

Island life

Brigita zeroes in on binary nature of the self

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Artist Brigita Ozolins's new exhibition explores the need for each of us to look inward in order to understand the true nature of our identity. It's an interesting concept, given some of the challenges the 68-year-old has faced – and overcome – in her own life, including a near-death experience almost 30 years ago when she fell headfirst off a balcony onto concrete below.

Her LOOKS DREAMS AWAKES exhibition is based on a series of quotes by Carl Jung – the pioneering psychiatrist who coined terms such as introvert, extrovert and synchronicity – and Ozolins has used hundreds of pieces of colourful, mirrored perspex set in timber panels to encrypt eight statements by Jung into binary code. However, several significant words have been left in English, offering cryptic clues for her audience.

It's not the first time Ozolins has worked in binary code – many Tasmanians will be familiar with her work Kryptos at David Walsh's Museum of Old and New Art – and she loves the "simplicity and minimalism" but also the "complexity" of using a combination of 0s and 1s.

"The quotes I picked from Jung were to do with the double side of the self that we have: a dark side and a light side," Ozolins explains.

"In order to become a whole person, we need to accept the shadow side of ourselves, that dark side."

Ozolins says her traumatic fall in Hobart in 1994, which resulted in her face being reconstructed with titanium, prompted her to reassess her life.

She was born in Melbourne and moved to Tasmania 40 years ago and worked as a librarian before becoming an arts administrator for the Glenorchy City Council, where she established the Moonah Arts Centre and co-ordinated events like Symphony Under the Stars and Carols by Candlelight.

But her brush with death led her to become an artist.

"I was incredibly lucky to be alive,"



Ozolins recalls. "I had nine different fractures in my face. You would never wish an accident like that on anybody."

In the darkness, she found light. Ozolins studied at the University of Tasmania's School of Art, completing her bachelor of fine arts with first class honours, followed by her PhD. She later worked as a senior lecturer at UTAS in the School of Creative Arts and Media, a role she recently retired from after more than 20 years.

"In a way, this terrible thing that happened to me was a catalyst," Ozolins explains.

"I felt like life was taking me by the arms

and giving me a shake, and telling me there were other things I needed to do."

She has since held dozens of solo and group exhibitions in Australia and overseas and her work has been part of festivals including Dark Mofo, Mona Foma and Ten Days on the Island.

Ozolins has completed residencies in New York, London and Paris and has completed large-scale commissions for MONA, Detached, TMAG, State Library of Tasmania and the Soros Foundation in Latvia.

Ozolins, who lives at Richmond, is preparing for an artist residency in Latvia, in

June and July, where she will conduct a writing-based installation and continue work on the book she is writing, a fictional account based on her family's Latvian heritage and the true story of her mother's escape from Latvia during WWII.

Ozolins says the opportunities she has embraced since her fall have been remarkable.

"It has been extraordinary, the things that have happened," she says.

LOOKS DREAMS AWAKES, a new exhibition by Brigita Ozolins, is at Bett Gallery until May 6. bettgallery.com.au