

The editors are pleased to present this special edition of the *Local-Global* journal developed out of presentations made at the ReGenerating Community Conference in Melbourne in September 2009. This volume has been a year in gestation, being published almost exactly on the anniversary of the conference.

The ReGenerating Community: Arts, Community and Governance National Conference, jointly organised by the Cultural Development Network and RMIT University, attracted more than 400 participants and featured almost 80 talks, presentations and workshops. A major aim of the conference was to reflect on the outcomes of the national, three-year Generations Project which was funded by the Australia Council for the Arts and arts funding bodies in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. This project aimed to explore the ways in which carefully planned and implemented community art projects could strengthen local government in Australia. Presentations were made at the conference on behalf of parallel projects that occurred in Geelong, the Latrobe Valley, Wangaratta (all in Victoria), Liverpool (Sydney), and the Charters Towers region in northern Queensland. This volume includes a report by Martin Mulligan and Pia Smith on key findings of the research on the Generations Project (pp. 34–41). Those findings are presented in much more detail in a 134-page research report, titled *Art, governance and the turn to community*, available from the website of the Globalism Research Centre at RMIT (www.rmit.edu.au/globalism/publications/reports).

The conference featured a wide range of keynote presentations, research presentations, artistic performances and exhibitions, and workshops which combined to present a kind of overview of the ‘state of play’ for the community art/community cultural development field of practice in Australia.

Many of the presentations were made available from the Cultural Development Network’s website soon after the conference. However, this special edition of the *Local-Global* journal is intended to create a more enduring legacy. The editors worked with authors presented here to shape oral presentations into essays and also research papers that meet the standards for credible academic publications. In many cases, these papers have been developed in response to feedback offered by conference participants or in more formal academic reviews.

Australians often look to the UK or USA for inspiration in regard to community art/community cultural development work. Certainly there is a parallel history in the development of these fields within these three nations and we can continue to compare experiences. In this volume there is

a paper based on the conference presentation by Lyz Crane from Partners for Liveable Communities Project in the USA. However, it was also refreshing to hear some non-western perspectives on community art from guest presenter Anmol Vellani, the Executive Director of the India Foundation for the Arts. Australia has much to learn from community art traditions in India and Vellani presented the fascinating story of inspirational community theatre practitioner K.V. Subbana (pp. 42–53). Also presenting at the conference was Kathleen Irwin from the University of Regina in Canada. Kathleen contributed a research paper (pp. 120–133) on the work of theatre company Knowhere Productions that she established in Saskatchewan, Canada.

Robyn Archer was invited to open the ReGenerating Community Conference because she has vast experience as an artist, director and producer working with a wide range of communities in Australia and internationally. Robyn delivered a deeply reflective and typically thought-provoking address (pp. 18–29) which set the tone for the conference. We also present the response to Robyn’s address that was made by Jane Crawley, the Manager of Arts and Culture for the City of Melbourne. Many conference participants felt that Jane’s comments built nicely on some of the points that Robyn had made, while also presenting a refreshing view from a local government staff member.

The organisers of the ReGenerating Community Conference were delighted by the number of people wanting to present papers on their research in community art, community cultural development or ‘socially engaged art’, as Marnie Badham calls it (pp. 84–99). Perhaps the growth in scholarship represents a certain coming of age for a field of practice that has grown quite dramatically in Australia over the last 30 to 40 years. As Badham makes clear, the Australia Council has tried to respond to this growing field over that time without ever really knowing what to make of it. It is time for deeper scholarship that can enable this practice to take its rightful place alongside other art traditions. Several papers in the Research Papers section of this edition analyse examples of practice (Gibson, Irwin, Khan and Ditton). Iris Curteis offers an innovative contribution on ways in which storytelling can extend ‘communality’ (pp. 150–163) while Kim Dunphy presents a detailed review of recent experiences in regard to evaluating this field of practice (pp. 100–119). It is interesting to note that several contributions are from people who are currently undertaking PhD studies related to this field of practice, while others have recently completed their doctorates. We can look forward to hearing more from such scholars in the future.

This volume is not able to do justice to the many performances, exhibitions, and workshops that were made by practising artists at the ReGenerating Community Conference. The journal contains only contributions that could be adequately captured in the form of essays and papers. The post-conference postings on the Cultural Development Network website

(www.culturaldevelopment.net.au) convey some of the flavour of other presentations through word and image. We have, however, included two essays that strongly reflect the experience of art practitioners in a final section, titled Practitioners' Perspectives. Ian Cuming discusses his experiences as a recipient of a prestigious Australia Council Fellowship, which gave him the opportunity to reflect on his decades of experience with puppetry in relation to the work of leading international practitioners Peter Schumann and John Fox (pp. 186–197). The essay by Cuming nicely complements Kim Dunphy's earlier paper on evaluating community cultural development work. The final contribution, by Myfanwy Powell (pp. 198–207), helps to bring scholarship and practice together by reflecting on an innovative collaboration between theatre students at Victoria University of Technology in Melbourne and the well-established City of Voices community theatre group.

We hope you enjoy this selection of presentations from the ReGenerating Community Conference.

Martin Mulligan
Globalism Research Centre, RMIT University

Kim Dunphy
Cultural Development Network