

PERCEPTIVE

POWER

**PROJECT ROOMS 1 & 2
24 APRIL - 16 MAY**

CARBON ARTS “BROWN BAG LUNCH” SALON EVENTS »

This summary captures the public program of events associated with *Perceptive Power*. All events took place within the Carbon Arts in-residence studio space at Design Hub, 24 April – 15 May, Wednesday – Friday 12.30 – 1.30pm

The ten lunchtime conversations and two special events invited guests from Carbon Arts’ professional network and public audiences to come together to explore key themes relating to the exhibition and the ongoing research of Carbon Arts. From the state of the renewable energy sector in Australia to the role of the artist in furthering a sustainable society, a diverse set of perspectives were drawn together within a rich narrative that enlivened the space and brought new audiences in contact with the works. It is estimated that over 200 people participated in the events.

Reader’s note: Published here is the original public program promotional text, accompanied by reflective, post-event summaries.

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Friday 24 April » 12.30 – 1.30pm
Making Sense of Echology: Challenges of data representation in public space

Guests will offer a critical review of the *Echology: Making Sense of Data* project led by ANAT and Carbon Arts, with an updated view of global and Australian practice in the field of data representation in public art.

Invited guests:

Vicki Sowry, Director, Australian Network of Art and Technology
 Greg More, SIAL RMIT / OOM Creative

Summary: *Echology: Making Sense of Data* aimed to foster innovative data representation in public art, and to integrate this with the sustainability of a precinct. A ‘seed, grow and propagate’ model was used, seeding the idea with a seminar tour of leading international data art practitioners, growing the practice by running a commission for public artworks with Lend Lease, and propagating it through the creation of new initiatives, such as *Sensing Sydney* which birthed the *Building Run* public art commission.

Despite these successes, *Echology* did not result in finished commissions. The ambitions of the initiative to both introduce a data practice to non-data artists at the same time as introducing this emerging art form to a developer entailed a lot of risk. Many artists responding to the brief found it too vast and intimidating; a more constrained scope may have resulted in better proposals. The panel’s choice to select two of the commissions from the international artists in the seminar tour reflected upon these factors, but was controversial.

While technically it is getting easier to build dynamic, sensor-based installations than ever before, there’s still a lot of difficulty in realising such works in the public realm. Complex art projects like these could learn from the design profession, in particular, incremental prototyping and service design are useful constructs for guiding experimentation with a set of stakeholders.

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Wednesday 29 April » 12.30 – 1.30pm
The Art of Open Data Platforms: Participatory democracy in the smart city

In this session, we look at a number of recent initiatives in Melbourne that have engaged the public through creative open data platforms, from City of Melbourne trees that respond to your email to buildings that run. Are these projects, and many others like them, successful in changing the relationship between a citizen and their environment? And will they result in a positive shift in the perception of ‘opening data’?

Invited guests:

Dr. Steven Manos, Director of Research Platform Services, University of Melbourne
 Steve Bennett, Open Knowledge Foundation Open Data Ambassador
 Craig Roussac, CEO, Buildings Alive
 Lorraine Tighe, Smart City and Innovation Program Manager, City of Melbourne

Summary:

Smart cities mean different things to different people. Individual entities such as councils only control a fraction of the data that makes up a smart city. So for effective planning to happen, different agencies need to collaborate. Forging these relationships is key. Similar issues exist within a physical building context. Sensors, environmental controls and other systems all talk to different authorities, like utilities and security, each with their own protected interests. Read only platforms are now being developed to amass this data without needing permission, facilitating better integration.

If you automate everything in the smart city you are taking away control, choice and decision-making power from people. Systems should be designed so that there are feedback loops with the public. Citizen science is a good way to get people involved. Bioblitz in the City of Melbourne was a successful example. We need to help people to understand the challenges of government and not be afraid of getting it wrong sometimes. A big challenge is bridging the gap between the data collected and how it gets applied back into the organisation. There’s no point crowd-sourcing data on a problem if there are no resources to address it. Ultimately it’s about posing the right questions.

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Thursday 30 April » 12.30 – 1.30pm
The Economics of Art: On the relationship between arts and industry

Is the critical voice of the artist, acting independently of benefactors, the strongest position from which to leverage change? Or is the artist most effective when working as a change agent in collaboration with government and industry partners? Different perspectives are explored on the funding of art and how this influences and guides art’s role in society.

Invited guests:

Esther Anatolitis, Director of Regional Arts Victoria, and co-curator of Architecture+Philosophy
 Pippa Dickson, CEO, Glenorchy Art and Sculpture Park
 Liz Dunn, Artistic Associate, Aphids

Summary: One of the profound changes with regard to the economics of art in the past 30 to 40 years is the emergence of public funding for art. This has enabled a different approach to art, encouraging a ‘public good’ aspect, affecting the way people make artwork and changing the status of artists. As a result, artists have been able to work thematically and more collaboratively, to bring wealth to a community through a publicly funded project. Projects like Regional Arts Victoria’s Small Towns Transformations offer artists the chance to drive powerful social change.

Artists working in this way can often have a difficult job to manage funder objectives, maintain the trust of a community and at the same time pursue artistic freedom. Arts organisations can be strong allies in this regard, offering validity, profile and support, particularly with strategic management of potential conflict. However, arts organisations also operate in constrained environments. Accountable to a community, a board and the necessity of fund-raising, they may not always be in the position to support the most provocative work. Artists working independently of such restraints can naturally be more critical and forthright. Ultimately a diversity of approaches, including the collaborator and the provocateur, need financial support if artists are to be effective agents of change.

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Friday 1 May » 12.30 – 1.30pm
Place-making for Sustainability: The role of public art

How can artists and urban designers help us reconnect with the often hidden or submerged environmental infrastructures in a city, such as energy, water or waste systems and natural ecologies? What are the potential benefits of bringing these to the surface?

Invited guests:
 Gilbert Rochecoste, Founder and Managing Director, Village Well
 Hugh Adamson, Co-Founder & Associate, CoDesign Studio
 Tom Civil, Artist

Summary: The dominant approach to development has long been one based on encouraging consumerism. A new language is taking hold, that of 'place-making' and 'tactical urbanism' that fosters all human flourishing, not just shopping! By integrating art with the overall vision for a precinct, in a strategic way, we can work creatively with budgets to introduce opportunities for artists to shape design. In terms of sustainability, public art can encourage us to reclaim our natural assets in order to rebuild important connections for our survival. Simple signposting of a submerged ecology can be very effective.

Thriving places are typically ones where everyone has the freedom to create something in the public realm. We need to bring this oxygen to communities for self-expression. Imagine if we had four blocks of a city open for civic experimentation. Street art exists as an interesting example of a condoned, anarchic, participatory architecture. Tactical approaches to art-making speak to the importance of artistic critique to the vibrancy of public life. Creative producers can gradually encourage developers to take on the risk of commissioning artistic freedom, building trust and a culture for experimentation over time.

Wednesday 6 May » 12.30 – 1.30pm
Collapsing Roles: The artist, curator and creative producer

Does the particular nature of politically and socially engaged art, such as that focusing on sustainability, demand a collapsing of roles? How is this work, which seeks to sculpt the world around us, best presented in a gallery space?

Invited guests:
 Dr Geoff Hogg, Director, Centre of Art Society and Transformation, RMIT
 Fleur Watson and Kate Rhodes, Curators, RMIT Design Hub
 Tin Nguyen and Ed Cutting, Tin & Ed
 Damian Smith, Design and Social Context, CAST, RMIT University

Summary: While issue-based art is not new, the complexity of today's issues – notably climate change – is seeing a shift in the way arts workers operate. Like scientists, they are working more in teams, working across multiple disciplines and blurring the lines between research, production and mediation. Access to skills and knowledge is also greater than ever before. We are in the age of liquid knowledge, where one person alone can realise a film. Within the gallery space, we are seeing artists and designers become the initiators of the mediation of their work, running workshops or panels. This increased agency of artists offers new challenges to curators to direct and foster this agency.

The emerging issue-based artists of today are also less interested in the gallery space and seek to work 'in the world'. Curating public space is the new challenge, which brings added complexities for artists and creative producers alike. Collapsing roles is energising for art, but it's also problematic, because art does something that is different to design or to curation. Art makes you see something in a new way. Creative producers and curators can give artists the space to support that role. Perhaps returning to some kind of defining position for each of these roles is now required.

Thursday 7 May » 12.30 – 1.30pm
Art+Science+Ecology: Future directions for research and education

Guests will share their experience of different models that encourage collaboration between artists and scientists within universities, with a view to developing an ecologically focused stream of study in Melbourne.

Invited guests:
 Dr Jordan Lacey, Lecturer, Architecture and Design, RMIT / Artist
 Dr Renee Beale, Cultural Programs Manager, Carlton Connect Initiative, and Science Communicator & Curator, School of Chemistry, University of Melbourne
 Dr Ascelin Gordon, Research Fellow in the Interdisciplinary Conservation Science Research Group, RMIT University

Summary: Funding for collaboration between artists and scientists has often come from a desire for scientists to communicate their findings or provide educational outreach. Increasingly, these collaborations are being seen as mutually beneficial where both professions see the benefit of the interaction in their own research. The VCA and the School of Chemistry at the University of Melbourne are now producing a series of residencies for artists that flip the traditional model to one where scientists are there to contribute to the artwork.

Pedagogical models that offer students opportunities to experience learning outside their chosen field, such as the New Worlds unit within the undergraduate photography program at Deakin University, are energising and often result in great projects and positive feedback. Ideally, more of these opportunities are offered to students, not least because the challenges we face today as a society demand diverse skill sets and perspectives to drive innovation. Residencies can be particularly rewarding, because they offer a freedom to explore and if the relationships are right can lead to great things.

Pushing this barrow within a university or research context can be difficult unless KPIs, e.g. for research outcomes, are broadened. But the time has come for Australia to catch up with the rest of the world and start offering dedicated degrees in art and science. New models of online learning also offer excellent cross-university platforms.



Top: Future Crunch event on the Future of Energy. Photograph by Tane Hunter; Bottom left: A Conversation with the Inevitable, Lea Rose Counsels, Matt Wiching and Angharad Wynne-Jones. Photograph by Jodi Newcombe; Bottom right: Making Sense of Ecology, Jodi Newcombe leads a salon event in the Carbon Arts-in-residence space. Photograph by Tobias Titz.

Friday 8 May » 12.30 – 1.30pm
Service Design for Energy Efficiency: Impossible behaviour to change?

A diverse set of practitioners provides a critical examination of the language and pathways employed to encourage behavioural and cultural shifts in relation to energy consumption. Have we learned from what has failed? Are we being creative enough in our approach?

Invited guests:

Adam Morris and Damon O’Sullivan, Founding Directors, Thick
 Dr Mark Elliott, Managing Director & Founder, Collabforge
 Rob Murray-Leach, CEO, Energy Efficiency Council

Summary: Behavioural barriers, which are very real, have been turbo charged by the way we run the energy market. Australians are currently being force-fed energy. We have to create a desire for change in order to drive it. It’s about selling people a vision of a better lifestyle and changing the national conversation. The progress being made taking small towns off the grid is really exciting. If we can get the cultural change in Wagga Wagga, it will be hard for doubters to convince people it’s a ‘crazy greenie thing’.

On the consumer side, exciting things are happening too, with gadgets like Nest and the new Tesla battery. What if our Fitbits told us about our electricity consumption? Every utility is currently trying to crack the nut of timely, engaging data provision, but they’re working within behemoth systems. We need to design separately for incentives and motivations. Incentives are extrinsic, driven by the bigger system, and motivations are intrinsic, driven by human behaviour. Maybe our energy meters should have the voice of our mothers, shaming us to do better!

Finally, energy savings equals money, which should be sufficient fuel for driving change. Forget about the technology, the most powerful tool is information on energy performance and a convincing business case, such as legislating disclosing energy bills as part of home rental rates.

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Wednesday 13 May » 12.30 – 3pm
DOUBLE BILL: featuring artists and curators also exhibiting for ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2015

12.30 – 1.30pm

The Historical Roots of an Emerging Practice: Art and sustainability

Artists, academics and curators working in the art and environment sector will share their research and experience of this emerging field, drawing on inspiring references from the past to say something about its significance and future direction.

Invited guests:

Dr Grace McQuilten, Vice-Chancellor’s Research Fellow, RMIT University
 Jen Rae, School of Art, RMIT / Artist / RMIT AEGIS Research Network
 Dr Debbie Symons, Artist / RMIT AEGIS Research Network
 Jasmine Targett, Artist / RMIT AEGIS Research Network

Summary: A lot of environmental practice is process based, it doesn’t trade in the same way as other art. For this reason it has been largely ignored by the art world since the 1960s. Working in this area in the 1990s was not cool at all. Early influences, like the Romantics’ depictions of industrialisation’s impact on the landscape, were very powerful. It’s important to depict frightening situations with beauty, to encourage people to spend time with a subject and contemplate it. When you scare people, they shut down.

Artists need to move beyond raising awareness. People are aware. Environmental artists are working with schools and rural communities, out in the world, moving beyond the cloistered gallery space. It does lead to a schizophrenic relationship with the art world. There’s a constant question of how do we navigate the poetics of a work with the environmental and educational benefits. Ultimately, the reward comes from the audience response. A new visual vernacular is being created, a whole community is engaged, new connections between cause and effect are drawn. Many artists are driven by both a sense of responsibility and a need to process the information they are receiving from scientists and other experts. It’s important work.

2 – 3 pm

Projecting Possible Futures: Collaborative design approaches to address climate change

The discussion will draw on the experience of the Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab’s Visions 2040 project for Melbourne and RMIT d-Lab’s Phase project at the Tarrawarra Museum of Art examining the impact of global warming in the Yarra Valley.

Invited guests:

Prof Chris Ryan, Director VEIL (Victorian Eco Innovation Lab), University of Melbourne
 Dr Michael Trudgeon, RMIT d-Lab / Crowd Productions / Deputy Director VEIL, University of Melbourne

Summary: One of the great skills of designers is to be able to construct visualisations of the future. As long as these are not over-specified, they work wonderfully as dialogic objects to engage people in an iterative conversation about where we’re headed and how it could be different. Working with artists and designers in this way provides an effective bridge between research and science and the means to implement change. In the face of unprecedented and overwhelming challenges, such as sea levels rising, city councils are becoming more open to alternative ways of problem solving.

As informed and enthusiastic young designers, students are a huge, untapped resource and, like artists, can be disarming enough to win the trust of both citizens and policy-makers. By working with masters’ level design students in visioning projects with councils, VEIL and d-Lab are developing a successful model of engagement that has seen tangible outcomes in places like Hume City Council. Embracing experimentation, creativity and risk-taking is part of this success, and will become increasingly important in order to counter the constraints of democracy during a time of rapid societal transition.

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Thursday 14 May » 12.30 – 1.30pm
A Conversation with the Inevitable: Confronting climate change and death

In a unique performative conversation, Angharad Wynne Jones and Matt Wicking invite grief and bereavement counsellor, Lea Rose to offer an open session about confronting the end of life and end of the world of we know it.

Invited guests:

Angharad Wynne-Jones, Artistic Director, Arts House / Founding Director, TippingPoint Australia
 Matt Wicking, musician, sustainability consultant and educator
 Lea Rose, Living and Dying Well Centre

Summary: Matt, Angharad and Lea experimented with making a grief counselling session public in the hope that the benefits of that process might be useful in the way we live with the inevitable grief many of us feel for our changing world. As environmental activists, they are struck by the disconnect between the rhetoric of hope that enfuses much current sustainability advocacy and the more private sharings between those same advocates who admit to feeling despair about the future.

This ‘performance’ is a step towards healing our relationship with the planet; asking what is it that makes life worth living at this time, what is our truth and purpose in life and death, and how can we live life so that at the end of it we may die in peace? It was an unprepared and raw grief counselling session that generated a very different kind of discussion among those who attended, together facing the fact that the planet we know is dying. In that way, it was an opportunity to turn pain into something that can be lived authentically and perhaps even transformed into a powerful force for change in our own lives and the lives of others.

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Friday 15 May » 12.30 – 1.30pm
Exploring Video Artforms: From documentary to performance

What are the different ways that artists are employing the medium of video to present their ideas and how does this invite different modes of perception? Artists from *Perceptive Power* and RMIT share their modes of production, philosophical and historical contexts that inform their video artworks.

Invited guests:

Ash Keating, Artist
 Keith Deverell, Artist
 Dr Dominic Redfern, Artist / School of Art, RMIT

Summary: We’re at a moment when video technology is accelerating which provides a great opportunity for looking at things closely. That re-seeing is a core strategy of artists. Cinematic production, say in 4K, allows a work to be created that is all encompassing and meditative. The greater and greater detail that we’re getting with improving technology is enticing. This scale allows a dialogue with big ideas, like human identity and existence. Presentation of the work then becomes a challenge – will it ever be possible to show it in a large enough format?

It’s not just about increasing fidelity; it’s also about where you can put cameras. Cameras are getting bigger, but they’re also becoming tiny. Drones allow us to go beyond the cinematic. But there’s also something wonderful about the analogue signal. There are so many ways to play with camera technologies and broadcast media, to play with degradation and the digital artifact – old TVs, security cameras. It becomes a reflection on technology itself. Video art is also a practice of place making. Multiple screen environments break down the idea of the edit offering people their own way to navigate the work. Sound is an essential part of creating this immersive environment.

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SPECIAL EVENT

Future Crunch: The Future of Energy
 » Project Room 1, Level 2, Design Hub
 Tuesday 28 April, 6.15 – 7.30pm

Renewable energy has finally come of age. Thanks to new technologies, policy changes, and investment growth rates for the global solar and wind industries now outstrip coal and natural gas, and the effects are slowly starting to be felt. In 2014 for the first time in 40 years, global CO2 emissions decoupled from global economic growth. Meanwhile, the fossil fuel divestment movement gathers pace, and in the imaginations of a coterie of engineers, physicists and artists an alternative world is taking shape.

Panelists:

Dr Phil Blythe, Founder and Managing Director, GreenSync
 Alicia Webb, Senior Policy Advisor, Clean Energy Council
 Tosh Szatow, Director and Co-Founder, Energy for the People and The People’s Solar
 Jodi Newcombe, Director, Carbon Arts and Researcher at RMIT’s Centre for Art, Society and Transformation

Summary: All four speakers agreed that the past year had been a difficult time. The renewable energy industry has become something of a political football in Australia, and all the speakers had been affected in some way, whether it was job losses in the industry, lack of investment or the drying up of funding. That said, there appears to be strong signs of hope especially in the community sector, which was seeing an explosion of interest in developing alternative energy models.

A range of promising technologies, especially in the area of battery storage, are also making the economic case for renewables more compelling by the year. This means that the ‘tipping point’ is no longer a matter of ‘if’ but ‘when’. There were also signs of hope in the fossil fuel divestment movement, whose arguments about stranded assets increasingly seem to be hitting home to large financial institutions. After a number of false starts, Australia appears to be once again on the cusp of a full-scale revolution of the energy industry.

