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Think Globally. Act Locally!

Proposed partnership to deliver a collaborative art-science exhibition for Toowoomba and the Darling Downs region

Introduction – the contemporary interest in art-science collaboration

Within contemporary art practice, science-art collaboration as a genre within environmental art overall is receiving considerable interest. Some recent examples are: the [Bimblebox](#): art-science-nature exhibition, currently on display at Logan Art Gallery, Queensland, which has been viewed by over 23,000 visitors since its commencement of tour in mid-2014. Another example is given by the extinct bird species artwork of [Emma Lindsay](#) on display at the Queensland Museum earlier this year. Finally, further afield, the digital and electronic interactive artworks of the Glenorchy Sculpture Park ([GASP](#)) and the [MONA](#) museum near Hobart in Tasmania.

The genre of environmental art itself has a relatively long history in Australia in terms of playing an advocacy role. Examples of such advocacy as embodied in recent exhibitions is bringing public awareness to such issues as the impacts and risks associated with large-scale coal mining; biodiversity loss on nature refuges threatened with development; heavy metal pollution in rivers and waterways; and plastic rubbish contamination of the marine environment.

Environmental art is also capable of advocating for inspiring and visionary solutions to the environmental problems, risks and impacts that we are experiencing in contemporary Australia and internationally. At a local, urban level such art practice has been used, for example, to depict alternative scenarios for future development and progress- envisaging sustainable, prosperous, local economies in which biodiversity is conserved, alternative energy is used as a main power source; and there is a proper balance between human and natural world values. These artistic scenarios have then been contrasted to other, artistic interpretations of a 'business as usual' future in which adverse social environmental and economic trends have been allowed to continue.

The HOPE organisation has recently become interested in the capacity of environmental art practice to engage the public with environmental sustainability issues. It has become aware of this capacity through the research work of one of its members, Andrew Nicholson, who is conducting a Master of Science exploration of the public engagement potential of the Bimblebox: art-science-nature exhibition. HOPE is now interested in the possibility of leveraging this research work by seeking opportunities for partnership with local art-oriented organisations in the Toowoomba and Darling Downs region.

Outline of the proposal:

Specifically, HOPE seeks an expression of interest from your organisation to create a project which would involve the commissioning or recruitment of a group of local artists. This group would be prepared to create a diversity of artworks which are illustrative of some

of the key social and environmental sustainability issues of significance to the Toowoomba and Darling Downs region. The detailed expectations of this project would be developed in consultation with any organisations expressing interest and involvement – but in general terms, HOPE would expect to see the artistic representation of environmental and social concerns within HOPE’s portfolio of community capacity building and environmental education interests. These might include but not be restricted to:

- Include something on the twin impacts of climate change and peak oil (greenhouse gas emissions – fossil fuels, deforestation, etc.) as exacerbated by mining on good agricultural lands and/or protected precincts such as national & state parks and nature reserves – see Friends of Felton and Acland examples
 - See also HOPE Charter for other possible linkages/sub-themes
- enhancing public transport and reducing urban sprawl within Toowoomba
- developing a greater level of public consultation and local government transparency on issues affecting the environment of the region. Perhaps by means of ultimately developing [deliberative democracy](#) and citizen jury [citizen jury](#) initiatives locally
- giving greater prominence to the creation of wildlife and native vegetation corridors and offering greater financial support to local bush regeneration groups

Within these general themes, it is anticipated that artists would be given a free hand to create works they believe closely align with a theme or issue of interest to them. Equally, for the purposes of public education, it is anticipated that these artists would also prepare didactic text to accompany the works; demonstrating how the artwork linked to the themes being depicted. The basic idea here would be to create interesting and possibly provocative works which could form the basis of public reflection, discussion and deliberation regarding future environmental and social sustainability issues for our region.

So far as scientific involvement in this possible project is concerned, HOPE would intend to draw upon the experience of some of the other environmental art collaborative projects already named. It would seek to identify and invite scientists and those with specific research expertise in fields relating to the issues and themes depicted in the artworks. That is, with an expectation that they would come into the project, meet with the artists, and engage in a cross – interdisciplinary dialogue with them. Based upon the experience of other art science projects studied in Australia, this could lead to a productive synergy between artistic and scientific perspectives on those very same issues.

Artists could benefit from having further information given to them from the scientific background to the theme they depict; scientists could benefit from the clear depiction of the sometimes complex issues emanating from their work, thus making it more accessible to the public; and the viewing public could benefit ultimately from the production of artwork which synthesise artistic and scientific understanding of the often complex interplay between social and environmental forces which directly affect the quality of life for people in this region.

Anticipated outputs of the proposed project:

- A culminating art exhibition which would be the direct product of the art- science collaborative dialogue already mentioned; and which would depict a range of social, environmental therefore economic issues of relevance to this region. That being either through artistic representation of the problem or issue itself, or its potential solution, or both.

Dependent on initial public response to this culminating exhibition it is envisaged that it could have a touring life and hence extend its capacity to engage with members of the public. It is also envisaged that there might be a number of workshop and public presentations on the project - with both adult and schools based educational materials to be developed in association with the exhibition. The ongoing process of the project's creation could be filmed for subsequent distribution on Internet platforms such as you YouTube - or for incorporation into an environmental art-oriented app or both.

If this project were to go ahead, it is anticipated that an evaluative report on the project, would be produced. HOPE's particular interest in such a document would be to largely focus on audience response to the exhibition; and any subsequent, pro-environment motivation or behaviour change which could be discerned in samples of the audiences which the viewed the artworks.

Should your organisation have an in principal interest in this proposal as presently advanced, or in helping shape its final form, please contact HOPE in the first instance as per the address above.

Regards,

Andrew Nicholson – HOPE senior researcher QLD