

**ART LAB:**  
*SWIMMABLE! READING THE RIVER*  
GASP 17-20 SEPTEMBER 2014



This document describes the reflections of a group of twenty-five participants including seven key artists invited to engage in the GASP *Swimmable!* Lab in September 2014. Over four days the group collaboratively explored the history, ecology and future ‘swimmability’ of the Derwent River at Elwick Bay. Together, the diverse group of artists, scientists and researchers considered the possibilities for public art outcomes at GASP.



*Swimmable! Reading the River*, is a collaboration between GASP and Carbon Arts.

**GASP** (The Glenorchy Art and Sculpture Park) is a dynamic, inspirational and internationally resonant open space providing unique encounters with art and creating memorable experiences for all in the natural environment. GASP’s vision is to commission new art towards creating and sustaining a place of imagination and wonder for everyone, enhancing and responding to the diverse ecology, history and heritage of the local environment.

**Carbon Arts** is a Melbourne-based organisation generating public art, exhibitions and events aimed at engaging society in imagining and shaping a more sustainable future. Carbon Arts projects foster innovation and dialogue between the arts and other disciplines to foster innovation in the face of contemporary environmental challenges.

#### **Acknowledgements**

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**Pippa Dickson, GASP**

*Swimmable! Reading the River* is a bold project addressing issues arising from Elwick Bay's poor water quality: once a popular swimming spot, it is now "un-Swimmable".

*Swimmable!* is a collaboration between artists, scientists, educators, environmentalists, industry and community. It was conceived by GASP with environmental arts organisation, Carbon Arts, as a 3 year project to deliver temporary and permanent, internationally resonant art. Art in all forms, that serves to connect the local community and visitors to the health of the aquatic environment and introduce new ways of thinking about GASP and the immediate environment.

The project can be traced to 2009 when a 17-year-old student summarized the desire of her generation; to make the water swimmable again. Building on an inclusive community approach GASP has sought the involvement of best practice partners elevating the possibility of beautiful, thought provoking and intelligent outcomes based on strong knowledge beds and in-depth enquiry. Partners include esteemed Australian artists, scientists, environmentalists and educators as well as the community including local schools that have come together on a voluntary basis to contribute to the concept.

Over the past two years we have undertaken targeted consultations including a half-day workshop in April 2013 where 23 participants representing the stakeholder groups (not including artists) established an approach for the further development as well as a process for engaging professional artists. This work led to the development of the *Swimmable!* Artists Lab held in September 2014, this document summarises this Lab.

The Lab was designed to foster processes of collaboration and encourage the early development of artwork concepts. Over four days it offered participants an immersive experience of the environmental and community context and introduced them to the wealth of supportive stakeholder organisations and resources available to develop emergent concepts.

Leading artists from around Australia (two currently residing internationally) were invited by the GASP Art Committee and Jodi Newcombe, Director of Carbon Arts. They included; Janet Laurence, Justy Phillips, Tega Brain, Julie Gough, Nigel Helyer, James Newitt and James Geurts. All of the artist's work is provocative, timely and relevant. They are all boldly original and push the boundaries of their genre creating work that carries the potential to reshape the cultural landscape. The reputation and ability of

the artists is critical for the success and ongoing resonance of GASP. These artists were selected for their keen interest in and history of engagement with environmental and social themes as well as their experience of working with/in communities.

As an arts space striving for internationally resonant art projects GASP fundamentally believes in artist led engagement, however, not at the exclusion of its community. On the contrary GASP's community provided the initial point of inspiration. This sharing of knowledge and perspectives has opened up a fertile ground on which to take the project forward and create new opportunities for invited artists. Furthermore, through engagement with partners like the Montrose Bay High School, GASP's unique community will be ongoing contributors and participants throughout the development and experience of *Swimmable!*.

A less risky approach might have been to simply approach a single artist, or undertake an open call for ideas. Instead, what appealed to GASP and Carbon Arts was allowing flexibility and facilitating space for the open-ended exploration of ideas. A Laboratory seemed perfect as a way to elicit new and authentic responses to local issues. By providing a space for arts and non-arts/environmental leaders to talk about their work we enabled a process of enquiry and potential collaboration. Ideas seemed to fluctuate with the tides and inspiration swirled with the winds. The *Swimmable!* lab was a generous space enhanced by the generosity of all the partners and participants who enthusiastically shared thoughts and ideas.

GASP aims to be an 'immersive experience', a place for imagination, wonder and reverie of which story telling is an integral part. Researching and recognising past and present uses of what is now the GASP site provides a fertile platform to explore possible futures, such as progressing the river to a healthier state in the face of climate change and ongoing human-induced pressures on its ecology.

Over the course of the next twelve months early concepts developed by seven leading, contemporary Australian artists will be distilled and developed in collaboration with workshop participants from the fields of science, technology and further afield, as well as selected interns from Constance Artist Run Initiative, and members of the local GASP community. We sincerely thank all of our partners for collaborating with us to date, as well as our private benefactors who have invested in the early development of this project, we couldn't do it without you!

GASP and Carbon Arts invited seven leading, contemporary Australian artists to experience the site at GASP and engage with the tight knit community of stakeholders from science, industry, government and the local community participating in the project since its inception. The *Swimmable!* team were augmented by the participation of Constance ARI and three interns selected to contribute to the Lab.

## Participating Artists

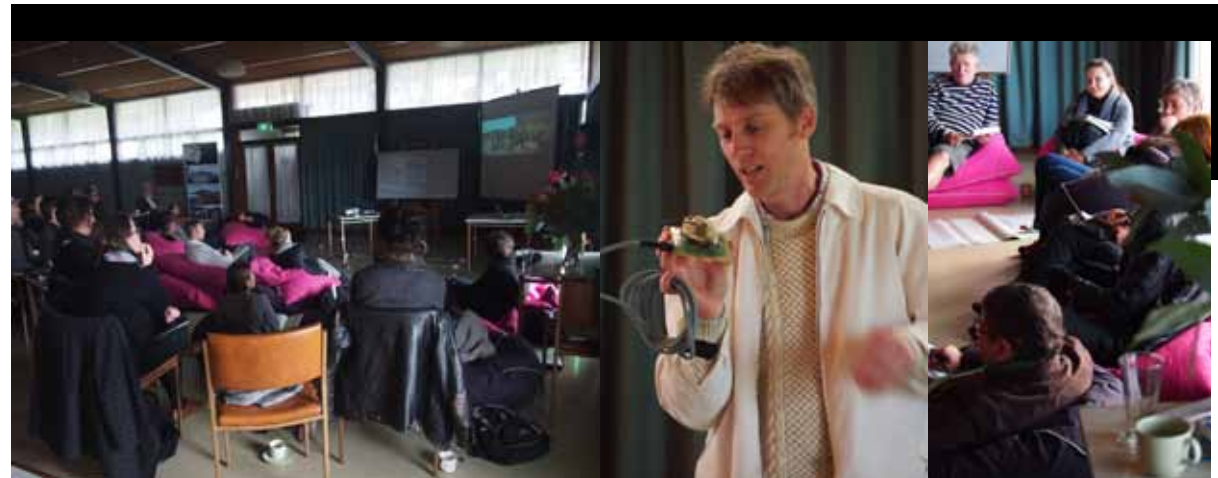
- Tega Brain
- James Geurts
- Julie Gough
- Nigel Helyer
- Janet Laurence
- James Newitt
- Justy Phillips

## Participating Partners

- Sean Riley, Aqueenal
- Josie Kelman, Bookend Trust
- Sam Whitehead, Derwent Estuary Program
- Stewart Frusher, Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies
- Christopher Lueg, UTAS Computing
- Jen Makin, Sense-T CSIRO
- John McCulloch, Sense-T CSIRO
- Lance Stapleton, Tas Water
- Hannah Sadler, Glenorchy City Council
- Spencer Woolley, Montrose Bay High
- Danielle Warfe, UTAS & independent fresh water ecologist

## *Swimmable!* Team

- Pippa Dickson, GASP
- Jodi Newcombe, Carbon Arts
- Sean Kelly, GASP Art Committee
- Selena de Carvalho, Constance ARI
- Aviva Reed, Constance ARI
- Eliza Burke, Constance ARI
- Grace Herbert, Constance ARI



The Lab offered multiple opportunities for exchange between artists, scientists, community members and other stakeholders in formal and informal settings. A symposium, site visits, trips further afield, roundtable discussions and social events allowed time for relationships, connections and ideas to develop. Some highlights of the four days are described here.

## DAY 1: Sharing of knowledge and perspectives

A mini-symposium, the first day saw all participants presenting their work. Asked to focus on their experience with rivers, where possible, presentations alternated between artist and non-artist. This provided visiting artists with an insight into the key issues faced by the river, and opened up dialogue around artistic, cultural and scientific ways of seeing.

*“The presentations provided exciting insights into the different lenses through which people view landscapes. The strongest resonance for me was the enthusiasm of the scientists and artists to collaborate and be inspired with each other’s ways of thinking.”*

– Aviva Reed, Constance ARI

*“Looking at all the talks together, I was struck by the similar reliance on creativity required by both artists and scientists, effectively a means of expressing and solving problems.”*

– Danielle Warfe, University of Tasmania

*“I was just blown away by the backgrounds, experiences and responses the artists brought to the lab – what an amazingly diverse group!”*

– Spencer Woolley, Montrose Bay High School



## DAY 2: Exploring ideas from the river

Artists and partners were invited to take to the water, beginning with a ferry trip to MONA. This provided a different perspective on GASP both physically and culturally. Artists were introduced to Kirsha Kaechele, who provided an overview of Heavy Metals, a related curatorial program of MONA concerned with remediating heavy metal pollution in the river. A community dinner in the evening at the Montrose Bay Yacht Club provided a valuable opportunity for artists to meet with the broader GASP community.

*“The multi-perspective approach to site by both the artists and scientists gave such a generous and inspired dimension to the Derwent River as a living body, complex and continual. This sharing throughout the Lab kept opening up spaces around thinking and sensing the river in a deeper way.”*

– James Geurts, artist

*Technically the biggest issue for the Derwent at Elwick Bay, which makes the area less ‘swimmable’, is most likely water quality affected by urban runoff and nutrient inputs.”*

– Lance Stapleton, TasWater

*“To experience the GASP Site from the river really invites a different way of relating to the site, the land and the river itself. This really brought to the fore, the fact that the river is a working river and that it remains a critical process of many of the industries that are situated along its riverbanks.”*

– Justy Phillips, artist



## DAY 3: Exploring ideas at GASP

Lengthy, exploratory walks along the foreshore at GASP were punctuated by presentations from Aquenal scientists on benthic worms and other life beneath the surface, a creative development workshop and a community BBQ. Some artists pursued one-to-one meetings with particular stakeholders.

*“Spending time at the site was really important. I experienced the restless atmosphere of the river and the park and how the site was connected to the surrounding community. The different perspectives from the week’s speakers and guests revealed the complexity of the river’s history in both a social and environmental sense.”*

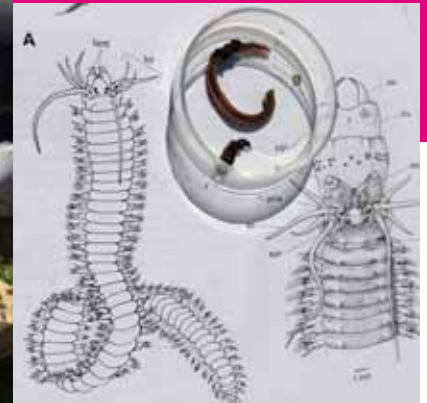
– Tega Brain, artist

*“The Swimmable Lab helped me to visualise and understand the River from a different contextual viewpoint. It expanded my understanding of its “function” as a system, to beyond functionality.”*

– Sean Riley, Aquenal

*“Strong discussions at the end of the lab about data and information, what it is, how it can be used, how it can be interpreted and/or how it is interpreted by different groups, were stimulating.”*

– Stewart Frusher, IMAS





## DAY 4: Reflections and next steps

The final day of the Lab was spent reflecting on the experience so far through roundtable discussion that brought back some of the non-arts partners to join in. This included discussion of expectations and next steps. The evening closed with a celebratory dinner to thank everyone for their contributions to a successful week.

*“I was excited by the various projects and possibilities that were raised, most in passing as tiny germinating mind sketches.”*

– Julie Gough, artist

*“I think TasWater would be keen to continue some involvement with the project particularly as there are synergies with other projects we are carrying out such as the Greater Derwent Sewerage Strategy.”*

– Lance Stapleton, TasWater

*“I left the workshop with a very strong sense that anything is possible and that there is an incredible body of knowledge to draw on within the process of developing a proposal and possible project.”*

– James Newitt, artist



## Eliza Burke

From knowledge about plastics pollution to global water shortages, science has made us increasingly aware of water's relatedness to other environmental systems and the impact of human industry on its health.

Whilst it has changed what we know about the world's water, science has also changed the meaning of water in the public imagination as evidenced by the emergence of new ecologically-driven narratives, images and practices in many areas of cultural life. This shift in the way we think about water acknowledges it first and foremost as a vulnerable resource, generating a desire to protect it and a broad-scale call for sustainable and

restorative practices to meet its needs. Developing practices that address these concerns is not simply a matter of good science, but also requires us to engage with water on social and emotional levels, and build new ways of understanding its meaning in our daily lives and our cultural environment.

Over four days in September at GASP, *Swimmable!* Reading the River Arts Lab provided a creative platform for thinking about the impact of science on our changing relationship with water and the role of artists in navigating this terrain. Focused specifically on Hobart's Derwent Estuary and the Elwick Bay site, the Lab invited artists and scientists to explore questions relating to the river's health, its cultural utility and how art and science might collaborate to develop greater community awareness of the river's value. As an initiative closely allied with the interests of the local community and the project title 'Swimmable' emerging from the articulation of a community desire to swim in Elwick Bay (something currently restricted due to health risks), the Lab explored the different approaches of art and science to the

meanings of the river, with a particular focus on art's role in destabilising assumptions, challenging perceptions and perhaps most importantly, responding to the imaginative potential of the science and the site. Through a mix of formal and informal processes including presentations, conversations, and walks along the 4km site, the foundations of the project were built on a curiosity about the combination of beauty and pollution in

the river and how 'data-driven' art might respond to this - is it simply a matter of putting data into visual forms through demonstration, illustration, communication? How can art give meaningful dimension to data and engage the public's imagination in space and time? What is data, and how might artists define it and use it to produce empathy and wonder?

From the first day of presentations the Lab unfolded as a series of provocations and propositions. The conversation at times grappled with territorial questions about the converging terrains of art and science and the objectives of each, but mostly it put empathy into practice, resisting the demarcation of disciplinary territories and addressing knowledge as a living system that ebbed and flowed with as much uncertainty as observable fact. Through sharing knowledge of such things as the heartbeat of oysters or the Indigenous histories of the riverbank, and perspectives on the river as a catchment, a system or a line within a sphere, it explored ideas that could not only generate intrigue and curiosity, but also activate a sense of communal attachment and empathic engagement. Driven by an awareness of the power of combining the interests of artists, scientists, business and community the Lab began the work of thinking about public art as a field for fostering an agency of care, encouraging nurture as a social practice and asking viewers to reflect on the changing relations between themselves and their local marine environment.

Through such an openly provocative framework, ideas that felt submerged in the river gradually came to the surface, forming conceptual pools around the following themes: the river's source, its containment and/or continuity as a vein, a dividing line, a threshold that is both opaque and transparent depending on how you look at it; water quality and the material processes of filtering and erosion, absorption and release, the build-up of heavy metals in sediment and the shallowing of the bay; the underwater community of plants and marine life and their invisible intelligence; the ideal of a pure environment as irrecoverable and the politics of claimed and unclaimed land; the relatedness between our bodies and water - our blood has the same salinity as the ocean; water as a dumping ground, a dead-zone, haunted space and/or extraction site.

After four days of discussion around these themes, the Lab had generated a deep respect for the different approaches artists and scientists brought to the site and for water as a medium of connection, a fluid material and symbolic element that occupies a unique imaginative space. The exciting task for the *Swimmable!* project now lies in nurturing these ideas formed in the Lab and engaging the public in the process, first as its audience but ultimately, perhaps, as swimmers in the bay.



## Jodi Newcombe, Carbon Arts

*Swimmable! Reading the River* was born from conversations I was privileged to have with Pippa Dickson, GASP's founding CEO, and a number of GASP partners in the scientific community who understood and were excited by the potential for the arts to be a collaborator in the project of environmental restoration.



Having worked as an environmental consultant for many years before founding Carbon Arts, I shared their enthusiasm regarding the unique potential of the arts to offer new ways of seeing and acting in the world. In particular, I have been inspired by the artistic practices emerging from a new field, often referred to as 'eco-art'. Stemming from the tradition of social sculpture, eco-artists are active, collaborative and often disruptive participants in shaping a more sustainable society.

The notion of 'reading the river' emerged from a the recognition of a common problem in natural resource management and environmental sustainability, namely that environmental phenomena, such as pollution or species decline, are often invisible, intangible or difficult to 'read'. This manifests in different ways, but has implications for how decisions are made about the use of natural assets, such as rivers. For Sean Riley, who through his marine consulting work at Aquenal, provides detailed assessments and surveys of life under water, there is a strong desire for this to be readily available to the public. For a variety of reasons, these reports aren't often accessed by the public who is affected by the decisions they inform. For those frequenting the foreshore at GASP there exists an opportunity for public

art to contribute to our ability to read what lies beneath the surface. Perhaps through this new legibility many more may participate in decisions about how the environment is managed for public benefit.

Arguably, this ability to read our environment is a finely honed skill – or embodied knowledge – that we once had in our DNA and have, to a large extent, gradually lost (or forgotten), with the exception of indigenous peoples who still retain these abilities today. Technology as a manifestation and extension of our human intellect provides us with these tools for seeing and sensing our environment in a different and very modern guise. Sensing Tasmania's pioneering work connecting aqua- / agricultural farmers with environmental sensor networks through collaborative data platforms, points to a myriad of possibilities for technology-enabled public participation in environmental stewardship. Chris Leug's research at UTAS with his students, developing novel applications for distributed citizen-led data collection and dissemination, for example through smart mobile devices, points to another set of possibilities for participatory readings of the environment.

This existing data in all its forms and the systems that generate it - from the tweeting oysters of Sense-T, to the traffic-light indicators of water quality developed by the Derwent Estuary Program or the environmental impact assessment reports of Aquenal – offers rich material for artists to work with. But to limit artists' engagement with the project to merely 'painting with data' would be to grossly underestimate the power and potential of their contribution. The ability of artists to ask fundamental questions, shift our perspective or shape a collective understanding or action is what is valued most in this project. The definition of data itself may need to be challenged, perhaps expanding it to include the collection of any material that assists in telling a story. Whilst the insertion of '*Swimmable!*' provides an ambition to drive the project, and a useful framing for a collaborative effort with science, it also opens up further questions around the historical and cultural context that informs the community's evolving relationship with the river and its uses.

The artists selected for the Lab represent a diversity of practices and approaches arguably necessary to respond to the range of possibilities and complexities that *Swimmable! Reading the River* presents. With the ambition to deliver a number of works over the next few years, the curatorial vision for this project is to facilitate a variety of readings of the river at GASP, some of which may or may not engage with technology and/or data, that together enhance connections between our own nature and that of the river. The Lab is a key step along this journey, serving to both showcase existing research and initiate new forms of research - the artistic and the inter-disciplinary. By creating meaningful encounters between artists, scientists, the community and the site, the Lab seeds a field of new possibilities.

**Stewart Frusher, IMAS**

Simply by bringing artists and scientists together the lab provided a forum for the exchange of ideas and concepts between people who seldom have this opportunity. Both scientists and artists do share common interest in the exploration of ideas and, although more constrained in the science profession, the ability to think “outside the square” and often “outside their comfort zones”. The latter is important for advancing society – which, given the socio-economic background of the site, offers challenges, both confrontational and exciting.

Of particular interest was the constant reminder, through for example, the global performances and exhibits of artists and international connections of scientists that the issues associated with the Derwent are really global in nature through the desire for global sustainability of our landscapes and a desire to remediate. The latter is a cornerstone of ecological sustainable development, which articulates that no generation should leave the planet in a state that is less sustainable than when they inherited it, or for future generations to inherit. Remediation of many parts of the planet is required as we realise how unsustainable development has been in the past.

While there is a role for everyone in caring for the planet, the art and science communities have an exciting role to play in the generation of information and knowledge and its interpretation in ways that not only convey a message, but generate thought and (potentially) action in the public.

Strong discussions at the end of the lab about data and information, what it is, how it can be used, how it can be interpreted and/or how it is interpreted by different groups, were stimulating. This included the broad range of data which was beyond the physical and biological data to data associated with the human system – social and economic, including perceptions, attitudinal behaviours, and so on. Utilising data as either a snapshot of the current system (biophysical or human systems – often referred to as the socio-ecological system) or as an ongoing capture (e.g. through for example sensors) process presented some exciting challenges and discussion.

I had an exciting discussion at dinner about the global “hardening” of the world’s foreshores as a method of stabilising the water/land margin and as barriers for rising sea levels. The discussion included the loss of the wetlands (some of the world’s largest carbon sequestration sites) as these can seldom retreat inland due to roads and other human infrastructure and thus “squashed” out of existence. The discussion revolved around potential solutions that were aesthetic, practical and artistic and could convey both the importance of these regions and enhance their area. I was struck by the knowledge and breadth of ideas and concepts from the artists that were underpinned by both a strong scientific and practical basis as well as a desire to be creative, aesthetic and thought provoking.

Importantly, I believe that the Lab laid further strong foundations for not only the interaction between the groups but an improved understanding of both the constraints and potential creativity of the groups and from my perspective, a slightly different way to view my professional world.



## Lance Stapleton, TasWater

Technically the biggest issue for the Derwent at Elwick Bay, which makes the area less 'swimmable', is most likely water quality affected by urban runoff and nutrient inputs. These can be addressed with engineering solutions. For GASP to make a meaningful difference in this space will require funding commitments from other players in the area and coordination of projects and initiatives by several parties, including the Glenorchy City Council, TasWater, the Derwent Estuary Program and the State Government. GASP's involvement through *Swimmable!* may well assist in public and funding support for a joint project.

In my mind the most critical issues are the need for baseline data, a set of clear targets and a plan to get there in a way that gets people excited, interested and involved. The current system of rating urban beaches for safe swimming is based around recreational water quality guidelines, which are mostly focussed towards harmful bacteria. The Derwent Estuary Program has developed a traffic light ranking system, which allows them to advise which beaches or areas are the safest to swim at.

If we are really and truly focussed on making Elwick Bay Swimmable again, we need to focus on this water quality issue and promote projects that can address poor water quality. To start with, a dedicated monitoring program focussed on the local stormwater inputs and some monitoring in the bay, focussed toward bathing risks, would go a long way to better defining the key impacts to water quality which could then lead to targeted solutions.

The most obvious solutions include restricting major point sources of pollution and in Elwick Bay this is probably related to the urban creeks and stormwater. Some sort of stormwater filtration through constructed wetlands is likely to make significant improvements to water quality in the bay and could be woven into an interesting and collaborative project with strong technical themes explored through artworks and public engagement.

The opportunity exists to make a meaningful environmental and social difference in Elwick Bay by providing a clear focus and engaging with stakeholders and the public. In short, to do something that makes a difference and brings people along for the ride. Approaches that look at water quality monitoring with high levels of public engagement and visibility could work well in this context.



## Christine Couganowr, Derwent Estuary Program

The DEP has been a long-term supporter of GASP, providing scientific and technical advice on water quality and storm water management, and we look forward to future collaborations. Swimmable is an important concept from both a human and broader ecosystem perspective. Water quality for human 'swimmability' primarily focuses on bacteria levels, but fish rely on a wider range of criteria. What's good for the fish will benefit us too.

Key issues and opportunities that could be further explored in collaboration with GASP include:

- monitor and track down pollution sources
- rank and progressively address key sources (eg fix leaks and cross-connections, treat stormwater)
- maintain and improve coastal and riparian habitat both as a filtration system and as habitat for fish
- maintain and enhance fish passage between the Bay and rivulets



**Selena de Carvalho, Constance ARI**

The consideration of the setting of GASP both ecologically and socially is visionary and inspiring. What resonated for me, in my experience of the *Swimmable!* Lab was a commitment to farsighted development and enrichment of this site as a community (beyond the human sense of what that might be) through the incorporation and encouragement of a deep regard for the politics of the space as a socio/ecological system.

As an arts and ecology showcase of presentations, what struck me most was the passion with which everyone in the room engaged in their specialised field, and the subsequent curiosity this ignited in others. This passion, depth of inquiry and breadth of knowledge was a rich resource to have access and exposure to.

This insight has grown my understanding of, and connection to GASP and the Derwent River. As a Tasmanian local I now see and experience GASP with new depth and appreciation. On a recent trip to northwest Tasmania I drove past the Lake St Clair turn off — towards the headwaters of the Derwent — and GASP instantly came to mind. By highlighting interconnectedness and the overlapping value of history, ecology, creativity and autonomy my perception of the Derwent, and my place, or relationship to place, within that environment has evolved.

One of the comments that has resurfaced for me following the lab is ‘what questions does an artist get to ask that a scientist does not...’ This freedom to question unbound by the outcome of a definitive or logical answer, I believe encapsulates the beauty of GASP and for myself, this is where the strength and enchantment of this project lies.

I found the ongoing provocation to re-wild and delve beneath the waters surface, to ‘swim’, a poetic notion. The fleshing out of this as idea, or possibility, or curatorial premise was intriguing and a curious point for conversation. The imagining of a river no longer full of toxins, the experiences of swimming that no longer (but could?) exist was an evocative catalyst for discussion. As were the self/socially/safety constructed boundaries that this conversation highlighted.

As the coordinator for the Constance ARI involvement in the Lab, I feel fortunate to have discovered and developed friendships with the artists who participated as interns. As emerging artists, the opportunity to connect with more senior artists with extensive and developed practices was invaluable. As was their diverse insight into how to develop and sustain an arts practice. The cross-lateral space of the Lab was generous, enabling and encouraged an accessible probing, not only into peoples practice but also the life stories each participant brought with them to the space.



The Lab aimed to facilitate a free and open-ended exploration and discovery of the site and the curatorial theme. Artists were invited to provide their reflections on this experience, hinting at some of the ideas to come.

**Tega Brain**



**James Geurts**



**Julie Gough**



**Nigel Helyer**



**Janet Laurence**



**James Newitt**



**Justy Phillips**





### Tega Brain

Tega Brain is an artist and engineer whose work rethinks the infrastructures, interfaces and institutions that structure our relationship with larger environmental systems. She creates site-specific installations, dysfunctional devices, experimental infrastructures, speculative services and information visualisations (sometimes using underpants).

Spending time at the site was really important. I experienced the restless atmosphere of the river and the park and how the site was connected to the surrounding community. The different perspectives from the week's speakers and guests revealed the complexity of the river's history in both a social and environmental sense. The history of the GASP site, first as a bathing spot, then a dumping ground, a tip, a forgotten shoreline and now as a destination became clearer as I spoke to community, locals and scientists throughout the week. It seems a narrative not atypical of many semi-urban shorelines that have recently been remembered and restored as green and public spaces.

The GASP! site struck me as an urban midden, materially layered with local memories in the

form of recollections of mudflat ecologies, spots where someone's relative had dumped earth from domestic excavation projects, burial grounds for old rusted out car bodies and other bits of urban detritus. Most of this is now hidden under a tidy layer of lawn but which also remains fresh in the memory of the local people. These memories remain encoded archeologically and reflect shifting relationships to the river. Presently, in the context of the stewardship of GASP!, there is now a collective desire to add another layer of poetic and thoughtful artistic interventions to the area.

Hearing from the many voices of the scientific community and projects undertaken to understand the river better was really valuable, from seeing the worm library of the benthic researchers to the ways scientists are trying to hear the oyster communities. These all helped me gain a richer sense of the river and its interpretation and gave a glimpse of the potential for the Lab and for GASP! to be a project that responds to environment in a post-disciplinary way. I kept asking myself what questions does an artist get to ask that a scientist or engineer does not? How might we produce work at GASP that invites and engages people with the shore and with its biodiversity? How might a project act as a conduit for the inclusion of non-human communities who are under represented in how we develop and approach the site?

### James Geurts

James Geurts has been producing large-scale, site and time-specific projects and gallery works in international contexts since 2002. He employs an 'expanded drawing practice' to draw out the spatial dynamics of each site, and explore their relationship with perception. Typically these projects work with features such as tidal zones, fault-lines, horizons, meridians, and other conceptual lines and markers of place. Geurts explores these features using processes ranging from installation, video, photography, land-art, living monochromes, and works on paper. He often modifies the function of technology in his works, for example: reconfiguring the circuits of fluorescent tubes and modify digital filming in ways that abstract site recordings, making them responsive to the movement of colour, light, weather and other fluxing conditions.



The strongest resonance came from being with the site, spending time walking along the shore, the one on one conversations with individual artists and scientists, and sitting and drawing by the river in an attempt to slow down time. The multi-perspective approach to site by both the artists and scientists gave such a generous and inspired dimension to the Derwent River as a living body, complex and continual. This sharing throughout the workshop kept opening up spaces around thinking and sensing the river in a deeper way. One notable aspect of the scientific research of the Derwent River, which was repeated throughout the presentations and conversations, was the river's relationship to air, and the oxidization process that helps break down the heavy metals in the river.

It was good to boat across the river, I also wanted to get in the river, put my head underwater. I planned to go scuba diving, next time for sure, but it was wonderful to share the underwater footage around the process of observing the river life. I reflected on the way these perimeters of measuring a living space becomes abstract data. The way the scientists

laid out a meter square frame on the uneven riverbed floor to sample the site seemed like a simple almost humorous, yet a profoundly symbolic and impossible endeavor, as the crab kept walking over the line of measuring. The quiet gaze and slow exploration also resonated with aspects of my approach to art practice.

Throughout the workshop I kept returning to thoughts around the 'paradigm of measuring', the trajectory and pursuit of human understanding, and the attempt to frame the unfathomable, a movable complex force such as a river. My attention also drew to the waterline threshold, the space where the surface of the river and the air above it meet, the thin lip defining the density of the difference of both bodies, the way they hold and refract light, defining the unseeable and the seeable.

### Julie Gough:

Julie Gough is an artist, writer and curator who lives in Hobart, Tasmania. Julie's research and art practice involves uncovering and re-presenting subsumed and often conflicting histories, often referring to her own and her family's experiences as Tasmanian Aboriginal people. Current work in installation, sound and video provides the means to explore ephemerality, absence and recurrence.

The gathering was both exciting and perplexing. How could we achieve some magical outcome? Nothing was expected in the traditional workshop (fast and futile) sense. This slow burn, of meet, think, interact, depart and gather our thoughts, was a nurturing process, and more useful, with considered outcomes eventuating in the longer term. The equalised engagement of participants as peers from all sectors was also promising and commendable. The key thought or sensation I felt during the lab was how obviously empty the river was of people in slow activity, for example boating, and how endlessly busy is the cacophonous highway with people rushing past, buffered in their vehicles. The lab highlighted and emphasized, as a microcosmic GASPI bound entity, the



larger issues facing contemporary western societies, i.e. the disconnect from place, environment and people.

However the walking track at GASP! does counter the modern world issues abovementioned that are strongly evident by the horrid highway and the abandoned river that itself once was a highway, historically. The walkers are interacting, encountering each other and owning the place by their regular inhabitation. There is hope. It was a gift to step sideways from life, and relocate daily for four days to GASP! – a place I had not spent more than minutes in previously. The familiar river, suburbs, highway became strangely amplified in all dimensions by the opportunity to forcibly engage with the site in the company with others also set this task.

I was most taken with the diversity of practice evident from the presentations, and also the interdisciplinary pull obvious in the work of most participants - whether artists or from the science sector. The keen willingness from the scientists to work with the artists was extremely heartening. I was excited by the various projects and possibilities that were raised, most in passing as tiny germinating mind sketches. Once people are at GASP! they realise what a special oasis it is. Wilkinson's Point is stunning. I particularly liked the rough edge feel of the surrounds, the cracked cement, careful planting, in fantastic synch with the slick beautiful built structure.

### Nigel Helyer:

Nigel Helyer is a sculptor and sound artist with an international reputation for his large-scale sonic installations, environmental sculpture works and new media projects. His practice is actively inter-disciplinary linking creative practice with scientific research and development. These interests form part of a larger project that seeks to integrate cultural and technical systems, especially those concerned with sound and acoustic ecology, within an environmental and biological context.

I have been fortunate to spend quite a lot of time in Hobart over the past three years, collaborating with Marine Scientists at (IMAS - the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies UTAS) and already had some familiarity with the GASP site. What fired my imagination most was the morning that I spent with the pensioner and proud builder/owner of the little sailing boat "Sea Breeze" moored in the bay. Robin has a host of historical information and personal memories that are deeply enmeshed with the river, and which are ever present in his enthusiasm for the location and the GASP project in general, for me it was this 'personal touch' that most struck a chord.



## Janet Laurence:

Janet Laurence has had a long and profound engagement with the 'life-world'. Over twenty-five years, her practice has extended to painting, sculpture, installation, photography, architectural and landscape interventions. The major themes that have emerged in the work include: the relationship between the museum, the natural world, and notions of preservation; the exploration of hybrid landscapes, that involve a fusion of natural and urban elements; alchemy and the transformation of elements from one state to another.



The strongest resonance for me was the presentation by biologists at the Swimmable! Lab, of their knowledge of life beneath the water; the making visible of all that marine life. It opened up the degraded state of that river which I thought about in the light of degraded and abused landscape becoming desert. To me, this river life that is left seems a strange half-life of creatures and organisms that emerge in this toxic environment. I thought about the river, its journey, it's past — before how teeming with life it must have been. I dreamt of that potential of life wondering how art can bring that back. At the same time I focused on the toxicity as an element to play with - to play with the possibilities of its transformation.

I really enjoyed the presentations of the individual artists' works and their ideas. The Lab certainly made me realise how all of us artists have our specific areas of focus, and how all of these could be relevant and I think in that way it was very successful. I left with such respect for the other artists. The Lab made it clear to me, the value of art, as only artists could do those things from years of focusing down sometimes crazy pathways. I found myself able to imagine in that site the different things that could be done by different preoccupations all of which could lead to a transformation in such a place, which is so potent for cultural interventions.

## James Newitt:

James Newitt's art practice encompasses media such as video projection, sound and text installation as well as public art projects. He uses methods of engagement and observation to explore the spaces between individual and collective identity, memory and history, fact and fiction as well as public and private space. He works on projects, which often involve extended periods of research into specific social, cultural and environmental contexts and the development of ongoing relationships with individuals and communities.

What resonated with me most about the presentations was the generosity of the diverse group of people who came with open minds and were willing to share their knowledge with each other. This happened both with the scientists engaged in research related to the river and marine life as well as with the artists

and project facilitators. This was the first time I've been able to experience first hand the Wilkinson's Point pavilion. The experience of standing suspended over the river on the boardwalk listening to Susan Philipsz's artwork blew me away. I left the workshop with a very strong sense that anything is possible and that there is an incredible body of knowledge to draw on within the process of developing a proposal and possible project.

How did the various interactions with artists and scientists inform your thinking/ resonate with your practice?

There was a generosity of spirit between the artists as well as the scientists where people were open to sharing ideas and references that was exciting to be part of. There were hilarious conversations

over the four days as each of the invited artists started to play with possible and impossible ideas. The openness of this early stage was really important, it effectively allowed us all to cast a very broad net without judgment, then to see what might remain within that net over a longer period of time and how those impossible ideas and loose threads might start to be consolidated into something more coherent.

I'm interested in how we feel, understand and tell stories about a site so the different perspectives and knowledge that was shared during the four days has provided a foundation to think about what those stories and experiences might be and from whose (or what) perspective they may be told.



### Justy Phillips:

Justy Phillips is a visual artist, whose practice is informed by the intimate ways people relate to each other and to the world in different social and cultural contexts. Her work continues to examine the diversity of and complexity of these human relationships and raises questions about the marginalisation of individuals and communities within society. She works across a range of media including video, print and installation. She continues to develop her practice through text-based installation, limited-edition publishing and an ongoing study of the vernacular and words in spaces.

The breadth of presentations from the project science partners was really fantastic. For me personally, those presentations that focused on river biology, toxicity, heavy metal contamination, river flows and movement of river sediments were really exciting. Presentations from Sam Whitehead from the Derwent River Estuary, who spoke about river flows and biodiversity, and Danielle Warfe from UTAS, who spoke from her personal experience of working in river ecology, both left a strong impression on me. Danielle's poetic referencing to negative perceptions

of rivers in the titles of pop songs also resonated with my practice of narrative-driven work. I really enjoyed the multiple presentations by Sean Riley from Aquenal and found the video footage of the Taroona Reef fascinating. On day two, the ferry ride up the Derwent to MONA was really spectacular.

To experience the GASP! Site from the river really invites a different way of relating to the site, the land and the river itself. Two things emerged for me through this experience. Firstly, I was struck by the scale and industrial expanse of the Zinc works just down the river from Elwick

Bay. This really brought to the fore, the fact that the river is a working river and that it remains a critical process of many of the industries that are situated along its riverbanks. Listening to the many presentations that reflected the water quality of the Derwent River and the heavy metal toxicity led me to consider more acutely other industries further up stream like the Cadbury's factory and the Norske Skog paper mill at Boyer.

The second thing that emerged for me through the experience of the ferry ride was an understanding of the river as a vital organism. What I mean by this is to understand the river as a living thing in itself; a living thing that is composed of flows, speeds and slownesses and rest; a living thing that leaks and is without boundary. In this sense, I approach this project in the context of the 'more-than-human'.

Other strong resonances from the Lab included the opportunity to experience the work of the other artists, to listen to other perspectives and see where there might be opportunity for collaboration or further discussion. Most fruitful for me were the conversations about what might constitute data and data-driven artworks at the site. Also, how duration might play a key role in the works developed for the site. I think this is really critical.

We can only ever see, hear, smell a slice of the river. When we stand and stare from GASP! towards the river, we do not experience the river as an entire system, but only a small window from which it comes and to which it goes.

