



THE RIVER PROJECT EDUCATION KIT

CAMPBELLTOWN ARTS CENTRE 28 AUGUST-24 OCTOBER 2010

THE RIVER PROJECT

As the key cultural and educational component of the Upper Georges River Urban Sustainability Initiative, *The River Project* extends upon the initiative's comprehensive on-site groundwork and in-depth consideration of management strategies for the area by examining and engaging with the social and cultural life of the river. Across multiple platforms—exhibitions, publications, performances, education and public programs—*The River Project* considers the Upper Georges River within the larger context of Asia and Pacific river systems by bringing together artists from Australia, China, India, Korea, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vietnam whose work explores such systems. *The River Project* restates the important fact that nature and culture are not mutually exclusive and invites us to reflect upon our relationships and role within these fragile ecosystems; to consider our interconnectedness, our histories and our shared future.

Artworks in the exhibition encompass a variety of mediums and include existing works alongside significant new commissions. Each work explores environmental, cultural or spiritual issues related to specific rivers in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. Major themes across the exhibition include the effects of modernisation and urbanisation, global environmental issues, and the way we use and manage the environment.

EDUCATION KIT

This kit highlights key works, ideas and themes from *The River Project* through case studies of four artists/projects from different countries: Mike Parr (Australia), Ringo Bunoan (the Philippines), Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba (Vietnam) and The Sepik River Project (Papua New Guinea).

The kit is designed to help teachers and students from Years 9 and 10 and Years 11 and 12 (HSC) use *The River Project* as a resource for studying contemporary art and issues concerning the environment. It is most effective when used in tandem with the exhibition presented at Campbelltown Arts Centre from 28 August to 24 October 2010 and is complemented by the project's substantial catalogue.

Each case study provides information about:

- the artist and their practice
- the artwork in the exhibition
- a river of interest to the artist.

A list of suggested learning activities for students is also provided. These incorporate questions and ideas to consider and debate, and suggested areas for further research.

CURRICULUM LINKS

This kit has been written in line with the New South Wales Visual Arts syllabus, but may be of interest to secondary school students studying History, Geography, Earth and Environmental Science, and Society and Culture. The content of the kit is targeted to teachers working with senior students, though information and activities can be adapted for use with junior students. Tertiary students and the general public will also benefit from using this resource as a guide to exploring *The River Project*.

For Visual Arts students a study of *The River Project* provides an opportunity to investigate the diverse nature of contemporary art practice, and to explore the complex ideas, issues, materials and forms used by artists. The breadth of the work in *The River Project*, in terms of content and form, provides great scope for study through the Conceptual Framework and of the Subjective, Cultural, Structural and Postmodern Frames. The project provides students with the opportunity to make connections between modern and postmodern artistic practice in order to gain an understanding of some of the key concepts of postmodern art.

The education kit was researched and developed by Nikoleta Szabados, Education and Public Programs Officer, Campbelltown Arts Centre, August 2010.

CASE STUDY 1

MIKE PARR (AUSTRALIA)
UPPER GEORGES RIVER



Mike Parr
Pure Water into Polluted Water 1971
The Georges River, Liverpool, NSW, Australia
photograph, dimensions variable
Performer: Mike Parr. Photographer: Felizitas Stefanitsch
Image courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery

MIKE PARR (B. 1945, AUSTRALIA)

Mike Parr is widely regarded as one of the most important Australian artists of his generation. Since 1970 he has created a broad body of work across a range of media including performance, installation, photography, drawing, dry point etching and sculpture.

For *The River Project* Mike Parr has reinterpreted his 1971 performance work *Pure Water into Polluted Water*, which saw him place a plastic bag of distilled water in the Georges River, Liverpool. This work was part of a larger body of work called *150 Programmes and Investigations* (1971–72) that comprised a list of instructions for performances. The original instruction for *Pure Water into Polluted Water* called for Parr to place a perspex cube filled with distilled water in a river.

In this exhibition Parr has presented the original instruction, a photograph of the 1971 performance, and a video of the work's contemporary reinterpretation in

2010, which includes Parr performing the original instruction with the perspex cube and a public discussion with Professor Edward Scheer in which the artist's actions are debated with an audience. Mike Parr's reinterpretation of the work raises questions about how our readings of objects and our relationship to the environment change over time.

Of the work Mike Parr says: 'There's something potent, relevant, about the contradiction—plastic bag/distilled water—except that now our awareness of the damage done by plastic bags is so great that the original contradiction, in careful tension, will be completely overwhelmed...Plastic bags weren't the issue then that they are now.'¹

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Visual Arts

- Consider the artist's actions within the context of *The River Project*. Examine the work through the Postmodern Frame. How has the artist used irony, parody, wit and/or playfulness in this work?
- The performance of *Pure Water into Polluted Water* involves the artist leaving the perspex cube in the water at the end of the performance. Describe how the artist creates a contradiction through this action.
- *Pure Water into Polluted Water* is an example of a performance artwork that has been documented using video. Define performance art. How is the audience involved in viewing this performance? Describe the experience of viewing *Pure Water into Polluted Water* (1971–2010) within the gallery setting. How might your experience of the artwork differ if you were at the site of the performances? How does the video add to or subtract from the live performance?
- Mike Parr believes that the performed action in his works is more important than the image produced.² Why do you think the process of creating this type of work is more important than the final product?

THE UPPER GEORGES RIVER

Running 56 kilometres through Dharawal Country, the Upper Georges River comprises the headwaters of the Georges River near Appin and its passage through Campbelltown to where it meets the estuary at Liverpool Weir. When viewing an aerial map of Campbelltown it is hard not to be struck by the prominence of the Georges River and the vastness of the bush that surrounds it. This tract of land is home to a wealth of flora and fauna, historically and culturally significance sites, and recreational and commercial activities.

The Georges River was an important transport route in the early 1800s when European settlers migrated to the area. After World War 2 urban development in the catchment area increased and today the river flows through both fully urbanised and heavily wooded areas.³

The main impacts on the natural environment of the Georges River Catchment are urban encroachment, pest animals, weed invasion, clearing, stormwater pollution, litter and longwall mining. Impacts of longwall mining on the natural environment include fractures in riverbeds and rockbars, water loss in rivers as a result of cracking watercourses and man-made structures such as buildings, roads, railways and drains, ponding and flooding of water due to changes in riverbeds, erosion, gas release due to fracturing rock strata, changes in water quality, and impacts on terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna.⁴

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Visual Arts

- Describe your impression of the Upper Georges River as a result of viewing *Pure Water into Polluted Water* (1971–2010). What role does the performance have in drawing your attention to the current state of the river and issues surrounding its management?

Geography/Earth and Environmental Science

- Research and compare bottled water and tap water. How does the use of bottled water create a contradiction? Consider this argument with reference to *Pure Water into Polluted Water* (1971–2010).

History/Society and Culture

- Visit the Georges River Environmental Education Centre to find out more about the history of the Upper Georges River.

1 Mike Parr, email correspondence, 2010.

2 Mike Parr, email correspondence, 2010.

3 Georges River Combined Councils' Committee, 'Historical and Cultural Importance', GRCCC, 2010, viewed 18 August 2010, www.georgesriver.org.au.

4 D. Kay, J. Barbato, G. Brassington and B. de Somer, 'Impacts of Longwall Mining to Rivers and Cliffs in the Southern Coalfield', in N. Aziz (ed.), *Coal 2006: Coal Operators' Conference*, University of Wollongong and the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, 2006; <http://ro.uow.edu.au/coal/59/>.

CASE STUDY 2

RINGO BUNOAN (THE PHILIPPINES)
PASIG RIVER



Ringo Bunoan
Bridge 2007
wooden pallets
dimensions variable
Image courtesy the artist

RINGO BUNOAN (B. 1974, MANILA, THE PHILIPPINES)

Ringo Bunoan is an artist based in Manila, the Philippines. She also works as a curator, arts writer and researcher. Her art practice addresses memory, shared experience and community life through installations that use everyday objects to create monumental forms. In her work she explores the physical and psychological dimensions of these materials by questioning our personal connection to objects and how they form part of a shared human experience.

Bridge is a simple makeshift construction that uses wooden shipping pallets stacked and nailed together to form an arch. The work references both literal and subjective meeting points between rivers, land and people.

It is evocative of crossings and connections, missed or otherwise, and reflects the fractures, ruins and excesses of contemporary life.

Of her work Ringo Bunoan says: 'In a lot of my work I use found materials that I collect from my neighbourhood or my friends, mainly because I think it is a more sustainable way of working. It is almost a critique of our very consumerist and capitalist culture. There is so much waste and excess in the world and I just don't want to contribute to that anymore. Most of the time my works, after the exhibitions, get dismantled and go back to being what they were. Pallets become pallets. Pillows become pillows. Then it's gone.'¹

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Visual Arts

- Analyse *Bridge* through the Structural Frame by describing the formal placement of the wooden pallets. Is an illusion created through the placement of the pallets?
- Consider the original function of the materials Ringo Bunoan has used to create *Bridge* and how the choice of wooden pallets adds meaning to the work. Consider this in terms of the Subjective, Structural and Postmodern Frames.
- Consider Ringo Bunoan's statement about her work. Discuss how this statement challenges traditional ideas about the artwork. How do you feel about this?
- Ringo Bunoan uses everyday objects in her work to give expression to memories and create new meaning. List objects of significance to you and consider ways you could arrange and present these to question or reinforce their meaning. Draw some examples of these arrangements in your VAPD

PASIG RIVER

Rivers are an important part of the cultural and industrial life of the Philippines. As an archipelago (a group of islands connected by water), water provides the means for trade and tourism in the Philippines. The damaged state of the Pasig River, which runs through Manila where Ringo Bunoan lives, remains a topic of environmental debate.

The Pasig River (called Ilog Pasig in Filipino) stretches for 27 kilometres, connects Laguna de Bay to Manila Bay, and divides Metro Manila in two. Long-term negligence and urban and industrial development has seen

the Pasig River become overwhelmed with pollution. In 1990 it was declared biologically ‘dead’—no longer able to sustain plant or animal life.²

Increased public awareness of the environmental crisis facing the Pasig River has prompted government and non-government bodies to take action to restore the river and develop methods to prevent further damage. These efforts include the development of the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission in 1999.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Visual Arts

- Research artists who make art about environmental issues. What role does art play in cultural, environmental and political matters? Are there limitations to art as a means of activism?

Geography/Earth and Environmental Science

- Research the wildlife found in and around the Pasig River prior to it being classified ‘dead’ by ecologists. What are contributing factors to the loss of plant and animal life along the Pasig River?
- Read Flaudette May V Datuin’s essay ‘For the Birds’ in The River Project catalogue. Hold a class debate about the ecotourism scheme she proposes. Do you think this would help rehabilitate and protect the Pasig River?

History/Society and Culture

- Research the history of the Pasig River. Draw a rough timeline of events that have shaped the river over time and that reflect its changing uses. Consider how this timeline reflects Filipino culture and history.

1 Artist talk, Campbelltown Arts Centre, 28 August 2010.

2 Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission, ‘Timeline of deterioration’, PRRC, 2009; www.prrc.com.ph/.

CASE STUDY 3

JUN NGUYEN-HATSUSHIBA (VIETNAM)
MEKONG RIVER



Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba
The Ground, the Root, and the Air: The Passing of the Bodhi Tree 2007
high definition digital video projection
duration 14:30 minutes
Image courtesy the artist and The Quiet in the Land, Laos;
Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo; and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York
Photograph: Yukari Imai

JUN NGUYEN-HATSUSHIBA (B. 1968, TOKYO, JAPAN)

Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. He was born in Tokyo in 1968 to a Vietnamese father and a Japanese mother. He has lived in Ho Chi Minh City since 1997. Water is a key theme in Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba's work. He uses it allegorically to explore the impacts of globalisation, war, mass migration, social change and constraints on freedom of expression through political oppression—which he articulates by the restricted movement of bodies underwater.

The video work *The Ground, the Root, and the Air: The Passing of the Bodhi Tree* examines the various youth cultures in Luang Prabang, Laos, as they try to achieve contemporary definitions of success without losing the essential roots of their heritage. Luang Prabang is an ancient city of Lao's monarchy and a landmark of Buddhist heritage that is currently experiencing change from global market forces. Filmed along the

Mekong River in this region, the video was made with the participation of 50 students from the local fine arts school who are captured both running around a sports stadium and sketching the spectacular landscape of the Mekong River as they sweep downstream in wooden motorboats. As the boats approach a Bodhi tree—a symbol of Buddha and enlightenment—some of the students leap into the water and swim towards it, while others choose to flow by on the river's current. In the work the river is used as a symbol of progress, spirituality and tradition.¹

Of the work Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba has said: 'It is a film about decision making for their [the students'] future...I tried to create this difference between the running around in the stadium and the linear journey downstream on the Mekong River. It is a contrast between becoming modernised and the circular motion representing spiritual aspects of their background.'²

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Visual Arts

- Consider how the artist has framed each shot of the film by examining camera angle, editing and movement. What effects and meanings are created through this framing?
- Analyse the work using the Subjective Frame. How does this work invite subjective responses from, and create meaning for, the participants, audiences and the artist?
- Consider how video art differs from films or documentaries. Use Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba's work in your response.
- Choose a location from your surrounding environment that speaks to your personal history. Sketch this location in your VAPD.

MEKONG RIVER

The Mekong River is the longest river in South-East Asia. It flows through China, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Over 60 million people in these countries depend on the river for fisheries, water, transportation, the supply of industrial and domestic materials, and many other aspects of their daily lives.³

Rivers such as the Mekong are shared resources of importance to many countries. In recent years the Me-

kong River has come under extreme environmental pressure from the very communities that rely on it for survival. One such pressure is caused by the damming of the river in different countries and the flow-on effect from this. The building of dams on the Mekong has formed part of an ongoing debate about the need for countries that share rivers to have unified strategies for river protection.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Visual Arts

- Discuss the significance of Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba's work in light of the information you have read about the Mekong River and in the context of *The River Project*. How does the artist use video to articulate social and cultural issues surrounding the Mekong's management?

Geography/Earth and Environmental Science

- Research debates about the building of dams in South-East Asia. Create a list of positives and negatives in terms of the effects of dam construction.

History/Society and Culture

- Research the Mekong River and draw a brief timeline of events that have shaped the river, including how the river has been used over time. Consider how these uses reflect the culture and history of the different countries that share the river.

1 Joe Fyfe, 'In deep water', *Art in America*, vol. 91, no. 8, 2008, pp .136–140.

2 Artist talk, Campbelltown Arts Centre, August 2010.

3 International Rivers, 'Lancang (Mekong) River', International Rivers, 2010, viewed 18 August 2010, www.internationalrivers.org/node/354.

SEPIK RIVER PROJECT (PAPUA NEW GUINEA)

RAYMOND DUMOII

SEBASTIAN DUMOII

JEFFRY FEEGER

KAWA GITA

ISHMAIL GROMBAN WITH JULIUS

AND JUNIOR KONI IGNAS KERAM

MARKUS KONNY

SALI SARI MAINDA

NANIAS MAIRA

GERHARD MINJAN

DAVID SAKA

KAMI SAKAT

FRANCIS TONGOI

HERRY WAYBENANG

RUDOLF WAYBENANG

ZACHARIAS WAYBENANG

HUBERT YAMBIN



David Saka
Untitled 2010
Kambot
acrylic on paper, 29.5 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist
Commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre

SEPIK RIVER PROJECT (PAPUA NEW GUINEA)

The *Sepik River Project* is an exhibition within *The River Project* that brings together contemporary artwork—primarily crocodile canoe prows, man-crocodile objects and paintings—from the Sepik River.

The project represents the important relationship between the Sepik River's distinct communities and their river home, the relationship between their art-making practice and their physical, social and spiritual environments, and the multiple contemporary realities of Papua New Guinea life. Sepik River communities have their own long-standing artistic and cultural practices. Over the last 30 to 40 years global influences in the region have been combined with these traditional forms to create unique, contemporary artworks.

The works presented in this project were acquired by independent curator Dr Susan Cochrane and emerging Port Moresby-based artist Jeffry Feeger on a trip to the Sepik River and loaned from the private collections of Oceanic Arts Society members in Australia. Jeffry Feeger's paintings of Sepik River artists represent an important cultural exchange between himself—a city-based artist—and artists from the Sepik River. Jeffry provided Sepik artists with contemporary materials such as paint and canvas and the skills to use them, and Sepik artists taught Jeffry some of their traditional art practices, such as carving. A major suite of commissioned works on canvas and paper by Sepik artists is a result of this exchange.

CROCODILE CANOE PROWS AND MAN-CROCODILE OBJECTS

The latmul creation story of the crocodile-man is a common theme in Iatmul people's art. It explains the transformation of their crocodile ancestor into a human being and the initiation rite of young men—the scarification of their torso with designs like that of a crocodile.

CROCODILE LEGEND

Before the earth was born nothing existed except a vast expanse of water wherein a crocodile dwelt. His accumulated excreta eventually formed land areas, and so the earth came into being, the crocodile gave birth to man, and man was completely dependent upon the crocodile who carried him about his back or in his mouth. Time went by and eventually man rebelled against his complete dependence on the crocodile and decided to seek a life for himself. After careful selection of a large stone, he waited until the crocodile fell asleep, picked up the stone and killed his benefactor with one blow. When he saw the crocodile lying still and dead, man was so overwhelmed with remorse for what he had done that he burst into uncontrollable tears. Day after day, week after week, he cried; his nose becoming elongated and for many months the tears flowed steadily. So extensive was the stream of his tears that it penetrated the earth's crust and flowed towards the sea, and the tears from the beginning of man's separate existence on earth formed the mighty Sepik river.¹

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Visual Arts

- Locate imagery of crocodiles in the works of art displayed and describe how they are represented. Locate representations of humans that show features belonging to an animal.

KAMBOT STORYBOARDS AND PAINTINGS

Most communities of the Sepik River have no access to materials such as canvas, paper, paints and pencils, nor have they ever used such materials. In the early 1970s, Australian teacher Helen Dennett, then based at Angora, provided people of the Kambot region with contemporary materials such as paper, canvas, paints and contemporary carving tools, enabling artists to use these materials to create works from their repertoire of traditional subjects.

Among works produced by Sepik River artists using these new materials are carvings—now popularly known as ‘Kambot Storyboards’—that depict the traditional creation stories and scenes of community life.

On their 2010 Sepik trip Dr Susan Cochrane and Jeffry Feeger gave contemporary art materials to Sepik artists as gifts. The project features the results of the artists

using these materials. As Dr Susan Cochrane describes: ‘We arrived at Kambot to find a painting session in full swing, with senior artists Zacharias Waybenang, Ignas Keram and Hubert Yambin sitting in groups with their sons and other younger artists, all painting on the black canvas and black and white paper we had supplied ... Although Jeffry had brought blue and other coloured acrylic paints, the Kambot artists preferred to restrict their palette to white, black, red and a touch of yellow ochre. Within two days, some 30 paintings and drawings of Kambot ancestral stories were produced, and the painting session was still going when it was time to leave.’²

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Visual Arts

- Examine the works in the *Sepik River Project* closely and create a list of materials, techniques and processes used by different artists across different forms. What affect—either aesthetic or symbolic—does each create?
- Hold a classroom debate about whether you believe that the introduction of Western art-making tools and materials in the Sepik River will have a positive or negative long-term effect on the cultural heritage of the Sepik River people.



Kawa Gita
Kwongombewi 2010 (details)
acrylic on canvas, 74 x 200 cm
Courtesy the artist
Commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre

SEPIK RIVER

The Sepik River is the largest unpolluted freshwater system in Papua New Guinea and amongst the most intact in the Asia Pacific. Located in the north-west of Papua New Guinea, it is one of the country's least developed areas and is free from dams and industrial developments. It is a highly diverse habitat—mangrove forests, herb swamps, tall lowland rainforests, cloud forests and alpine heaths—that is home to a number of threatened species of birds, important fish species, and crocodile populations.

Around 80,000 people live in villages along the Sepik River. There are many distinctive language and cultural groups with unique customs and lifestyles. In Papua new Guinea's submission to UNESCO World Heritage, it was stated that the Sepik River is 'perhaps the most linguistically and culturally diverse area in the planet with over 300 languages in an area the size of France'.³ The region is currently being considered for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Visual Arts

- Locate imagery of birds, crocodiles and fish in the works of art displayed. Describe how each individual animal is represented within the whole, and its relationship to other animals represented. Locate representations of humans that show features belonging to an animal. Find out what a totem animal is and how it is significant to the Sepik River people.

Geography/Earth and Environmental Science

- Research the process and criteria for adding a natural site to the UNESCO World Heritage List. Are there any regions in Papua New Guinea that are currently listed as World Heritage sites?

History/Society and Culture

- Compare and contrast the lifestyle and practices of the people of Port Moresby with the people of the Sepik River region. What values and practices do they share? How are they influenced by each other? What are the main factors that drive art production in each region?

1 Gloria Stewart, *Introduction to Sepik Art of Papua New Guinea*, Garrick Press, Melbourne, 1972, p. 27.

2 Susan Cochrane, 'Sepik Journey', in *The River Project* (exhibition catalogue), Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown, 2010, p. 105

3 Papua New Guinea Department of Environment and Conservation, Submission to UNESCO: East and West Sepik Provinces, 6 June 2006, viewed 18 August 2010, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5065/>.

PROJECT TEAM

Project Director Lisa Havilah

Project Curator Binghui Huangfu

Curator, The Sepik River Project Dr Susan Cochrane

Assistant Curator, The Sepik River Project Jeffrey Feeger

Associate Curator & Project Manager Susan Gibb

Education & Public Programs Officer Nikoleta Szabados

Production Manager Morgan Randall

Minto Producer-In-Place Mal Fruean

Project Support Pedro de Almeida, Megan Davis

Project Art Direction & Design Suzanne Boccalatte

Publicity Kym Elphinstone, [art]iculate

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Campbelltown Arts Centre

Cnr Camden & Appin Roads, Campbelltown NSW 2560 Australia

PO Box 57 Campbelltown NSW 2560 Australia

+61 2 4645 4100 artscentre@campbelltown.nsw.gov.au

campbelltown.nsw.gov.au

Open daily 10am–4pm

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