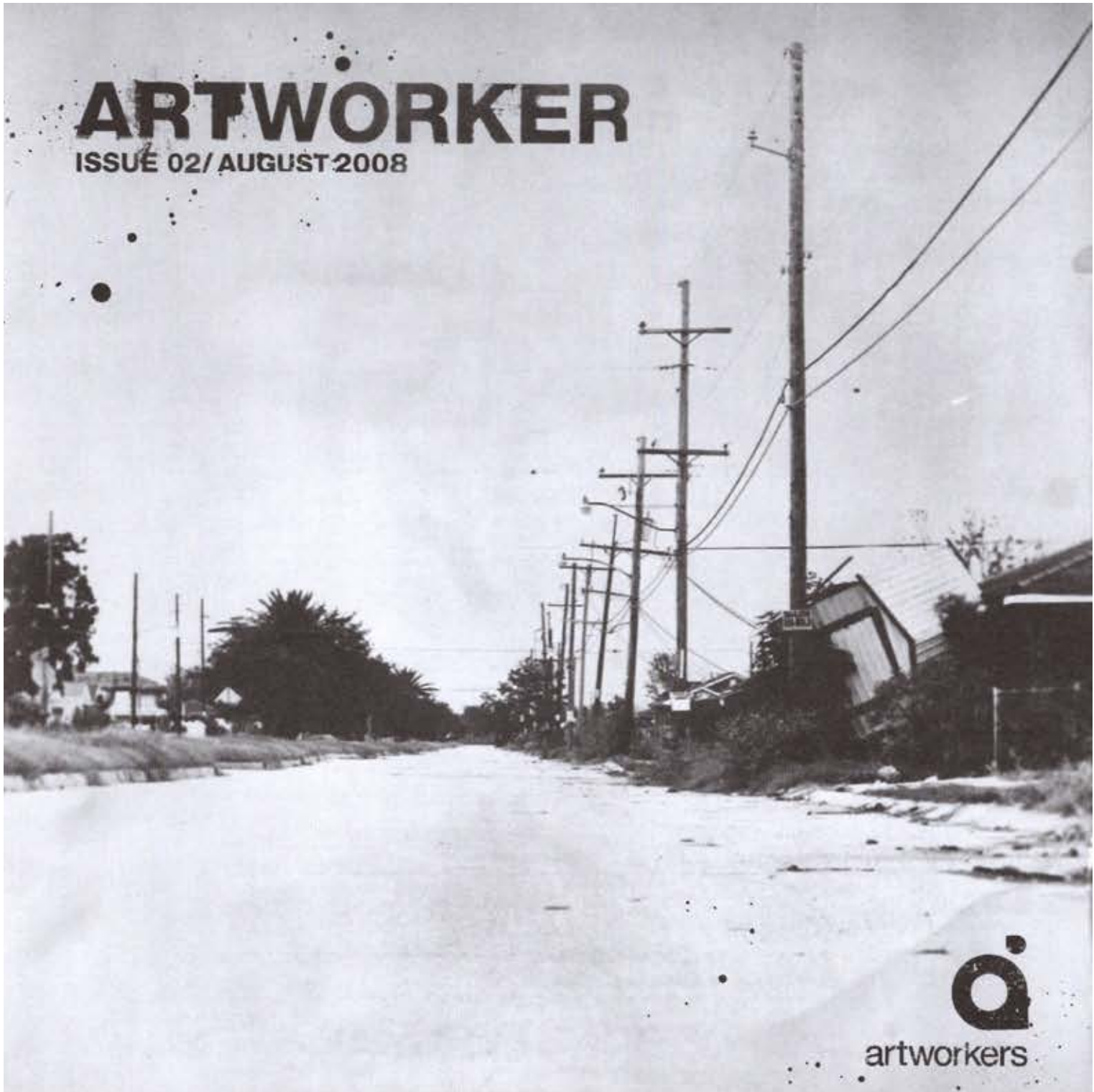


ARTWORKER

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artworkers

Designing and fabricating site-specific artworks and custom street furniture for architectural and landscape environments, Urban Art Projects (UAP) is the brainchild of Matt and Daniel Tobin. Both art school graduates, the Tobin brothers started UAP fifteen years ago, and today still continue to maintain their own art practices in spite of frenetic schedules.

Urban Art Projects gives power to artistic vision, assisting artists, architects, landscape architects and developers in making their mark. Constructing art projects from idea to design and fabrication, UAP are famous for being behind some of Australia's most stunning public art installations including Sebastian Di Mauro's 'Drift' sculpture at 33 Charlotte Street, Brisbane (QLD); the National Police Memorial, Canberra (ACT); Virginia Wilson's 'Transcendental & Cascade' at the Deutsche Bank's Head Australian Office in Sydney (NSW); and Judy Watson's installation at the Sydney International Airport.

I caught up with Urban Art Projects (UAP) Matt and Daniel Tobin, (although not at the same time as their schedules tend to include

"UAP has been able to profile well in (our) niche market. We have done this by clearly identifying our abilities and services, as well as building strong relationships with key galleries and artists throughout the USA, Europe and the Middle East." **Daniel Tobin**

The commitment to developing export sales in the US was followed through with frequent visits of at least every three months. On the first three visits, the Queensland Government assisted with arranging introductions and meetings in-market. The big breakthrough finally came when UAP established an office in Los Angeles, further consolidating their market presence. After 18 months of repeat visits and a considerable financial investment, UAP won its first job in the US. Since then, the market has opened up for them.

"Australians are seen as having a unique view of the world. Once you open doors in the export markets there are heaps of opportunities." **Matt Tobin**

Four years after their export journey began; UAP is now establishing a presence in the United Arab Emirates. In this market Matt and Daniel

EXPORTING ART TO THE WORLD: URBAN ART PROJECTS

Wendy Mansell

frequent overseas trips these days!) to talk about UAP's experiences in expanding into export:

Four years ago the decision to enter into export was driven by a number of factors. Most of UAP's business at the time came from Queensland and New South Wales. While Melbourne seemed like a logical step in their expansion, on investigation the expenses associated with setting up and managing an interstate operation proved too expensive, with too little return. With the potential of an Australian recession impacting on their domestic business, the move into export markets was also seen as a means of insuring against the impact of an economic slow-down at home.

Matt and Daniel began researching potential export markets, looking at the construction industry, relevant policies, how public art is integrated and the selection process for their target markets of the Middle East, China and the United States. Whilst the Middle East had the highest level of construction industry activity, and the USA had the least, America was chosen as the best locale for UAP's first foray into export. The decision was based on the relative ease of dealing with the USA in terms of language, cultural similarities, policy, shipping and quite a favourable exchange rate at the time.

have chosen to enter via a partnership rather than establishing another overseas office at this time.

Working via a local partner in this case helps to reduce the financial risk, aids with negotiating local politics and cultural differences, and allows UAP to leverage off their partner's existing networks and market knowledge. Asked whether entry into new markets would be via partnerships or establishing an overseas office, Daniel explained that "local partnerships are considered on a case by case basis.... we will also continue to look at establishing our own offices in key markets to further control our growth."

As new jobs are won in the export market, and with strong potential for increased demand, the challenge of balancing this rapid growth in export opportunities with maintaining domestic profile and relationships is key. This stage of export expansion is a critical one for all companies as their resources are stretched to meet new market demands. However, for UAP they are unequivocal about the importance of ensuring their Australian networks remain strong and continue to grow with international business:

"Maintaining our business culture and our Australian operation is very important to our growth. Expansion and growth provides exciting opportunities for both ourselves and the artists and designers that we work with, so we are constantly communicating to our key clients and

partners how they can also benefit in the new marketplace.” **Daniel Tobin**

After four years’ experience developing export activity for their company and their artists – we asked UAP if there were anything they would suggest for artists looking to branch out into international markets:

- * **In each new marketplace appoint a local representative as quickly as possible – either as an employee or alliance partner;**
- * **Use key external consultants for advice through expansion and growth – a great consultant can offer intelligent, informed and unbiased opinions when clarity is of utmost importance; and**
- * **Contact your State Government Trade division and/or Austrade, and start a dialogue with them about your goals and aspirations, and seek their advice.**

Ultimately, individuals will have different reasons for considering whether entry into export markets makes sense for them. However, the basics remain the same, irrespective of what industry you are coming from. Understand

that entry into export markets takes time, a considerable commitment of resources, research and a track record for your product or service at home.

For artists, it is especially important to research cultural factors ahead of time that may impact on the reception of your work, such as censorship laws in other countries that may exclude imagery such as nudity, or even portraiture in art. As with any new venture, conducting research well in advance and developing your networks will save time and money, and may lead you in unexpected directions.

HELPFUL LINKS:

- 1 Urban Art Projects:
www.uap.com.au
For innovative art projects, installation and design.
- 2 Austrade:
www.austrade.gov.au
Austrade offer advice, a range of programs, export opportunities and export Grants.
- 3 Australian Customs Services:
www.customs.gov.au
The Australian Customs Service website provides a range of fact sheets and information on export requirements in Australia.
- 4 Dept of Foreign Affairs + Trade (DFAT):
www.dfat.gov.au
DFAT provide a range of information about free-trade agreements and information on international business, trade and statistical analysis.

Dennis Nona working on his work *Ubin Kubiri* in the UAP Studio. Image courtesy of UAP.



Sebastian Di Mauro's installation at 33 Charlotte Street, Brisbane (QLD) *Drift* (2005)
Cast aluminium, image courtesy of the artist and UAP.

