

# A picture spooks a thousand words about town's history

Lenny Ann Low

One very cold and dark evening a few weeks ago, Svenja Kratz says she met a tall, female ghost in the doorway of a 19th century cottage. Seconds later the camera in her hand went dead.

Kratz and her companion, fellow Brisbane-based artist Sarah Mace-Dennis, said they backed away from the hovering spectral resident of Haefliger's Cottage – one of the many historic buildings in the small goldmining town of Hill End – gathered up their camera equipment and left immediately.

"I just couldn't go in there," Kratz, 26, said who will leave the town today after completing an artist-in-residence project with Mace-Dennis in the town.

"We really didn't feel it was respectful to go in," Mace-Dennis, 23, said.

Both artists say they were not prone to believing in ghosts previously but, after spending six weeks holed up in another historic Hill End cottage for their residency, the two started getting chatty with the afterlife.

"We went back [to Haefliger's] but we always said, 'Hi, we're just here to take photos' when we got inside," Mace-Dennis said. Hill End has a history of ghost sightings and spooky stories since its gold rush days went into decline a century ago.

Mace-Dennis and Kratz, who plan several exhibitions for their photography, video, sound and new-media work, concentrated on stories of women dealing with the hardship of living in the town as its gold rush fortunes rose and fell. "We heard a lot of stories about women who either killed



"We heard stories of women who killed themselves or their family" ... Svenja Kratz and Sarah Mace-Dennis chop firewood at Murray's Cottage in Hill End. Photo: Tamara Dean

themselves or killed their family because they couldn't deal with the isolation," Kratz said.

While the pair continued in that vein, their project altered

due to their supernatural encounters. Photographs taken in their kitchen showed faces at the window, both discovered black-magic literature at

Haefliger's and the artists took to sleeping in the same bed to avoid feeling fearful at night.

A discussion and preview of their work, *Guided By Voices*, will

be part of the Newcastle new media arts festival Electrofringe in September. The exhibition will feature an interactive installation triggered by viewers'

bodies and will show a projection of a ghostly figure telling stories of Hill End. It will then tour city and regional galleries.