

SITWORKS: STRATEGIC INTERVENTION IN ART AND SCIENCE DIALOGUES

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Abstract

Siteworks is a research program centred in an Australian bush location three hours drive south of Sydney. The first in 2009 brought fluvial geo-morphologists onsite for several months prior to an event that brought together other earth scientists with local, national and international artists, professional performers and a site-based artist and director. During each of the two days entitled Ten Trenches, presentations from all participants, was followed by a series of performances.

In the following years this pattern was adopted for Siteworks, looking above the ground as well as beneath it. Consistent dialogue with local indigenous people, their cosmology, stories and lore together with performance threaded through each event. Narratives concerned with colonial occupation of riverside locations were a focus in 2010 involving historians and archeologists; in 2011 a botanist worked with an ecologist to build a bark canoe, joining with other artists and scientists working with flora and fauna; nutritionists, a farmer, a celebrity chef and an agrarian professor met with artists who had made work concerned with the future of food in 2012; a night-time public event the following year drew a thousand people to listen to astronomers and anthropologists, and a sound performance based on electromagnetic phenomena; bio-diversity in October of 2014 included onsite camping and nocturnal tours to find both art and animals.

The paper will outline the experience of managing and developing the Sitework series of events. The thematic frameworks and specific collaborative projects between artists and scientists will be evaluated for bringing together diverse practices and expertises. Future events will continue with approaches to better understanding of humans in the physical and natural environment and how threats to climate, water, food and shelter can be addressed through collaborative interventions involving artists, scientists and the enfranchised citizen.

The Bundanon Trust was established 20 years ago by Arthur Boyd one of Australia's best known painters, who noted that he 'couldn't exhaust this landscape' and directed that the 3000 acres of riverside rainforest bush be used for scientific research and agriculture as well as art, education and recreation. Investigations across disciplines have led to surprising outcomes characterised by the sharing of ideas about process, materials and the role of risk and experiment.

1. Deborah Ely is the Chief Executive Officer at Bundanon Trust and convenor of the interdisciplinary, site-specific project SITEWORKS. Prior to taking up her position at Bundanon Trust, an arts and education institution near Sydney, Australia, she was the Visual Arts and Craft Manager at Arts New South Wales, a state government funding body. Previous positions include Director of the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney; founding Director of the Centre for Contemporary Photography in Melbourne; Co-ordinator of the first Experimenta festival of new media art in Australia; and Visual Arts Director of Watershed Media Centre in the UK. She was trained in Britain as a painter and art historian and is a Professorial Fellow at the University of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia.
2. Mike Leggett has film and video work in archives and collections in Europe, Australia, North and South America and has practiced professionally as an artist, curator, writer, researcher, producer, editor and teacher. He has a PhD from the Creativity & Cognition Studios in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, the University of Technology Sydney,

and a Masters of Fine Art from the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales in Sydney. He has curated exhibitions of interactive multimedia for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney (Burning the Interface<International Artists' CD-ROM> also seen in Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne); the Brisbane International Film Festival; the 5th International Documentary Conference; Artspace, Sydney; and Videotage Festival of Video Art, Hong Kong. He contributes to the contemporary arts newspaper RealTime and contributes to Leonardo Reviews Quarterly (MIT Press).