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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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Seeking Resonant Frequency in the Australian Landscape

Dr Anton Hasell
RMIT University

ABSTRACT

We non-indigenous people who live in Australia find ourselves 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.

“Landfall” (or “land-ho”) are the calls of those aboard a craft at sea on sighting land, a call loudly reported in a voice quivering in both hope and fear. To beach the craft upon a shore radiant with unknown treasure and opportunity requires navigation of crashing waves on rocky coastlines, promising a dangerous and threatening sequence of events.

Once on shore, however, land gives up its resources and its destiny to its colonisers. Whether it be a small island, a continent or the planet, colonising scenarios have played out in full. Sustainable futures for the seven (and rising) billion people feasting upon our planet looks evermore doubtful.

We non-indigenous people who live in Australia find ourselves 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.

My studio practice, since 1994, has been to find ways, through images, objects and sound, of diminishing the misapprehension we feel about the landscape in which we live. I left Melbourne’s urban living for a regional Victorian country life in 1989. The darker, harder to grasp, rhythms and patterns of the Australian countryside (if we choose to notice our misfit), has inspired my self-given task as an artist to tune into the resonant frequencies of the landscape I have come to know, in order to help me, and us, tune into our country.

This program of enquiry has developed in three parts. The first part’s task was to devise a metaphorical method to let all of us see the country with fresh eyes, as if for the first time. The second part was to follow the example of Ludwig Leichhardt, and to encourage our leaving the coastal hinterland and travel to the interior. The third, and I think final part, asks the question; how can we live sustainably in our country beyond exploitation, that is, how are we to live in tune with the visual, sonic and visceral patterns of experience of our country?

In 1994, I made sculptures and bells, prints and drawings imagining fishing trawlers leaving Port Lincoln with citizens on board bound for the Great Southern Ocean. I made a group of life-sized diving suits to be used to lower people into the freezing and darkening sea to a depth at which they could only just feel their bones, and so embrace the reality of their mortality, that they might arrive in the moment, to become present. When pulled up into the light and ‘born again’ upon the trawler deck, and taken back to Port Lincoln, surely people would feel the eucalypt tree’s strange indifference to their presence and, for the first time, ‘see’ that this is a country not scaled to human domestication but operating at orders of magnitude incompatible with suburban dreaming.

We might then tune into the 'resonant frequency' of the country and be able to resist the urges to shape the landscape patterned to ideas fashioned overseas.



Figure 1
Armageddon Bell

Small bell-sculptures made for this project became more highly developed through the application of sophisticated digital engineering in a commission for Vision Australia of an interactive bell-sculpture in 1995, and again between 1998 and 2002, using computer software to design never heard before bells for the Federation Bells Carillon projects commissioned for Australia's centenary of Federation. The Harmonic Bell design was invented for these projects as they required bell sounds in perfect harmonic pitch, a sound sought by European bell founders but now invented in Australia. This bell's pure tone is a unique ambient resonance of the Mia Mia landscape where it was invented and first heard, joining the thunder of the bullroar and the raucous squawk of the cockatoo as part of the sonic fundamental frequencies in the Australian soundscape



Figure 2
Federation Bells Installation

The second part of this project was to draw people from the coast inland. Leichhardt could see the truth of the Australian topological skin. It was a perfect truth for him. The major rivers on the west of the dividing range flowed inland. Even the hairs on his own skin could feel the downhill pull of an inland sea. His trek to Port Said crossed numerous rivers flowing up from the centre to the gulf.

The simple and overwhelming truth was that there was an inland sea, that he would be irresistibly drawn to it, and after a frolic in its waters he would travel on to the colony of Perth. In 1848, he set out and we await his return. Meanwhile, like a child to his childishness, I determined to make more suitable navigational instruments for his further use. “Brother, throw away the compass, the set square, those dividers and sextant that barely gets people about in Europe, and mislead us here”, I would have said. Each instrument I invented for him is kept in proper adjustment through its connection to the landscape. The ‘Lunar Navigational Instrument’ tracks the shifting glint of the moon across a bronze orb in a small water container, and by marking that journey throughout the night, the instrument leaves a curve scraped in the sand. Some rudimentary calculus of the curvature directs the pathway forward. There is a ‘Solar Navigational Instrument’ and ‘Over-the-horizon Sonic Navigation Instrument’ which sounds a small harmonic bell and collects its echo through an elaborate ear piece. Close to the continental centre, there is the ‘Inland Sea Shell Navigational Instrument’, which is a cast bronze shell with ear piece on a bearing turntable, allowing one to turn it and listen for the loudest archetypal crash of waves, and an arrow to point out where this is coming from.

The ‘Water Finding Navigational Instrument’ is cleverness itself, if the psychology of birds is ever clever. Three magnifying glasses are aligned to make an adjustable telescope, and two cast bronze budgies are perched upon it in splendid colour. At dusk, the flock is attracted to and visit our decoys, (especially to the blue budgie), only to, eventually, bore of the stiff company and wheel away towards the nearest waterhole. By following the line of sight with the telescope, one then merely follows by foot to water. So, all the tools (there are more but it is too tiring to tell) that are needed, and maps too!

Figure 3
Leichhardt’s budgie
water-finder instrument



But not European drawn maps or pictorial depiction unable to work in a flat and featureless plain, repeated across Australia. Instead, beautiful maps beaten out against the anvil earth in copper sheet, taken along for the purpose. Here every scrape and mark of the earth itself is transferred to each map, including the marks of previous and ongoing occupation, and in this way the subtle topology of a plain is captured as no eye can discern. Only the touch of a finger can read the braille of Australia. This our child Leichhardt knew, and I have tried to share his knowledge.

My current research is making a study of naturally occurring patterns: of the shifting distribution of birds on bodies of water, the scatter ratios that rocks and trees observe, and the dispersal of sea shells scoring the beat of waves. These, as well as the rhythmical swirls of water flows coursing through creeks, are patterns that I suspect can be read as a kind of 'sheet music' to the landscape. We can penetrate the surface and appearance of things to really 'site read', or otherwise sense, feel and hear the orchestral truth of our Australian experience, that we belong to it, not it to us, and that we serve its song-line needs rather than have it serve those tuneless needs of our own.



Figure 4
Leichhardt's map of
Hopkins Falls

The palpable and visceral nature of the Australian experience must necessarily diminish the visual dominance of cultural experience too common in global creative expression. Here, the senses are interwoven in powerful and secret ways, and sound vibration over vast and shallow space shivers above and below the audible range, as felt pulsation, as electrical fizzing, as much tasted, touched, seen and smelt as heard. Intuition alive to these complex sensory experiences can bring us in tune with country.

If we are true in our tuning in to country, we have something useful to share with a world looking for sustainable co-habitation on their part of the planet. We can share our special listening experience with them.

Listening is fundamental to our discovery of self, and place of being. We all must find ways to live in tune, and in rhythm, with our landscapes. My exploration of the sonic experience of the Australian landscape is resulting in sculptural, multi-sensory forms worth listening to. In this way, I hope to share the subtle percussive sounds and invented listening experiences with my fellow citizens, and with people across the world.

I have just completed the invention, casting and tuning of a 'difference-tone' musical set of 10 bell-sculptures for the Long Now's 10,000 Year Clock project. The Long Now Foundation (www.longnow.org) proposes visionary long term thinking for sustainable life on our planet, and is undertaking the truly amazing clock project. The maintenance-free clock is being constructed inside a mountain in Texas, and it encourages people everywhere to keep 'in-time' with the planet's needs and to tune into its clock bells (perhaps the clock's bells will help people tune into the planet's ambient hum) for the sustainable future we seek.

CAD processes combined with rapid prototyping technologies are central to my practice as an artist, which is why I have recently completed a Synapse Residency at CSIRO's Lab 22 exploring direct metal 3D printing. A number of alternative direct metal printing technologies have been used to print the Long Now 'Difference-Tone' bell design in titanium and in stainless steel/bronze fused materials. These are the first bells 3D printing in direct metal. The partial frequencies of this new bell design are carefully arrayed to have the bell generate a pitch that is an octave below the lowest actual frequency in the bell. The invention of this psychoacoustical effect is only possible in our digital age.



Figure 5
3D printed
'Difference-Tone' bells

Accessible, interactive and participatory public art installations, like the Federation Bells Carillon at Birrarung Marr Park Melbourne, become sites of shared multi-sensory experience for people. This is a kind of art experience, beyond spectatorship and entertainment, that invites everyone to listen to the creation of sound fields made by the actions of people around them.

It is a listening experience for the positive energy of others. It invites people to partake in creative play, to share their considered sensibilities. People anywhere in the world can download the phone app of the Federation Bell Carillon, or use its web page, to compose music for this set of unique musical bells. Imagine, people joyfully engaged in accessible, participatory and responsive creative playing together.

This is public space that is made accessible and participatory through public art architecture designed to enhance feelings of inclusion and community wellbeing. It is a vision for public art connecting people with one another and with the country they share with each other, listening for resonance, and being sensitive and alive to the interwoven fields of vibration animating life all about them. People are composing with the fabulous and bewitching sounds of the Australian landscape that emanate from these unique bronze forms.



Figure 6
3 Twisting bell forms

Open, free, egalitarian, playful and ingenious creativity and invention, isn't that what we Australians stand for in our cultural life, and shouldn't this be our gift to a world in desperate need? That everyone gets to 'have a go' is not just a mantra for seeing if an idea works through participation, it is integral to the idea of 'a fair go', that powerful concept underwriting our community's ingenuity (and the remaining hope for a prosperous future). Being sensitive to subliminal resonant frequencies and rhythms of our ancient landscape; tuning into country; this is the work of discovering who, and where, we are.

"Landfall" might be the call of someone's pirate-maniacal imaginings of untold wealth appearing on the horizon, like those simple (it turns out, too simple) economic models of vast cattle farms, mineral mining and other schemes of exploitation that draw people to the heart of outback Australia. But it can also be a call to tune into landfall's siren song, to find oneself drawn to the irresistible sonic patterns that resonate and ricochet, reverberate and echo in, around, across and under the complex topological forms and vast open spaces of living country.

It is my greater hope that this kind of investigation, of tuning into our country and of building joyful sites of shared creative play for people of all ages, might help inform us as to the kind of society needed to find a sustainable harmony with the planet we are so very crowded upon.