

preservation of history which is a result of rapid urbanisation. Agdag's *The Control*, an invented architectural control tower made from intricately-pieced-together pieces of Enviro-board and paper, warns us about the fragility of our mechanised society. In *Hard Rubbish*, a 'cast' of an old chair made from tissue paper and PVA, Kuter replicates the form of an otherwise discarded object in an ephemeral, transparent material, questioning our penchant for over-consumption and the value in preserving the past.

In his installation *Better Days*, a wasteland of old and new technologies, **Ryan James** presents progress simultaneously as a creative and destructive force. Many of the artists ask us, 'what is the price paid for the pursuit of technological advancement?'

Loss is a recurring theme throughout *3D Sustainability*. The depletion of natural resources concerns the work of **Mimi Dennett** and **Oonagh McGowan**. In *The Picnic is Over* Dennett creates a fish skeleton out of a picnic blanket, which is 'swimming' in a Perspex tank, to comment on unsustainable fishing practices. McGowan's interactive installation is similarly titled *The Party's Over*, but concerns itself with the recent shortage of helium - a non-renewable resource at once used in serious scientific and medical applications and for frivolous party balloons. The filled balloons that comprise the work are tethered, but with the availability of scissors, the viewer has the potential to pop or untie them, and perversely participate in wasting this valuable element.

The subject of natural resources is also central to **Jenn Bishop's** *Rain Machine - Gimme Shelter*, which was conceived during the ten year Australian drought. It is an experimental sculpture that has both earnest and whimsical elements. The viewer is able to create a rain 'storm' while being protected from it, but is also reminded of how precarious the availability of fresh water, arguably our most precious and valuable resource, is.

Candy Stevens' work *Mother's Milk*, an installation of a life-sized cow and its calf, made from wire covered in living wheat

grass, is similarly double-edged. On the one hand the work is a playful conflation of an animal and its paddock. On the other hand, it asks serious questions about the farming industry and its impact on our environment and our health.

These questions are encouraged in **Kathy Holowko's** outdoor installation *Please Do Touch the Artwork*, a circular site comprised of joined reclaimed wooden chairs. Holowko deliberately creates an interactive, social space that facilitates dialogue about the artworks, and the ideas and debate they inspire. And so, the exhibition comes full-circle.

3D Sustainability continues the conversation about sustainability in the arts and beyond, showcasing some of the varied directions Victorian sculptors and installation artists are taking. Although the works demonstrate a diversity of technique and style, from suspended structures and floor installations to interactive pieces and more traditional sculptures, many of the artists explore similar concepts and materials. The impact of urbanisation and technological advancement on the environment is a common concern, with the use of reclaimed and natural materials featuring strongly across the exhibition. Other issues include the importance of cultural heritage in creating a sustainable society, the depletion of natural resources and the legacy of colonisation. Overall, *3D Sustainability* promotes inquiry, debate and action in the viewer, with artists reflecting on the beauty, banality and challenges of living in a society in transition.

By Stephanie Karavasilis
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3D Sustainability

3D Sustainability
Yarra Sculpture Gallery
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Curators: Stephanie Karavasilis, Ryan James and Kathy Holowko
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Design: Kathy Holowko

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THE YARRA SCULPTURE GALLERY PRESENTS

3D Sustainability

The premier arts event for the 2013 Sustainable Living Festival



Candy Stevens, *Mother's Milk* / Stephanie Karavasilis, *All That Remains* (detail) / Wona Bae, *Pebbles*

ART AND SUSTAINABILITY: A DIALOGUE

There is no doubt that creativity is the most important human resource of all. Without creativity, there would be no progress, and we would be forever repeating the same patterns. - Edward de Bono, Sur/Petition, 1992

The relationship between art and sustainability is a fraught and complex one. 'Sustainability' has quickly become a buzzword in politics, commerce, science, media and the arts in a relatively short space of time, and is often used merely as shorthand for 'environmentally friendly'. And while this is not without value, artists can contribute to a more nuanced and complicated understanding of sustainability, both through their practice and their work.

Art is one of life's most sustaining phenomena; cave paintings dating back 40,000 years have been discovered in Spain, and the oldest dated rock art in Australia is 28,000 years old. This suggests

that art is not only physically enduring, but spiritually and culturally necessary for humankind. The irony, however, is that by the very process of creating artworks, artists are entering a system that is not ecologically sustainable. Artworks put pressure on the environment through their use of resources, from creation and storage to transportation, conservation and exhibition. Nevertheless, it is not practical or desirable to suggest that art be sacrificed for the survival of the planet. True sustainability is the harmonious relationship between humankind and the earth. At the United Nations 2005 World Summit it was noted that this requires

integration of three interdependent and mutually reinforcing 'pillars': economic development, social equity and environmental protection.

Like all of us, artists need to be mindful of their ecological footprint and consider ways to lessen their impact on the environment, whether through reducing consumption and waste, using environmentally friendly products and/or recycling and re-using materials.

Artists have always been resourceful and, by extension, used reclaimed materials, sometimes out of necessity, often for innovation and commonly for their inherent aesthetic properties. Pablo Picasso is attributed with inventing collage by being the first artist to paste a piece of discarded material - imitation-woodgrain wallpaper - to a surface, but this was an aesthetic and creative rather than political act. Similarly, when materials have been scarce or too expensive, artists scavenge, salvage and make-do, re-purposing otherwise unwanted materials. In the *9 by 5 Impression Exhibition* of 1889, Australian impressionists - Charles Conder, Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton - showed works painted on cigar box lids collected from tobacconists. Joy Hester, who turned to drawing partly because she could not afford canvas or even board, once bashed a piece of discarded tin flat so that she could paint on it. Rosalie Gascoigne was a self-confessed gleaner, collecting all manner of waste for her stunning assemblages and sculptural installations: abandoned street signs, shed feathers, old lino floor tiles, eroded enamelware, wooden soft-drink crates, dried flora and rusted corrugated iron. Having studied Ikebana, she was a natural arranger who was attracted to the beauty in the mundane and the weathered.

Would we call these artists' practices sustainable?

Sustainability in art, as in the broader cultural context, is not about simple solutions, popular adages - 'reduce, re-use, recycle' - or even the individual pursuit of a carbon neutral footprint. While the latter is an admirable and useful step, it does not address the complex, sometimes discordant, nature of sustainability within

our society. Sustainability is, I would argue, as much about the conversation and choices we make as a global community as it is about how individuals live.

Sustainability is about maintaining essential ecosystems and managing our limited natural resources to provide for the wellbeing of future generations. It is about enabling all people, not just those in the Western world, to have a high quality of life without depleting that which sustains life. It is as much about social responsibility as it is about managing climate change, species extinction, habitat loss, population growth, pollution, resource depletion, urbanisation and over-consumption. It requires empathy, dialogue and support for people to change entrenched behaviours and thought patterns as much as it does scientific research, economic planning and policy implementation. It asks us as a species to consider and connect with the natural environment, a difficult and often elusive concept, particularly for non-indigenous and urban Australians. Our colonial past means that conquering the unknown is more familiar to us than seeking to live in harmony with it. Colonial Australian artists were drawn to representing the natural world, but this was often in the form of wonder, awe, fear and domination. Our disconnection from the natural environment means that belief in climate change only peaks when we are directly affected by severe weather conditions like flood and drought. At the same time, there is a groundswell within Australia for more sustainable practices.

Artists have always contributed to the development of society and provided innovative ways of seeing. As much as scientists, activists, politicians and economists need to lead the discussion on climate change and sustainable futures, artists are integral to the dialogue. Art is engaging and as well as, or indeed instead of, providing solutions, it asks questions, inspires debate, critiques the status quo and encourages creativity - all necessary for the development of a sustainable society and the uptake of sustainable living.

Contemporary artists keep the conversation going, engage the public

in ideas and possibilities when they are fatigued with statistics, weary from political argy-bargy and confused by the climate change 'debate'. Artists' practices are inherently multi-disciplinary. Art occupies a space where concepts, aesthetics and making intersect. Contemporary artists draw from science, nature, technology, history, architecture, economics, mythology and anthropology, aesthetically and conceptually.

Three-dimensional artworks are particularly well-suited to explorations of sustainability, with their emphasis on form and tactility, and through their relationships to space and the immediate environment. *3D Sustainability* showcases both the range and depth of artistic conversations in contemporary sculpture and installation art.

The use of reclaimed, foraged and organic materials is integral to many of the works in the exhibition. **Tony Adams** is interested in bio-diversity and habitat-loss, creating a refuge for pollinating and pest-controlling insects by stacking salvaged and natural materials in *Insekten Hotel*. **Teresa Bennett** crochets imagined, nest-like habitats from cellophane and redundant video tape in *High Rise*, re-purposing discarded materials like the birds that inspire her. **Liz Walker, Mandy Gunn, Charles Lawler** and **Stephen Hughes** collect materials that would otherwise become waste, and in so doing comment on the impact of human intervention on the natural environment. Walker manipulates reclaimed roofing iron in *If I Bring Lunch, Will You Stay?*, creating the illusion of a soft bag from hard metal, while Gunn hand-shreds and weaves the burnt-out inner tubes of tyres in *Firesticks*, referencing both bushfires and indigenous 'fire stick farming'.

The impact of urbanisation on the environment and our actions is also prevalent, both thematically and in artists' use of materials. In *Neighbourhood Watch* Lawler recycles timber and tin to create miniature landscapes that reflect on how people adapt their surroundings to suit their needs in a changing environment.

Hughes' *Sustain-a-Bowl Creation in De-fence-of a Paling World* is a more grandiose statement: a totem made from reclaimed weathered red gum fence posts and hardwood palings that reminds us of the creative potential in otherwise wasted natural resources.

Wona Bae, Jennifer Leggett and I (**Stephanie Karavasilis**) all use found sticks to create our works, although our intentions differ. While Bae is inspired by the beauty and cycles of nature, using repetition to build intuitive, organic forms in *Pebbles* and *Wishing Well*, Leggett alludes to the impact of technology on the natural world by creating digital-graphics-inspired bird designs from cut and glued native twigs in *Untitled Relief Sculptures*.

In contrast, I cover the surface of eucalyptus twigs with fragments of pages from a second-hand bible in *All That Remains*. Placing these bone-like pieces in petri dishes filled with cracked clay references the opposing forces of nature, science and faith, and intends to question what will sustain humanity physically and psychologically. The impact of colonisation on the physical environment and cultural psyche is central to both this work and **Annee Miron's** *You Are Still Part of the Commonwealth*. Miron suspends hand-plaited ropes, which are 'anchored' with a noose on one end and the Union Jack flag on the other, over the roof trusses of the gallery, reminding Australians of the colonial ties that bind us and, in turn, prevent us from gathering intimate, vital knowledge of country from indigenous custodians.

The knowledge of one's cultural heritage, which is fundamental to understanding how to live sustainably, is also central to **Susie Lachal's** aptly titled work, *Cultural Heritage*. Lachal, who spends part of each year volunteering in Cambodia, projects a laser-cut floor plan of the Temple Preah Khan, now a ruin, to draw attention to lost knowledge, particularly that of water management in the region around Lake Tonle Sap.

Daniel Agdag and **Anne-Marie Kuter** also lament the disregard for the

