

UNESCO Observatory
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***CREATING
UTOPIA***

Imagining and Making Futures
Art, Architecture and Sustainability

Lorne Sculpture Biennale Inaugural Conference 2018

Editor | Lindy Joubert

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EDITORIAL TEAM

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Lindy Joubert

Designer

Seraphina Nicholls

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal that promotes multidisciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence. Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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COVER IMAGE

Leon Walker
Photography at
The Lorne Sculpture
Biennale 2018

THEME

The inaugural conference, ‘Creating Utopia Imagining and Making Futures: Art, Architecture and Sustainability’ was held at Qdos Gallery, Lorne in March as part of The Lorne Sculpture Biennale (LSB) for 2018, under the Biennale’s curatorial theme of ‘Landfall, Nature + Humanity + Art’.

The sixth Lorne Sculpture Biennale was a vibrant festival celebrating the best of Australian and international sculpture. The stunning Lorne foreshore became a picturesque pedestal for a curated landscape of sculptures, presented alongside an exciting program of events devoted to pressing global issues of nature and endangerment, under the distinguished curation and visionary direction of Lara Nicholls, curator at the NGA Canberra.

Accompanying LSB 2018 was the inaugural two-day conference, ‘Creating Utopia, Imagining and Making Futures: Art, Architecture and Sustainability’. Keynote and invited speakers – conservationists, visual artists, architects and academics – reflected on issues of environmental degradation, processes of social and environmental transformation and regeneration, from a diverse and thought-provoking range of viewpoints.

“Creating Utopia” examined the green revolution – greater than the industrial revolution and happening faster than the digital revolution. The speakers were introduced by the inimitable Design Professor, Chris Ryan, whose elegant and thoughtful comments to each presenter added a distinctive contribution. Issues relating to climate change; facing uncertain global futures and protecting our planet by taking control, being prepared, and offering solutions for long-term impacts were the topics. The conference heard the voices of experts who offered innovative and well researched future directions to the world’s mounting problems.

Invited Speakers included Mona Doctor-Pingel, an architect, based in Auroville, India since 1995. Her keynote address, ‘Journeying to Oneness through architecture in Auroville, South India’, discussed the natural and built landscapes found in the unique social utopia that is Auroville, with an emphasis on experimental building techniques using local materials and craft principles, inspired by biology.

Esther Charlesworth, Professor in the School of Architecture and Design at RMIT University, the Academic Director of the new RMIT Master of Disaster, Design and Development degree [MoDDD], and the founding Director of Architects without Frontiers (AWF). Since 2002, AWF has undertaken over 42 health, education and social infrastructure projects in 12 countries for vulnerable communities. Esther spoke about the role Architects can play in improving the social and economic capacity of vulnerable people through design.

Janet Laurence is a Sydney-based artist who exhibits nationally and internationally. Her practice examines our relationship to the natural world, and has been exhibited widely, including as an Australian representative for the COP21/FIAC, Artists 4 Paris Climate 2015 exhibition, and an artist in residence at the Australian Museum.

Professor John Fien, based in Architecture and Urban Design at RMIT, spoke about the techniques and strategies for countering human harm of the environment based on design thinking and education for sustainable development.

Professor Ray Green, Landscape Architecture at the University of Melbourne presented his research on 'The Changing character of Australian coastal settlements assessed through the eyes of local: A perceptual modelling approach', exploring how ordinary people living in smaller Australian coastal communities conceptualize the "character" of the places they live and the changes they have noticed. In many such communities the valued 'character' of people's towns and individual neighbourhoods is being lost, often as a result of replacement of older, vernacular forms of architecture with new buildings and changes to the natural landscape that do not fit into the local residents' established images of their towns and neighbourhoods.

This issue, volume 6, issue 1 of the 'UNESCO journal, multi-disciplinary research in the arts' www.unescojournal.com offers essays from a diverse range of authors and they are as follows:

Gabrielle Bates is a Sydney-based artist and writer exploring the intersections between place, politics and esoteric practice. Gabrielle has undertaken three residencies in Southeast Asia, and her art works have been selected for many competitive award exhibitions. A major survey of her paintings was held at Victoria University and she has produced 11 solo exhibitions.

Dr Greg Burgess, Melbourne-based Principal Designer at Gregory Burgess Architects, discussed architecture as a social, healing and ecological art. Burgess' international reputation has been established through a significant award-winning body of work, which features housing, community, cultural (including Indigenous), educational, health, religious, commercial, exhibition design and urban design projects.

Dr. Alecia Bellgrove is a Senior Lecturer in Marine Biology and Ecology with Deakin's School of Life and Environmental Sciences, and a marine ecologist with botanical and zoological training. Her research focuses on the role of habitat-forming seaweeds in ecological systems, their life history dynamics, and the impacts of anthropogenic disturbances such as sewage effluent and climate change. Her paper focussed on feeding the world with seaweed, without killing the planet. Although seaweed has many negative connotations, it plays a fairly major role in life here on earth - it is the primary producer of oxygen, it serves as the base for food webs and is a habitat provision. Seaweed she assured us can be the solution to many of our problems.

Dr. Ching-Yeh Hsu, Professor at the Department of Visual Arts, University of Taipei spoke about the role of visual art in creating utopia. Deeply rooting your art in nature creates a greater rapport and appreciation for nature itself, she maintains, while the use of abandoned material and junk for the creation of art is also a powerful way to express ideas for mutualism with the environment.

Jane and Peter Dyer, urban beekeepers based in middle-ring suburban Melbourne. Their apiary, Backyard Honey Pty Ltd, was seeded a decade ago with the idea of creating a micro-business that would work towards shifting negative perceptions about bees and help shape a sustainable future. Their paper provided an advocacy opportunity to actively explore the intersection of bees with art, architecture and landscape in a sustainable future.

Their presentation, A BeeC's – changing our thinking to changing the world, was developed to highlight the following aspects: Why do we need bees? What do healthy bees need? They provided an overview of built environments that actively promote bees through art, landscape and architecture.

Adjunct Professor Anton Hassel from RMIT claims non-indigenous people living in Australia find themselves on an ancient land mass that is nearly, but not quite, familiar. It is a landscape with unique archetypal cadences, an ambient pulse that unsettles us, and against which our imported familiar architectures and garden-planting schemes act as a bulwark to its strangeness, keeping us émigrés to country.

Professor David Jones and his team, Mandy Nicholson, Glenn Romanis, Isobel Paton, Kate Gerritsen and Gareth Powell wrote 'Putting Wadawurrung meaning into the North Gardens Landscape of Ballarat'. The paper discusses creating the first Indigenous-inspired sculpture landscape in Australia. This paper, prepared by the Indigenous-rich consultant team in conjunction with the Wadawurrung (Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation) and City of Ballarat, reviews the aspirations of the project together with these narratives and relationships in etching a design and master plan on the canvas.

Paula Llull spoke of Nature as being at the core of artistic creation. The inclusion in art of ideas like ecosystems, natural environment or extinction requires a medium that minimises the distance between the artwork and the spectator. She spoke of the work of Janet Laurence as one of the most remarkable contributions to this current. In particular, her installation Deep Breathing. Resuscitation for the Reef illustrates the commitment of the artist in communicating with feeling the threats such as global warming and its resulting acidification of oceans on particular natural environments.

Phillip B. Roös, Anne S. Wilson, and David S. Jones presented their research on 'The Biophilic Effect: Hidden living patterns within the dance of light'.

They challenged the notion of 'Healthy cities' and 'well-being' as being the most topical and misused words in our global society. They see them being used in discourses about new strategies and policies to create urban environments often masking a failing 'healthy economy'. This discourse, they claim, is the result of our human-made environments as a consequence of our Western quest for 'development', having 'economic renewal' as part of our global urbanisation. This quest appears to be casting aside our primal knowledge of living structures and systems, our important spiritual and innate affiliations to the natural world that we are part of, and thereby loss of biophilia.

Dr. Shoso Shimbo is a garden designer from the esteemed Japan Horticultural Society, specialising in Japanese gardens. He is a director of the International Society of Ikebana. His work in this field, and that as an environmental artist seeks to harness the life force of nature. His sculptural works have featured in some of the nation's major contemporary art exhibitions, and a new work 'Sea Snakes: Trash Vortexes' was a feature of LSB 2018.

Marcus Tatton's sculpture practice is an example of using recycled, natural materials. He works as a sculptor for over of thirty years in Tasmania, Marcus acknowledges that the purpose of his sculpture making is seeking enlightenment. Marcus lives in line with the Asian proverb "to seek enlightenment is to chop wood".

Dr. Rose Woodcock, from Deakin University, presented her research and investigations into a practice-led project 'Merri Creek to the MCG', featuring broken glass sourced from along the Merri Creek in Melbourne's north. The status and function of the glass is ambiguous but rich in possibilities, with the glass fragments connecting her practice with issues of soil sustainability. Rose drew upon aspects of Parmenides' poem on the nature of 'what is' to explore the workings of language, in particular how poetic language can open up otherwise tightly construed discourses.

In conclusion, the conference was a wonderful success in a beautiful setting amidst the gum trees and birds surrounding the atmospheric Qdos Gallery. All the papers were inspirational and left an indelible mark on the audience. Sincere thanks to all who attended, the excellent list of speakers, the team - Graeme Wilkie OAM for his overall, tireless support; Lara Nicholls the LSB curator for her helpful ideas and professionalism; Gillian Oliver for the superb food; Laurel Guymer, the behind the scenes angel of 'La Perouse' at Lorne who managed the bookings and accommodation and our diligent rapporteur, Jeremy Laing. The excellent Deakin University intern student managed all computer glitches, problems and presentation hurdles.

Sincere thanks goes to Evelyn Firstenberg who generously and professionally edited all the conference papers. These people and others, the LSB committee and particularly Deakin University who gave generously for the LSB Education Program, enabled the 'Creating Utopia' conference to make a significant contribution to issues relating to climate change, environment-

Lindy Joubert
Editor-in-chief

Seeking Enlightenment

Marcus Tatton
Artist

ABSTRACT

For 30 years now, this artist has been visiting the clearfelled coupes of the Tasmanian Forestry Logging regime to maintain his silent vigil, his personal politic, in this uniquely reimagined use of forest industry waste.

He has created furniture, percussion instruments, photography, graphics, sculpture, poetry, installations and architecture, and taught design and making in these industrial remains of the clearfell. But there has not been a clear way forward to his message being heard.... He was disappointed by audience responses in America to his earlier interior sculpture in clearfelled woods: 'the viewers were seeking beautiful objects with which to adorn their homes, and to remind them of the beauty (in the absence) of nature...' 'it would reinforce the duality of political stances, quite counter-productive...'

This 20-minute long discussion paper will show images of artworks that plot the developments through 30 years of art practice on the coal face of destruction in delicate forest ecosystems. The images and words describe the artist's initial political intention of exposing the waste material and the beauty within, and on to questioning through his large public sculpture how our culture desires short-term gain at the expense of long-term loss, through to his more conceptual works recognising the limitations of human language systems in valuing nonhuman ecologies – a great place for sculpture to step in! The paper finishes with the artist's current explorations into indecipherable languages.

It is clear that the solitary days spent in the forest wasteland impact deeply on this artist's practice. In a sense this is the studio, this is where the soul-searching for contemporary humanity is happening.

"To seek enlightenment – chop wood.

When you have attained enlightenment – chop wood."

For 30 years now, I have been visiting the clearfelled coupes of the Tasmanian Forestry Logging regime to maintain a silent vigil, my personal politic, in a unique and reimagined use of forest industry waste material.

The 500-year old eucalyptus trees, along with everything underneath them, are mown down in 100 hectare lots. The coupe measurement used to quantify this process is the two-dimensional land area, without regard for the third dimension of living, breathing, organic space. It strikes me that there is a major flaw in the language used to comprehend this drive, and I will talk further on the limitations of language to value non-human entities.



In fact, the process is more designed around land grabbing in competition between humans than it is about creating products for human advancement. As Buckminster Fuller was saying in the 1950s and 60s, we are creating full-time jobs for people to keep ourselves busy when there are already enough resources available to us all for healthy living. The various political forces of the last 30 years in Tasmania have continued to sanction the clearing of giant tracts of forest and to windrow the broken remains of canopies, sub-canopies and microcosms into heaps for the process known as 'hot burning'

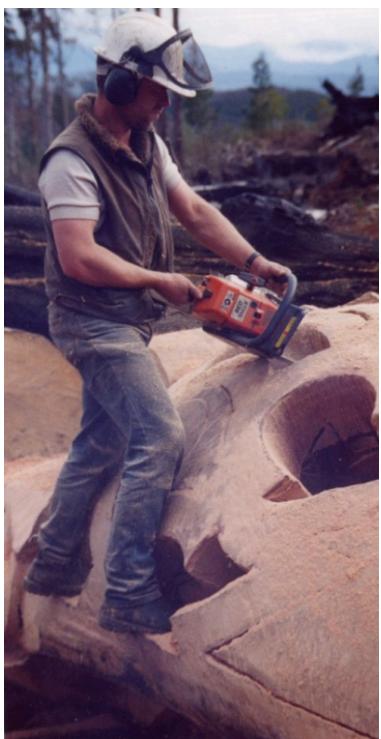
Hot burning is where the clearfelled ground and forest remnants are monitored scientifically to attain perfect burning humidity, so that the ash from the hotburn will provide the essential seedbed for the next mono crop of eucalyptus that (we are told) would otherwise not grow. The helicopter armed with incendiary balls begins circling in the centre of the coupe and spirals outward enlightening the pingpong balls of napalm as they leave the machine. Slowly the fire builds in the centre of the 100 ha area, drawing the air into a central plume that can only be described as those images of doom and disaster we have each grown up with.



However, this is not before I have infiltrated the system to take time amongst the forest remains to seek my own form of enlightenment. I spend days camping and making artworks in these seemingly destroyed environments. Artworks grow and develop through the time that I spend, contemplating the wreckage in a language more similar to a Carrara marble quarry than that of a Tasmanian political war zone.

I have created furniture, percussion instruments, photography, graphics, sculpture, poetry, installations and architecture whilst revaluing the industrial remains of these coupes.

However, early in my career I was disappointed by audience responses to my interior sculpture, lovingly crafted using the revalued clearfell wood. "The American Collectors who jumped on my work in the 1990s were seeking beautiful objects with which to adorn their homes, and to remind them of the beauty (in the absence) of nature... it would reinforce the duality of political stances; to me it was quite counter-productive..."



Through this development as a clearfell artist, I attempted to present forest valuing as a personal politic rather than as a 'them and us' equation. I began carving the giant eucalypt log sections into chainsaw textured symbols using the whole girth sections intact, showing the sheer monumental scale of these forest giants - up close. I would meet with forestry tree fallers and discuss the shape of their chainsaw teeth, and who had been killed most recently from falling branches as they sawed through the 90 metre tall giants.

I spent three weeks shaping and hollowing out a giant eucalyptus ewer or amphora in the ancient civilisations' tradition of creating commemorative vessels, documenting ultimate cultural attainment.

This piece, entitled 'Trophy', was shaped over three weeks, taken to the studio, and kiln dried for four months, reinforced with concealed stainless steel bands and set on a monolithic rock in Sydney



Tatton Marcus
Trophy
2006

Then I would carve a mythical megafauna beast for a public art commission, this time to be placed on the walk from the Meander River to Split Rock Falls in Central Tasmania; or a set of binary code strewn across a landscape as measures of our culture, but in the context of ancient eucalyptus forests with tree sections showing 500 annular rings or more. Several times during these carving projects I would need to continuously camp right next to the log to deter the incursions by firewood cutters, who would sometimes begin cutting firewood from the other end of the selected giant carving specimen!

All the while, the needs of family living were building. Together with Maree and three small children, living on 28 acres just south of Hobart, the woodstove became the central focus. Collecting wood and keeping it up off the ground has always been a Tasmanian tradition, but as a sculptor spending increasing time with my young children, I needed to make a living with less time in the forests with my chainsaws, keep the children happy, and keep the wood supply for the woodstove up off the ground.



I created hollow play huts with my children, and the birds were following us to get the grubs from the newly split wood. We made bird hides, and the children got up close to firetails, honeyeaters, fairy wrens. Reinforcing these bird hide doorways with steel fencing pickets developed into layering fencing wire between courses of firewood, until whole architectural forms were being created, with in-built safety and for public display.

I began showing the woodstacks publicly as a further way to revalue natural material, and to continue the conversation about renewable resources and the ultimate carbon equation that we all live within. The premise that small is still beautiful, and that we can all live simply with meaning and hope if we use our resources with more time and more creative and physical effort, bodes well in Southern Tasmania.

It was my statement about not setting fire to great edifices of tree stacks but rather to take each piece with some respect and use it wisely, perhaps for cooking, or warmth... If you do decide to visit me in my studio, you need to give me at least 40 minutes notice to allow me to crank up the woodstove and get the billy boiling by the time you arrive!



Tatton Marcus
Stacks
2006

As the creations have developed over extended years spent in clearfell, my format has become more conceptual and experiential, where I take installations to city audiences, inviting city dwellers to wander and play amongst artwork. I am finding it very difficult to create work for a gallery setting nowadays, without the context of land and space, and photosynthesis, my messages cannot connect... I'm a rural guy but I get great heart from visiting galleries around the world. One piece that inspired me by Tasmanian sculptor Lucy Bleach was entitled 'Nature is a Language – Can't you Read?'



Now, in 2018, I still visit the clearfell coupes several times a year, often to cut my own firewood from the continued huge stockpiles of ancient tree sections. The woodchipping industry has been in recession for the last six years, initially due to low export market demand, and then with the purchase by conservationists of the dinosaur woodchip process facility at Triabunna on Tasmania's mid east coast, when Forestry Tasmania was losing too much money and had to liquidate assets. Tourism is very popular throughout regional Tasmania, but still the forestry industry continues to cut old growth areas and to set off huge hotburn fires in autumn, when settled weather conditions lower the chance of uncontrolled wildfire.

Through my observations of forestry practices over 30 years, I continue to wish for value-added silviculture practices such as the pruning of lower branches to create clear wood for veneer and high grade structural timber, instead of the short-term pulp industry that degenerates the soil and biodiversity much faster than necessary. Where there has been harvesting and soil disturbances, there are always young eucalyptus saplings growing; which means that massive fire is not the only way to begin a new forest.



So I believe that there has been enough land cleared of the majestic and giant eucalypts in Tasmania, and that now there can be added value incorporated into the regenerated forest areas to make them work like European forests, where programs are developed for 200 + year cycles. Tasmanian land management has come of age. In forestry there is no further justification for the volume-based bulk Tasmanian pioneer mindset, now we are in a global carbon culture, and the few natural, non-human-manipulated areas still in Tasmania have suddenly graduated to incredible cultural significance and value.

Currently, I am creating sculpture in serpentine steel as a way to connect with greater audience numbers in a more permanent material. I am using a giant version of the word 'environment' written across public (urban) land. It is twisted and broken, echoing the scattered bones of the clearfelled forests. It seems the word 'environment' has become both so commonly used and abused, which is another reason for the revaluing of the nonhuman world needing to be stated.

It is about the propensity for language to roll off the tongue, and to be reduced to pure concept without experience of place and time. The more quickly we each communicate amongst our fellow humans, the less connected we become with the time-weathered spaces and ecologies of the nonhuman world. I was heartened to hear recently that Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are at last bound for amalgamation, at last the entity will be known as 'You Twit Face'...



Seriously, though, language to me inherently holds great limitation. I call it two dimensional. I only feel complete when engaging with things in silence - well, maybe with a chainsaw or angle grinder! Crowded in human chatter, without silence and time taken in vast open country (preferably covered with giant trees), I sense I cannot possibly appreciate the gravity of a living place, of the scale of biodiversity, and of the entities that human senses cannot know, even in one hundred years. For example: as a budding 17-year old carver, I remember slicing a large lump of wood off the side of a growing kamahi tree in the native rainforest I had grown up with in New Zealand. The colour of the fresh cut wood was mesmerising, beautiful, and I carved it green, with sap rolling forward from the cuts of my gouge. Before dark, it had become a bowl with the bark still on the outside, and I sat it next to my pillow that night, enjoying the sappy smells as I slept. But it was in the dark of night that I was awoken by a glow, so bright I had to sit up. There within the hollowed-out bowl was a powerful phosphorescence glowing along the grain lines, swirling around strongly in some lines more than in other sections, but cumulatively covering perhaps 70% of the interior surface. I was mesmerised again, it was bright!

I couldn't find anything about this in the library. I sat it by my pillow again, and again I awoke amazed to see the glow in the middle of the night. It was mysterious, silent and seemingly fragile. No-one I talked to believed me.

But then the third night I noticed the glow was not so bright. It became less and less in the following nights, and within a week there was no further phosphorescence at all.

The more I spent time in the forests, the more I became awed by these sorts of intimate experiences.



I could sense that there is a whole spectrum of ‘other occurrences’ living there while I was crashing around in my big boots and earmuffs. I began to slow down and sit, silently there, sometimes in the dark of night.

It is this form of enlightenment that we can be privy to in this privileged 21st century Australia. It is the form of enlightenment where we lose our inherited arrogance as a dominant species, and begin to observe deeply, roundly, spending much time and in solitude. As Peter Dombrovskis said ‘we can get back to it all’. Whenever I do this, it makes me want to tread ever more lightly.

Perhaps with our chosen sculptors’ tools we begin to manifest the deep wonder of this life experience, the total wonder of consciousness within a seemingly non self conscious living system. In sculpture there is a revaluing, an openness that human chatter, and indeed human knowledge, is not a whole measure of this planet. With a revaluing of knowledge as lame and even inappropriate, there can be space amongst humans that is undefined, undecipherable, and there can be the openness that there do exist many more developed systems of communication, mysterious and layered, within our daily midst. The solitary days spent in the forest wasteland have impacted deeply on this sculptor’s practice. In a sense, this industrial wasteland is the studio, this is where the soul-searching for contemporary humanity is happening.



For me, it is this multi dimensional language of sculpture that hints at the breadth of what we experience on 21st century Earth. It is heartening to feel heard by ever-widening circles of travelling, cultured audiences, the kind of folk who take time to observe and wonder in silence, to explore happenings and objects without forming hurried opinions, allowing themselves to be transported.

It seems our western world is ready for sculpture to create new interpretations of who we are on this Earth. It is so enlightening to be speaking sculpture with you all!