A network advocating research in the arts through industry engagement

The RMIT School of Art Common Ground Network is focused on research in the arts through industry engagement. The objectives are to form and develop transdisciplinary projects with industry partners in the context of contemporary urbanization with a particular interest in urban centres and adjacent communities. Researchers involved in RMIT’s Common Ground network projects include School of Art staff, researchers, professional artists, cultural industry partners and RMIT Alumni.

The Common Ground Network focuses and strengthens existing industry relationships and supports new ones with the objective of building long-term partnerships. The development of a strategic approach to industry engagement arose from the need for a more cohesive and tactical framework, which would provide an environment to allow researchers to forge stronger ongoing links with industry partners. The network advocates the RMIT University values of being connected to industry and community, which are viewed as active partners in our teaching and research and the value of creating and disseminating knowledge to meet the needs of industry and community.

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THE MERIDIANS INTERCULTURAL FRAMEWORK

The Meridians Intercultural Framework grew out of research undertaken by Art in Public Space researchers in Shanghai, China, 2008-10. The outcomes of this research resulted in the development the Meridians Intercultural Framework, the Meridians Art in Public Space Network and several Art in Public Space projects. Following is a brief introduction to projects developed from the framework.

Wind Drawing, Cameron Robbins on the rooftop of the ECNU School of Art, Shanghai, China, 2010.

MERIDIANs
SHANGHAI, 2010

Meridians: Shanghai 2010 - Transdisciplinary Art & Sound in Public Space Project researched connections between public urban contemporary art and international collaborative practice. A collaborative team of Australian and Chinese researchers based at East China Normal University (ECNU), Shanghai, China, produced the project. As a result Australian researchers spent over one month in Shanghai at ECNU developing artworks responding to the theme. These works accumulated in an exhibition opened in May 2010 by Jacinta Allen MP, the Victorian Minister for Innovation, Industry and Regional Development.
INDUSTRY PARTNERS

This project was developed in partnership with ECNU, Arts Victoria and the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development. The project was officially a satellite exhibition of the Australian Pavilion of the Shanghai World Expo, as part of Victoria’s cultural contribution.

RESEARCHERS

Clare Leporati, Tammy Wong, Rupa Ramanathan, Cameron Robbins, Geoff Hogg, Claire Tracey, Joanna Buckley, Zhou Changjiang, Chen Xi, Yu Bing, Zhang Langsheng, Wang Kai and Wei Tianyu.

Below: Opening of the exhibition at the ECNU School of Art, Shanghai and Claire Tracey’s Chopstick Cloud.
Gateway: Melbourne 2011 was an exhibition of contemporary visual arts exploring intercultural dialogue between Australia and China. The exhibition launched on April 18, 2011 at the Museum of Chinese Australian History (MCAH), Melbourne. Gateway was developed as a return exhibition to Melbourne based on earlier connections forged through the Meridians project in Shanghai. The exhibition was opened by Mark Wang, Deputy Chairman of the MCAH and Associate Professor Kevin White of RMIT University and attracted over one hundred people to the opening night. Gateway was developed in partnership ECNU and the MCAH. This visual arts exhibition was the first contemporary art project developed through the Art in Chinatown partnership between the MCAH and RMIT University.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS
The exhibition was developed in partnership with the Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne and East China Normal University, Shanghai, China.

RESEARCHERS
Geoff Hogg, Maggie McCormick, Shao Xiongchia, Tammy Wong, Clare Leporati, Greg Szopa, Cameron Robbins, Claire Tracey, Joanna Buckley, Julian Clavijo, Jacqui Chan, Ceri Hann, Wei Tianyu and Angela Zhang.
Curating the Ancient City: Lumens Festival is an Australian visual arts project planned to be held in the intriguing city of Suzhou, China in 2012. This photography and video projection festival will be located in the mystical network of canals that are characteristic of the city. The festival will work with the unique site of the canals by showcasing a selection of excellence in contemporary Victorian photography and video. The festival will be held over five consecutive nights. Imagery will be projected onto the white walled built environment that surrounds the canal regions. Audiences will be wide ranging and will include local communities, local businesses, local university communities and arts enthusiasts. This project is developed in partnership with the Victorian Government as part of their sister province relationship with Jiangsu Province, China.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS
This project is under development with partners Suzhou Institute for Art and Design, Arts Victoria and Australian Scholarly Publishing.

RESEARCHERS
Shane Hulbert, Geoff Hogg, Clare Leporati and Tammy Wong
In September 2010, seventeen RMIT Art in Public Space researchers took part in an artists in residency program over three weeks in Istanbul, Turkey, 2010’s nominated European Capital of Culture (ECOC). The research residency was the result of a ten year partnership with the Sile Local Government. Sile is a region of greater Istanbul located on the Black Sea and is well known as a beach resort to locals of the area. RMIT’s partner organization the Sile Local Government hosted the artist researchers on a historical tour of Turkey giving the group a background to the richness of the countries heritage. At the end of the tour the researchers were based in Sile, Istanbul for over two weeks where they produced works to be displayed throughout the town. Artists responded to Turkey in unique and personal ways through the production of works of varied materials and content. A total of twenty-three projects were produced transforming the town centre into a site of exhibition. The works were officially launched on October 2, 2010 by Sile’s Mayor Can Tabakcoglu. Locals of the area were invited to the launch to explore their own town through new interpretations of Sile by RMIT researchers.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS

This project was developed with the Sile Municipal Local Government, Turkey.

RESEARCHERS

Geoff Hogg, Claire Tracey, Pable Alvado, Shao Xiong Chia, Chloe Vallance, Rowena Martinech, Monika Poray, Penny Algar, Michel Teague, Karen Mayo, Danella Bennett, Gabi Brasil, Elaine Hogarty, Matthew Phelan, Suzie Pinchen and Tammy Wong.
A team of School of Art researchers collaborated to respond to the Design Research Institute’s Design Challenge 2010 on Crime. The team proposed to reframe the social experience in the urban context of the city of Melbourne. The research project investigated the social value of trust between individuals in public urban spaces by design interventions through art. Our proposition was that the shared exercise of trust between individuals and cross-cultural communities can contribute to safer communities; and that encouraging individuals to interact through aesthetic participation with one another can develop trust between them and can therefore mitigate against anti-social behaviours manifesting as crime. By researching and developing a creative strategy based on processes of participatory relational aesthetics, this project will research the value of interaction, integration and interrelation for building stronger inter-personal understanding and trust in diverse urban based communities in the city of Melbourne. A series of Trust projects are to be developed by a number of artists. The major project currently under production is Reach Out, by Karen Casey, a participatory three-channelled video exploring the sense of touch in handshaking in public spaces.

**INDUSTRY PARTNERS**

Dianella Community Health
City of Melbourne’s Signal program, Sile Municipal Council and the Kopalli Foundation, Mexico.

**RESEARCHERS**

Elizabeth Grierson, Geoff Hogg, Rupa Ramanathan, Nellie Baines, Shane Hulbert and Tammy Wong

The Trust Project Website - a platform for the projects.
Rembrandt’s: 9 Installations is part of an ongoing RMIT research project looking at the urban and civic transformation of Knox. This research combines the Schools of Architecture and Art in a series of interventions, studios and engagements with the development processes of industry partners – Knox City Council, the Victorian State Government and private businesses like Rembrandt’s. Knox is part of a Melbourne metropolitan area grappling with urban change brought about by the need to create more sustainable and interconnected city centres and municipalities. Knox, under the Melbourne 2030 planning strategy is a principle activity centre – a previously unknown urban form, a city where a shopping centre currently stands at its heart. At the base of this research project is a question about how the suburban can become civic and what are the spaces and activities required to create a city centre that is a viable public realm. What composition and character might this have? In part, to answer these questions is to examine what already exists. To look at Knox through the idea of change, thinking about how the physical and cultural environment might alter, and what might be gained and lost during such transformations. It is these tensions that bear on the Rembrandt’s: 9 Installations project. The triangular land that Rembrandt’s sits upon is identified in the Knox Central Urban Design Framework as a key redevelopment site, the location for a ‘feature form’: a building of significance in the creation of a new urban form for Knox Central. The importance attached to this site stems not only from its strategic proximity to the expanding shopping centre and the considered civic cultural precinct, but also its physical position as a ‘gateway’ to Knox Central and for its historic relevance to the community. The countless formals, receptions, Mayoral and debutante balls and Over 28 nights that passed though Rembrandt’s since its opening in 1973, have made it a site of cultural significance; a place of celebration, ceremony and memory. In the absence of a city centre, Rembrandt’s and the Knox City Shopping centre were in many ways the popular cultural venues, places of public gathering and urban amenity of this eastern suburb for 30 years. Three decades is not a long time in urban history but in the post WWII suburban history of Australia the impermanence of built and urban form is synonymous with a progress that invigorates the suburban pastoral ideal with an urban challenge.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS
Knox City Council, Victorian State Government Department of Strategic Planning and Economic Development and the Cultural Services Team and Vince Lopes – Owner of Rembrandt’s Entertainment Centre.
RESEARCHERS
Anthony McInnesy and Simon Whibley
The City of Greater Dandenong is a growing suburban area of south eastern Melbourne. As it is recognised as an expanding area of greater Melbourne, State and Local government authorities have invested in developing the infrastructure of the central activities district. As a result of these strategies, projects such as ‘Viachroma’ have been possible. Viachroma was a site-specific artwork by RMIT artist and researcher Rowena Martinich, at the recently completed pedestrian walkway at Dandenong Station. The project explored how the use of public art activities can alter the environment and enhance the experience of pedestrians turning ordinary public spaces in sites of engagement.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS

The project was a result of a partnership between Rowena Martinich of RMIT University, the Victorian State Government Department of Transport, Connex, The City of Greater Dandenong and MAB Corporation, a property development company.

RESEARCHERS

Rowena Martinich and Jenny Pemberton-Webb
Shane Hulbert’s exhibition ‘Expeditions’ was an exhibition held at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne. The body of work presented in the exhibition explored the significance of our ongoing relationship with the land, the identity of our nation and the Australian cultural psyche resulting from the adventurer determination to discover and lay claim to sites, locations and territories.

**INDUSTRY PARTNERS**

Centre for Contemporary Photography and Kayell

**RESEARCHERS**

Shane Hulbert
The project Sand Reiki, was developed by Public Assembly in partnership with the UCI Bicycling Championships and The City of Geelong. Public Assembly is a collaborative partnership between Lynda Roberts and Ceri Hann, a practice that explores the creative potential of play in public space. The opportunity to present a work that would compliment an International event based in Geelong led to the development of a kit of tools for public sand raking. Inspired by the Japanese tradition of raking patterns in Zen gardens Lynda and Ceri sourced items from the local tip shop and constructed rakes for the public to use the foreshore as a giant canvas. In essence the work might be considered a paradoxical statement about having to break patterns to make patterns when attempting to walk lightly on the earth.

**INDUSTRY PARTNERS**

UCI Bicycle Championships, City of Geelong

**RESEARCHERS**

Ceri Hann, Lynda Roberts
Ian De Gruchy is an artist specialized in working with light projections. For the UCI Bicycle championships Ian transformed the City of Greater Geelong’s Town Hall façade with a series of images. This project was realized in partnership with the UCI Bicycle Championships and the City of Greater Geelong.

**INDUSTRY PARTNERS**

UCI Bicycle Championships, City of Greater Geelong

**RESEARCHERS**

Ian DeGruchy
The Afghan Tea Cycle project was established with the goal of designing and building a functioning prototype of a pedal-powered purpose-built Afghan Tea Cycle. The tea cycle will provide a micro-business for an existing trader in the Afghan Bazaar Cultural Precinct, Dandenong. This project was developed in partnership with the City of Greater Dandenong. By supplying an authentic Afghan tea service experience and in the process promoting Afghan culture through social practice and aesthetic impact, the Afghan Tea Cycle will contribute to intercultural exchange and encourage culturally inclusive practices that can be shared beyond the precinct at civic events, festivals and private functions.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS
City of Greater Dandenong

RESEARCHERS
Aslam Akram and Ceri Hann
Designing Sound for Health and Wellbeing was funded from 2008-2011 by an ARC Linkage grant, to provide a new perspective on the effect of sound and music on the health and wellbeing of patients located in the Emergency department at St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne. From 2008-2010 art, music and sound researchers from the School of Art and medical practitioners and health psychology researchers from St. Vincent’s Hospital embarked on a randomized control clinical study to test their especially composed sound and music compositions on Emergency patients as they waited for medical attention. The project is the first to demonstrate significant outcomes in the reduction of stress and anxiety of these patients due to the application of sound and music in an Emergency care setting. The findings of the study demonstrate that art, and in this case sound and music can enhance human health and wellbeing.

The first ARC funded project team for the School of Art, has published 3 refereed journal papers including the Medical Journal of Australia (5/ 19 December 2011), and the Journal of Applied Arts and Health (Vol 2:3, December 2011) and a feature was published in the ACUADS Interventions in the Public Domain. Research 09/10, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University: Brisbane. A book about the project, Designing Sound for Health and Wellbeing was published in 2012 (Australian Scholarly Publishing: Melbourne) and includes compact disc recordings of the sound and musical compositions.
The researchers have presented four conference papers including *The 2010 Art of Good Health and Wellbeing, 2nd Annual International Arts and Health Conference, University of Melbourne*, and 2 round table sessions including a 2010 ARC Linkage Projects Seminar in the Faculty of Education and Arts & Faculty of Science and IT, the University of Newcastle, (7 October 2010).

Members of the team have been awarded two awards: *The Arts and Health Australia Award for Excellence 2010 in Arts and Health in Primary and Acute Care* (2010) and an *RMIT University Research Award* (2007).

**INDUSTRY PARTNERS**

This study was supported by the Australian Research Council’s *Linkage Project’s* funding scheme (project number LP0882346), project title, *Designing Sound For Health and Wellbeing*, and by RMIT University, St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne and the RMIT Design Research Institute.

**RESEARCHERS**

Dr Keely Macarow, Dr Philip Samartzis, Professor Elizabeth Grierson, David Brown, APAI – PhD candidate - SoA and Dr Tracey Weiland, Professor George Jelinek, Dr Craig Winter (St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne).
**Melbourne Sound/Trace: Swanston Street Hoardings Design Project** investigates art in public space within the context of Melbourne’s transport system. The selected works by Pixi Mix (alumni) and Chris Bold (graduating June 2012) respond to the site around RMIT University through recording the sounds and traces of Melbourne’s city life. The designs were commissioned by The City of Melbourne. The launch was on 5 June at Art in Public Space, Building 50, Orr Street, Carlton, celebrating the installation of the hoardings on Swanston Street outside of RMIT University. They will remain up for the duration of the tramway construction works.

Images: Chris Bold & Pixi Mix

**INDUSTRY PARTNERS**
The City of Melbourne

**RESEARCHERS**
Dr Maggie McCormick. Pixi Mix, Chris Bold
SKYPETRAIT: INTERCONTINENTAL FACES
MELBOURNE & REUTLINGEN, GERMANY 2012/2013

Skypetrait: intercontinental faces investigates the role of drawing and portraiture in the public space of Skype. Paired participants taking Skype as their interface use the Blind Contour Drawing Technique or Drawing with the Right Side of the Brain to develop a series of Skype portraits. The outcomes are published as projections, exhibitions, full colour hard copy publication, online sites, public presentations in Germany and Melbourne with an associated RMIT art residency for the German participants in March 2013. The outcomes include the Gertrude Street Projection Festival, Melbourne July 2012, City Library Gallery, Melbourne March 2013, City Hall, Reutlingen April/May 2013, Project Space, RMIT University, Melbourne April 2013 and online at ARTE Creative TV (German/French) and Skypetrait Facebook page linked to the Art in Public Space Researchers and Alumnus page.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS
This research project was developed through a partnership between Reutlingen University, Germany and RMIT University, Melbourne supported by the Goethe Institute.

RESEARCHERS
Dr Maggie McCormick (RMIT University) & Professor Henning Eichinger (Reutlingen University). RMIT: Fiona Hillary, Pixi Mix, Chris Bold, Freya Pitt, Georgie Humphries, Dan Mitchell. Reutlingen University: Uta Kraus, Annie Kurz, Christina Liadeli, Chantel, Rasquin, Thea Tromsdorf, Tatjana Zhabina.
This project explores how innovative art projects on public urban screens can combine with electronic social network systems on smaller screens to initiate an international dialogue on the problem of adaptation to climate change. The main theme of this trans-disciplinary research is on the environmental and cultural significance of water in three cities in the Asia-Pacific region: Melbourne, Shanghai and Tokyo.

The project is based at RMIT University in Melbourne, and has received substantial support from two major Australian companies: Grocon, Australia’s leading privately owned development and construction group, and Fairfax Media—one of Australia’s largest diversified media companies. These companies have joined with the RMIT team as part of their aim to actively engage the public in civic dialogue on contemporary environmental questions that affect us all. The Spatial Dialogues project was awarded a category one research grant by the Australian Research Council.

The artists and cultural theorists on this team see water not only as a significant, contestable resource, but also as an element essential to all life and, as such, replete with deep cultural values frequently overlooked in the expedience of everyday urban life. The three key cities in the project occupy quite different environmental contexts and arise from diverse historical legacies. Yet these three portal cities also have things in common, and the Melbourne team aims to connect with artists in Shanghai and Tokyo to explore how water prevails as something crucial to us all. In these ways the
team seeks common ground through social network systems for a dialogue on global environmental questions and the adaptation to climate change.

The three cities in this project are all in coastal regions: Melbourne and Tokyo are located on estuaries and Shanghai on the Yangtse delta. As such, they are three of many coastal cities that are particularly subject to the effects of rising sea levels. All three cities engage in trade in virtual, or embedded water, that is not always immediately visible in the production of goods and services. Australia and China are major gross exporters of products requiring substantial amounts of water, while Japan is a major importer of such products.

**INDUSTRY PARTNERS**

**Australian Research Council** awarded the project a category one research grant.

**Grocon** is Australia’s largest privately owned Construction, Developments and Fund Management Company. Its core values in its everyday work are Safety, Sustainability, Community and Innovation

“Grocon is happy and proud to be associated with RMIT University in the delivery of the Spatial Dialogues project. We see it as an opportunity to further demonstrate our leadership in the sustainability area. Grocon delivers buildings with only the highest environmental standards, Media House being but one of these. Additionally, Grocon has just finished construction of Sydney’s first 6 Star Green Star office tower at 1 Bligh Street, and in Melbourne we have the greenest building in Australia in the carbon neutral Pixel.

Along with sustainability, Grocon’s core values include Community, which sees us focus on our responsibility to give back something to the societies in which we live and work. We are currently constructing a number of projects on a not-for-profit basis and we are also employing disadvantaged young people and offenders from the juvenile justice system on our projects as part of our community employment program. Our involvement with RMIT in this project is therefore entirely consistent with Grocon’s aspirations and objectives as a
socially responsible and innovative participant in the Australian property and development industry.”

**Fairfax Media** is the largest integrated metropolitan, rural and regional print and online digital media company in Australasia, with publications and websites in every State and the ACT in Australia, and in New Zealand. Among its flagship publications is The Age, a highly regarded newspaper founded in 1854, which is also available online at www.theage.com.au and via smartphone and iPad.

The RMIT University Spatial Dialogues team is working with Fairfax Media to bring environmental art works from Melbourne, Shanghai and Tokyo to the huge public screen on the front of Media House, 655 Collins Street in Melbourne – headquarters of The Age.

David Hoath, Chief Operating Officer for Fairfax Media’s Melbourne Publishing division, said recently: “This project is the type of community involvement we want for our media screen. With a strong editorial stance on sustainability and environment generally and water conservation specifically, the Spatial Dialogues project is particularly relevant at this time. We are delighted to be working with RMIT, and are thrilled to be able to provide a showcase for their work.”

**RESEARCHERS**
(School of Art & external)  
Project Leader: Associate Professor Linda Williams (SOA), Dr. Phillip Samartzis (SOA), Mr. Simon Perry (SOA), Dr. Dominic Redfern (SOA), Dr. Kristen Sharpe (SOA), Associate Professor Larissa Hjorth (School of Media & Comm), Haco (sound artist, Japan) & others TBC, Fine Arts College of Shanghai University, Shanghai Academy of Social Science.