

ART CITY

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EDITION

EDITORIAL

Penny Finnigan
Watt Space Manager

Art City was a publication put together and distributed during the early 1990s by a group of volunteers, as a platform for discussion of art and its position in the steel city of Newcastle. It was published every 2 months, with a different editor selecting a theme for discussion for that issue.

As pointed out by Judy Wells in her editorial in the July 1992 issue of *Art City*, “The arts are a potent force for environmental improvement, as well as a tool for regional and urban development. They bring life to a city and they provide a base for social restructuring. They are also good for business. She went on to nominate communities worldwide that have used the arts as springboards to changing cultural conditions.”

1992 was an exciting time in Newcastle, with the potential for the inclusion of arts venues in the emerging Honeysuckle precinct kept on the agenda by the now defunct Newcastle Contemporary Artists Inc. It was a time of collaboration by both the visual and performing arts, under the name Newcastle Arts and Crafts Coalition, to lobby for spaces at Honeysuckle and convince Newcastle City Council of the broader benefits of the arts to the community. One result of this lobbying was the establishment of a permanent home for Performing Arts Newcastle, and, for a while, the possibility of a contemporary art space being established in the Sawtooth Building at Honeysuckle (now occupied by the Museum). Another was the public art programs that were established at Honeysuckle and also at the Council.

As well as the regional gallery, spaces for art were well established in the city. We had artist run spaces like Newcastle Contemporary Gallery in Wood Street, Nick Mitzevich's first gallery 249 Gallery in King St, The John Paynter Gallery, Back to Back and The Community Art Centre studios; Mark Widdup was there at Cooks Hill Gallery, and Watt Space the student gallery had been established in Watt Street in 1989.

Times change and yet so much stays the same. Spaces have closed, but others have taken their places. Renew Newcastle has established a whole other layer to how artists work in Newcastle through its collaborations with property owners, and the value of the arts has been acknowledged through programs such as the Arts Health one at John Hunter Hospital. It would seem that finally the place of the arts is firmly established in the fabric of the city. However, over the past twelve months we have also watched aghast at the happenings at Newcastle Art Gallery and wondered. In conjunction with its 25th anniversary, Watt Space has published this issue of *Art City*, we hope in the spirit of that original publication. This issue is really just a cursory exploration of what is happening now, with articles from both some of the long running spaces and some of the new venues. The articles are just a taste of what is happening now, just to whet your appetite.

THE ARTS

At John Hunter Hospital

“The arts are and should be recognised as integral to health and health services”.

- A prospectus for Arts and Health, Department of Health and Arts Council England, 2007.

‘Research has shown that patients experience a number of positive physiological effects when exposed to works of art during treatment’

- Julie Kent Eppstein Uhen Architects 2011.

Juliet Ackery
Co-ordinator
John Hunter Hospital - Arts for Health

The John Hunter Hospital Arts for Health (JHHAFH) program cares for the Rankin Park campus, relieving stress and creating a healing environment for the whole hospital community. Based on arts plans that incorporate all the arts, including music, temporary exhibitions and special artist commissions, it has developed a warm and changing atmosphere for the hospital community.

The JHHAFH is a community based program and keenly represents the work of the local artists throughout the Hunter area. For

patients coming from different areas of the Hunter New England Health catchment area it can be very reassuring to see the work of familiar local artists on the hospital walls. Many patients comment that when they are worried and cannot sleep the thing they can do to divert and engage their mind is to wander the hospital corridors looking at the artworks. This is very healing.

JHH Arts for Health has continued to grow and evolve. From its conception in 1998 driven by Marily Cintra who then handed on the



Image: Student Alchemy Exhibition at John Hunter Hospital, *photo Miranda Lawry*

co-ordination of the program to Pippa Robinson and then myself, the program has created partnerships with artists, schools, institutions and health establishments throughout the Hunter area. Currently JHHAFH has a permanent art collection, which includes diverse Aboriginal artworks (made possible through HNELHD Cultural Redesign working towards Closing the Gap) situated throughout the hospital, and thirteen temporary exhibitions spaces which are changed every three months and located throughout the hospital.

Many of the schools in the area display their artwork in the corridors and often an

exhibition opening will include a musical performance by the children, which gives us great joy. These connections with children are vital as they provide an opportunity for the children to have a positive experience at the hospital. This can provide some reassurance if a child needs to return to the hospital for a medical reason.

The exhibitions also include a number of annual exhibitions which include Harmony Day, Naidoc Week, the Hunterbald (staff exhibition), Multicultural Health Week and the Wake Up Exhibition and Alchemy Exhibition both in partnership with The University of Newcastle.

These partnerships with TAFE and the University of Newcastle have created opportunities for students to participate in the day to day life of the hospital. Their work is seen by the many people who enter the hospital. The Emergency Department is one of the busiest in the State, seeing an average of 70,181 people a year and about 18,708 people visit the outpatient departments in a year.

JHHAFH has also, over the last four years, extended the number of projects undertaken throughout the hospital. Again the University of Newcastle and the School of Creative Arts have been strong partners. Through the undergraduate Directed Studies course and also the Honours program there have been numerous students who have influenced the emotional outcome of many patients. They included Kylie Harris who has

enlightened the waiting area in the O&G Outpatients and Abbey Cecil who worked with JHHAFH and completed her Honours thesis (receiving a Jenny Thomas Travelling Scholarship) in Arts Health.

In the Same Day Intervention Suite, the photographic works by Mel Young have completely changed the feel of that unit. From an enclosed space with no windows, the unit now has wonderful sea views. Patients now ask to have the bed near the water!

JHHAFH in partnership with Birri-Li Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health Services engaged Saretta Fielding to create Koikalingba (Place of Fruit Bearing) which reassures and welcomes Aboriginal families entering K2. It is a celebration of pregnancy and birth and a celebration of life.



5 MINUTES

WITH ROSE AND RENEE

Kathryn Camm,
2014 President Watt Space Committee

Rose Turner and Renee McIntosh are two artists to watch. They each approach their art making with their own particular flair and finesse, producing local art works worthy of much praise.

Rose Turner is a local artist who describes her practice as “a mash-up of illustration, painting and occasional hand sewn sex toys. I have a strong foundation in drawing, which is important to my own ideas of visual storytelling. I love playing with weird, sexy and ugly ideas and seeing if I can balance something pretty with something repulsive.”

She draws inspiration from her surrounding world; “I’m a girl who eats up

visual junk food as she can - I’m a total whore for images but mostly I’m inspired by pornography style, 80’s b-grade horror films, anything in a gluttonous Baroque style and the colour pink. LOTS of pink.” Turner’s works are provocative and thought provoking carrying with them themes of sex yet somehow radiating and oozing sweetness- we’re not too sure how she does it.

2014 has brought with it exciting new ventures for Turner. She states- “Recently I was asked to participate in an emerging designer showcase which uses a mobile ecommerce app as a platform. The App is called Lodie and was created by an Australian couple to expand the commercial profile of independent designers



Image: Install image *Erotophilia*, Gaffa Gallery, Sydney 2013, **Rose Turner**



Image: *Beatrix*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, **Rose Turner**

and create something useful, accessible and inspiring. It's exciting to think my audience will be global by the end of the year!" Look out this artist is going places.

Working within similar mediums but producing very different works is Renee McIntosh. McIntosh mainly works on paper with watercolours or textile mediums with embroidery. Speaking about the featured artworks she explains, "I tend to illustrate objects that have a connection to me. 'Compact' is a watercolour and pen illustration of a vintage compact my husband gave me before we got married. And the embroidered shoes are my wedding shoes ('Wedding Shoes'). These items are sentimental to me and deserved portraits."

She lists some of her main points of inspiration as being anything from ornamentation, diagrams, still life or objects that hold memory, to that of people that are messy, textiles, observational drawings, femininity, patterns, good paper and seeing great accidental colour combinations.

When asked about her current practice, McIntosh explains "I only really think I found out what I was doing with my practice in 2011 in my Advanced Diploma of Fine Art from Newcastle Art School Tafe. Before then I was just making things without them having any relation to me. My practice is still evolving, but it was definitely born out of that art school."

McIntosh is currently undertaking a BA in Visual Communication Design at the University of Newcastle. When speaking about this new avenue she has ventured upon she states,

“Doing this course makes me wish I started it instead of completing my fine arts degree.”

McIntosh has also been featured in ‘Mici’ Magazine, claiming it has been one of the highlights of her professional career to date.

Newcastle’s local art scenes houses many exciting up and coming artists, but we believe the futures of these artists look particularly bright. You can spot these artists’ works hanging in local shops around Newcastle so keep an eye out, you’ll be seeing much more of them soon enough.



Image: *Wedding Shoes 2013*, embroidery floss on Muslin, **Renee McIntosh**



Image: *Compact 2013*, watercolour and pigment, **Renee McIntosh**

NATIVE ZINE



Liam Madsen
Emerging artist

After graduating from university I moved in with my fiancé and daughter, started a part-time job at Apple in addition to my other two jobs. I spent my time off taking care of my family and home, and I found little time left over for photography. Eventually I realized I had to make time for photography and my art practice.

Artistically I had no direction. Having spent the last three years of my practice working to briefs and exploring different genres of photography I finally needed to decide what I wanted to shoot. I looked back at my roots in photography, using the camera to document the world around me. I spent years photographing Newcastle's skateboard culture but I decided it was time to find a new subject. I began contacting friends from university asking to photograph their studios. Fortunately, they happily invited me into their spaces but aligning our schedules became a

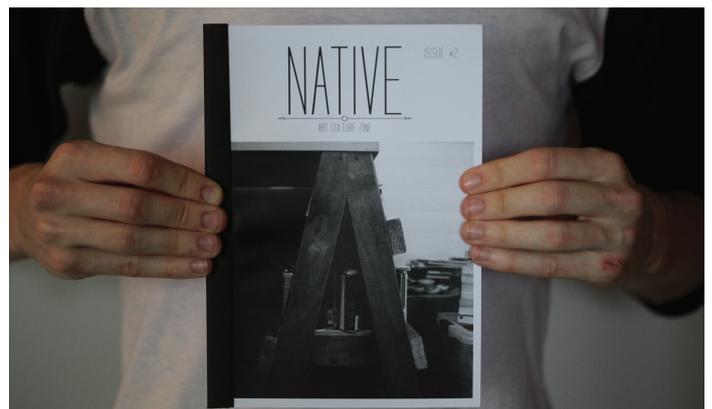


Image: Liam Madsen

nightmare. In the first three months of the project I only photographed a handful of spaces. I needed to find other subjects to shoot between studio visits.

I found it challenging, so I spent most of my free time going to galleries around Newcastle and Sydney looking for inspiration. In July 2013, Nick Pont and myself organized a trip to Sydney to see the Jeff Wall exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art. I decided to document the journey and strung a camera around my neck that allowed me to take photos of Nick as well as



Image: Audience interacts with artwork by Jeff Wall at MCA



other commuters and the urban environment. Inside the gallery I noticed the scale of the work and how the glow of the light box mounted images drew in the audience. I took photos of the exhibition, always placing it in the context of its viewership with attendees in the foreground. I did that because it is important to not only understand the work itself but also its context within the exhibition.

It also helped me preserve the aura of the work, which continued to hold me in awe after scanning the film into my computer.

From that point I took my camera to every gallery so I could document the work. I began to connect the photographs I took in the galleries with my artist portraits, realizing the

importance of documenting Australia's up and coming artists and emerging art scenes. At that point I decided to make a conscious effort to distribute the images to the community and that marked the beginning of Native.

Nine months later I have produced two issues of Native and am currently compiling images for a third. I am also looking to improve my journalism by taking one or two writing courses in my spare time. Most importantly, I have a better understanding of the value of my studies.

A Bachelor of Fine Arts is not just a qualification for a job; it is an immersion in art practice. An opportunity to learn how to gather your knowledge together and apply them to something you are passionate about.

RENEW NEWCASTLE

CELEBRATES 5 YEARS

“ The idea was so crazy simple it might just work. ”

Siobhan Curren
Renew Newcastle

During a visit to his hometown of Newcastle in 2008, Marcus Westbury walked the length of Hunter Street to search out a venue for a small bar he hoped to open. The volume of empty properties that littered the CBD was at its peak. The Mall had a growing reputation for being unsafe after dark. The place was a virtual ghost town on weekends.

As Westbury wrote on his blog at the time, ‘Returning to Hunter and King Streets every few months is like witnessing a time-lapse tragedy. Building after building, block after block, and street after street are falling empty and slipping into a state of decay. By my count there’s something just short of 150 buildings on the main streets that are sitting in various states between vacated, empty, boarded up, abandoned, and ruined.’

It was a far cry from the Hunter Street

Westbury recalled from his childhood when the footpaths would heave with people from all over Newcastle dressed up for a day of shopping in town.

Knowing that Newcastle is full of people with imagination who would love nothing more than to do something, anything, in these empty buildings, Westbury set about formulating a scheme that would allow these creative people access to empty spaces for little or no cost until the property owner got a better offer.

The idea was so crazy simple it might just work. After garnering the support of a bunch of people willing to help cut through the red tape and legalese, a property owner prepared to collaborate, and a whole lot of flights between Melbourne and Newcastle, the first of several packed-out public meetings about Renew Newcastle was held in late 2008.

All was explained: Premises are 'loaned' to projects on a rolling 30-day license for a minimal fee. Property owners can swiftly resume control of the space if a better offer comes along. But in the meantime people are given the opportunity to test and develop their enterprise and the space they occupy is transformed into an interesting place to visit.

On 16 January 2009 after trawling through more than 100 applications, Renew Newcastle's first ten creative projects moved in to otherwise empty spaces. On Hunter Street Mall they included sound and media gallery Loop Space, architecture installation The Room Project, children's art workshop space Emerald Arts, photography exhibition space Gallery Raw, and animation studio Specially Trained Monkeys.

In a former eye surgery clinic on King Street desk-based creative projects switched their computers on including online content creators Conversant Media, graphic designers Made By Heath Killen and Neon Zoo, filmmaker McBrat Productions and interior designer Tim Neve.

In the first 12 months of operation Renew Newcastle assisted a total of 29 creative retail and studio projects to open and negotiated the introduction of free wi-fi in Hunter Street Mall

Renew Newcastle has gone on to support a total of 138 creative and community projects to activate 59 otherwise empty properties. The scheme has since been replicated in cities around the world.

An independent study of the social and economic benefits of Renew Newcastle

conducted by SGS Economics & Planning in 2012 confirms what experience has already shown:

Creative space activation generates new jobs, develops participant's skills, engages volunteers, creates intellectual capital, mitigates blight and improves business and community confidence and regional brand value.

The study determined that Renew Newcastle yields a return on investment of more than 10:1. And this doesn't include the value of the creative output resulting from the projects involved.

Renew Newcastle projects were directly referenced as one of the main reasons Newcastle was listed as one of the top ten cities to visit in Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2011 – the first Australian city to ever make the list.

A report by Destination NSW shows a 25.5% increase in visitors to the Newcastle LGA for the four years up to September 2013. Hunter Street Mall is listed as visitors' second most popular destination.

From a virtual ghost town to the second most popular place to visit in Newcastle. Turns out it wasn't such a crazy idea after all. The bar on the other hand...

Renew Rewind Exhibition: celebrating five years work brings spaces to life

The Emporium (former David Jones)
185 Hunter St, Newcastle

Wed 10am – 4pm, Thu 10am – 5pm, Fri 10am – 5pm,
Sat 10am -4pm.

THE NUMBERS

2008-2014

138 creative projects supported by Renew Newcastle

59 otherwise empty properties activated by Renew Newcastle projects

12 property owners who have partnered with Renew Newcastle

12 professional development events for Newcastle creatives

13 guided walking tours conducted by Renew Newcastle

13 projects that have gone on to sign commercial leases graduates

30 artist run galleries

26 artist studios

39 retail initiatives

32 office-based creative projects

11 event projects supported



Image: Benjamin Perrett

THE • SOCIAL MEDIA • ACTIVIST

Is Instagram the new platform for feminist artists or is it another picture lost in cyberspace?

Emily Sinclair
Student Artist

Instagram: not just a social media outlet to place cool filters on your food. It is fast becoming a platform for feminist art. While the Internet has done many remarkable things for society, is it proving to be problematic for contemporary art?

Many feminist artists have chosen to enter their work into a global arena with the audience being any individual with a computer or smart phone. Politically hinged art pieces are being posted with themes of rape, domestic violence and other negative effects of a patriarchal society constructing a woman's identity. Over 14000 photos on Instagram hold the hashtag

#feministart. With these strong messages, is social media the place to present artworks of this nature or are they getting lost in a sea of #selfies and #foodporn?

This poses the question, is Instagram desensitizing the urgency and importance of these feminist issues incorporated within the narratives, and does it affect the authenticity of the art produced?

Pioneers in feminist art during the women's liberation movement of the 1960's and 1970's claimed feminist art was to influence the cultural attitudes and transform stereotypes



Image: Emily Sinclair

of society. Yoko Ono produced an intense and moving performance art work called *Cut Piece* (1964), which was a protest against domestic violence and aggressive assaults on women.

Feminist artist Ana Mendieta created confronting works with heavy themes. The six colour photograph series *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)* (1972) depicted various naked body parts smeared against glass.

The work introduced a different concept of the female form and was large in scale and confronting to the viewer. The audience was pushed into a confronting experience that bombarded their sensors and asked them to engage with the work around them. These sensory elements associated with seeing

artworks are crucial. It is this element of engagement that contributed to the impact pioneering feminist artists had on the art world.

Removing the sensory factor of such strong narratives and creating works to only be viewed in a digital gallery limits the capacity it has to affect the audience by solely allowing it to be viewed via a small screen. Does the art then become only another image on the Internet, losing its meaning and intention?

The limitation of social networks to promote activist art may prove problematic for feminist art-making practices. Is this a positive step in the direction of contemporary art, marking a new wave of feminist artworks with a revolutionary platform or is it deviating from and harming the endeavors of activist art?

THE SEVEN PAINTERS

Celebrating 14 Years

Newcastle's well known The Seven Painters, grew out of a group of friends who met at Newcastle TAFE - firstly in the late eighties, then once more in the late nineties. At the time they studied painting or drawing one or two nights a week, and then painted in home studios on the weekends.

At the end of (for some) their second Fine Art Certificate they decided to break out on their own. Since that year (2000) The Seven Painters have held painting sessions almost every Tuesday evening.

About ten years ago they were blessed in acquiring studio 17 at Newcastle Community Art Centre. Having the studio quickly became more than just a 'place'. Being at NCAS has enabled the Painters to mix with many different artists and to become more involved in Newcastle's thriving artistic community.

Individually, the group consists of painters of different levels. In their weekly sessions they not only paint together, but critique each other's work- or help each other by sharing ideas or the work of newly discovered painters.

As founding member, Andrew Finnie, says: "Meeting together is all about commitment. It's the opposite of working in a vacuum. We all have other employment but making paintings (or other art) satisfies our basic human need to create.

"Though we paint together there's very little chance of getting our work mixed up. Everybody in our group approaches painting from a different perspective - depending on their influences, personal taste or environment.

"It might be a cliché, but in a lot of cases the aim of our work isn't necessarily the final

“There’s the joy of discovering a new technique, or a new subject, or a ‘new’ painter - or a new audience. Of course when an image works then we have added icing on the top.”

The name “The Seven Painters” came about almost by proxy. When we first started off we had eleven members, then they dwindled to six, then five then back up to seven. So eventually we settled on the name The Seven Painters - regardless of how many people we had showing. We felt it was important to have some kind of identity, so that the wider community would know who we were.

I think that’s worked because this year will be our 9th exhibition together. That’s a show every 18 months and I feel it exhibits a great level of commitment from a group of artists who also all have full time jobs. Part of that commitment comes from the wonderful support of people like Jill Stowell and Kerrie Coles, and also from the warm community reception our group shows have had over the years.

This year we have moved on from our old gallery and are very excited to be showing for the first time at Newcastle Art Space (NAS).”



The Seven Painters latest show is entitled “The Seven Painters: Celebrating 14 years.”

The show opens on 9th May at 6.00 pm, Newcastle Art Space, 246 Parry Street Hamilton East.

Gallery Hours are Thurs-Sunday, 12 - 5 pm.

THE SEVEN PAINTERS
CELEBRATING 14 YEARS

NEWCASTLE ART SPACE: 8 MAY – 25 MAY

ANDREW FINNIE,
PATRICIA WILLIAMSZ, JENNIFER FINNIE,
MICHAEL BATEMAN, MALCOLM SANDS,
SARAH KNIGHTS, NEVILLE COTTEE,

CORDIALLY INVITE YOU TO OUR OPENING CELEBRATION ON:

FRIDAY 9TH MAY, 6.00 PM

TO BE OPENED BY DR JOHN BARNES, DIRECTOR
CESSNOCK REGIONAL ART GALLERY

[HTTP://SEVENPAINTERS.BLOGSPOT.COM/AU/](http://sevenpainters.blogspot.com.au/) WAXFIN@GMAIL.COM



Newcastle Art Space: 246 Parry St Hamilton East
Gallery hours: Thursday - Sunday 12-5pm

HAPPY 25th BIRTHDAY

to

The logo for Watt Space features the word "Watt" in a large, bold, black, cursive script. To the right of "Watt", the word "SPACE" is written in a smaller, black, uppercase, sans-serif font. A horizontal line extends from the end of the "Watt" script, passing over the "SPACE" text.

Penny Finnigan
Manager, Watt Space

For me there is a problem with the current history as published on the Watt Space web site -not factual inaccuracies, but the failure to recreate in any way the atmosphere that surrounded the labour, birth and childhood of this amazing entity that is now taken for granted – the conflict, blackmail, passion and persuasion which led to the establishment of the Gallery, and the political manoeuvring and absolute integrity of those involved which has finally established Watt Space as the relatively secure institution it is today. History can of course make people uncomfortable if it involves criticism and as well it may be felt that the past is no longer relevant but I don't agree. I was

there for some of it and would like to tell you how I saw it – others may have a different point of view of course. But I think we need to remind ourselves of this history regularly to properly value what we have today.

The fact that Watt Space still exists in its current form rests with those first students, members of the Fine Art staff and a little later, Directors, who fought battles of which you probably can't conceive. The Art School had just joined the University – not necessarily a comfortable fit and one that still inspires debate. SRC funding had always been allocated to the sports clubs and controlled by a select



Watt Space at Watt Street - Watt Space Archive

few, and it was only by threats of audits that the first champions of the Gallery, George Drewery, Jacquie Henderson, and Bryan Bulley (supported behind the scenes by Art Theory Lecturer Ross Woodrow) were able to secure support – the idea that an “approach” led in a seamless way to the establishment of the Gallery could not be further from the truth. Mass protests and loud hailers were involved.

These students and the ones who immediately followed did not just form part of the committee, but sought positions on the Union board to influence decisions about the Gallery – on one occasion election results were held up because the committee convinced the Fine Art students to come out in force to vote their candidates onto the board, unheard of; it held up the count by a week.

Pippa Robinson was the first Director, appointed on a part time basis. The way she developed and filled this role was an amazing thing to watch – I was a student at the time of her appointment. Those were the days before mobile phones and laptops – try to imagine how it would have been. Having no office, she

was like a bag lady trekking through the studios making contact with students, setting up the whole infrastructure of how the programs would work from scratch out of a suitcase. Having provided financial support, The Faculty and Union were pretty reluctant to provide anything else, so we thought we were lucky when an office made of temporary screen walls was set up in the Fine Art Building. It was soon declared an OH&S risk (and was), but for that moment in time Pippa finally had access to a phone – she had to go into the Head of School’s office to use it, quite an imposition.

After that she occupied a spot in the gym that the students couldn’t find. Eventually, after some five years of pressure and politicking she was finally given the office the Director occupies now; we were overjoyed but even then we shared a photocopier, were told off regularly for using too much paper, or else accused of stealing it.



Watt Space at University House - image Roger Hanley

We walked on eggshells constantly.

There are a million stories, I guess now only of interest to those who were there, but it was amazing to be involved and to help create this living thing.

The formalising of the Director's status by finally giving her a place to work was followed by a growth in support from both the Faculty and the Union for the Gallery – good press for Watt Space which reflected on them finally changed attitudes and made life relatively easier for me by the time I took over as Director.

“ We thought we were lucky when an office made of temporary screen walls was set up in the Fine Art Building...”

A further milestone was the introduction by the Union of the student assistant at Watt Space – certainly a measure of their increased support and recognition of the Gallery, and of the workload of the Director.

I assumed the role just after the Gallery moved to its current premises in University House. The Union had been offered space in University House for the Gallery, and they assumed that we would like the space facing on to King Street, currently occupied by the Hub (lovely windows but no walls). John Broughton, the CEO of The Union was disbelieving when , after exploration of the back areas we discovered the spaces

we currently occupy, at that time filled with rubbish and covered with oil and grime- John thought we were mad. (Weirdly, while we were sitting in the bowels of this dead building talking about the possibilities, an old lady came wandering from the depths wanting to pay her bill – the electricity area had been closed for years so with no explanation of how she got in, we figured she was a ghost).

The growth and consolidation which happened after that, through a succession of Directors and committee members and the now well known artists we claim as exhibitors will be the subject of essays in the catalogue to be produced in conjunction with our formal anniversary exhibition in September.

Watt Space is the longest running student art gallery in Australia – most student galleries closed after the abolition of compulsory student union fees but we survived and expanded, due to continuing funding and other support provided by UoN Services.

The Gallery's agenda continues to be the provision of opportunities for professional experiences for students of UoN. We have recently replaced our lighting and hanging systems, had a new kitchen installed and purchased a laser level. The Gallery is still run by a committee made up of staff and students, plus staff from UoN Services. In 2013 the gallery was awarded a Vice Chancellors award for Teaching and Learning

With all this it is easy to forget the stridency and tenacity that was required 25 years ago.

BECAUSE OF WATT SPACE

Ben Mitchell
The Roost Creative

A few weeks ago I was asked to present as part of a series of industry talks centred on how to make Newcastle a more creative city. The general thesis behind what I was saying was that we were past the point of making Newcastle ‘more creative’ – that part has been handled quite diligently over the past few years – and we’ve now reached a stage where more people need to be made aware of the city’s creative community. The irony was that I’d spent the majority of my delegated five-to-ten minutes arguing this point, and hadn’t the necessary time to just rattle off all the relevant amazing projects happening in Newcastle. Given the time, Watt Space Gallery would have been at the top of my list.

I think an artist’s ‘first show’ – whether it be a solo exhibition or a part in a larger group effort – is a very important part of their life and career, and a gift that has been given to many local creatives by Watt Space Gallery myself included. I want to say it was 2011, it may have

been even earlier, but it was before I knew how to grow a beard or what exactly to do with myself as a creative person. Carl Morgan – who I had met through university – offered me a spot in that year’s *Look See* exhibition, part of an annual Newcastle art event that has only got more and more ambitious year by year. Young, nervous, and eager to impress, I shelled out what I thought was an unheard of sum to have several of my university projects framed, and hung next to several heard-of artists, like Beastman and Trevor Dickinson. I was sick with excitement, and didn’t quite know what to do with my hands – I was a real, grown up artist in a real, grown up art show. All because of Watt Space.

Once I got involved in this scene, I couldn’t get enough of it. The whole idea of collaboration, networking and making new friends through sharing art got me very excited. Through the people I’d met at *Look See*, I learnt about some local shows run by a collective named

The Roost Creative, and started submitting art with an embarrassing amount of gusto – one show even featured six or seven pieces all submitted by me over a three-week period. It wasn't long until the gang at The Roost noticed how excited local shows got me, and took me on board as one of them. *Look See* rolled around again and my number of participated exhibitions was now in the double digits, and Carl had me on as an official photographer, where I was rubbing shoulders with Ken Taylor, Numskull and Eddie Zammit, all personal heroes of mine. All because of Watt Space.

I've seen student-run shows where everything goes wrong up until the last minute: tears, breakdowns, broken frames and all. I've experienced – several shows in a row – my artwork being hung in the corner of 'The Pit' because it was too different to fit with anyone

else's on the larger walls. I've probably spent a collective week in volunteer gallery-sitting hours, offering impromptu tours to visitors to pass time. I've grown accustomed to the opening night rush, attempting to fix every little problem whilst trying to keep several conversations running across the gallery floor.

I've been hung – most recently – on the same wall alongside Tyler Stout, the man who first got me into poster design. Years have passed and I'm now Board President of The Roost Creative, with three international art shows under my belt as lead curator, and lecturing part-time at Newcastle University, pushing for my students to give their 'first show' a shot, just like Carl Morgan did for me. All because of Watt Space.



Look See 2011, with my first ever exhibited works. Photo by Marcus Dixon.

OCTAPOD

Arts | Culture | Community

Christina Robbards
Director, Octapod

Founded in 1996, Octapod is a non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting a vibrant, diverse and sustainable arts community in the Hunter region.

It started life as an informal collective by ‘a group of artists and students who liked the idea of a public access media space – where people could create and browse interesting and unusual, non-mainstream media’ (Healy, 2005) and was formally incorporated in 1997. Initially known as The POD (and officially registered as ‘The Platypus of Deliverance Association’, which won the debate against ‘the Prince of Darkness Association’), Octapod was conceived as an incubator and a common infrastructure for a variety of independent projects. Founders included Damien Frost, Sean Healy, Aaron Bristow and Marcus Westbury.

Octapod’s main project, *This Is Not Art* (TiNA) Festival began life in 1998 as the National Young Writers Festival and the National Student Media Conference.

These two events took place in the week after the Newcastle Fringe Festival. With the addition of Electrofringe in 1999, and Sound Summit in 2000, the term This Is Not Art was coined to explain the five very different but interconnected events.

Octapod operated as a volunteer run, project based organisation until 2003 when it took on two part-time paid staff as the result of increased funding.

Over the past few years Octapod has focused on delivering a range of projects that build capacity within the sector, support career development for artists as well as develop new ways to support participation in the arts by diverse communities.

Other early projects delivered by Octapod included:

- 101 Bikes for Newcastle (bicycle recycling campaign)
- The New Pollution (Australian zine anthology book and website)
- Evolver
- Virtual Newcastle – a photographic ‘click and wander’ tour of Newcastle
- h2w2 (guidebook)
- Corporate Standover Tactics For Dummies

Current projects include:

This is Not Art (TiNA) - one of Australia’s leading independent arts festivals, TiNA is committed to creating an experimental environment where artists can test and exchange ideas that belong outside of institutions.

Culture Hunter is the Hunter’s online arts directory and information hub. Track down an excellent artist, sniff out an ideal venue or scout out events coming up in the Hunter. Produced by Octapod since 2006, Culture Hunter exists to showcase the diversity of the creative sector across the Hunter. It is the place to find out about the latest arts news, events and opportunities across the region.



Image: TiNA Festival, Octapod.



Image: TiNA Festival, Octapod

PODspace - In 2014 PODspace will operate as a pop up exhibition and education program. Octapod will work with partners to activate spaces around Newcastle, presenting four exhibitions featuring the work of emerging and established artists, alongside a public program of artist talks and/or workshops.

Creative Access Program - Octapod is working with the community to develop new models to support artists with disability, and support the development of inclusive arts and cultural programs.

With a handful of part-time staff, Octapod is always open to taking on volunteers and student placements. For a full list of current opportunities, please go to <http://octapod.org/volunteer/>. Roles include working on TiNA in communications and business development, becoming a PODspace Director, developing a cultural mapping project through Culture Hunter and assisting with a research project exploring the impact of the NDIS on participation in the arts by people with disability. We like to match the interests and skills of volunteers and students with what needs to be done.

For more information: Contact Christina Robberds, Director on 02 4021 1605 or email admin@octapod.org. Check our website for the latest news and to subscribe to PODpress, Octapod's monthly newsletter.

CUT TO THE PAGE :

Art Criticism in Newcastle

Una Rey

Artist and Art History Lecturer,
The University of Newcastle

When I moved to Newcastle in 2006 someone (who shall remain anonymous), told me “There’s no art scene in Newcastle, just a series of disconnected conversations.”

Since then, as an artist, a postgraduate student, an art history lecturer at The University of Newcastle and a freelance arts writer, I’ve enjoyed many of these “disconnected conversations.” In addition, I’ve been privileged to have writing published regularly, most consistently on the local scene for The Newcastle Herald’s H2 art page (when the almost tireless Jill Stowell needs a break, and with thanks to the excellent Weekend Editor, Jim Kellar). In that capacity,

I owe countless thanks to the unnamed artists, students, colleagues, curators, gallerists and interested observers who have helped tease out ideas in concert with, and against, my own views and observations.

Admittedly, the currency of print media – and regional newspapers especially – is waning as a relevant place for arts journalism in an era of countless blogs, social media commentaries and miscellaneous online conversations. It’s partly generational – few post-1994 digital/net babes seem attracted to tomorrow’s fish and chip paper – and even that’s a role that’s redundant! Nevertheless, a forum for arts related discussion

is crucial to the community, even if it's simply to link the disparate conversations and insights that percolate up across the region. And, on occasion, to hold people (or more often, institutions), to account.

For an art critic, one of the most delicate and difficult things is to review student's work, knowing that it is a brave and anxious thing to show work, even for the most seasoned 'exhibitionists.' The sensitivity that encourages artistic self-expression is a double edged sword when it comes to public revelation, but it's a necessary whetting stone for the artist, and the more it gets practiced, the better.

The idea of re-launching a quarterly-style 'art-paper' in Newcastle has great potential and there are some excellent art writers developing within The University who could do it with style. Not only can they hone their craft, but expanding the rigour of the 'studio critique' into written form is a genuine service: who better to do it than fellow students? Nothing means more to an artist (aside from the cash – but that's another article) than someone taking time to engage with their work: to find its edges, unravel its intentions, wonder at its methods.

Art criticism has to be more than a prosaic description of the work to do anyone any favours – the reader or the maker – but declaring judgements beyond a Facebook 'like' or 'congratulations', and putting a name to it, requires a considered form of poetry; it demands some weighing of the first reflection, an effort of enquiry, some empathy, some courage and a dash of discrimination – a word not often credited with its positive implications.

In 'interesting times', like those we are experiencing in 2014 with uncertainty at Newcastle Art Gallery (no longer seeing itself as 'Regional', and all which that implies), limited commercial galleries and little in the way of alternative exhibition spaces, the opportunity is for radical art action and rigorous art debate. If writing it up, getting it down or posting it seems too committal, at least we can celebrate and further elaborate on these beautifully disconnected and sometimes rugged conversations face to face: be bold and true with one another, but have a heart. And for the record – I still think making art is harder than having something to say about it.

ALT-MEDIA Wants your brain!

ALT-MEDIA is a group of enthusiastic fine arts students focusing on collaborative new media projects. With a wide range of abilities including programming, electronics and knowledge of interactive systems we would like to mix your delicious brainjuice with our skills! ALT-MEDIA is looking to collaborate with fellow students or other practitioners who would like to integrate some level of digital or electrical interaction within their artworks, performances, gigs, or wearables.

Contact tim.buchanan@uon.edu.au for more info

What's On Newcastle May – June 2014

Compiled by Michaela Swan, 2014 Watt Space Committee

<p>Art Systems Wickham 40 Annie Street Wickham NSW 2293 asw.artspace@hotmail.com M: 0431 853 600 OPENING HOURS: FRI ,SAT,SUN 12 - 4 PM</p>	<p>Vera Zulumovski May 9 – May 25</p> <p>Jon Wilks, Steve Berry, John Langeley May 30 – Jun 15</p> <p>Matthew Tome Jun 20 – Jul 6</p>
<p>Back to Back Galleries</p> <p>GALLERY HOURS: Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 11am - 5pm LOCATION: 57 Bull Street Cooks Hill 2300 NSW TELEPHONE: (02) 4929 3677 WEBSITE: www.newcastlepotters.org.au</p>	<p>Connections Robyn Outram and Cathe Stack 9 May - 25 May</p> <p>Small: believe in magic Small artworks by local artists – a multi-media exhibition 30 May – 15 June</p> <p>Verve Painters Ink (Stephanie Berick, Jill Campbell, Cath McCarthy, Beverley Leggett Simmons, Shelagh Lummis) with ceramics by Vicki Hamilton, Susan Myerson and Sharon Taylor. 20 June – 6 July</p>
<p>Four Point Gallery</p> <p>681 Hunter Street Newcastle West 2302</p> <p>Thursday- Sunday 12pm-4pm.</p> <p>All enquires fourpointgallery@gmail.com</p>	<p>Group Show 26th April – 17th May</p> <p>Selected Wall Space 17th May – 7th June</p> <p>Ann Sutherland & Ewen Sutherland 28th June – 19th July</p>
<p>Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery Address : First Street Booragul NSW 2284 (adjacent to Lake Macquarie High School) Postal : Box 1906 Hunter Region Mail Centre NSW 2310 Telephone : 02 4965 8260 Fax: 02 4965 8733 Email: artgallery@lakemac.nsw.gov.au OPENING HOURS</p>	<p>FIRST CLASS 13</p> <p>UNTIL 1 JUNE</p> <hr/> <p>CLICK: SCHOOLS IN FOCUS</p> <p>UNTIL 1 JUNE</p> <hr/> <p>JANET LAURENCE: A CASE STUDY</p> <p>UNTIL 20 JULY</p>

<p>Lovett Art Gallery</p> <p>Lovett Gallery Newcastle Region Library 2nd Floor, Laman Street Gallery Hours Monday-Wednesday: 9.30am-8.00pm Thursday & Friday: 9.30am-5.00pm Saturday: 9.30am-2.00pm</p>	<p>Shaun Tan – The Lost Thing Exhibition Until 3 June 2014.</p>
<p>Newcastle Art Gallery</p> <p>1 Laman Street Newcastle NSW 2300</p> <p>Telephone +61 2 4974 5100 Facsimile +61 2 4974 5105</p> <p>artgallery@ncc.nsw.gov.au</p> <p>Open 10.00am – 5.00pm Tuesday to Sunday</p>	<p>BLUE+WHITE 15 February – 11 May 2014</p> <p>FULLY FIGURATIVE 15 February – 11 May 2014</p> <p>PETER MALONEY: A focus 15 February – 11 May 2014</p> <p>NOVOCASTRIA 10 May – 13 July 2014</p> <p>THE TOKYO CONNECTION: Shoji Hamada and Kanjiro Kawai 24 May – 10 August 2014</p> <p>NEW ACQUISITIONS 2012 – 2013 24 May – 10 August 2014</p> <p>PAPER WEIGHT 24 May – 10 August 2014</p>
<p>Newcastle Art Space – NAS 246 Parry St Hamilton East NSW 2303 Gallery hours: Thursday - Sunday 12-5pm</p>	<p>The Seven Painters 8 May – 25 May</p> <p>Handwise VII Curated by Ahn Wells opening night Friday 30 May 6pm Music and Drawing Event Exhibition curated by Ahn Wells 29 May – 15 June</p> <p>John Morris Rachel Milne 19 June – 6 July</p>

Watt Space the Students' Gallery of the University of Newcastle

E: wattspace@newcastle.edu.au

T: (office at Callaghan Campus) +61 2 4921 5188

Gallery hours:

Wednesday to Sunday 11am – 5pm or by appointment

Location:

University House

Cnr King and Auckland Street

(entrance off Auckland St)

Newcastle NSW

Australia

2014 Watt Space Open Show

7 May - 25 May, 2014

Opening night 6:30pm Thursday 8 May 2014

Judges are Meryl Ryan, curator at Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, and artist Peter Gardiner, music to be provided by ensemble members from the Hamilton Collective.

28 May - 15 June, 2014

Sculpture Exhibition

Heidi Mainey, Amy Swan, Michelle Schmitzer, Kass Bangel

MEND

Group Fibres and Textiles Exhibition

Innocence

Nadia Aurisch and Laura Jefferson

Works from Berlin

Skye Jacobson

What Birds Are These

Kate Burton

18 June - 6 July, 2014

Negative Space

Flynn Doran

3rd Year Graduate Exhibition

Co-ordinated by Mary Van Gils

Honours 2014

Barbie Procobis

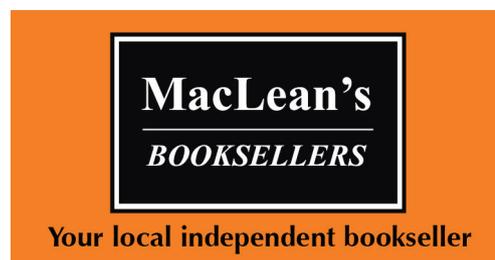
Honours 2014

Manon Marguerite

A Journey of Discovery

Tanya Matas

Sponsorship of the 2014 Open Show provided by...



In conjunction with Bunnings Warehouse Kotara,
Coles Markettown, Woolworths Jesmond,
The Co-Op Bookshop Callaghan and Newcastle Gallery Society