

Shaping and Weaving the Lake Arts Precinct

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Abstract

This constellation of projects across the Lake Arts Precinct on Awabakal Country seeks to create connection by weaving stories and shaping place. Compositions of sound, light, sculpture, inhabitation and landscape are embedded with concrete forms, ephemeral activations, and location-based media. The projects, some complete others ongoing, are guided by the voices of artists, the Lake Arts team, participants and the MAC yapang Aboriginal Reference Group.

Keywords

Placemaking, embedded technology, augmented reality, public art, location-based media, holographic enfolding, living sculpture

Returning to a new old Country

The Lake Arts Precinct, a new name for an ancient place. A stretch of Awabakal Country once abundant, now valued by the buildable square meter – a value multiplied with lake view. The ecosystem is in salvage, healing through the sharing of culture and care. Coming to the Precinct from far away but returning to the familiar night sky of my childhood, I fell in love with the eucalypt air and googled the remnant industrial toxicity of the revered mud crabs.

Tasked with transforming Lake Macquarie's arts offering from gallery to a precinct, I mapped a path of listening and supported experimentation. We asked and offered artists what they needed to thrive and sought projects that perforated perceived barriers between local culture and art. We listened to stories, experiences and

histories. Learnt of the industries that drove economics and displaced people. Stories flowed; tales of swimming in the warm outflow of the smelter and sightings of the catfish who made nests. Too often in my listening I heard, 'the art gallery, I went there once', and realised that no matter how good the art, a gallery could be a tick-off destination. Having come from New York where there is an endless stream of audience and whole range of arts-media I knew that even the most Instagrammable location needs to enable connection to create the experiential density at which culture emerges.

A path

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, became the Museum of Art and Culture yapang – MAC yapang in 2019. A regional public gallery renown for exhibitions driven by the Aboriginal Reference Group who are integral to MAC yapang. "We're not afraid of the difficult issues" Auntie Selena Archibald reinforces at yarns.

With the Awabakal name 'yapang' that means both journey and path, we consider our naming as a responsibility to enable pathways through engagement and opportunities. A path is an invitation, an assurance of a way, a shared perspective, a journey taken together.

In Australia we are aware that not everyone feels invited to creative and cultural spaces, and then came the challenge of coaxing audiences back from the covid-19 recluse. To encourage people to come inside Courtney Wagner who was the MAC yapang Curator in 2022, invited local artist Brett Piva to paint a mural that spans three sides of the building. The mural was a composition of enlarged paint marks created by local high school students who gathered materials from the surrounding park to make the brushes. Poetically titled '*Like moths to*

a flame' the mural wraps around the MAC yapang, exposing a playful creativity and inviting people to approach.

We also looked to placemaking to celebrate a new festival and visually link festival sites around the Lake. Goldberg Aberline Studios (now Beautiful and Useful) hosted creative flow workshops with participants creating patterns that were printed into lantern skins. Each June the lanterns emerge and mark that the Dobell Festival of Arts has arrived.

Weaving experience

Place is enriched through inhabitation and memories, both our own and those of people who have shaped the landscape before us. I arrived at Lake Macquarie for the construction of the Multi-Arts Pavilion mima – MAP mima a small versatile venue for digital art and performance. Located in Speers Point Park where Cockle Creek meets the Lake it was given the Awabakal name 'mima' which means 'cause to stay'.

Pippa Budge, MAP mima's first curator, Katie Bugeja the public art curator at the time and I began to seek the connections that would enable projects and create the experiences of this new place. Built around a 360-degree projection space that transforms into a stage, MAP mima is also place where art is embedded and tethered.

On the North wall the bricks carry messages in Morse code with long shadows of Casuarina tree needles and a water like reflection of the coded text. Tilted *Awaba _ Salt Water Lake* this brickwork was designed by Claire Lavis and Kira Jovanovski. Within the facade are a series of six speakers that play when they sense proximity. Adam Manning (living on Awabakal/Worimi Country with Kamilaroi kinship) created the first soundscape *A*

Rhythmic Acknowledgment for Walking Experiences. The rhythms he performed and recorded include a clapstick corroboree rhythm based on the Gumberry Jah song, the ambiguous rhythms of the digeridoo, and an improvised clapstick rhythmic response to the site. The composition of sounds is approached like a symphony where each source blends with the next. The pattern of waking determines how the rhythmic acknowledgment is experienced.

MAP mima is surrounded by a series of augmented reality sculptures, *The Virtual Landscape*, created through a series of workshop and with an open invitation to add your own VR drawing. One of the works that can be discovered by scanning a QR code is *Awa*, by Saretta Feilding (Wonnarua) with Soundscape by Rod Smith, (Aniwan/Wonnarua) and support from John Hancock and Tim Davidson (VEARA). *Awa* is an Awabakal word meaning flat surface with ‘Awaba’ being the name of the lake. The animated drawings are inspired by the stories and knowledge held and shared by Aboriginal people. Canoes head out into Cockle Creek for the annual mullet run and people gather around a campfire to enjoy the harvest. Footsteps from all directions, represent and celebrate Awaba as a place where people continue to come together to live, learn and share stories.

MAP mima in its versatility can be experienced in a multitude of ways. It is a place that beckons revisiting, to experience at different times of day and in different forms. A place designed for accidental discoveries as well as scheduled events. Over the last two years MAP mima had become a site rich with experience. A place for experimentation and discovery. One of the many compliments I’ve heard from community is that MAP mima “made the Park feel bigger” a comment that also speaks to the experiences that place can hold.

The idea of playing the building is carried through our programming and is captured in Sanné Mestrom’s *Lady of the lake*, a reclining concrete figure that is designed to be climbed and played on. To launch this artwork Sanné came with a ute-load of giant foam blocks. The act of play expanded and embedded around the artwork.

Holographic pollination

People come to the Precinct, and something is shared. Artists and guides tell stories, questions provoke a multitude of answers. To engage with the arts is to be part of a networked conversation. Flows of creation stirred by connections and communities.

Holography has shaped my path and practice. I learnt from and have created with a scattered community of people who work with holograms. There are so few people who make art holograms around the world that at one point in time I may have known them all. New materials and cheap lasers have since expanded access while digital printing offers new methods of creating. Coming to Awabakal Country with my holography packed in, I connected with Assoc Prof John Holdsworth (University of Newcastle) and Matthew Willis and together we are building a holography studio, to share, grow and hold knowledge.

A hologram is a physical encoding of optical paths that shapes transiting light. My holograms are created through a process enfolding and unfolding, with my artwork exploring spatial dynamics, psychogeography and emergence. This understanding of holography frames my conceptualisation of how place can be encoded with creativity and expanded with digital encounters.

Kakilliko, to be

The Sculpture Park around MAC yapang stretches to the water, a spectacular place that didn’t beckon engagement. I added it to Google Maps and invited an Easter Egg hunt – digital and cultural declarations that this is a place to experience. The next stages of revitalisation will weave new pathways through the grounds, install sculptures created by artists for the site and grow a cornucopia of native plants. A knapping floor of stone tools has been identified, so there will be yarning to decided how to respect and shape the experience of this site. It’s a slow project, conceptualised and realised on and with Country, a healing and creative inhabitation where art and nature can hold each other.

As well as the physical infrastructure we are developing a location-based sound experience. Recorded onsite and layered across it, the location triggered Sound Trail will bring together voices of Elders and artists as well as musically composed layers. It is a process of listening, to create an experience of listening. The project is in collaboration with Dr Luke Hespanhol (University of Sydney) and the MAC yapang Aboriginal Reference Group with stories shared by Professor John Maynard, Uncle Douglas Archibald and Uncle Norm Archibald (Biraban Local Aboriginal Land Council) and a musical score by Adam Manning. To experiencing the Sound Trail is to unfold time and bring voices back into the now, multiplying and embedding meaning.

Uncle Douglas Archibald shared his vision of trees woven together and how as a child he was intrigued by a circle ‘boundary’ tree that connected him to his culture. So *Kakilliko* was planted with six local varieties of eucalypt marking the direction of significant places and given its Awabakal name meaning ‘to be’. The trees are being grafted into portals and the living sculpture becomes a place to share stories and to experience continuous history.

Through these projects and activities, the Lake Arts Precinct aims to foster connected experiences that speak with culture and creativity. We invite the Everywhen back into place.

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Brett Piva

Like moths to a flame, 2022



Goldberg Aberline Studios
Beautiful and Useful
Dobell Festival of Art Lantern Project
every June since 2022

Dobell House



Curious Legends creature party for
PRESS PLAY 2023



Storm Approaching Wangi and Other Desires, 2022
A ballet by James Drinkwater, Belle Besaley, Skip Willcox and Joseph Franklin



kids disco



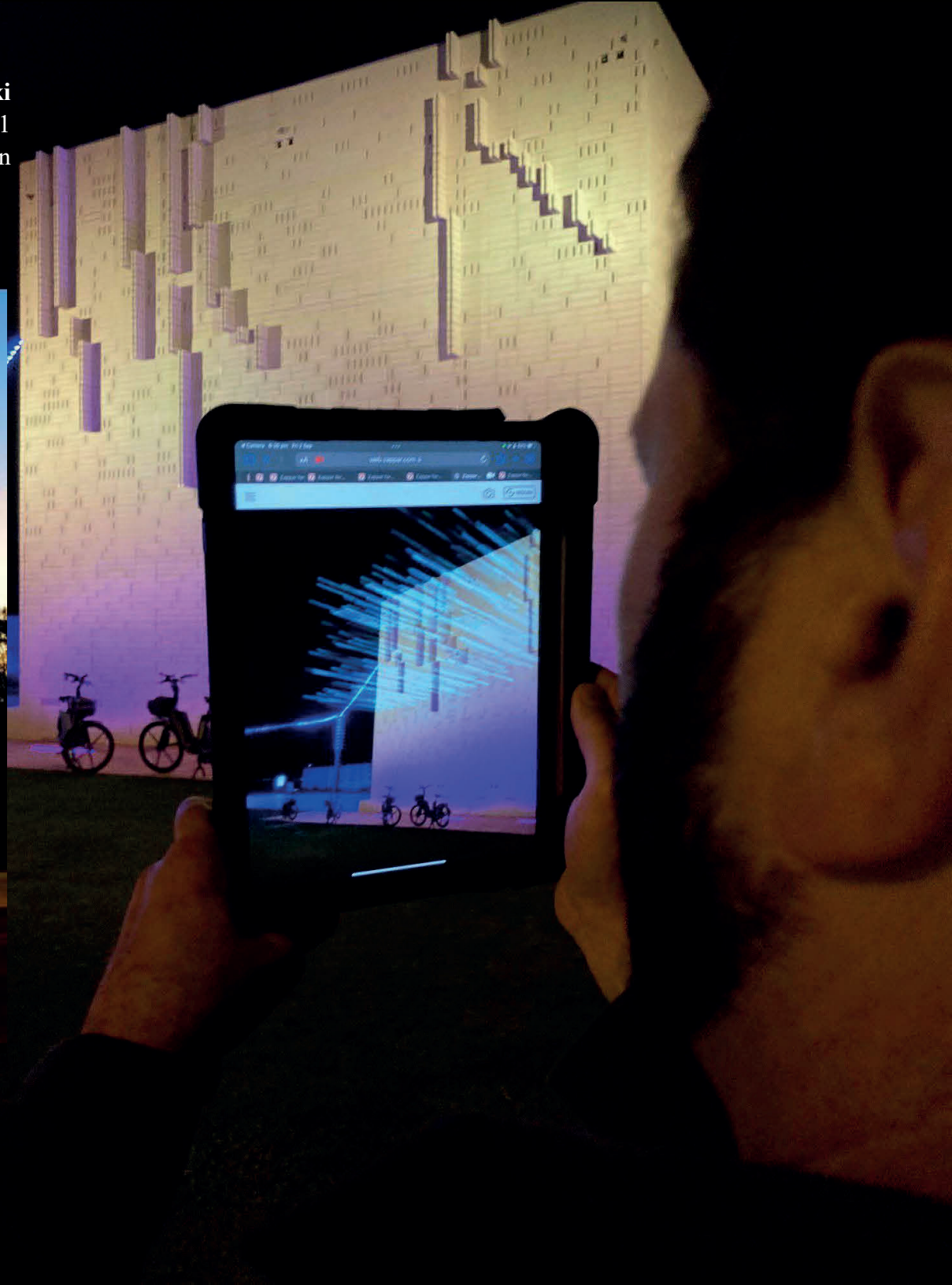
James Price, *WildeLife*

emerged technology

Multi-Arts Pavilion mima



Claire Lavis and Kira Jovanovski
Awaba _ Salt Water Lake, 2021
brickwork design and augmentation



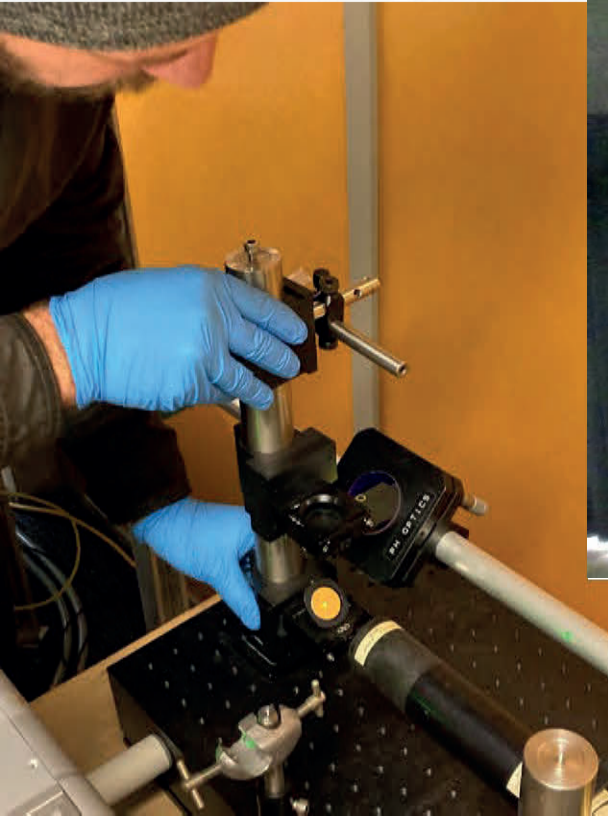
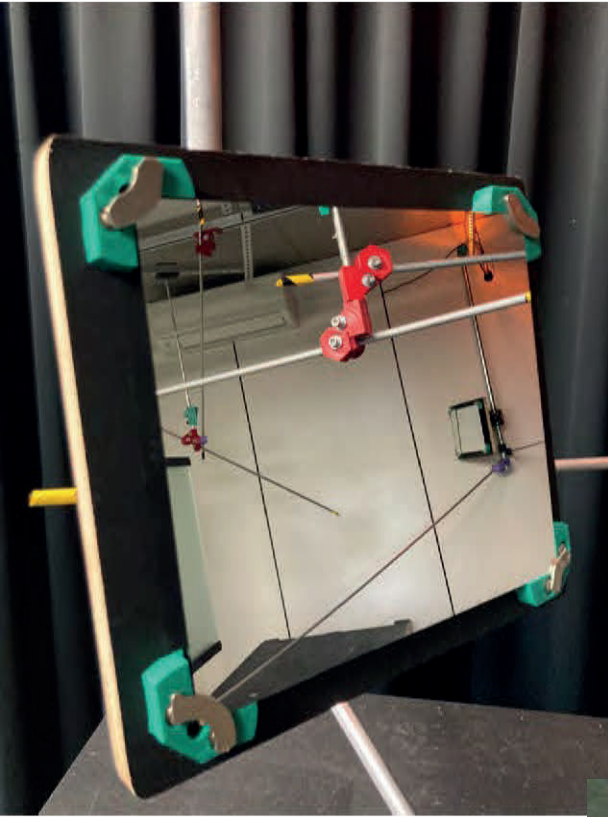
Adam Manning
Rhythmic Acknowledgment for Walking Experiences, 2021
Multi-channel sound installation



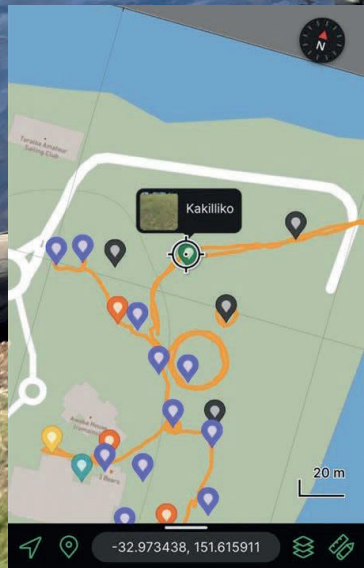
Saretta Fielding
Awa, 2022
augmented reality



Sanné Mestrom
Lady of the lake, 2023
playable sculpture



Holography Studio
University of Newcastle Galleries
aligning the pulse laser



recording and mapping the Sound Trail



Uncle Douglas Archibald
Kakilliko

