



LAND

and

ART

FIELD EDITION

LAND and ART magazine is a bi annual publication covering art, land, and regionality in Australia / Internationally.

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Cover Image (Back and Front)
The Ignorant Artist - by Ryan. F Kennedy

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Editorial Article

Written By: Ryan F Kennedy and Anthony Sawrey

SOMEONE told us that LAND AND ART was like soup. We're still not entirely sure what kind of soup they meant. But we liked the idea. Soup is nourishing. It brings things together. It can be made from whatever is at hand — simple or elaborate, familiar or completely strange. It's never just one thing. Perhaps that is what we hope this magazine can do. The response to our Zero Edition was stronger than we could have imagined. It introduced us to new artists, writers and contributors, and showed us there is a real hunger for a publication that takes artists and artistic practice seriously while remaining connected to the places where that work happens.

This edition continues that experiment. Inside you'll find conversations with artists, ideas about land and place, and reflections on making and presenting contemporary art outside the usual centres. Anthony Sawrey considers Sebastian Henry-Jones and his curatorial approach to Cementa, while our cover brings us back to our own involvement with the festival through its 2025 residency program. Ryan Kennedy talks with Cameron Robbins about public art, place and the artist as a kind of barometer — someone sensitive to the forces and histories moving through a landscape. We also look at permaculture, children's drawings, regional residencies and the strange, productive territory where art, agriculture, ecology and everyday regional life overlap.

These things might not seem to belong together at first. But that is partly the point. We're interested in the connections that emerge between seemingly unrelated things — art, land and people, ideas and place, the serious and the slightly ridiculous. LAND AND ART is a place to explore contemporary art beyond the white cube and out into paddocks, towns, sheds, roadsides, community halls and the everyday life of regional places.

We hope you'll dip into it, get curious, disagree with something, find an artist you've never encountered, or stumble across an idea that resonates. A magazine doesn't have to tell you what to think. It can simply give you things to think about. And we'd like to keep that door open. If you have something to contribute — an article you can't get published elsewhere, an interview, an artist project, a regional curiosity, a festival announcement, a country show, a knitting group, an odd local story or an idea that doesn't quite fit anywhere else — give us a shout.

We're also interested in working with Edition Partners who want to support the magazine and the artists, writers and communities it connects. That might be through financial support, advertising, in-kind contributions, information sharing or simply helping us get the magazine into more hands. Have something to say? Want to support what we're doing? Get in touch. It all starts with a cuppa and a conversation.

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Inter/view: With Curator Sebastian Henry-Jones

Written by: Anthony Sawrey



Printmaking workshop by Glennys Briggs. Site School (is cool), co-curated by Sebastian Henry-Jones & Lana Nguyen for Parallel Structures, an initiative between the University of NSW, Murray Art Museum and the Community Farm, Albury Wodonga. 2024. Photograph by James T. Farley.

THE past decade has seen some significant shifts in the Australian visual arts community. And with that shift has emerged new and relatively untested conditions with which to make works. Artists who are driven to experiment with their practice and seek new avenues of collaboration and community engagement no longer have to be based in metropolitan centres. They also do not need to pursue recognition or support within a limited selection of key galleries or specific academic trajectories. New unique art spaces have moved into suburban fringes and regional Australia generating new interactions with hitherto untapped audiences, while upending the how, why, and where, of arts practice everywhere. Cementa has been at the forefront of this upheaval, driving the development of an arts ecology that has meshed, via a diverse range of artists, innovative approaches and abstract thinking with regional culture and community. The curator for the seventh iteration of Cementa is Sebastian Henry-Jones coming to Kandos with an approach strongly informed by Do It Yourself culture and social hacking, underpinned by the fundamental idea that people are creative before they are artists. Land and Art spoke with Sebastian in the lead up to the 2026 festival.

L&A: Tell me more about the idea that people are creative before they are artists.

Seb: In 2023 I curated Unison at Melbourne's West Space and that was where I came up with that idea. It came from the observation that none of the most meaningful cultural experiences I've had occurred inside of an art gallery. I think that we're all creative in our own way and that the official visual forms and languages that we learn in art class and which are reproduced in large institutions circumscribe this creative capacity in many ways. And that the scope of professionalised arts networks and infrastructure provides for cultural self expression is very narrow compared to the breadth of human imagination. It sounds really obvious but art institutions, because they are in the business of promoting artists' careers, they have to work with artists, they can't think about or work with an expanded idea of culture, they are stuck in this professional exhibition churn where they have to provide a certain number of professional opportunities to artists so they can in turn grow their careers.

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Djon Mundine, "Always Was", Cementa24 - Photo Alex Wisser

L&A: So, who has influenced you as a curator?

Seb: That would probably be Sydney's DIY community. I'm thinking about gigs and warehouse parties that were unofficial (and) were also spaces where people were encouraged to practice their politics, to think about what their politics are. Within this small scene were also what the implications were for the rest of society. These ideas then continued on in my professional career.

L&A: You are conscious of not bringing in a settler mentality when working with local communities. Has this approach been productive?

Seb: I think this just makes general sense and is best practice when it comes to putting on a festival that will have involvement from a large number of artists and audiences from out of town. With it I want to acknowledge that there is already a strong creative ecology in Kandos and the surrounding region – There are a lot of artists working locally already. Of course before all of this, Dabee Wiradjuri people practiced their culture here for thousands of years, a land-based cultural expression that comes specifically from the Country that Kandos is situated on. For me, acknowledging these already-extant layers of creativity and culture is a way of ensuring that the festival stays specific to where it happens, and something that reflects the particular quality of life in Kandos. It also ensures that the festival remains interesting and engaging to the people who make the special context of Cementa what it is.

L&A: The festival is also an overlap between indigenous heritage and European and American conceptual art. Are these difficult aspects to reconcile?

Seb: It's something that young artists and curators often approach me with questions about...(Some) participants feel very uncomfortable actually making work about...the aboriginal land they are on. If you were an outsider artist, I mean maybe you are non indigenous, don't live in Kandos and you come in and you, with the best intentions want to make a work that is in keeping with the cultural protocols of that area, the instinct is to try and find a traditional owner you can talk to.

But in the festival there are 30 something projects, 40 something artists attached to those projects so it is kind of unmanageable for one traditional owner to actually have real conversations so that is not really a viable methodology. Non-aboriginal artists may have to decide on what their relationship to a place is by actually just engaging with it on their own terms, using those histories they are hopefully equipped with. (I believe) you can string them all together into a coherent history, but that is something non indigenous artists (might be) hesitant to do.

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Double Negative - Ryan F Kennedy -Participating artists with Radical Fields at Cementa Residency- Photo by Anthony Sawrey

L&A: So should artist just fuck around and find out instead? Use your skills, throw it out there and work stuff out later?

Seb: It is not something I'm enforcing (laughs) I don't think because I have made this provocation, every work in the exhibition has to corroborate that theory. I don't think the show would be that interesting if everything was just a different example of a theme. But...I have had meetings with a lot of the artists in the exhibition about this, especially artists working with natural materials and Its really nice to be able to learn about what they think without necessarily...attempting to uphold the cultural practices of the place it's set in. But It can be both things too.

L&A: How important is the concept of 'place' in a regional town like Kandos?

Seb: Georgie Pollard always talks about the fact that regional places are more connected to 'place' and there are reasons why. It is less built up so the environment is in your face. She says a big part of this is the idea of accountability in a small town where you are not anonymous and you actually are accountable to where you are in that way. If you live in a big city like Sydney you can kind of be anonymous..you don't have to contribute to the place that you live in in an active sense. you are required to do a bit more in a smaller town. In an area that is built up the history has been built over it is just much harder to access those histories you have to go to a museum or a particular place.

But in Kandos it is everywhere.

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L&A: Are you worried about the response? What is the best outcome for you?

Seb: I'm one of the biggest critics of relational aesthetics. I subscribe to the Claire Bishop critique where relational works that exist in a museum are totally emptied of meaning. But what I'm excited about with these relational spaces in Cementa is they are not happening in art galleries. I'm also interested..to see where things go wrong and how that affects the outcome.

For me it's a total success if the festival actually happens so I'm not too concerned with assessing how good or bad particular projects are.



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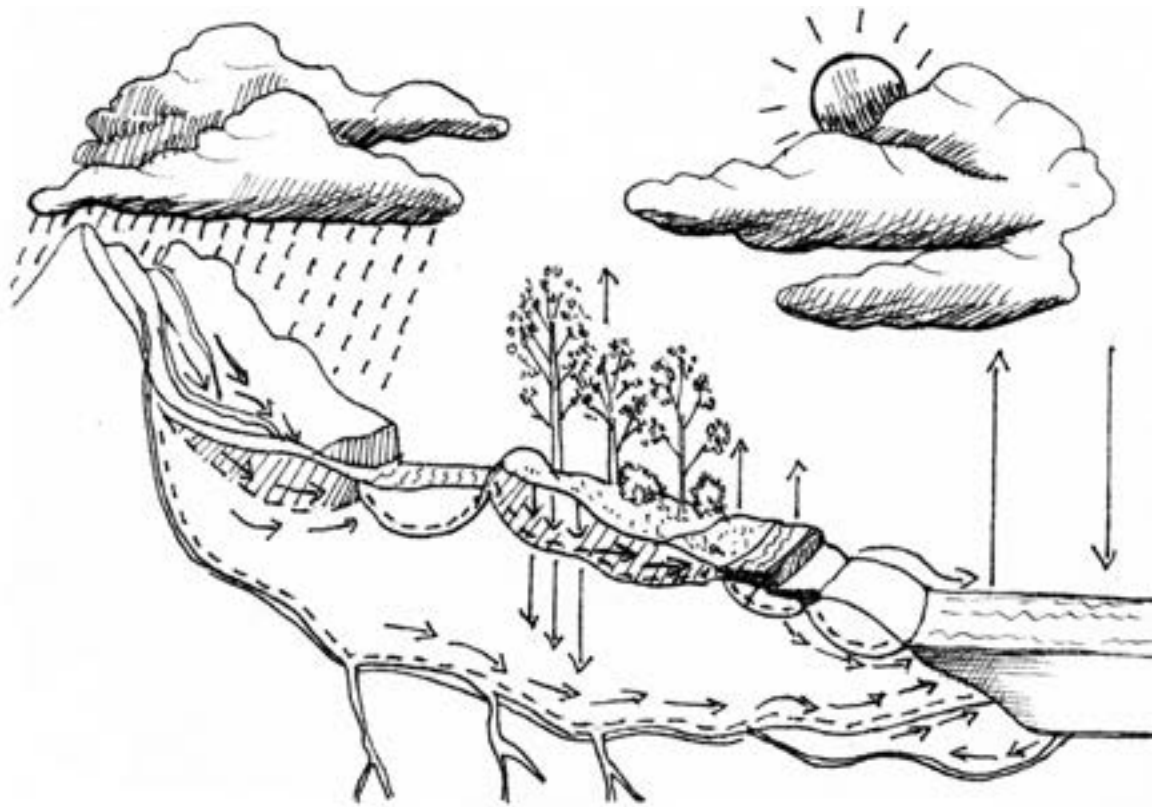
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Wisconsin, USA

Making Knowledge Portable: Art and Permatil Global in Timore-Leste

Written by: Ryan F Kennedy



Illustrated by Azibiy

LAND and ART caught up with Glenlyon local Lyn Jenkin to discuss Permatil Global, environmental education and what happens when knowledge is shared rather than simply delivered.

There is something deceptively simple about an instruction manual. Look at the picture. Understand what you are seeing. Follow the steps. Make something happen. And yet anyone who has spent an afternoon assembling flat-pack furniture knows that the gap between receiving information and actually understanding it can be considerable.

Now imagine that the information you need isn't about assembling a bookshelf. Imagine it concerns water, soil, food, forests, agriculture, climate, land management and the relationships between people and the places they live. Imagine that information needs to travel between languages, cultures, climates and communities, and that the people receiving it may have very different levels of literacy, money or formal education. How do you make knowledge portable?

This is one of the questions at the heart of Permatil Global, an Australian based organisation working across permaculture, environmental regeneration, education and community resilience globally. Its work began in Timor-Leste more than two decades ago and has grown into an international network sharing practical knowledge across the global tropics. The organisation was founded by three people — Lachlan McKenzie, Lyn Jenkin and Timor-Leste's Eugenio “Ego” Lemos — and grew from the recognition that communities already possessed enormous amounts of knowledge, while also facing enormous gaps in resources.

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Many of its illustrations were produced by Timorese artists, many are graduates of Arte Moris, the art school and not-for-profit organisation in Dili who have now started their own collective to build their livelihoods through art. The artists don't simply sit down with a completed manuscript and draw pictures to accompany it. They go into the field. They see the techniques being demonstrated, observe how things work, talk to the people using them and encounter the conditions in which the knowledge actually exists.

The process begins with visiting people and place. That sounds obvious, but it has profound consequences. A written description of a technique can tell you what something is supposed to do. Being there allows you to see what it actually does — what the soil looks like, where the water runs, how people move through a site, what problems emerge and how someone adapts to them. The illustrations that result are consequently far more than decoration. They are technical drawings, teaching tools and a form of translation. For communities with low or no literacy, an image can communicate something that a paragraph cannot. Lyn describes this as fundamental to Permatil Global's approach.



Lachlan McKenzie, co-author of the Tropical Permaculture Guidebook (left) with illustrator, Gibrael 'Aziby' Dias Soares Carcho (right)
Photo provided by Permatil Global

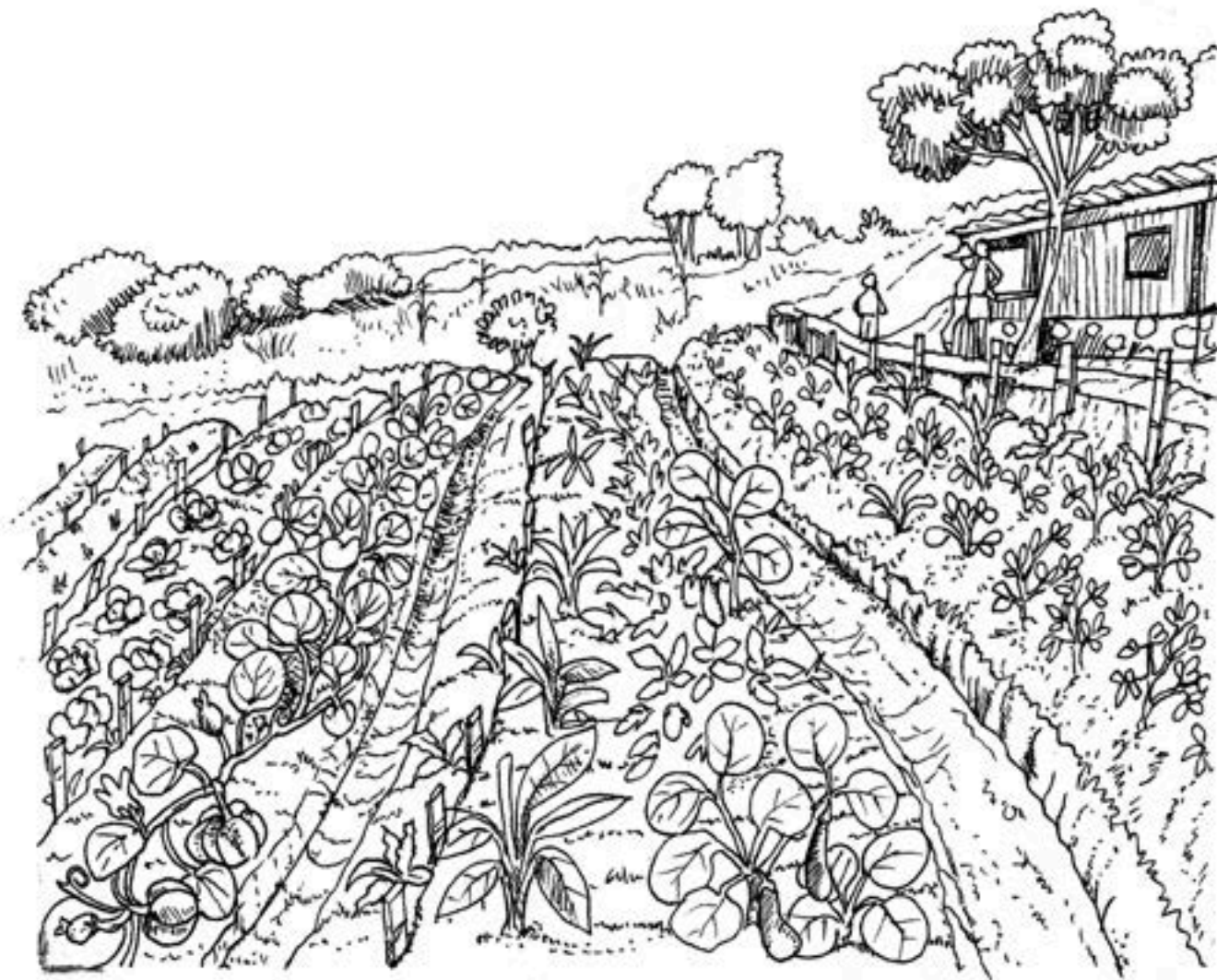
The organisation is deliberately trying to reduce language and money as barriers to education. Its resources are made available through a “pay what you can” model, and the numbers tell an interesting story: only around 20 per cent of people who access the guidebook pay for it. That isn't regarded as a failure. If anything, it confirms the reason for the model. Many of the people accessing the material simply don't have the financial means to purchase a resource that might cost a significant proportion of their annual income. The point is not to sell the knowledge but to share it.

That distinction becomes particularly important when thinking about the movement of knowledge from one place to another. Permatil began in Timor-Leste, but the guidebook has now travelled to more than 160 countries. More than 150,000 copies have been downloaded. Those numbers are impressive, but Lyn is quick to suggest that they aren't really the measure of success. The real measure is what happens afterwards: someone downloads the guidebook, reads it or looks through the drawings, tries something, changes a garden, restores a water system or shares what they have learnt with another community. Knowledge moves.

One of the phrases Lyn returns to is “learn by sharing.” Another is “the resources are designed to shape solutions, not prescribe solutions.” It is an important distinction. A prescriptive model arrives with the answer already determined. It says: this is how you do it. Permatil Global's framework is different. It provides tools and knowledge but leaves room for the people using them to respond to their own conditions. “Understanding your ecosystem is key” Lyn says, describing the importance of first mapping your environment before deciding on actions.

That principle seems almost deceptively straightforward. Before deciding what a place needs, you have to pay attention to what is already there: what water is present, what grows, what knowledge already exists, who lives there, what resources are available and what has worked before. The process of observing and mapping becomes a form of education in itself. It also begins to blur the boundary between land and art.

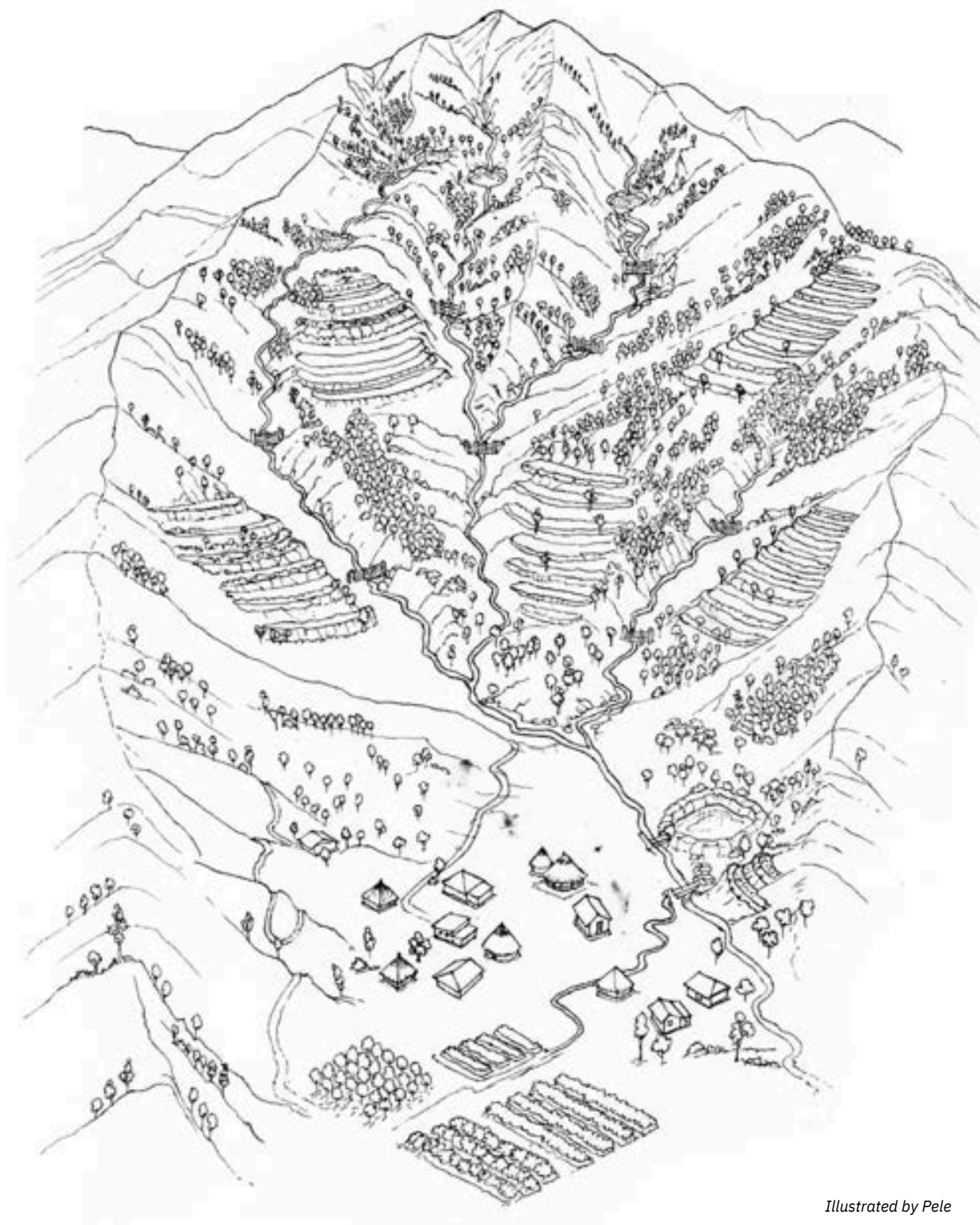
The artists working on the guidebook are not simply illustrating environmental knowledge. They are participating in the same process that Permatil asks of the communities it works with: go there, observe, listen, understand the conditions and then respond. The artist is not outside the landscape looking in. They are part of the process of understanding it. In that sense, the artist becomes something like a translator — not translating one language into another, but translating between experience, knowledge, image and action.



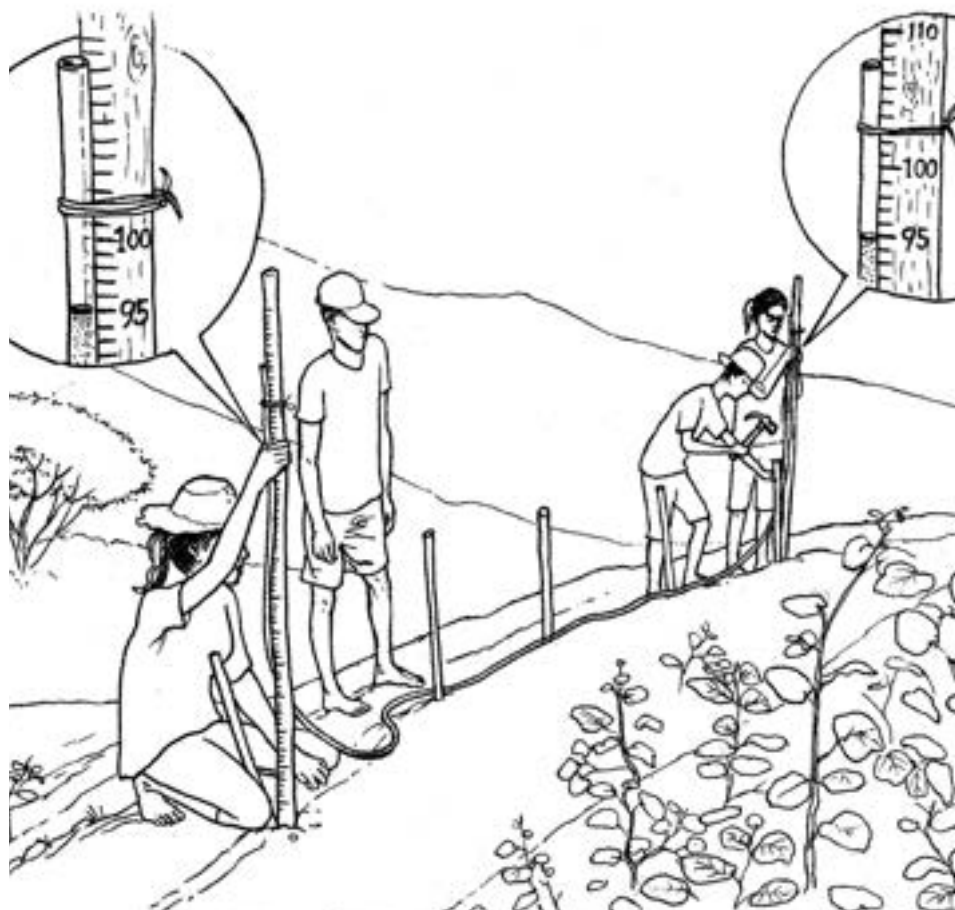
Illustrated by Gibrael 'Aziby' Dias Soares Carochó

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Lachlan McKenzie, co-author of the Tropical Permaculture Guidebook (left) with illustrator, Gibrael 'Aziby' Dias Soares Carochó (right) Photo provided by Permatil Global



Illustrated by Pele



Illustrated by Pele

Costa Georgiadis, presenter of ABC's Gardening Australia, captured something of this when he encountered the guidebook:

“When I first saw the book I was engaged by its clarity and quantity of information, the drawings and illustrations telling a thousand words and concepts. To the people that it was created to serve, the images are the communication and I felt like I had learnt so much just by flicking through the book briefly.”

That last point is important. You can learn by looking. And perhaps more importantly, you can begin to recognise that you are capable of learning. There is an interesting parallel here with Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, which challenges the assumption that education must begin with one person who possesses knowledge and another who doesn't. The premise is radical but simple: intellectual inequality should not be confused with inequality of circumstance.

People may have radically different access to resources, education and opportunity without being radically different in their capacity to think. Permatil Global's use of images seems to operate within this territory. The guidebook does not need to assume that the person looking at it is incapable because they cannot read a complex technical document. Instead, it asks: what other ways can knowledge be communicated? And then it provides them.

This is particularly visible in the work of the artists. The illustrations are highly technical. They have to show processes accurately enough to be useful, while remaining understandable without relying entirely on written language. There is something wonderfully practical about this. Art isn't being asked to make the information beautiful. It is being asked to make theory usable. And yet, in doing so, the images become something more than diagrams. They become part of a visual language through which knowledge can move.

That movement is now increasingly global. Permatil Global works with like-minded organisations and groups in different parts of the world, supporting local implementation rather than simply reproducing a Timor-Leste model somewhere else. This is where the distinction between exporting and sharing becomes important. The guidebook began in one particular place, but the knowledge inside it is referred to as a gift from Timor-Leste to be adapted to other communities / ecosystems. Soil changes. Rainfall changes. Plants change. People change. The relationships between communities and their environments change.

The resource provides a wealth of knowledge and tools, but the application belongs to the people using it. The model, in other words, is not copy and paste. It is observe, adapt and share. Perhaps this is why Lyn says the two ideas — sharing knowledge globally and exporting a model — can ultimately become the same thing. Knowledge is a framework that communities can use, change and pass on according to their own circumstances. The success of that approach is visible in the reach of the project. Permatil Global's work now extends across more than 160 countries, with the vast majority of guidebook downloads coming from communities within the global tropical belt — the very regions for which the resources were initially developed.

But again, the numbers aren't really the story. The story is what happens after the download.

Permatil has continued to develop youth programs, community education, water restoration and environmental initiatives. Its PermaYouth work brings young people into practical learning around food, water, climate and ecological resilience. And there is a particularly powerful idea sitting underneath all of this: knowledge is not complete until it is applied. In some of Permatil's programs, participants don't receive their certificate simply for attending a course. They receive it after demonstrating that they have put the knowledge into practice. The distinction is significant. Learning isn't something that ends when the teacher stops talking. It becomes learning when action is taken: a garden is planted, a catchment is restored, a technique is shared, a young person teaches someone else or a community takes an idea and makes it their own.

This is perhaps where Ego Lemos's philosophy becomes particularly powerful. His work in Timor-Leste has earned international recognition, including the Medal of Timor-Leste and other major environmental and ecological honours, but his approach remains grounded in the relationship between people and land. One phrase associated with Ego captures that relationship beautifully: "The forest looks after me, now I look after the forest."

It is difficult to imagine a simpler definition of reciprocity. It also changes the direction of education. Rather than seeing the environment as an object that needs to be managed, the relationship becomes reciprocal. The land provides something to us, and our responsibility is to learn how to provide something back. That idea runs through Permatil's work. It begins with mapping your environment because you don't know what you've got until you look. It continues through visiting people and places before deciding what should happen. It appears in the insistence that resources should shape rather than prescribe. And it is reflected in the guidebook itself, where knowledge gathered from particular landscapes is turned into something portable — something that can travel without pretending that every place is the same.

Regional art is often described in terms of place, but there is a danger in treating place as simply a backdrop. Place is not scenery. It is knowledge. It is history, weather, soil, infrastructure, memory, language, plants, animals, people and the accumulated ways that communities have learnt to survive within particular conditions. To work with place is therefore to pay attention. And paying attention is itself a creative act. The Permatil artists demonstrate this in an unusually literal way. They enter a landscape, observe what is happening and translate that experience into images that allow somebody else to understand it. The organisation does much the same thing at a larger scale. It listens to communities, observes their environments and works with existing knowledge before developing resources. The process is circular rather than linear. Knowledge is gathered, shared, adapted and put into practice, and then new knowledge emerges and travels back into the network. This seems particularly important at a time when environmental problems are increasingly discussed as global problems requiring universal solutions. There is an obvious need for global knowledge, but there is an equally obvious danger in assuming that global knowledge should mean one global answer.

Permatil Global offers another possibility. Perhaps what we need to circulate isn't a universal solution but a shared capacity to observe, experiment, adapt and learn from one another. A set of tools rather than a set of instructions. A framework rather than a formula. A way of looking rather than a prescription.

And perhaps art has a role in making that possible. Not because art can solve environmental problems, but because artists are often good at paying attention to things that are easily overlooked — relationships, patterns, changes, contradictions and the particular qualities of a place. The artist entering a field to draw a technique is doing something surprisingly close to the community member entering that same field to understand their own environment. Both begin by being on land.

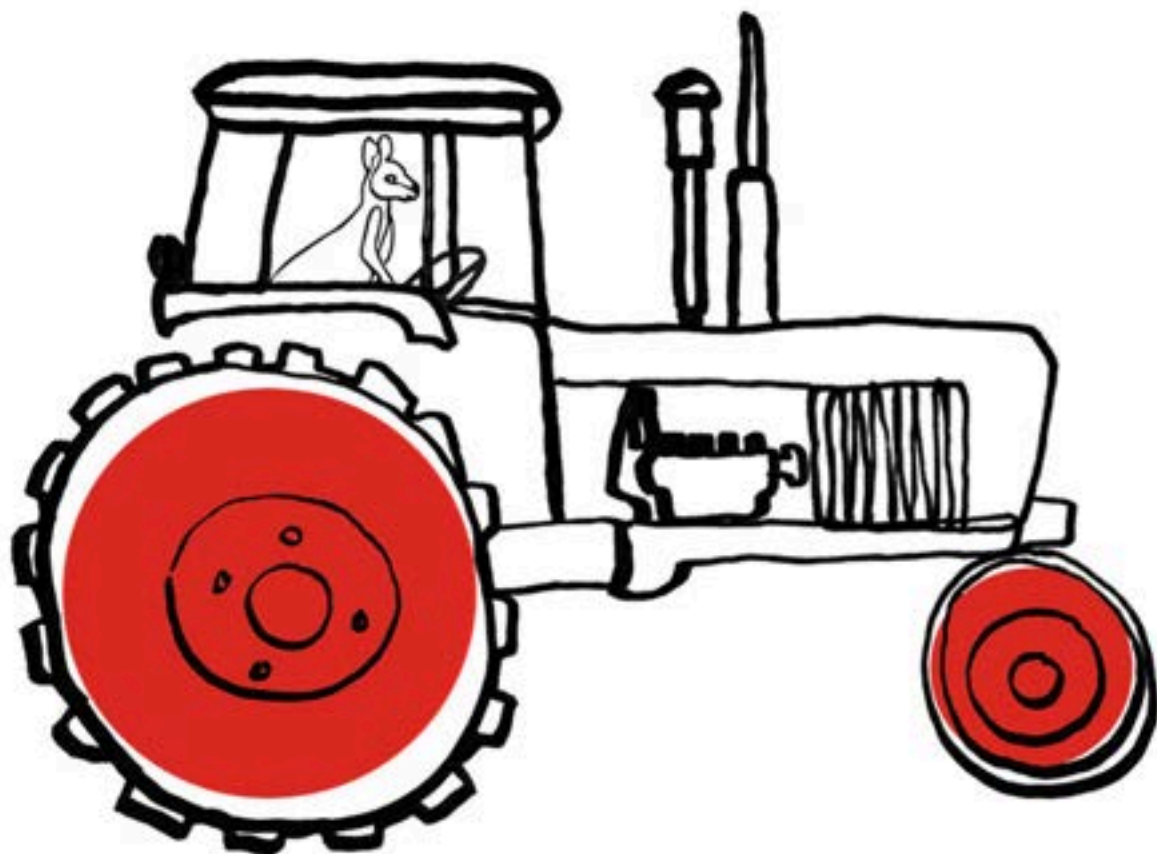
The next volume of the Tropical Permaculture Guidebook is being developed around water restoration and catchment management. Once again, the process begins on the ground, with people, knowledge and place, and with a new generation of illustrators translating what they encounter into another form. There is something fitting about this. The first books grew from knowledge gathered through communities and landscapes in Timor-Leste. Those books travelled around the world. They have been downloaded, read, looked at and acted upon across thousands of communities. Now that knowledge is producing new knowledge.

The process continues. Perhaps that is the real achievement of Permatil Global. And perhaps, ultimately, that is what makes knowledge genuinely portable: not that it arrives unchanged, but that it arrives with enough life left in it to be nurtured into something new.

For more information visit:
permatilglobal.org

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*The co-founders of Permatil Global and producers of the Tropical Permaculture Guidebook, Ego Lemos (left) Lyn Jenkin (centre) and Lachlan McKenzie (right)
Photo provided by Permatil Global*



RADICAL FIELDS

Serious / Play
Glenlyon, Vic



Q&A: Cameron Robbins ; Artists As Barometer

Written by: Ryan F Kennedy



Wind Drawing by Cameron Robbins - Photo By Ryan F Kennedy

CAMERON Robbins is an international artist based in Castlemaine on Dja Dja Wurrung Country in central Victoria, Australia. For more than three decades, his work has explored what happens when natural forces — wind, water, light, gravity and weather — are allowed to become active participants in making art. Working across drawing, kinetic sculpture, sound and large-scale public installation, Robbins has developed a significant body of work in Australia and internationally.

At the centre of much of his thinking is the idea of “dissipative structures” — things like storms, whirlpools and living organisms that hold a recognisable form while constantly changing as energy moves through them. Rather than simply depicting these forces, Robbins builds machines and instruments that work with them. Wind makes drawings, waves play organ pipes, sunlight drives moving mechanisms. The resulting works become records of particular places and conditions — capturing weather, time, movement and the histories embedded within a landscape. In this conversation with Ryan F Kennedy, Robbins discusses systems, authorship, slow time, invisible forces and the relationship between art and place.

Artwork as a system:

L&A

You've written about dissipative structures — vortices, storms, organisms and other systems that maintain a recognisable form while constantly changing through the flow of energy. Is this idea key to understanding your work? And what did you recognise in these structures that felt particularly relevant to making art?

CR

I really want the drawings — and all the work I make — to be understandable without background information or prior knowledge. There should be enough information within the drawing or installation itself for people to recognise that there is another agency at work, that there are larger forces contributing to what they're seeing. You don't necessarily need to understand the science to encounter the work. But for me, it's important to explore these larger biological, physical and philosophical systems and see how they might inform both the work and the discussion around it.

Dissipative structures became important to me through the work of Ilya Prigogine. They're systems where energy is passing through and dissipating, but in the process it creates a recognisable form. You see that everywhere in nature — storms, organs, vortices. The water vortex is a particularly interesting one because it's almost like a living thing. Energy enters, it organises itself into a recognisable form, and energy is expelled. It's very close to being a metaphor for a cell or a living system. Having worked with water and atmospheric vortices for a long time, I can see why we're attracted to them. They're almost alive in the way they move and continually form and reform. We're attracted to them in the same way we're attracted to fire. And I think that's a great thing to think about with artwork. I want people to be attracted to it and feel that they can't tear themselves away. That's the ideal for me.

I've run into dust devils in South Australia and experienced what they're like from the inside. You're surrounded by this swirling wall of dust, but inside it can be strangely clear and cool. You have these moments where something feels almost metaphysical — as if it has intention or agency — while another part of your brain is saying, well, it's just a natural phenomenon.

I'm really interested in that tension. There's a fine line between what appears to be alive and what isn't.

Giving up control:

L&A

Your machines are carefully designed, but once activated they're subject to wind, water, waves, gravity, friction and other forces beyond your control. At what point does your authorship end and the behaviour of the system begin? Or is that distinction irrelevant to you?

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Cameron Robbins at his drafting table - Photo By Ryan F Kennedy

Slow Time:

L&A

The Very Slow Drawing Machine deliberately operates at an almost imperceptible pace. What does slowness make possible in the work? Are you interested in making viewers experience a timescale that sits outside the speed of everyday life?

CR

Yes, absolutely.

The Very Slow Drawing Machine was the beginning of a series of long-duration drawing works for me. Before that I had been making drawings over minutes or hours, but I started wondering what would happen if a drawing operated over days or even an entire lunar cycle. The lunar month is approximately 29.3 days. I've always been fascinated by astronomy and by the scale that observing the sun, moon and stars gives us. When you watch a lunar eclipse with a group of people, you might sit there for hours. And it's interesting to remember that what you're actually observing is the movement of the moon — a movement that normally takes a month.

I think we're often disconnected from the timescales of the things we're actually living within.

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Seal Wailing - by Cameron Robbins and John Turpie 2002 as part of 'sculpture on the cliffs' Ellistown, SA 2002 - Photo provided by artist

Making the invisible visible:

L&A

Wind is invisible — we only see or experience its effects. Currents are often invisible. Forces such as gravity and friction are experienced constantly but rarely noticed. Is part of your practice about making invisible forces perceptible?

CR

Definitely.

A lot of the work is about finding ways to reveal forces that are normally present but unseen. I've worked directly with things like geomagnetism. There is a mountain near Falls Creek with a magnetic anomaly, and maps specifically warn people not to take compass readings there. So naturally, I went straight there with a compass.

I mapped where the magnetic field varied most strongly, marked the landscape, and then used long-exposure photography at night to trace the line with light. The resulting work made something completely invisible and perceptible.

I've done similar things with water vortices. A slow vortex can appear completely still until you introduce ink. Suddenly the ink begins describing these extraordinary structures — concentric forms, currents moving up and down, convection flows that were always there but couldn't previously be seen.

The force is already present. Sometimes you just need to introduce something that allows it to reveal itself.

The same thing happens with atmospheric vortices. You can't see them unless something — fog, smoke, moisture — makes their movement visible. As soon as you introduce that element, suddenly you can see this incredibly fast, dynamic thing happening. But without it, it's completely invisible. And time is similar. Time is invisible as well. You're trying to find some way to bring these things into the visual world.

I was once invited to make a solar-powered work at the Museum Contemporary Art Australia in Sydney. I was interested in the relationship between the roof, the sun and the gallery space below, and technically it would have been quite straightforward to run a cable from a solar panel down into the gallery. But they were not allowed to perforate the membrane.

There were all these existing things coming through the roof — sewerage, antennas, electrical infrastructure — but no, I wasn't allowed to make a new perforation. It became one of those very practical moments where the realities of architecture and infrastructure meet the ideal possibilities of a work.

And I think that is part of what interests me. These forces and systems are always there, but they're often hidden behind the surfaces we live with. The work is sometimes about finding a way into them.



MILLKULTURE - by Cameron Robbins at Yarra Ranges Regional Museum - Photo provided by artist

Place and intervention:

L&A

How important is the existing history of a place to you? Are you trying to reveal something already present in a landscape, or are you introducing something entirely new into it?

CR

You can't push the cart without the horse. That's really where this question takes me — the relationship between the artwork, the brief and the place itself. When I first started making public artworks, I would look at a brief and think, Oh my God, how am I going to address all of this? The Indigenous history, settler history, different communities, the landscape — all these layers. You can end up feeling as though you have to illustrate everything. But after doing a few public artworks, I started to think differently. I thought, Look, I'm just going to go to the site first and see what comes to mind.

I'm a big fan of the idea of the artist as a barometer — a sensitive instrument. You go somewhere, something comes to mind, and you follow it intuitively. Then you return to the studio and develop the idea. What's interesting is that when you later look at what you've done, it often connects back to the brief in ways you couldn't have logically designed.

For me, the place comes first. The brief is important, but you can't push the cart without the horse. I've had experiences where that process has become very direct. At Elliston on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia, a friend told me about these extraordinary blowholes in the cliffs. At the time I was working with organ pipes, so I took some over and experimented with placing them into the openings in the rock. The waves drove air through them and produced this incredible moaning sound. But Elliston, and those cliffs in particular, also carry a very difficult history. The sound gradually took on another resonance — almost like a wail or a cry. That experience taught me something important about responding to place. I don't necessarily want to extract a single story and put it on display.

FIELD EDITION

The work became a wind drawing instrument drawing directly onto a concrete wall. There is a rotating stone from a quarry, geological references, and lyrebird feathers that function as aerodynamic components within the machine. All these stories are embedded in the work, but they're not presented as a list. You might encounter it simply as a machine making a drawing. Or you might enter through the mechanics, the geology, the history or something else entirely.

I walked into the museum after being invited to develop an idea for the project, and the whole thing appeared to me almost immediately. I thought, Oh God, I've got a really good idea. I think it's going to work. I went home and made a model out of a beer carton, cork and bits of paper from the kitchen because the whole thing was too complicated to draw properly. I took it in and everyone loved it. It was a pure response.

But when you look at it afterwards, all these connections are there. That's what I mean by the artist as a barometer. My job as an artist is to provide the clues. I don't want the work to be completely obscure, but I also don't want it to be too narrow. I want there to be enough there for people to make their own connections. For me, that's the most interesting relationship between an artwork and a place.



*Cameron Robbins discussing MILLKULTURE - @ Yarra Ranges Regional Museum
Image by Yarra Ranges Regional Museum*



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The Wrong Thing, Precisely Measured: Why the art world needs a new currency for measuring impact

By Dana Thomson, Founder, Nourish Group Consulting.



Dana Thomson (left) with volunteer at Harvest Arts Festival 2025 - Photo By Alex Wisser

THERE is a particular kind of silence that falls over a funding meeting when someone asks an arts organisation to justify itself in dollars. The number exists, but it was always a proxy, standing in for something harder to price. And yet here we are, in a sector asked with increasing insistence to prove its worth in the only currency that funders have historically trusted: economic return on investment (ROI). Yet, the origins of the arts bear no connection to economics. But more on that later. Creative Victoria and other grant funders' current appetite for ROI on grant funding is understandable. Public money deserves public accounting. It is, however, a narrow instrument for a wide phenomenon, and if the arts sector accepts economic ROI as the only acceptable ledger, we will spend yet another decade measuring the wrong thing extremely precisely. What a festival, a gallery or a community arts program actually produces — belonging, pride, connection, the quiet reassurance of being seen — has never sat comfortably inside a spreadsheet built for ticket entry dollars, additional spend and possibly overnight stays.

A 2020 sector briefing from the University of Technology Sydney and the Nelson Meers Foundation makes the same point at a national scale: while cultural and creative activity contributes some \$112 billion to Australia's GDP each year, that statistic captures almost nothing of what the sector actually does to people and communities. What these outcomes need is their own currency. I'm calling it social currency: value that is real, that circulates, and that can — with the right instruments — be counted.

I came to this thinking quite sideways, through several years of developing an approach to measuring the social value of tourism in regions rather than the arts themselves, until it became obvious the two were converging. The arts, their exhibitions and festivals were increasingly measuring themselves using tourism and visitor metrics, and qualitative visitor sentiment was one of the few metrics to measure social impact.

Using the Australian Social Value Bank (ASVB) platform, I developed a methodology which as a volunteer, suggested we apply to a small Victorian harvest festival, Radical Fields, in 2025. The artist feedback survey and community social impact assessment we ran turned up something unsurprising in retrospect and quietly radical in practice: the headline result was a dollar value, measurable increase in people's sense of feeling part of their local community, well ahead of anything visitor spend could tell us. Artists spoke of a low-ego, non-hierarchical space that let them experiment without the usual professional armour. Attendees spoke of belonging. That is the language of a wellbeing framework rather than a tourism dashboard, and the ASVB gives it a defensible dollar figure precisely so that a funder can weigh a festival's contribution to community wellbeing against, say, a mental health program's, on equal terms.

Sitting inside those headline numbers were the details that made them credible. Artists were paid, and they described the festival as one of the only spaces in their working year where they could show unfinished, uncertain work without professional consequence, several tracing a new collaborator or a settled direction for a body of work straight back to conversations had over the festival weekend. Attendees, most of them local, talked less about what they saw than who they stood next to while seeing it — neighbours they hadn't spoken with recently, volunteers and newcomers all folded into a shared afternoon, as a small town quietly reaffirmed its creative identity with itself. That texture is exactly what a wellbeing framework is built to hold.

FIELD EDITION

This is the theory of change worth insisting on: an arts experience is, first and foremost, a wellbeing intervention, one that also happens to move money through a local economy as a downstream effect. The causal chain runs from participation to psychological and social outcomes — confidence, purpose, connection, self worth, cultural pride — and only then to economic activity: jobs, spend, repeat visitation. The cultural theorist John Holden's now-influential distinction between the intrinsic, instrumental and institutional value of arts and culture is really an argument for the same sequencing: intrinsic experience comes first, and everything instrumental — including the economic case — follows from it. Reverse that order, as most funding frameworks do, and you end up optimising for the caboose while the engine idles.

The language of “frameworks” and “instruments” can make this sound like a recent discovery, when it is closer to a recovery. People have gathered to make, tell stories, dance, sing, mourn and celebrate since long before there were funding bodies to ask why it mattered. What has

changed is our growing ability, and need, to articulate that value in a language funders can act on — a matter of finally building better instruments to recognise and communicate a value art and culture have carried all along.

I have watched this play out across contexts that on paper have nothing to do with each other. In some work for Tourism Australia with four of their Discover Aboriginal Experiences marketing collective members, the social value Indigenous tourism operators generated for their own communities — employment with dignity, intergenerational knowledge transfer, cultural authority reasserted rather than performed — was measured through social return on investment (SROI) modelling precisely because that was the language funders needed to take it seriously. In work with a NSW caravan and holiday park operator, a six-domain social impact framework and a statewide survey of more than six hundred respondents produced the same pattern: the strongest driver of value was a sense of local connection that people could not otherwise access, well ahead of any economic multiplier. Different sectors, same discovery — the strongest signal of community wellbeing — social currency - has been hiding in plain sight for want of a rigorous way to measure it.

This is an argument for measurement, done properly, not against it. Social currency, or a dollar figure attached to wellbeing outcomes, is a translation device, not a reduction of the art to a commodity. It lets a philanthropic trust, a municipal council and a state or national funding body sit at the same table and compare like with like, using a currency none of them invented but all of them recognise. Measuring of social currency and sharing transparency is the gift the sector can offer funders, and the sector should insist on being measured for the right thing rather than resist being measured at all.

Which brings me to why this matters right now, ahead of the next Radical Fields festival. The evaluation work I'll be repeating there in 2027 is the beginning of a longitudinal case for what a small regional arts festival is actually for, built one season at a time rather than tacked on at the end of a program. If community wellbeing sits at the centre of how an arts organisation understands its own purpose, then measuring it in a currency the rest of the world already speaks is the clearest way of saying, in language a funding panel can act on, what any artist or audience member already knows to be true: that this mattered, and here is the proof.

1 - Wearing, A., Dalton, B. & Bertram, R. (2020). *Sector Briefing: Arts & Culture — The Social Impact of Australia's Arts & Cultural Organisations*. University of Technology Sydney, in partnership with the Nelson Meers Foundation.

2 - Holden, J. (2006). *Cultural value and the crisis of legitimacy: Why culture needs a democratic mandate*. Demos.
<https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Culturalvalueweb.pdf>



Quick Fire Questions: Cameron Robbins

Written by: Ryan F Kennedy

AT the end of our discussion I presented Cameron with a series of quick fire questions, with rules being you can pick one, none or both. There is a nice absurdity to these rules that permits the response to be an exercise in getting to know oneself and someone else better. Below are Cameron's responses, he and we are curious what are yours?

Wind or water?

[Redacted]

Gravity or friction?

Gravity.

Fire or ice?

[Redacted]

Land or sea?

Not easy... Definitely land.

Chaos or order?

[Redacted]

Entropy or emergence?

That one is tough... Both.

[Redacted]

Evolution.

Metaphysics or physics?

Without a doubt both.

A perfect machine or a beautiful failure?

Ah easy a

[Redacted]

A drawing you control or one you discover?

Discover.... that's where the art is.

The force or the form?

That's what its all about.

[Redacted]

Both. Can't have one without the other.

Mildura, Australia: A Town Worth Researching

Written by Ryan F Kennedy

IN April 2024, Anthony and I drove north to Mildura for BORDERS, a three-year creative recovery project connecting artists and communities along the Dhungala (Murray River). Rather than a conventional annual festival, BORDERS unfolded across four cross-border communities before culminating in a three-day gathering in Mildura. What we liked about the project was its decision to follow the river rather than the map, bringing artists and communities on both sides of the Victorian–NSW border together through a shared relationship to place, water and the Dhungala.

What we didn't expect to find was one of the best regional art resources we'd come across. At the Mildura Arts Centre MAC, tucked upstairs inside Rio Vista, is a dedicated art library: a room filled with art-history books, artist monographs and publications, with tables and chairs where you can actually sit and read them. The collection is available as a resource for artists, students, academics and researchers, but it is also there for the everyday visitor who simply happens to wander in and wants to browse.

As Luci Callipari-Marcuzzo, Gallery and Heritage Team Leader, puts it: "If you're a casual visitor we encourage you to casually browse around. Sit in the space, do some research. We recommend you see the Mildura Library online catalogue to get information on what books we have and what books need to be reserved."

It is an incredibly simple idea, and perhaps that is what appealed to us most. You don't need a purpose-built library or a huge budget — just some books, a secure bookcase or box, and somewhere to sit. And if that fails, we are all regionally well acquainted with roadside libraries, old town halls and sheds with a lock on the door. Radical Fields is planning to plant its own version in spring 2026: a lockable bookcase rescued from the tip, filled with books that can be browsed and read on site. Artists and arts organisations are well placed to curate these little pools of knowledge. People are always giving away art books, op shops often have more than they know what to do with, and every community has its own collection of interests and obsessions waiting to be discovered.

The discovery feels particularly appropriate in Mildura. MAC itself houses an extraordinary collection of Australian and international art, while the city's history includes the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, which played an important role in the development of experimental and site-responsive art in Australia. BORDERS continued that tradition in a different way, connecting artists along the river and across state lines. Together, the Arts Centre, its collections, library, the Triennial's legacy and projects like BORDERS reveal something much bigger: Mildura is not simply a regional town with some art in it. It has built, over time, a remarkably rich cultural ecosystem — and sometimes the most useful part of it is simply a room where you can sit down, browse a book, or settle in and do some research.

Contact the Arts Centre team directly : gallery@mildura.vic.gov.au / Mildura Library : <https://www.mildura.vic.gov.au/Explore/Libraries>

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CALENDAR

UP COMING

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Art, architecture, cinema, theatre
26 September to 24 October 2026,
Messina, Sicily

<https://www.biennaledimessina.it/>

Festival Pour les Oiseaux La Havre

Experimental and improvisation music festival
30 Sep – 04 Oct 2026

La Havre, France

<https://www.festivalenfrance.com/festival/festival-pour-les-oiseaux-piednu>

Urban Art Biennale at Völklingen Ironworks

Exhibition of industrial art in a former steel works
Oct 5 - Nov 15

Völklingen, Germany

<https://voelklinger-huette.org/en/exhibitions/urban-art-biennale-2026/>

Canmore Festival of Art & Creativity

Experimental and participatory community events.
September 18-20

Canmore, AB, Canada

<https://artsplacecanmore.com/whats-on/festivals/festival-of-art>

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CALENDAR SUBMISSIONS

Know of an exhibition, residency, festival,
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No drum circles please

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Clovis, New Mexico -

2026: Saturdays 8 AM - Sell Out - Tuesdays 5 PM -
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<https://farmersmarketsnm.org/marketfinder-markets/clovis-farmers-market/>

Every Wednesday

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Semana Musical Llao Llao

An annual classical music festival in Bariloche,
Argentina. The Festival breaks through the
Argentine tradition, and brings classical music to
the foothills of the Andes.

<https://www.semanamusical.com.ar/en>

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Gangneung International Art Festival (GIAF) An
annual contemporary regional art festival held in
South Korea. Organized and fully funded by the
private corporate PharmaResearch Culture
Foundation.

<http://giartfestival.com/en/>

K-LAB is an artist-run international Biennale takes
place in Nevelsfjord, Kjerringøy in Northern
Norway, above the arctic circle, 67°49' N and 14°
89' E.

<https://www.kjerringoylandart.com/about.html>

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Setouchi Triennale

Contemporary art festival held every three years
on the islands of the Seto Inland Sea, Japan

<https://setouchi-artfest.jp/en/>

FIELD EDITION

The Block, Daylesford Australia - Photo by Anthony Sawrey

IT amazes me that free-to-air television still retains a great deal of vigour, serving up week by week great doses of distraction that captivate audiences while pushing sponsored products and services. One of the best examples of this form of mass entertainment from a bygone age must surely be *The Block*, brought to us by Australia's Nine network.

Those who are not familiar with the format, the series follows four or five couples competing against each other to renovate and fit out houses to sell at auction for the highest price. Today the series purchases land and builds their houses from scratch in a new location each season. Last year it was the town of Daylesford's turn to be exposed to the gaze of the TV-watching Australian public.

The local council gave the go-ahead in 2024 and with their blessing commenced what was probably the biggest building project to take place within the town for many years. The site occupied a strip of former pasture along the A300 to Castlemaine and by January 2025 the parcel of land was surrounded by fencing. Plans strategically leaked online revealed five massive new homes with identical layouts slotted onto 2,300 square metres (around a half acre) each. Builders worked long hours getting the places ready for the arrival of the film production crew before a suitably diverse range of contestants then moved in to figure out how to complete the empty shells and tart up the yards.

Daylesford is a rather nice quiet little place, entertaining a steady stream of visitors coming to enjoy wine drinking by open fireplaces and wandering around makers markets and the botanic gardens. Its ambience is twee and pleasant with a touch of gold mining history far enough into the past to be romantic. There are some grand buildings here and there for interest but for the most part Daylesford is a village of modest character with little of the visual pollution and rapacious development associated with metro Melbourne or big regional towns.

The Block development, by comparison, was a petrochemical plant in scale. Dozens of trucks surrounded it and security guards manned entrances constantly in use. Within the walls, for the convenience of contestants and crew, the production company created a mini Sunbury: a periurban oasis, a 50 minute drive from Daylesford, with sponsor outlets including big Australian corporations including Bunnings, McCafe and Chemist Warehouse. Up until October 2025, when the completed houses went to auction, the world of hype, branding and product placement was firmly a part of the town's identity.

To say the whole project was a perverse affirmation of commercialism, branding and marketing in the guise of entertainment is obvious. But I'm not going to sit here and lambast the production via Marxist notions of alienation, consumer ennui or some clever Adornoesque deconstruction of the culture industries. One thing is for certain, however: the town is now the custodian of a vast imposing collection of alien dwellings. They nevertheless seek assimilation into our regional consciousness, no different from, and perfectly acceptable to be understood and read, as sculpture.

For nearly 18 months I had driven past the places fully intending to do a walk around. Finally the day came and with it the question of how to approach what I considered an art installation. So, I parked my car off the highway and edged closer, staying under the cedar trees at first, taking in the overall effect before walking onto the entrance lane to begin my tour

Heavy gates and robust fences stretch the entire length while each place feigns friendliness via their garden arrangements. But lawn and native shrubs could not relieve the mute impenetrability of the five facades behind the fences; augmented by drawn curtains, empty sun lounges and shuttered garages. In fact, the presence of a single rubbish bin outside on the path was the only clue that anyone even lived there.

Architecturally the buildings are all in a modular barn-house style, a popular tree-change design trend which emerged in the early 2000s. While barn-houses are considered to be rural-inspired, with their long horizontal forms and gable rooflines, we are talking about farm shedding and outbuildings, rather than traditional Australian country homes. The basic structures take the form of an H with the central entrance and living area set well back from the forward-thrusting bedroom wings and the overall effect is one of intimidation. While there has been an attempt here to mitigate this effect by alternating roof profiles and mixing up black and white Colorbond with brick and wood textures, there is no escaping their harsh countenance.

Now, if you want to truly understand an artwork in 3D space, you have to come at it from all sides so I went round the back where its rear border abuts what is currently a no man's land. And what do I find here? A great long grey steel wall. Daylesford's own version of the East Side Gallery (minus graffiti). Tall and impervious, this barrier evokes security structures across the world protecting sensitive sites from prying eyes. There are not too many of these installations in small country towns so it really catches my attention. And try as I might, I can't help thinking of data centres, military bases and border walls.

FIELD EDITION



The Block in Daylesford, Australia - Photo by Anthony Sawrey

But how could it be any other way? We cannot forget these shacks are now private homes, albeit with a lustre of celebrity (tawdry and commercial but still celebrity), and every weekend hundreds of visitors wander over to have a look at them. How would I cope if I lived in one of those places? I'd probably keep the blinds closed, the doors shut and hide outback just like the current owners do. No wonder The Block has such a forbidding countenance; all five houses are magnets for the curious. Which, when you think about it, is a funny reality to deal with if your notion of a country lifestyle is couched in the language of peacefulness, hideaways, retreats and escape.

As I completed my circuit, a couple with a dachshund on a lead walked past me while peering into the garden of house number 4. Another group further along were taking selfies beneath the Torii gate of number 2. During the entire time there was no activity within The Block; not even a twitch of curtain. Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the road, sat a mixed array of post-war weatherboard and corrugated iron-roofed homes with people outside chatting, mowing lawns, washing cars and just generally enjoying the sun. The contrast could not be more telling.

Eventually The Block will become part of the environment it occupies, but it is hard to know how long that will take. And while Daylesford got eight million injected into its local economy during production, only time will tell what long-term benefits will come from being a part of it. My guess is probably not much. The Block certainly didn't boost local house prices and I'm not sure how many ongoing jobs were generated.

Meanwhile the whole marketing juggernaut has moved on. The story they're telling, one of joy through renovating, lives on elsewhere through social media feeds and TV. But as for the houses left behind here, considering their public profile, they may just remain as little more than monuments to otherness for a while yet. The otherness embodied in fleeting celebrity, reality TV drama and metropolitan notions of regional living.

Residencies / Opportunities

Læsø Island residency, Denmark

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Website: <https://www.kingislandgallery.org/artistresidency>

Research / Reading / Listening

Perfection by Vincenzo Latronico, translated by Sophie Hughes

New York Review of Books, 2025

Perfection is fundamentally about making meaning in a world where the real and digital, the local and global, have fused into one hybrid, monstrous, relentless thing.

Order online.

Beer Stained Pulp by Adam Kimberley

Unicorn Publishing 2026

Born from a fanatical Instagram account, this book chronicles the best in vintage beer mats from the 1960s and 1970s. Order online.

The Installation Art Podcast

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Every Jan 1st @ Glenlyon Recreation Reserve,
Sutton's Lane, Glenlyon

11am (usual start time)

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Many thanks — Radical Fields

Contact: radicalfields@gmail.com

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