

Sandra Bridie, b.1945, Cataract Gorge/Cataract Gouge, Performance at Adjacent Space, August 2005
(a fiction)

Sandra Bridie is a doer and a bit of a risk taker. In the mould of the intrepid traveller, she has often used her walking performances as an opportunity to explore unknown or dangerous terrain. More akin to the adrenalin junkies who scale mountains, cross deserts or oceans on solo missions, Bridie has created an artistic 'context' for experimentation with her own human limits - her walks are contained within the configuration of the shape of the infinity symbol. This motif seems at odds with the various locations Bridie's endurance trials are enacted, such as mountain ranges, isolated underground tunnels and caves, crests of volcanos, hurricane-blown prairies, or across perilously thin frozen lakes.

Bridie began her artistic practice in her mid twenties after spending an extended period travelling overseas, which included a studied experimentation with various lifestyle options. On returning from her travels she enrolled in art school in South Australia and here began her practice of 'landscape art' with a difference. This mode of practice was influenced by current trends and also such seminal artistic experiences as being amongst the group of students assisting Christo and Jean-Claude working on 'Wrapped Coast' in October 1969. She also worked with artists participating in the legendary Mildura Sculpture Triennials of 1970 and 1973, whilst producing her own small 'expanded field' plots on the peripheries of the Triennial site. But it was not until Bridie saw British walking artist Richard Long's Straight One Hundred Mile Walk, at the AGNSW in the late '70s, that walking, or 'landscape performance' as she preferred to call it, become her sole method of artistic production.

The title of the current performance work, Cataract Gouge, ironically plays with another piece Bridie performed in the winter of 2003 during an artist's residency at Cataract Gorge on the river Esk at Launceston, Tasmania. Her residency at the Gatehouse Cottage at the entrance to the gorge coincided with extreme flooding of the river and gorge, an event well documented over the history of the gorge. Bridie had embarked on the residency as an opportunity for reflection on her practice, rather than action, but on surveying the floods abating over the First Basin area around the submerged swimming pool, she couldn't resist an opportunity to 'do an infinity walk'. Sensing that the event would produce valuable artistic documentation, she walked intently into the swell, ready to walk for eight hours in the shape of infinity. After two hours of walking against the powerful current of the shallow waters, Bridie experienced a sudden and extreme exhaustion and was swept into the river. Airlifted to safety after someone raised the alarm, Bridie could add this adventure to a number of other rescues from peril in the pursuit of her art.

At the age of sixty, due to the extreme conditions the artist regularly endured for her practice, such as prolonged exposure to heat and glare, her eyes began to give out and it was necessary for her to undergo an operation to remove the cataracts that had formed over the lens of both of her eyes. In the name of a punning title for a performance, 'Cataract Gorge - Cataract Gouge', she decided to create a virtue out of her situation. Rather than cancelling an exhibition booked during her convalescence from the eye operation, Bridie decided to use her circumstances to create an informal performance for Adjacent Project Space. Presuming that the infinity configuration had by now been internalised by her as a kind of 'inner walking template', the artist figured she would have no trouble walking the infinity walk with her eyes covered in medical gouze pads for eight hours.

Bridie asked her long-time colleague Judy P. to assist her in the performance, requesting that Judy set up the performance/installation site and to set her on her path. What you see here in this video documentation of the event is the result.





