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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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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

EDITOR'S LETTER

The sixth Lorne Sculpture Biennale, March 2018, 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. The inaugural conference, *Creating Utopia Imagining and Making Futures: Art, Architecture and Sustainability* was held at Qdos Gallery, Lorne, as part of the Biennale's curatorial theme of 'Landfall, Nature + Humanity + Art'. Keynote and invited speakers – conservationists, visual artists, architects and academics – reflected on issues and processes of social and environmental degradation, transformation and regeneration. The presentations came from a diverse and thought-provoking range of viewpoints offering innovative, and well researched future directions to the world's mounting problems.

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. Mona Doctor-Pingel, an architect from Auroville, India delivered her keynote address, 'Journeying to Oneness through architecture in Auroville, South India', discussing 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. I would like to thank all the presenters for their valuable contributions and this issue, volume 6, issue 1 of the 'UNESCO journal, multi-disciplinary research in the arts' www.unescoejournal.com is testament to their important research and life's work.

The conference was considered by all who attended to be a wonderful success. Inspired by the beautiful setting amidst the gum trees and singing birds surrounding the Qdos Gallery. 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 intern student managed all computer glitches, problems and presentation hurdles. A very sincere thankyou to Evelyn Firstenberg who generously and professionally edited all the conference papers and most importantly, a very special thankyou to Seraphina Nicholls who has tirelessly and superbly designed and managed the collation and publication of this special issue. 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, environmental and global futures and the role of the arts and sustainable planning.

Lindy Joubert

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Magical Resistance in the Suburbs: Ritual walking and spirit mapping

Gabrielle Bates
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ABSTRACT

At a time of rapid transformation in many parts of Sydney, my practice-based research investigated how magical rituals and objects associated with Witchcraft might be used to protect neighbourhoods affected by questionable development and gentrification. In this short paper I outline the first part of my investigation, which explored how enchantment informed my ritualised process of walking through neighbourhoods threatened by the construction of the WestConnex Motorway. The experience of enchantment allowed me to perceive the Sydney suburbs of St Peters, Newtown and Camperdown as places of spirit, encouraging me to express their dynamic characteristics and qualities in creative experiments such as ritualised smoke drawing, mapping and collage. The resulting iterative outcomes known as Spirit Maps subverted conventional forms of cartography by working with intuitive, more elastic means of memory mapping that aimed to invoke the living presence of the Genius Loci and advocate for the conservation of threatened urban spaces.

KEYWORDS

Witchcraft | Enchantment | Ritual | Mapping | Collage

Recently, many parts of Sydney have been affected by the development of major infrastructural projects. Much of the change, overseen by the NSW State Government, was rolled out without satisfactory consultation with communities most impacted. Despite strong public opposition¹, the projects were pushed through, resulting in the displacement of communities, the demolition of heritage homes, and the removal of significant quantities of trees in public parklands.²

These circumstances prompted my Masters research at UNSW Art & Design between 2016 and 2018, a creative investigation that explored how magical objects and rituals associated with Witchcraft might be used to protect places affected by dubious urban change. Throughout the research period, a variety of processes were explored, including ritualised walking, smoke drawing and the magical configuration of collages. These early experiments resulted in the production of various Spirit Maps that aimed to subvert conventional forms of mapping and advocate for the conservation of the places under threat.

Witchcraft is an expression of Pagan spirituality³. It is generally agreed that Witchcraft's contemporary incarnation emerged in the 1960s, drawing on holistic cosmologies from a range of Occult belief systems⁴. A practice rather than a religion⁵, it derives from a highly diverse and eclectic subculture of creative applications that use ritual and magic⁶ to manifest desired outcomes. Anti-establishment and radical, the "unauthorised...use of the creative process"⁷ lies at its core, "to devise novel solutions to personal and social problems."⁸ While society may see Witchcraft as subversive, practitioners generally use it for self-protection⁹. Its nature-based sensibility can also facilitate more sympathetic connections between life and experience in urban centres¹⁰. These links between creativity, subversion, protection and place laid the political foundation for my investigation, opening the underground, multi-dimensional space I needed to express protest and pursue resistance to dubious urban change.

Gentrification and urban renewal in Sydney are nothing new, but at the time of my research their intensification mirrored broader currents of global power imbalance¹¹. I wanted to highlight this macro problem through a micro lens by taking as case studies three Sydney suburbs affected by such change. St Peters, Newtown and Camperdown, along with many other suburbs in Sydney's Inner West, were experiencing dramatic transformation due to the construction of the WestConnex Motorway. Neighbourhoods and large tracts of parkland fell to the chainsaw and wrecker's ball, with little regard for their historic value or relevance to community identity

In response to this, my first impulse was to walk the geographic boundaries of the suburbs in question. Walking alone can be a form of meditation that "offers an unparalleled way to open oneself to the 'Spirit of Place' and to its subterranean history."¹²

Accordingly, my walks became vigilant rituals during which I gave myself over to the places I explored, feeling out their character and histories to develop a deeper understanding about how they were changing. Each ritual walk required focused concentration and a willingness to experience my surroundings in alternative ways. I memory-mapped the dynamic relationships between roads, architecture, flora, fauna and people, and the more my perception became attuned to the patterns within these living relationships, the more I began to experience a phenomenon that I can only describe as ‘enchanted’.

A unique perspective that challenges disenchanting material values¹³, “[Enchantment]...opens a pathway toward...experiences that swell the heart and stretch the limits of belief and understanding.”¹⁴ It has also been suggested that “many urban Pagans are creating this enchanted vision of the city through their active revisionings [sic] of the urban landscape.”¹⁵ My own experience of enchantment presented me with a means to reimagine these urban spaces as the dynamic, living entities often referred to in esoteric traditions as the *Genius Loci*¹⁶, the “Spirits of Place.”¹⁷ Thomas Moore suggests “we could go a long way towards bringing charm into modern life by revering local spirits and protecting their homes” and it was this thinking that underpinned my subsequent creative outcomes.

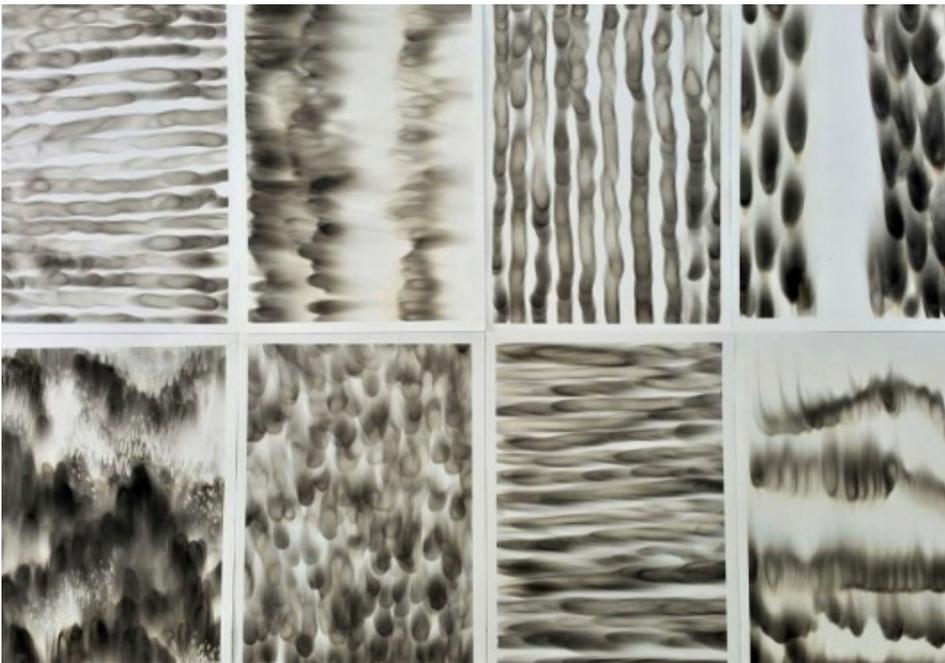


Figure 1. Gabrielle Bates, Experimental candle smoke drawings on paper, 2016, mixed media, 21cm x 97cm each

My first artistic experiments aimed to catch the fleeting, ephemeral qualities of the *Genius Loci*. When a ritual walk was complete, I returned to my work space where I fixed a sheet of blank cartridge paper to a light flat surface. Holding the surface semi-upright, I passed a lit candle beneath the paper, creating sooty smoke marks of varying intensity. The marks, such as the spots, dashes or straight/wandering lines seen in Figure 1, appeared to have a certain freedom, but I could also gently direct them in a way that mapped out my memory of the ritual walk I had just completed.

This type of drawing with candle smoke progressed from simple experiments on paper to more complex collages called Spirit Maps, such as Spirit Map 2 (St Peters) seen in Figure 2. These collages comprised various types of organic curved shapes and circles. In Witchcraft, the circle is regarded as a symbol that marks the “boundary between structures of time and space, between ordinary reality and sacred time (infinity), and sacred space...in which magic will be worked.”¹⁸ I cut the circular forms away from the smoke marked paper in a ritual gesture that suggested a kind of release or setting free of the form from its paper plane. Other small curved pieces of paper coated in coloured pigment were also cut away, and added to the collection of shapes. The forms were then configured together using a ritualised, intuitive process of working back and forth between the layers, allowing the shapes to find their place within the ‘geography’ of the collage. Lucy Lippard describes a similar process of invocation used in more experimental, indigenous and artistic forms of mapping: “It makes clear how memory fades as it recedes, how legend then myth creep in and take over...Telling stories that are...not linear, but always coming back around...Going backward, the artefacts get mixed up, the path meanders, allowing more lateral exploration.”¹⁹

Figure 2. (Left)
Gabrielle Bates, *Spirit Map 2*
(St Peters), second iteration,
2017, collage on paper, 67cm
x 52cm

Figure 3 (Right) Gabrielle
Bates, *Spirit Maps 1-6*, mixed
media collages on paper, 67cm
x 52cm each, exhibited at The
Tim Olsen Drawing Prize, AD
Space, UNSW Art & Design,
Paddington



As the shapes fell into place, it became clear that they were echoing the multi-layered nature of the living relationships I perceived in my case-study neighbourhoods. They appeared to move towards or away from me in multiple layers that, once finally configured, co-existed within a single dynamic entity. Thomas Moore writes about the shift in position that occurs between subject and place when things are allowed their own vitality: “My own position changes when I grant the world its soul... as the things in the world present themselves vividly, I watch and listen. I respect them because I am not their creator and controller. They have as much personality and independence as I do.”²⁰ By adopting this kind of open approach that relinquished sovereignty and control, I found that the configurations seemed to embody the many changing histories, repetitions, patterns, borders and relationships in my neighbourhoods.

And while some of the smoke marks also subtly alluded to the boundaries and units found in conventional map designs, their softer tones lent themselves well to the more organic circular forms, evoking an ethereal quality that stood in strong contrast to the geometric compositional forms of conventional maps.

A suite of nebulous Spirit Maps 1-6 (2017), seen in Figure 3, emerged from this process to override the recognisable, logical representations usually found in conventional maps. Traditional cartography is described as “the more cerebral or political need to fill in the blanks, to own vicariously by recording.”²¹ The Spirit Maps 1-6 rejected this idea of ownership and absolute knowing by abstracting the picture plane, introducing intuitive marks and patterns, and working from a more poetic position that suggested an emotional and perceptual engagement with place.

A later iteration of these Spirit Maps manifested as a large digital print work on wallpaper. The medium of wallpaper was chosen for its allusion to domestic space, as residential zones were as much at risk from dubious development as the streets and parks surrounding them. The image of Spirit Map 1 (Camperdown) (2017) was selected for enlargement and digital print reproduction, then sliced away from the wallpaper to reiterate the ritual act of cutting and releasing used in earlier experiments. The work was then fixed to the wall of Chrissie Cotter Gallery in Camperdown, shown in Figure 4, where it could operate as a more independent, numinous expression of a living suburb, an alternative representation that transcended traditional ways of experiencing and valuing place.²²

These early experiments paved the way for my research to explore other ritual processes, which resulted in the production of three-dimensional fetish objects such as protective amulets and talismans, and community-based actions involving the ritual veneration of endangered trees.

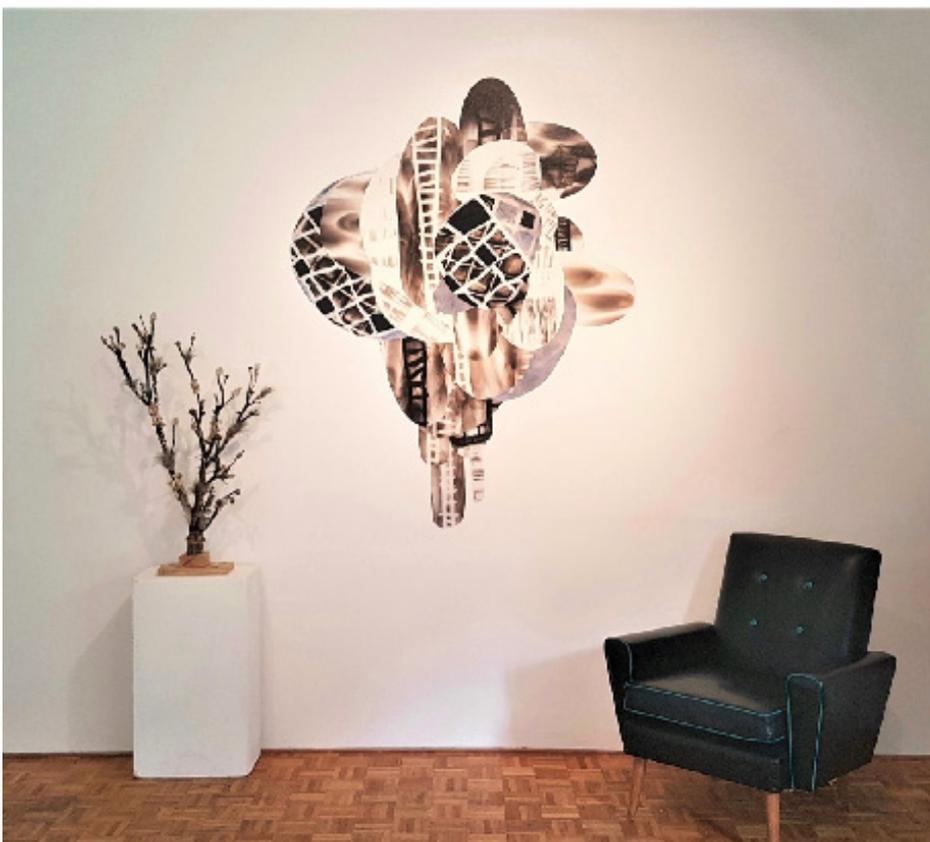


Figure 4. Gabrielle Bates, *Spirit Map 1 (Camperdown)* in situ, 2017, digital print on wallpaper, 1.7m x 1.2m, Chrissie Cotter Gallery, Camperdown

By conceptually blending politics with Witchcraft, my early Spirit Map experiments actively engaged with neighbourhoods threatened by radical urban change to undermine the modern values that facilitate profit-driven over development. The practice based research helped to expand my knowledge of esoteric practice, grass roots politics and material potentiality in unexpected and exciting ways, uncovering alternative methods for addressing the ever-increasing sense of powerlessness experienced in places affected by rapid urban change. Ultimately, I felt that I was being guided by the places I engaged with, and this perhaps was the most satisfying outcome of all, a championing of the spiritual modes of relating to, and connecting with place, to genuinely care for and understand it.

NOTES

- 1 A coalition force across Sydney's Inner West suburbs is headed by the WestConnex Action Group which disputes the project and calls for its end. Accessed 1 November 2017 <http://www.westconnexactiongroup.org.au/>.
- 2 Christopher Knaus, "Westconnex: bitter battles mark the road to Australia's urban future." Accessed 21 June 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/05/sydney-westconnex-road-bitterly-disputed-future>.
- 3 "Paganism is a religious movement without a hierarchy or a charismatic leader...[it] is not centred around basic doctrines or theological assumption; rather it is based on a pervasive ideology with its own dynamic... It incorporates in its worldview the weaving together of current issues of concern, such as the environment and women's issues, with very ancient ideas, such as polytheism, animism and mythology. As such it can be seen as a creative response to the problems of alienation in a world of high technology and fast paced modernity... addressing the need for a new combination of values which are appropriate in the modern context." Lynne Hume, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, (Melbourne University Press, 1997), 1-2.
- 4 Susan Greenwood, "Feminist Witchcraft: A transformatory politics", *Practising Feminism*, (London & NY: Routledge, 1996), 109.
- 5 The difference between Witchcraft and Wicca is outlined on the Traditional Witchcraft and Occultism website, accessed 15 May 2018 <https://traditionalwitchcraftandoccultism.wordpress.com/2012/02/15/what-is-the-difference-between-wicca-and-witchcraft/>.
- 6 Magic is defined by Alistair Crowley as "the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity to will." Mandy Furney, "A Nature-Based Religion in the City" (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2004), 21-22.
- 7 Loretta Lee Orion, "Revival of Western Paganism and Witchcraft in the Contemporary United States" (State University of New York, 1990), 6.
- 8 *Ibid*, iv.
- 9 Orion, "Revival of Western Paganism and Witchcraft", 384.
- 10 Scholar Mandy Furney states, "all city dwellers must establish some form of relationship with their environment." Furney, "A Nature-Based Religion", 4.
- 11 Human geographer Peter Jackson argues that capital interest is the reason for urban change and gentrification. Peter Jackson, 'Culture and capital in urban change', *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography*, (London & NY: Routledge, 1995), 56-57, and Vincent Carducci advocates for a more 'activist-style' approach to cultural production, stating, "The temptation to abandon art practice as a mode of critique against the process of gentrification, or the broader currents of neoliberal capital for that matter, needs resistance." Vince Carducci, "Art and Gentrification", *Temporary Art Review*, accessed 13 November 2017 <http://temporaryartreview.com/on-art-and-gentrification/>.
- 12 Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*, (New York: New Press, 1990), 17.
- 13 These disenchanting values reflect "the rationalising processes of bureaucracy and functional organisation...and the tendency of capitalism to undermine values by turning everything into commodities." Mark Bahnisch, *Sociology of Religion in Postmodernity: Wicca, Witches and the neo-pagan Myth of Foundations*, (Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology, 2001), 2.
- 14 Thomas Moore, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), x.
- 15 Furney, "A Nature-Based Religion", 25.
- 16 The Oxford Dictionary defines *genius loci* as "The prevailing character or atmosphere of a place" or "the presiding spirit or god of a place." [OxfordDictionaries.com](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/genius_loci), accessed 28 August 2017, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/genius_loci.
- 17 Moore, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*, 146.
- 18 Orion, *Western Paganism and Witchcraft*, 74.
- 19 Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*, 25-26.
- 20 Thomas Moore, "Beautify and the Reanimation of Things", *Care of the Soul* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 268.
- 21 Lippard, *The Lure of The Local*, 78.
- 22 I am still exploring this process, experimenting with more complex methods of wallpaper collage involving ritualised drawing, cutting and installation processes.

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