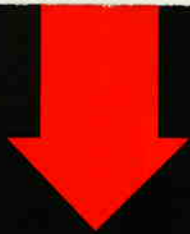


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The Community Arts Network of SA is a member based organisation. It forms part of a national network of sister organisations in most capital cities across Australia.

AIM

The Community Arts Network aims to support arts development and creative expression at community level towards the ideal of diverse and vibrant community cultures.

COMMUNITY ARTS

Arts practice and creative expression are at the heart of a community's vitality. People have always come together to sing, tell stories, enact rituals, to celebrate, to mourn and to mark significant events in their lives. Besides being able to see great art, people need to actively participate in these activities. This is what is meant by the term community arts, it might be a new name but it is not a new idea.

LOCAL CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

It is through the things we do together as groups and communities that we gain a sense of collective identity, a sense of place and a sense of belonging. When we value these things a positive concern for our social well being follows and we begin to take charge of our present and shape the future to meet our aspirations.

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Cover: Rock paintings by Nyungar students from Hamilton Hill High School. Community artist, Ron Gidgup. Photo: Ben Alpers. See article page 24.

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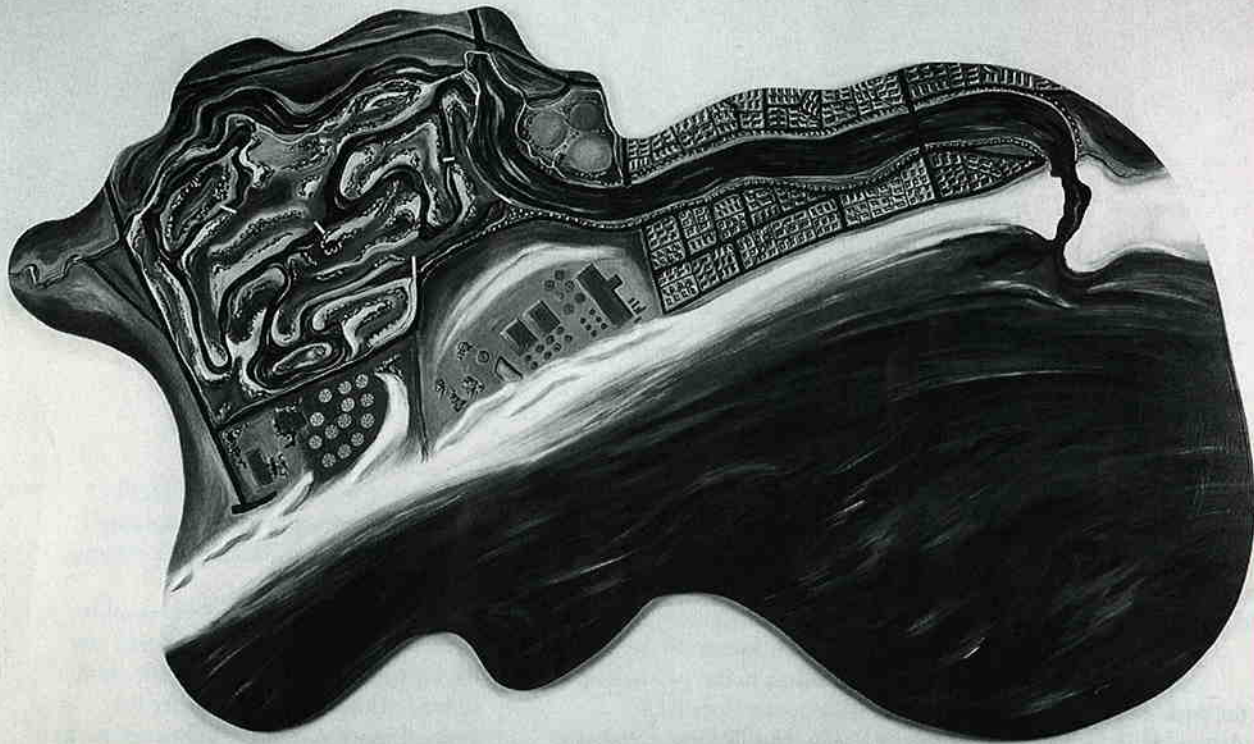
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COASTWISE



Patawalonga Basin and neighbouring coastal region. Model created by the Coastwise Project SA Arts Team: Maggie Savage, Alison Radford and Gay Canning.

PAT RIX

... definitely not for stick in the muds! Pat Rix explores an interdisciplinary approach to cleaning up an urban coastal waterway.

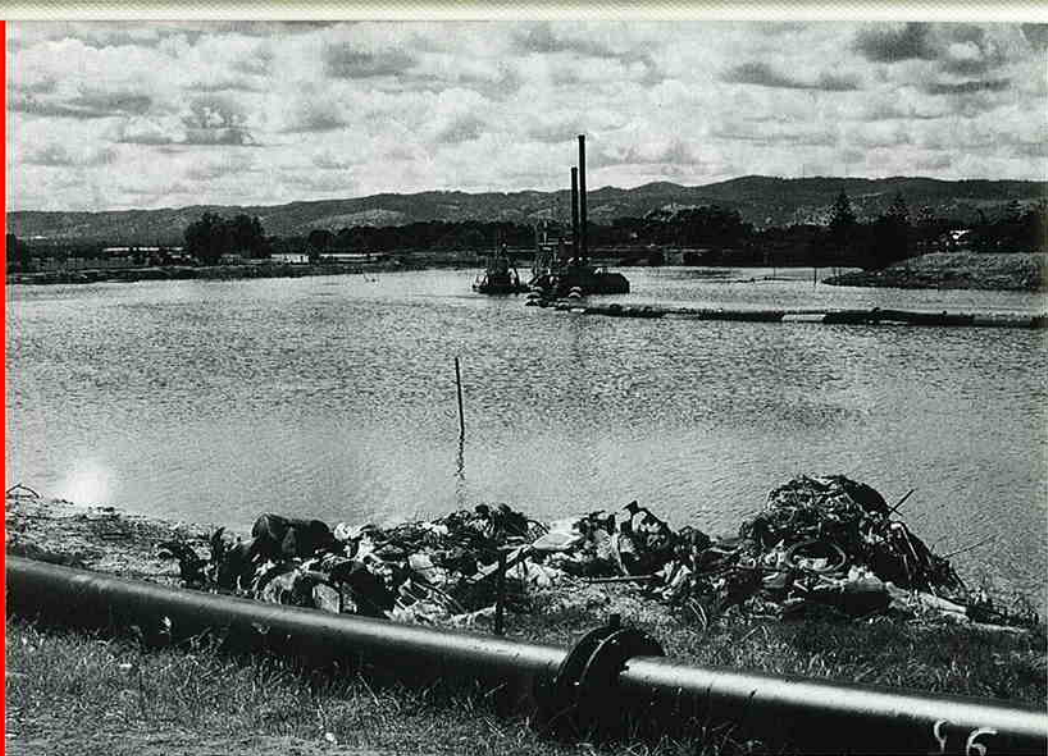


In 1995 the SA Coastwise project, the third such in Australia, brought together the South Australian branch of the Australian Conservation Foundation, students from the Mawson Graduate Centre for Environmental Studies at the University of Adelaide, community action groups and a visual artist. They all became involved in an attempt to find a satisfactory environmental and community solution to what has been called the most polluted waterway in Australia, the Patawalonga.

Coastwise, now into its second year, is a national joint initiative focusing on environmental planning in rural and urban coastal areas. The bodies involved are the Australia Council, the Australian Heritage Commission and the Australian Conservation Foundation. A unique feature is the involvement of university students in the collaborative process.

Kathie Muir from the University of Adelaide engaged Adelaide-based visual artist Maggie Savage for her expertise in bringing art into political and social issues, and into environmental design. As

[There is a] necessity to stretch and challenge university teaching methods so that students understand the value of community consultation in environmental planning.



Dredge situated in the northern reaches of the Patawalonga Lake. The accumulated debris in the foreground is an indication of poor water and environmental quality.

a community arts worker, Maggie saw the necessity to stretch and challenge university teaching methods so that students understand the value of community consultation in environmental planning.

Mark Parnell from the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) is also convinced that dealing with current problems, which are both local and visible, has been of great value to student designers because it encourages a socially sound approach to research and planning.

This unusual interdisciplinary approach reminded me of a story about another very unusual team effort, one which also sought to combine the logic of science with the intuition of art. It went something like this: Once there was a lark with a beautiful voice. The lark wished to fly to heaven to sing to the gods, but the other birds told her this was impossible for her wings were too small. One day, however, the lark was inspired to ask the practical eagle for help and eventually it was on the back of the eagle that the lark reached heaven, bringing the gifts of music and inspiration to the gods.

I spoke with Maggie Savage, Mark Parnell and Mawson Graduate Centre for Environmental Studies (MGCES)

graduate, Alison Radford, to find out how well the eagle and the lark approach had worked during the Coastwise project. The aim was to facilitate community involvement in working towards ecologically sustainable solutions to stormwater pollution problems in the Patawalonga, a recreational waterway located in Adelaide's suburban Glenelg. Given the rising tension between the Glenelg Council and the residents of the nearby suburbs of Henley and Grange, I wondered whether art could soothe the savage beast!

Mark Parnell describes the conflict as having arisen when the South Australian Government attempted to honour its election promise to clean up the Patawalonga. After commissioning a report from environmental scientists, the government's favoured solution was the creation of a channel from the Patawalonga basin to the sea, through which the toxic sludge could be pumped.

Community and environmental groups, including the ACF, considered that this scheme disregarded the environmental concerns of adjacent communities. The decision was viewed as one which supported the Glenelg Council's desire to encourage would-be developers at the site. The Glenelg Council favoured the channel because it would meet

developers' requests that the water be suitable for primary contact, meaning that it be safe for swimming all year long.

The ACF and infuriated members of the Henley and Grange residents' group saw the channel proposal as extremely short-sighted. Although it would solve the Patawalonga's immediate problems, such a channel would create pollution problems elsewhere as toxic sludge from 'the Pat' drifted via tidal movement towards Henley, Grange and West beaches.

As tempers flared and the debate heated up, Mark Parnell and the SA branch of the ACF (which had already been involved in Patawalonga issues for two years) worked with Nick Harvey, Associate Professor of Environmental Planning at the University of Adelaide, and Damian Moroney from the Henley and Grange council, to put together the submission for Coastwise funding.

'It was a pragmatic decision', says Mark Parnell. 'Combining art with what was basically an environmental problem requiring a science and engineering background seemed unusual, but we needed a way forward. We needed funding and our proposal fitted the Coastwise guidelines.'

As it turns out, Mark and the ACF learned much about different approaches to community consultation.

Although Maggie Savage's primary brief as a visual artist was the preparation and presentation of alternative proposals devised by the MGCES students, her initial role seems to have been that of mediator. 'There was a lot of anger initially. When I first came on the scene, the atmosphere was very tense. People living in the Henley and Grange areas were upset and on the verge of panic. It had developed into an "us and them" situation. It was hoped I would introduce a more rational element to the debate. It was a case of "Stop! Cool down! Let's look at the problem!" '.

Given that the project aimed to serve as a model to demonstrate how communities, levels of government, arts and design professionals, and environmental students and organisations could work together, it was necessary for Maggie to familiarise herself with the problem as quickly as possible. She then had to organise opportunities for community members, scientists and students to air their concerns and discuss alternative solutions.

the practical objectives of Coastwise were very clear: to assess the environmental impact of the current proposed options for the Patawalonga clean-up; to promote community acceptance of the need for a sustainable solution; to assist in developing ways of managing stormwater and improving water quality in the catchment; and the preparation and presentation of the alternative or modified proposals for the Patawalonga, using contemporary art.

Each objective placed strong emphasis on community involvement and education through workshops and public meetings. Mark and Maggie agree that it was through these that the debate was able to continue with considerably less friction than before. Whereas community response to her role was very positive, Maggie acknowledges that, initially, it was extremely difficult to get government

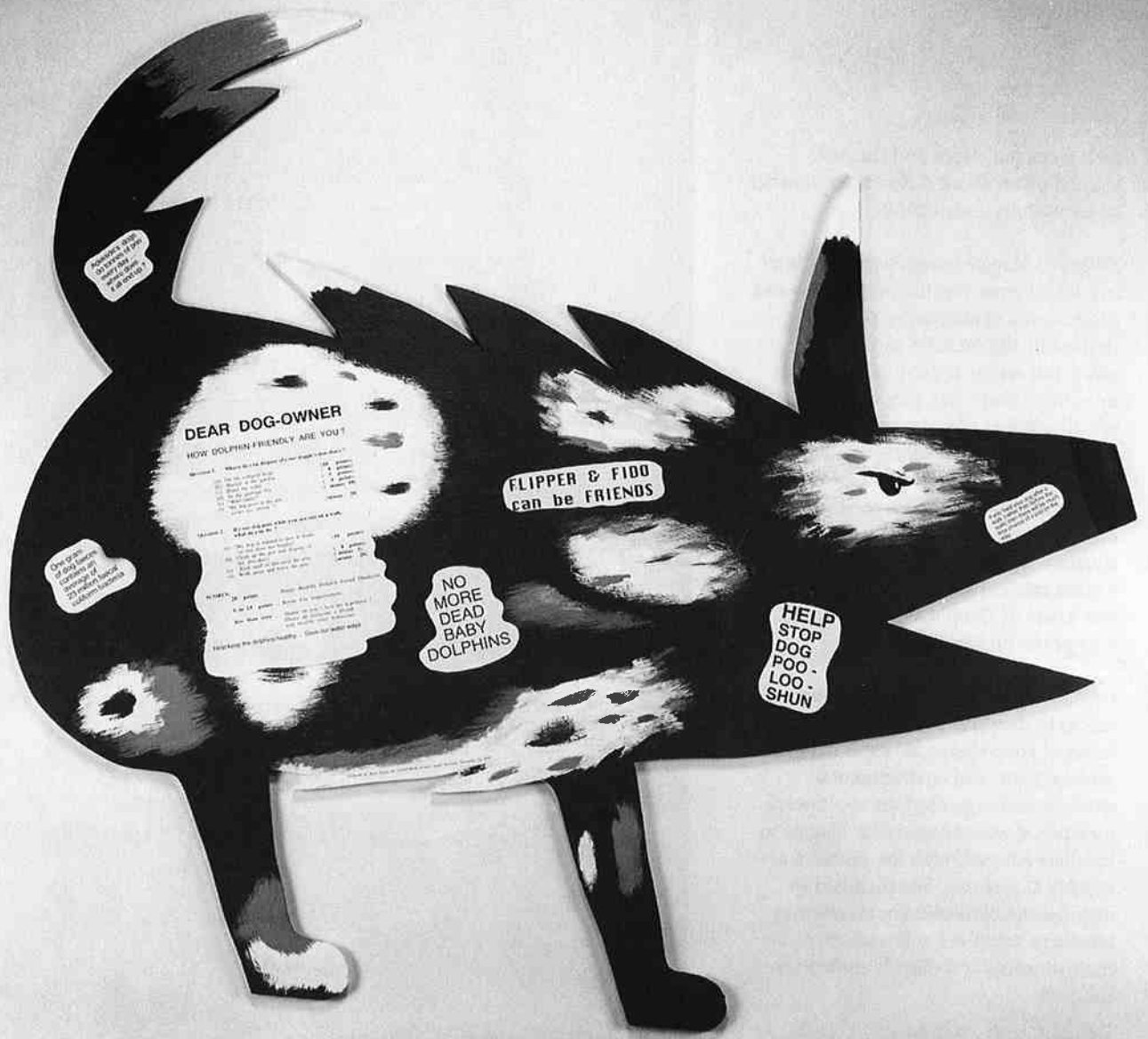
boards to take seriously her role as artist in a environmental planning project. Maggie embarked on an artistic program that would involve the local community and promote the Coastwise project to the wider public. The first event, 'Curly Creek Day', was conceived as a memorial to the Sturt River which had been a curly waterway before it was diverted into a stormwater channel. Curly Creek Day also symbolised the project's objection to the proposed stormwater channel to the sea. The second, 'Ocean Care Day', highlighted the problems of short-sighted urban planning along the foreshore, as well as celebrating the reasons why people love the beach. Thirdly, Maggie organised an artistically designed educational display to inform the public of pollution issues that are a community responsibility.

As part of their participation in the Coastwise project, students at the University of Adelaide's Mawson Graduate Centre and at the University of South Australia were asked to come up with innovative ideas for managing the Patawalonga basin stormwater problem. As students worked on solutions it soon became clear that contour maps and topographical models provided the most graphic overview of the area.

Eventually this gave rise to the idea of three free-standing, interpretive models depicting landscape, seascape and urban streetscape. These extraordinary models on legs became the visual component of Coastwise; marrying the precise, linear qualities of maps with a free-flowing, painterly response to the colours and light of landscape. The models are made



Coastwise art design educational display. Here, the average street is illustrated alongside a new cluster development. The streetscape has a mini wetland constructed and incorporated into a pocket park.



Dear Dog display table top. The idea was to target dog owners and alert them to the enormous pollution problem that dog-poo creates in our waterways. This was initiated by community member Brett Stokes.

of wood, paper and clay. Unlike most other environmental planning models, they are light, simple to dismantle and easy to transport.

The end result has been a happy compromise and the scientists are very pleased with the way the models are developing, particularly the Patawalonga one, which has already been displayed.

Maggie: 'When working with scientists it is important to have a certain amount of accuracy for them to take you seriously. Working with the students was a very dynamic process and we wanted the visual presentation to reflect that openness to new ideas.'

The first model, of the Patawalonga and adjacent coastal region, began with an idea from one of the student reports which was taken up by community groups and environmentalists. The solution involved improvement of stormwater quality by taking it through a wetlands system.

Many environmental planning students have science backgrounds and find it hard to present ideas in a visually stimulating and understandable way, but Alison Radford, a recent graduate of MGCES who believes in the therapeutic benefits of nature, was keen to work on a plan for the wetlands solution. Originally a landscape architect, Alison designed a wetlands plan that incorporated an

eighteen-hole golf course. She took into account prevailing winds, tree screen planting and even created a meandering walk through the wetland wonderland for non-golfers.

In her plan, stormwater is slowed down by going through reed beds. In this process although the usual pollutants remain in the sludge, many are taken up by plants — and water quality going out of the wetlands is greatly improved. Another feature of her design is the great expanse of sea, painted by Gay Canning in delicious sweeps of blue and green. Alison: 'Maggie worked from my scale design to create a work of art. Some people in the community group were very keen on dolphins and seagrass. For

...dealing with current problems, which are both local and visible, has been of great value to student designers because it encourages a socially sound approach to research and planning.

them the sea was the strongest symbol of water because that's where all watercourses end up. The psychological link must be there for art to work and it does. We live on a tidal gulf and that means we need to take even more care of the watercourses which enter it.'

Mark Parnell and the ACF believe the model represents a realistic and certainly a more ecologically sustainable solution than the channel.

Mark: 'We need to deal with this waterway so that it allows a certain amount of regeneration. So that reed beds can grow back and it can be given the opportunity to regenerate. The Pat has never had that opportunity. For most of this century it has been over-used as the

stormwater catchment for a large part of Adelaide, an area in which there are something like 200 000 houses. It hasn't been a habitat for a very long time. Nothing can live there. And, given the rubbish that pours into it, it is probably unreasonable to expect that the Patawalonga could be safe for primary contact every day of the year. The wetland solution is an ecologically sustainable compromise, even if it doesn't suit developers.'



Alison agrees that it is a matter of changing attitude. 'Wetlands are intrinsically interesting to people and I think we are all becoming more attracted to places that are constantly growing, where the bird life and animal populations change with the weather and with the seasons. I suspect that many people prefer a more natural kind of landscape to the usual cut grass and rose beds. This is a much better solution for the whole area rather than the channel. All the developers want is to dredge it and clean it so that they can build more up-market tourist facilities. And all that will do is shift the polluted sludge north to beaches that are used by all of us.'

Alison believes that people on the end of landscape and environmental design should be interested in it and like it. She suggests this will only happen if more artists are involved, because community arts consultation strategies enable people to discuss their visual and emotional reactions to environmental design. 'I always enjoy working with people, especially artists. I like the flood of ideas that comes with brainstorming, and this was a different kind of project. It was happening in the here and now. It stimulated me to attend all sorts of public meetings as well as Water Board and Catchment meetings, and I met some very interesting people, all with different barrows to push. I've learnt so much and can see how much needs to be done to improve things.'

After the Patawalonga model came the second design, also concerned with stormwater management. This was

entitled 'The Typical Catchment' and is based on Professor John Argue's design for a Bowden Community development, currently under construction. In turn this model jigsaws into the third or 'Urban Streetscape' model. Both illustrate how stormwater from houses, footpaths and roadways can be filtered through reed beds in a mini-wetland and stored in underground aquifers from where it later can be pumped back up to irrigate the parks.

Mark: 'Again the problem is how to educate people so that rubbish and pollutants don't enter the stormwater system. Getting this understood at a community level requires proper education and that takes time.'

Maggie: 'For example, dog poo! We've also made a "Dear Dog Owner Table" in the shape of a rather aggressive dog. This was initiated by a community member, Brett Stokes, and alerts people to the surprisingly enormous pollution problem created by dog poo in our waterways.'

Both Maggie Savage and Mark Parnell believe that environmental improvement will only really come with attitudinal change on the part of communities. Mark emphasises that this was the only real point of agreement between the government and the environmental groups. Hence the theme: the people and places that we feel connected to become the people and places that we care about.

Alison: 'It's about a sense of place, a sense of belonging and a sense of identity. We have to educate people about that.'

Maggie: 'The real question is: do we go on living the same way we always have with our increasingly sick environment or is it time to re-assess our relationship with the environment? And that's where I came in as an art worker. My premise has been that if we care about people and things we connect to, we want to keep it that way or even improve it if we can. So if we actually go and look at the places we enjoy, we can ask ourselves several questions: What is it we love about this place and how can we keep it that way? What would a better relationship actually



Fresh Air performing at Ocean Care Day, December 3 1995, Photo: David Edey.


Combining art with what was basically an environmental problem requiring a science and engineering background seemed unusual, but we needed a way forward.

look like? And what if we all decided we wanted a better relationship with the land. Well, what would that look like? It was partly from the ensuing community meetings and discussions that the idea for the models came about. And for me, that is what they represent — that desire to have a healthy relationship with the land, with the environment, whether urban or rural.'

According to Mark, Alison and Maggie, both the wetland solution and the Parfitt Square development in Bowden are creative and ultimately cost-saving solutions to water management and expensive park maintenance. They, like many others in the field, are convinced

that more local governments will favour such approaches to public recreation areas in future because they cost less to maintain.

The main strengths of being involved with this project?

 Maggie Savage and Mark Parnell acknowledge that the Coastwise project has been hard work. However, both agree that it has been worthwhile because the Patawalonga issue itself is highly relevant and still to be completely resolved. They hope that since it is a high profile issue, it will continue to have an impact on government and community attitudes. They see it as a possible forerunner of environmental problems to come.

And, even though the present government has not significantly shifted its position on the dredging and clean-up of the Patawalonga, Maggie believes that they have certainly learned that communities will not be easily placated by short-sighted and ecologically unsound solutions to pollution problems.

Scientists, community members and arts workers on the project team also agree that the issue at stake was and is much larger than a local disagreement between

two groups. They see that it is about everybody. And it has global implications.

Maggie Savage: 'We all have to change. At the heart of the problem is the question of how to change our entrenched cultural attitudes towards water and waste, that "out of sight" is "out of mind".'

Gay Canning: 'Do we really only take a stand when it is our own backyards which are threatened? Or do we get out and learn how to prevent that now?'

My feeling is that the Coastwise SA team has achieved more than is immediately evident in the government's recent decision to dredge the sludge. It has definitely marked the beginning of open, informed debate and it has definitely raised public awareness that natural resources are not something which can be used indefinitely. It has also resulted in a portable and highly relevant exhibition which will excite interest in ecologically sustainable and aesthetic solutions to stormwater problems in urban areas.

So, in the light of all this, have the eagle and the lark flown together successfully?

Gay Canning: 'I think it's a great idea to make something beautiful out of what was essentially a scientific exercise'.

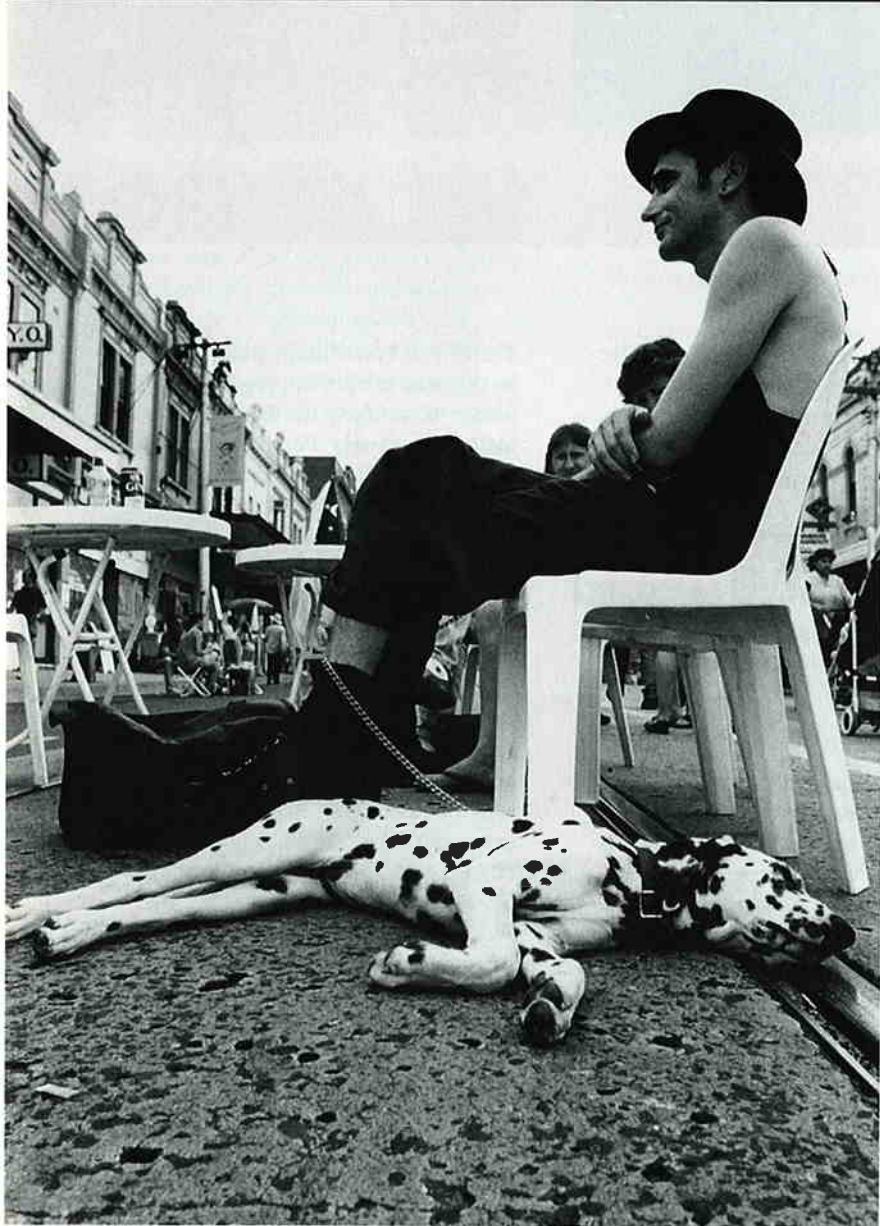
Maggie Savage: 'It would have been so easy to get bogged down in the research stage of this project. Thanks to the scientists we covered a lot of ground in three months.'

Mark Parnell: 'We never would have thought of a day at the beach, involving children and adults of all ages in making and flying kites. This [Ocean Care Day] was just one example of how we tapped into a whole different bunch of people.'

Alison Radford: 'I think community artists are naturally good communicators. More artists should be involved. I hope this is only the beginning.' ■

Pat Rix is a musician and playwright who lives in Adelaide.

COMPULSIVE PETITIVE



Northcote Festival VIC, 1994. Photo courtesy Northcote Leader Newspaper

ALEX PRIOR

Alex Prior explores the positives and negatives for community arts practice in the move to compulsory competitive tendering for local government in Australia.



1994 the Coalition Government in Victoria introduced the Local Government (Competitive Tendering) Act. In late 1995 local councils began offering contracts for community arts services. Under the Act, councils are required to allocate 20% of their expenditure by 1994–95, and 50% by 1996–97. Two councils, Melbourne and Darebin, both with long histories of involvement in community arts, have now gone to tender.

TENDENCIES



Dancin' the Darebin Darbin Parklands, Northcote. Photo: Emmanuel Santos.



Darebin, this has been actively encouraged, with local artists being given advanced training to help them with their tenders, and Carol Mavric believes that small arts organisations could see tendering as an opportunity. Darebin, however, remains something of an exception. When community arts began to grow, the council took the opportunity of contracting artists to run projects rather than increasing internal staff. This has meant that it has a reliable, skilled group of local artists and that it is almost impossible to 'package' for contract.

Where councils (following a more common approach) increased their in-line staff to cater for the extra demand, the subsequent 'unit' is much more easily offered to tender. This may well give rise to council's community arts staff preparing internal bids in competition with organisations or groups which they helped to foster. And in the long term,

winning bidders could be reluctant to help develop future competitors. Once the program has been tendered, the winner will have a three to five year fixed contract. Again, this can be viewed in two ways. To the positive, it guarantees levels of financing for the period of the contract, allowing the winner to formulate realistic plans. In the negative, unless there is a provision in the contracts for transfer of assets, the winner could be discouraged from buying equipment which might benefit the community.

In addition, at the end of the contract, it is re-opened to tender — the council will decide the amount allocated to the program 'in camera' (the overall budget is hidden at the tender stage). This will make it difficult to influence levels of funding available to the arts — the lobbying that has been one of the strengths of community arts at both the local and the state level.

Tendering assumes that council income and expenditure is measured monetarily. While this is true for services such as garbage collection, it is not necessarily true for human services. Services such as Meals on Wheels (and community arts) have received large amounts of community support — often in the form of voluntary labour and in-kind assistance from local businesses. This support is provided to council and has formed an important part of many community art projects. It is not clear whether the same support will be available to a private contractor.

The other broad question that arises: how will tendering affect community arts practice?

The immediate answer is that project sites will change away from local government venues (for which we will have to pay market rates). Melbourne Writers' Theatre, probably one of Australia's longest running community writing

programs, has just signed a commercial lease on the Carlton Courthouse Theatre with the City of Yarra. This has committed them to developing the theatre commercially, where previously they had use of the building for a peppercorn rental, and were able to make it available very cheaply.

And one of the places projects won't be going is schools. With schools budgets under pressure, they are increasingly charging for the use of school buildings. One arts worker pointed to the example of a school charging rent to a project which benefited its own students.

Any reluctance of contractors to invest in assets could also mean equipment hire costs will increase as a proportion of project budgets. Increased costs in these areas will have to be met through either an increase in administrative efficiency (reduced cost), an increase in income (grants or participants fees), or a reduction in artist's hours or conditions (shorter projects or lower pay).

Overseas evidence from non-arts tenders indicates that the last is the most likely outcome; while British theatre companies report *increases* in the number of administrators employed and a subsequent reduction in artist hours and the number of projects undertaken (Prior 1994). They have also increased ticket prices and reduced rehearsal and devising periods. In the first six months of 1993, the number of theatre-in-education companies in Britain (a very reliable indicator, as education is the responsibility of local authorities) was reduced by a third.

A crisis meeting in Coventry in March of that year indicated that the trend was likely to continue, and that the primary culprit was the reduction of in-kind and other support from local government (brought about by the *Local Government Act 1988*, which introduced compulsory competitive tendering in the UK).

Economically, this suggests that the cost of theatre-in-education was much too high.

Economically, the right of reply belongs to the out-of-favour Milton Keynes, speaking of London in the 1930s: Instead of using their vastly increased material wealth and technical resources to build a wonder city they built slums; and they thought it right and advisable to build slums because slums on the test of private enterprise 'paid', whereas the wonder city would, they thought, have been an act of foolish extravagance, which in the imbecile idiom of the financial fashion would have 'mortgaged the future'; though how the construction today of great and glorious works can impoverish the future no man can see until his mind is beset by false analogies from an irrelevant accountancy... (Davidson 1996).

Poor Milton Keynes. In the 1960s they named a slum after him. It's just off the M1, north of London ■

Alex Prior is a freelance writer and community arts organiser who is based in Melbourne.

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In Victoria, compulsory competitive tendering is about to affect the way community arts does business.

Competitive tendering threatens the nature of community arts' long-term link with local government, but it also opens up intriguing possibilities for more community control.

ran dan

LOCKIE MCDONALD

First published in FAR
(Fremantle Arts Review,
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vol. 10, no. 2

For five weeks in
May–June 1995 the Perth
community theatre
company, Ran Dan Club
was in residence on
Christmas Island in the
Indian Ocean. On
Christmas Island were
Caroline O'Neill, Vanessa
Lombardo, Marty
Cunningham, Sandy
McKendrick, Peter
Keelhan, Jane Davies and
Lockie McDonald.

The following is an extract
from writer/director Lockie
McDonald's journal.



Fire Torches, the beach performance, Lockie McDonald and Marty Cunningham. Photo: Stephen Smith

A CHRISTMAS ISLAND JOURNAL

sweetland

Week 1

Day 1 — Wednesday 3 May 1995

Sliding under grey tropical cloud the plane banks. Christmas Island at last! After two years of planning and a four-hour plane flight up the desolate glory of the WA coast. There it sits. A brush stroke of green leaf and limestone cliff juts out. Afloat on the high seas of the Indian Ocean. Swell, kicking cliffs as it rolls past. The pilot informs us the time is one hour behind WA and three hours behind the eastern states. Another time zone, another country.

I love small airports. From coastal Kalbarroo to the red, red deserts of Kalgoorlie they're always different. Each has its own charm. Unless of course you're stuck there. They're the first impression. The last memory. Unlike their international counterparts they still express a community ethos. Small clusters of people stand, smile, lean over to shake hands, catch up, and collectively stare at empty sky. Waiting. A regional ritual.

Free from the confines of the plane our kids slam about the tiny two-room terminal. Strip off winter with their clothes and shoes. Malay baggage handlers point, laughing as my bed of nails comes of the plane. Humidity and heat caress our faces then swallow all. Devastate. The tropical beastie licks its lips.

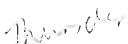
The flats we are to stay in are small but comfortable. Tucked at the foot of a cliff. Its cascading curtain of leaves rolls down to greet us. Christmas Island is like nothing I've seen before. An extinct

volcano rising off the floor of the Java trench. Lush green vegetation drips off its cliffs, back into the sea. Three hundred metres from the shore the ocean floor drops 3000 metres. In places it drops kilometres to the bottom, right from the foot of the cliffs.

Frigate birds circle like pterodactyls. Skating over thermals above the cliff's edge. This is Asia. Australasia. The future and prehistory, all crawling with crabs and exotic life. Predominantly Chinese and Malay people make up the island's 3000 population, with a few hundred Europeans. Our flats are in the Malay Kampong. *Kampong*, we are told, is Malay for village.

Two Moslem boys fan a smoking BBQ at the rear of the Sukirami Restaurant, as the evening call to prayer croons and crackles across the kampong hockey field. A small flat piece of grass is squashed in between the Singapore-style three-storey flats.

We all drop early. Our tired veins pump optimism.

Week 1 
Day 2 — Tuesday 4 May 1995

4.30 a.m. First call to prayer cracks out of the speakers from the mosque. Isabelle, our 14 month old daughter, wakes. It may be early but it's a magnificent sound.

Smells of garlic and Chinese herbs cut into our noses when we visit the childcare centre to book the kids in. We have meetings with the principals of the primary and secondary school about workshop schedules. There is only one

school on the island, teaching pre-primary to year ten. Late in the afternoon we meet the Arts Christmas Island committee, the group that has invited Ran Dan Club to the island for the purpose of involving the Malay and Chinese communities in the Christmas Island Festival. Ran Dan Club will run a series of workshops in circus, music, puppetry, screen printing, creative writing, lantern making and fire effects — culminating in a series of events for the festival. The committee members all seem helpful and willing to put in. A relief. Arriving in a community without adequate local backup is to live in the heart of crack up country.

Ran Dan Club has worked throughout WA since 1989, with the demystification of the arts being its primary aim. It gives communities the opportunity to participate in and control the creative processes involved in a range of art forms. It has worked with Aboriginal communities, prisoners, Homeswest high-rise estates, inner city unemployed young people, and regional communities in the Pilbarra and Kimberley.

Week 1
Day 6 — Monday 8 May 1995

We have just come home after performing at the Chinese Literary Association Hall for members of the Chinese community. Last night we did the same in the kampong, out the front of Eddy's Deli and in the Malay Club behind the mosque. Our tiny show starts with Sandy's old lady puppet. The kids are enchanted and scared of the puppet. Surge in around to look, then scatter and scream as she comes closer. Peter's



The lantern making workshop. Randaan artist Jayne Davies and island resident Kim Ho. Photo: Stephen Smith

Ran Dan Club has worked throughout WA since 1989, with the demystification of the arts being its primary aim. It gives communities the opportunity to participate in and control the creative processes involved in a range of art forms.

rubber gloves bagpipes and pan-pipes captivate. Marty walks his slackwire and sets them laughing. I finish with some magic and the bed of nails. Performing in this setting is magical. I love this. We're modern day vagabonds, gypsies, travelling tinkers, slipping under the skin of the next community. Inoculating against apathy. Empowering people to use the latent talent that lies in every soul. The ability to create. To explain their particular complex pocket of human existence. By actively involving all three communities — Chinese, Malay and Australian — we will attempt give people on the island the opportunity to express the unique ethos of Christmas Island.

Week 1

Day 7 — Tuesday 9 May 1995

Rain wraps its arms about the island. Enveloping sheets of water block the view of Flying Fish Cove. Pete, Marty and I head off to the school, the only ones on the island, to start 'instant circus' workshops. The kids enjoy the simple activities we offer. Slight twists on circus cliches. Delight in their eyes.

After six sessions with year one, two and three, we are tired and wet with sweat. In the breaks during the day, Abar, the Chinese school cleaner, gives us Mandarin lessons.

Week 2

Day 12 — Sunday 14 May 1995

My feet crunch across the crushed coral of Lilly Beach. Twenty-five metres at the widest, it sits between two cliffs. Hurling its best down the channel, the power of the swell is exhilarating, terrifying.

We spend all day swimming then resting under leaves the size of beach umbrellas. When everyone goes off for a walk, Sandy puts Isabelle to sleep in a hammock made from a sarong slung between two branches. I watch her face snoring angel breaths as my curry mouth burns from the *Nussi Lamut* lunch. Rice with curry sauce and fried crunchy white bait.

Week 2

Day 13 — Monday 15 May 1995

We spend the day unpacking our gear from the ship, setting up a workshop in the old technical college at Poon Saan. In the evening we have a company meeting. Debate sets in, heads collide, tempers flare and subside in an amiable resolution. But it's not totally resolved. At the centre of the debate is the most effective way to practice community art. Should we take a broad brushstroke approach, giving a creative experience to as many people as possible? Or should

we concentrate efforts on smaller groups of people, enabling greater skills development in the limited time? The decision is made for us after pressure from the community to involve as many people as possible.

It is an ongoing debate. One of the difficulties of working in a collective of seven artists is the differing ranges of experience and expectation. As there is never ongoing funding to work as a group, an ongoing working practice is difficult to develop. The inconsistent nature of arts funding promotes individualism. Each project has a short painful period as each of us finds our place within the group and agree on a collective way to work. It reminds me of a baby cutting its teeth. We dream of a day when we can work together more regularly. Dream of what the baby could become!

Week 2

Day 14 — Tuesday 16 May 1995

The sky over the ocean fills with purple blue. A storm is coming. Today is a day of sweat! Sweat, sweat and more sweat. School workshops, odd jobs, cutting keys, cutting cane for lanterns, after school circus workshops with kids. Zainal and Faridah come to the evening circus workshop and explain to us about

the Moslem school which many of the Malay kids attend after their regular school hours. This has prevented them from coming to the after school workshops. We decide to do two extra workshops in the kampong at suitable times.

Night is so quiet here. No cars cruising by, no telly. The seduction of a good night's sleep beckons. I'm up at six to do the breakfast radio show with Margie and Paula.

Week 3

Day 15 — Wednesday 17 May 1995

Pools of burning pink orange and purple bounce off the surface of the ocean as the sun sinks.

I have just returned from my first creative writing workshop on the island. Five women turned up. After introductions, two Chinese women left. They thought it was a calligraphy course. I was shattered. Later I found out they'd arrived at the lantern making workshop full of giggles and laughter. By the end of the night the three remaining women had produced some remarkable poems.

Week 3

Day 18 — Saturday 20 May 1995

After a long night and day of sleep I am awake. Weak, groggy, but awake. A tropical ear infection and a virus that's come down from Asia have just had their way with me. A double whammy. Last night Vanessa took me to hospital at about ten. At the end of the evening I had crashed. A sore neck, painful fingers and toes, and finally I had trouble walking and breathing.

I explained to the nurse that being in theatre, I have dramatic tendencies. Combined with my nursing training, the consequences are lethal for a hypochondriac such as myself. Her response: 'Don't worry Lockie, you look like shit'.

They filled me with antibiotics, pain-killers and sent me home. Back at the flats, Sandy and Caroline carried me to bed.

I woke this afternoon to the sound of drums. Looked out the window to see Pete in a pocket of shade on the kampong hockey oval, surrounded by Malay kids and adults, all playing the Samba. At last we're off. Full swing, full tilt off. Lanterns, puppets, screen printing, writing, circus, drumming. Its happening in all three communities. Now that the Malay kids are doing circus, the adults have come on board too. The big successes in the workshops are circus with the kids; music, screen printing and lantern making with the adults.

Week 3

Day 21 — Tuesday 23 May 1995

Evening showers are becoming a theme. As the day closes, a hulk of dark grey blots out the seeping light, lets loose its load. Pellets hiss through the air, thud into the hot receptive earth. A sea of tiny clapping hands. The heat is a drink I savour now. A damp reminder of long salubrious nights on Queensland verandas, in my youth.

A swag of mail arrived from the mainland today. It is easy to forget the outside world here. There's been no newspaper on island for two weeks now because of heavy airfreight commitments on inbound flights.

I'm still deaf in my right ear but am confident my hearing will return soon.

Week 4

Day 23 — Thursday 25 May 1995

Too hot, too tired, too stuffed to write. Three school workshops. An after school circus workshop at Poon Saan and an evening workshop with the kids at the kampong. Final evening prayer calls from the mosque. Bed calls, seduces, I sink.

Week 4

Day 24 — Friday 26 May 1995

This morning we walk through from the Post Office Pedang and then eight hundred metres down to the jetty.

Halfway down the beach a pontoon breaks its moorings in the swell and heads for the rocky beach. Five Malay barge operators charge, feet bang down

the jetty. Nothing said, they jump, land on the barge, throttling white foam out behind. They ride toward the escaped beast. A lone man in khaki uniform and white safety helmet rides the bow. The pontoon surfs toward the reef. Barge nears the pontoon. The guy on the bow launches himself. Hangs above the water. Mid-air. Lands on the pontoon. Another follows. A line is thrown. Fluid, slick adept movements. No fingers lost in panic. Tied on and towed to safety. Out the back of the breakers.

No one clapped. No one watched except us. It was an impressive sight. Like a surgeon slipping in, to sew up a ruptured aneurism. Another day at the office for the Malay guys. Acrobatic artists to the uninitiated.

Week 4

Day 26 — Sunday 28 May 1995

Big day. Big sea. Big drop-off. Big fish.

The day for the fish killing workshop arrives. Its our last day off. We charter a boat. Snorkel in a cave big enough to moor the boat inside. See a pod of sixty dolphins. As we slide back through a purple sunset I catch a two and a half foot yellowfin tuna. Later he fills our bellies and tastes like chicken. This is paradise.

Week 4

Day 28 — Tuesday 30 May 1995

We know we are in Asia when Pete, Marty and Sandy visit Gretta beach with Margie. It is covered in thongs and other rubbish. Knee deep in thongs. If it floats it is there. A beachcomber's paradise. The rubbish is washed up on currents from Java, straight to Gretta beach. Margie, a local, tells Pete about a sculpture she made called *Greta Garbo*. Pete's mind sets off.

Today we set up Pete's thong hand sculpture on the town's only roundabout. Pete has been working with a year seven class to build a giant hand covered in thongs. The hand pours thongs and beer cans into a spiral on the roundabout's island. If you want to drive anywhere on Christmas Island you have to go through the roundabout. It's an instant success