

WATER CULTURE PRESENTATION UNESCO-Venice May 2017

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www.ccanw.co.uk

CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Part 1. The Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World (CCANW) is an educational charity which uses the Arts to explore deeper understandings of our place within Nature.

In the Sixties, increased environmental awareness encouraged artists to address nature in new ways. For many, painting landscapes or fabricating big metal sculptures became incompatible with a sense of the Earth's fragility seen from Space.

As a young curator, I first showed the work of the artist Richard Long in 1975. A student work 'A Line Made by Walking' incorporated elements of ritual, landscape and impermanence within a simple black and white photograph. Long's work emerged at a time when Land Art, conceptual art and arte povera were important movements, typified by work which had a minimal impact on the environment.

I also curated several exhibitions of a next generation of British artists whose work engaged with the natural world, notably David Nash. From David Nash I learned of the work of Andy Goldsworthy, whose early career I then helped to develop. This is a work Andy made at the North Pole in 1989.

Later, in the years leading up to the Millennium, the world had become increasingly concerned with climate change, species depletion and habitat loss, and this led to new movements such as 'Eco-Art' which often involved interdisciplinary working between artists and scientists. I'll be talking more on this later.

My wife Jill and I became convinced of the need to establish the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World, in the belief that the arts could raise eco-consciousness and engage people in ways that science and conventional advocacy often fails.

Since we opened our first Project Space in 2006, CCANW has organised a wide-ranging programme of exhibitions and activities around changing themes. Until 2013 CCANW delivered its programmes from a Project Space in the Haldon Forest in South West England where it attracted around 40,000 visitors annually.

We developed several academic and professional partnerships, notably with Oxford Brookes University over the 'University of the Trees', inspired by Joseph Beuys concept of 'social sculpture'. We also contributed to the setting up of the Arts and Environment Network of the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM) with whom we make an annual award.

Between 2013-15 we were based at the University of Exeter, being largely focussed on delivering

our 'Soil Culture' programme.

All of our programmes have been supported by Arts Council England and other Trusts and have contributed to several of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

By far our most ambitious programme to date, 'Soil Culture' (2013-16) became the UK's most substantial contribution to the UN International Year of Soils 2015. It comprised a research phase followed by a series of artist residencies chosen from 655 applications received from 39 different countries.

The residencies were held in a wide range of organisations. These ranged from the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew, to the Eden Project in Cornwall. The resulting exhibition 'Young Shoots' then toured, starting in Bristol-then Green Capital of Europe.

A second exhibition 'Deep Roots' showed groups of work by six established International artists, including Mel Chin who used hyper-accumulator plants to extract heavy metals from contaminated land and Claire Pentecost who refashioned soil into ingots to reflect its true worth.

Although the promotion of safe water resources are referred to by the UN as Millennium Development Goals, no mention was made of the plight of the world's soils. We thought that perhaps the UN's designation of 2015 as the International Year of Soils would correct this but the UN released no funding to support the year. No support was either given by the UK government. Soil Culture-an arts led project- became the UK's major contribution to the year.

In 2016 we moved to the Dartington Hall Estate, at the invitation of Schumacher College and are now part of a new 'family' of arts and ecology organisations. Our other Directors are Dr Richard Povall-who leads on symposia, Dr Daro Montag-on research and Sally Lai.-on artist residencies.

Artists working within a group, or artists working alongside scientists is a growing tendency today.

In Korea, together with the artist group Yattoo, we are working with the National Institute of Science and Technology in Ulsan on the Science Walden Project: a laboratory/lavatory turning human waste into energy (yes, you are paid to poo!). CCANW has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work with the Korean Environment Institute.

We are also encouraging several botanical gardens who already have galleries, including the Royal Botanic Garden, Eden Project and the University of Padua, to work with us on the development of arts programmes and to collaborate together.

Working in the way we do exposes several weaknesses and threats:

We have no continuous funding, but are funded on a project by project basis. Since 2006, at least 50% of this funding has come from Arts Council England who prefer to fund 'new' projects rather than the same core costs of organisations such as staffing. The success of these applications depend on developing 'new' projects for which we need to raise the remaining 50% from other sources, from our partners, other stakeholders, Trusts and sponsors. Ideally, we need to develop several different projects simultaneously, to ensure continuity and minimise risk.

Part 2. CCANW has already used the arts and artists to engage with water issues, and a 'Water Culture' programme would be a logical development from our previous 'Soil Culture' programme.

'Greenhouse Britain' (2007) was a programme centred around an exhibition by the US based Harrison Studio. Its central feature was a giant relief model of mainland Britain onto which a multimedia video projected the anticipated rise in sea levels due to climate change.

The programme 'Reflections on Water' (2009) was organised around an exhibition of photographs and films by artists which communicated a sense of connection with water. This is a work by the Canadian artist Marlene Creates. It was accompanied by panels that traced other artists' fascination with water movement, from Leonardo's drawings to the 'pool' paintings of David Hockney.

Several other programmes involved exploring impacts on water resources, for example 'Fashion Footprints' (2010) which looked at the ways that designers were tackling the problems facing sustainability in the fashion industry. This was developed with graduates from the London College of Fashion.

Part 3. CCANW and the 'family' of arts and ecology organisations now at Dartington have considerable experience of partnership working and would welcome the opportunity to help develop an international 'Water Culture' programme.

During my career, and particularly as a commissioner of Korea's first biennale I have travelled extensively through the Middle East and Africa. In the past year, I have delivered papers in Belgium, Italy, South Korea, China and Hungary.

I have found that few public galleries have a particular interest in art and ecology, notable exceptions being one in Sittard in the Netherlands and the Pori Art Museum in Finland. An exhibition 'Water.War', accompanied by an excellent publication, was recently organised by Gluon in Brussels. Recently launched in Geneva, 'Aqua' is a worldwide travelling exhibition organised by Art for the World in partnership with UN Water.

'Inner Nature' is a touring exhibition of videos on the theme of water opening in Valencia in November. Last month, Lucy and Jorge Orta organised an educational project on plastic ocean waste for primary school children at the Peggy Guggenheim Museum here in Venice.

Based on our past experience and research, CCANW has already devised its own outline 'Water Culture' programme comprising an exhibition, commission, artist residency, international symposium, writing competition, film programme and publication. This could be adapted for different Water Museums.

We know many artists who have addressed water issues in different ways. Some, like Amy Sharrocks from the UK, have actually created their own '**Museum of Water**'; a collection of publicly donated water and accompanying stories accumulating over two years in different sites worldwide.

Amy currently has over 700 bottles in the collection, ranging from water from a holy river in India, to a burst London water main, a melted snowman and condensation from a window. Her collection has already been shown in many different places and was nominated 'European Museum of the Year' in 2016.

In another work 'All the Seas' artist Tania Kovats assembled bottles of water from 200 seas using a global network of contributors.

A few examples of other water issues with which artists have engaged include:

Water as a subject of contemplation. The river photograms of Susan Derges (UK).

Rising sea levels due to climate change. 'HighWaterLine' by Eve Mosher (USA) and the 'Drowning World' photographs of Gideon Mendall (SA).

Excessive water extraction. Projects along the Rio Grande by Basia Irland (USA).

Safe drinking water. The 'Water Box' project by Ichi Ikeda (Japan).

Water pollution. Photographs of plastic waste affecting seabird life by Chris Jordan (USA).

Hydroponic plant environments. Greenhouses by Avital Geva (Israel).

How then can collaboration within the framework of a Network strengthen and provide new opportunities for all parties?

Collaboration over research and programmes between Museums shares expertise and costs, reduces duplication and waste.

Permanent or changing temporary art exhibitions and activities increases press coverage and repeat visits to Museums.

The arts and artists engage people with water issues in ways that science and conventional education frequently fail.

The Dartington Estate could host international conferences and workshops relating to the Network.

Lastly, CCANW could organise a greater number of artist presentations and activities at any future meetings of the Network.

These are opportunities that I hope we can all follow up together.

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