



Back to the City

in 2008

**an exhibition of collaborative projects between artists,
and architects as well as landscape architects**

in Newcastle, New South Wales

- part of the **Creative Cities** series,

15 to 20 site-specific installations - all in walking distance - designed and built by interdisciplinary teams in the public domain (to activate spaces, both constructed and natural), seeking to reveal the unique character of the place and a different kind of urban experience.

Suggested as a fringe (satellite) event to complement the Sydney Festival. The exhibition will be free to the public.

Project Partners

Main Project Partners (*tbc*)

The Newcastle Alliance Inc.
Honeysuckle Development Corporation

The project is also supported by the following institutions (*tbc*)

Newcastle City Council
The Sydney Festival
Newcastle Regional Art Gallery
Goethe-Institut Sydney
City of Sydney
Royal Institute of Architects
Newcastle Port Corporation
Newcastle Regional Art Gallery
Goethe-Institut Sydney
Tourism NSW
The University of Newcastle, School of Architecture and Built Environment
The University of Newcastle, Faculty of Education and Arts
s_Lab Space Laboratory
Watt Space Gallery, Lovett Gallery, and other local galleries,
other relevant institutions.

The involved project partners and stakeholders will assist with planning issues and public consultation, give financial support, promote the idea, offer political support and access to sites, assist the Advisory Panel, give in-kind support, and assist in securing funding for the involved teams.

There has been a widespread consultation with the stakeholders regarding the project and there will be substantial ongoing consultation with the community as the project develops.

'Public space, the interstitial gaps of urban areas, represents an essential shared asset.'

(R. Atkinson)

Concept

- **urban interventions, working *in situ***
- **encapsulating the spirit of place in the installations**

Newcastle city centre will be transformed into a showcase for art and architecture through an extended series of public space installations.

This collaborative exhibition project involves teams of established, as well as young, emerging artists, architecture practitioners, and landscape architects.

The aim of the project is to investigate contemporary and relevant crossovers between the disciplines, as well as testing and experimenting with new forms of collaboration. Such blurring of disciplinary boundaries has been increasingly relevant for artists and architects since the 1960s.

The demonstration projects (installations) will enhance the creation of urban place identity of the city centre. The current commercialisation of public space leads frequently to a loss of its symbolic and spiritual identity. Ephemeral interventions can help to stop and even reverse this loss, and lead to a re-valuation of the qualities of public space.

The selected sites will be at key transitional points and the project will transform and revitalise the city centre and its community. The teams need to select their site(s) and this needs to be part of the concept. However, there are some preferred sites and possibly obvious locations, such as:

- next to Lee Wharf, at The Boardwalk
- at Wheeler Place
- where Darby St meets Civic Park
- along the water edge of Wharf Road, the Tug Berths
- around Newcastle Beach, Shortland Esplanade
- along Hunter Street
- in Newcastle West along King Street
- along Honeysuckle Drive.



The exhibition will feature around

15 to 20 site-specific installations – all developed for a particular location - throughout the urban fabric of Newcastle's City Centre, at different locations stretching from the public harbour waterfront to the courtyards of heritage buildings in the centre; using prominent, public locations beyond the confines of the gallery space, as well as little known 'charged' spaces such as lane ways off the city centre or along the river. Such places can offer particular spatial experiences hidden in the urban fabric of everyday life. Reclaimed vacant shop fronts would be interesting as exhibition space too. Artists and architects collaborate to present a new view of the city centre, its context and water edges. The culture of temporary installations and interventions in public space are an important resource for urban renewal, which can generate new activities and make a significant contribution to city life. It has the potential to activate the invisible spaces which are hidden between the centre and the harbour.

The project will address the growing need to develop culturally rich, sustainable social environments. Therefore, the teams are asked to address the following key issues:

The four major curatorial themes

have been identified as conceptual basis, to bring out the possible diversity of collaborations between the disciplines and allow for speculation:

- People and Public Space: Connectivity – Reclaiming Public Space. Commercialization of Public Space.
- Urban Renewal and Interdisciplinary Collaboration – Mapping the Site.
- Coal, Mobility and the Infrastructure along the Waterfront - the *PortCity* and the scale of the incoming vessels.
- Urbanity, Density, Cosmopolitan Lifestyle - Integrating Information Technology. Working and Living in the City Centre.

Waterfront and *PortCity* – creating new opportunities for existing urban structures

In times of urban regeneration the whole city centre has to rethink its position. The compact peninsula of Newcastle City Centre offers an ideal condition to reinvent the urban condition of Newcastle, to recognise its urban infrastructure, street network and to reconnect the city with its water edges.

The curator is asking for bold interventions to bring life back to the city centre, to create a new dynamic in the city and along the waterfront. Such temporary urban interventions will transform the public spaces for a little while, offering unexpected opportunities for new encounters and activities.

Interdisciplinary proposals that reflect a general political / spatial awareness of culture, underpinned with a clear position about urban situations in post-industrial transformation processes, are most welcome.

Is there a connection between Newcastle and other port cities (eg. Sydney)?

How can you draw people's attention to all the qualities of Newcastle city centre, its cultural and industrial heritage, its urban diversity, the extraordinary topography and port landscape?

Publication

An accompanying book '***Back to the City - A Dialogue between Artists and Architects***', will feature the built installations and ten critical essays on interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as the '***Art + Architecture map of Newcastle***' (offering opportunities for sponsorship branding). To ensure a high academic quality of the publication, the essays will be double-blind refereed.

Previous publications, in July 2002 in Berlin: the first project '*Rethinking: Space, Time, Architecture*', book published with Jovis Publishers (Berlin).
In September 2004 in Brisbane: the second project '*Absolutely Public. Crossovers: Art + Architecture*', book published with Images Publishers (Melbourne).

Wider Benefits

The *Back to the City* project will put a spotlight on the Newcastle City Centre and Port landscape as innovative, vibrant and interesting places to visit. It will highlight the city's built environment, its architectural (sometimes hidden or invisible) qualities and geographical attributes. It will also showcase local as well as international artistic and architectural talent and demonstrate the city's support of new ideas and opportunities.

City Tourism: This will bring greater visitation to the city centre, the city and region, during the period of the installation, and will provide people with an opportunity to rediscover (or redefine) Newcastle as a contemporary regional centre, with a re-emerging cultural identity.

Educational benefits at the University: Through such a cross-Faculty 'design+build studio' program and partnerships, we create opportunities for architects and artists to assist the community in place-making and urban renewal.

The projects will encourage visits to the city centre, help learn more about the qualities of our city, and invite people to walk to the various sites.

Preliminary Schedule

- Call for Participation 30 June 2007
- Submission of Project Proposals 02 November 2007
- Assessment of Proposals and Selection of Participants mid November 2007

- Submission of Final Projects to Planning end November 2007

- Realisation of installation works and Exhibition; Media events incl. a symposium on 'Public Art' with invited speakers Dec. 07 – Febr. 2008

- Opening Day Thursday, 24 January 2008

- The installations will be displayed for the period of 3 weeks 24 January to 10 February 2008

An independent Advisory Board and Selection Panel will ensure a high standard of selected works.

The University of Newcastle, School of Architecture & Built Environment will run this collaborative exhibition project in collaboration with the Faculty of Education and Arts (School of Fine Arts), as a Design + Built Studio (an experimental interdisciplinary studio, in Semester 2, 2007), and ensure the imaginative, open framework of this exhibition project.

Members of the **Advisory Board and Selection Panel** include:

- Bridget Smyth, City of Sydney
- Klaus Krischok, Goethe-Institut Sydney
- Professor Anne Graham, University of Newcastle
- Nick Mitzevich, Director Newcastle Region Art Gallery
- Michael Cohen, Live-Sites Program Newcastle
- and others (tbc)

During the implementation phase the Advisory Panel and Curator will work closely with Newcastle City Council.

Prize

The Selection Panel will also decide about the
'Best Installation in the Urban Context' – Prize:

\$2,500

to be chosen from the realised installations at the opening day.

Furthermore, one of the Main Project Partners would like to have the opportunity to select one team and their work to develop this towards a permanent installation, after the exhibition.

Media Partners (tbc)

The Herald, Sun Herald, ABC Radio and University Radio, HDC Newsletter, and others. We will keep the community updated on the progress of the project.

Submission and Selection criteria

We are looking for the most interesting and stimulating projects for Newcastle city centre. What is crucial is the quality of work and ideas, expressing an interdisciplinary approach. The most successful proposals combine extraordinary siting, striking form, scale and materials, and a determination to work collaboratively across the discipline boundaries. We are seeking teams with the best conceptual ideas and the ability to design buildable projects which can be delivered in a short timeframe.

The submissions need to have exhibition quality. It needs to give answers about the site, the broad concept, and the materials proposed.

Please submit your proposal as hard copy print-out and on CD, to:

Professor Steffen Lehmann
School of Architecture and Built Environment
The University of Newcastle
University Drive
Callaghan NSW2308, Australia

Collaboration and Dialogue

Objects in urban space, such as sculptures, fountains and monuments had always a significant role in the urban fabric, as visual focal points, landmarks and nodes of urban life. For a long time, there has been an ambivalent relationship between architects and artists. However, the different disciplines have a great ability to share their working principles, and debate ideas about the public realm and contemporary city culture. Beyond the 'official architectural production' there is a renewed interest in mobile and ephemeral work, which has the unique potential to construct meaning - and change cities in a more sustainable way than nonflexible, permanent work could do.

An openness to collaborate stimulates dialogue, creates relevant crossovers and allows people to do extraordinary things. Harnessing the potential of such collaborative working methods, there are great opportunities for innovative outcomes of this research and exhibition project, to publicly demonstrate the benefits of collaborative work, and to raise the benchmark for improving the quality of design in our built environments. It is expected that the teams will work with site-specific strategies and react to the various places by inserting their works in public space, courtyards and buildings. Can we identify urban fragments which carry the essential meaning of the city? The wide range of unpredictable outcomes will include sound and light installations, engaging in an exploration of the city's grid and edges.

Young talent and established names

Participation is open to all artists, architects, urban designers, media artists, etc (and students of those disciplines). It is likely that the participation will be drawn primarily from the NSW-based artist/architecture scene, but proposals from outside NSW are also welcome. Artists and architects and students of those disciplines from NSW as well as from outside NSW are actively encouraged to apply.

Prior registration is not necessary; the teams simply submit their proposal before the deadline. The project is structured to provide opportunities for emerging and local artists and architects, which is consistent with the curator's approach, which is to foster young talent and promote regional content.

Financial support will be provided to the selected teams to realise their proposals.

Organisation

s_Lab Space Laboratory for architectural Research and Design, part of sLab (Australia) Pty. Ltd. For further information see: www.slabs.com.au

Artistic Director and Curator: Professor Steffen Lehmann, The University of Newcastle
Dr. Steffen Lehmann brings a wealth of international experience and extensive knowledge of curatorship to the project. His curatorial work, teaching and writing demonstrate an enduring commitment to involve the local community in excellent exhibition projects. Steffen determines the theme and oversees the event. He will, together with the Selection Panel, select the works and provide the conceptual platform for installations in the urban context. "The 'Back to the City' exhibition will be based on a continuing dialogue between the different disciplines, different worlds engaging with each other in this collaborative endeavour", he said. "The installations will weave an artistic walking trail through Newcastle's city centre, linking up public spaces, places that are not-done-yet and the waterfront foreshore, with the aim to challenge, surprise and delight the viewers."

Project Manager: Gerry Bobsien

If you have any questions prior to submission you may email: gbobsien@ncc.nsw.gov.au

See the following link to download the text document: www.slabs.com.au/projcoll.html

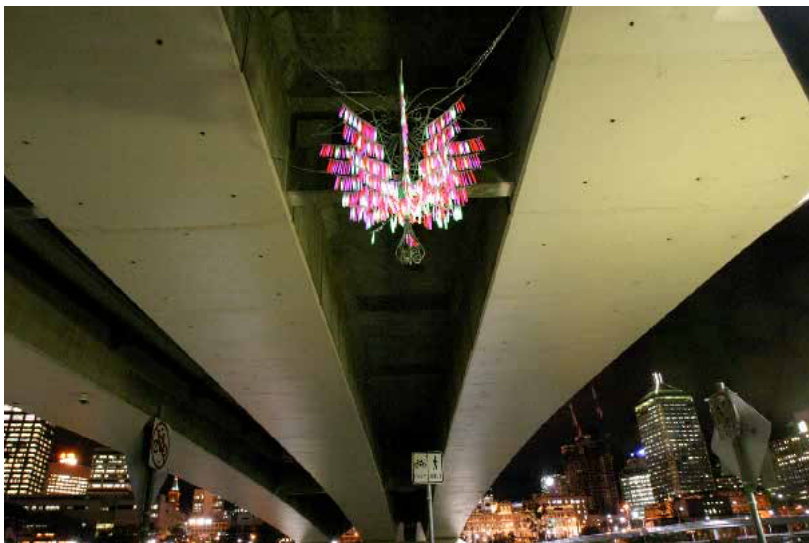


Photo of site-specific installation, part of 'ART+ARCHITECTURE' Sept./Oct. 2004 in Brisbane: A glowing chandelier underneath Victoria Bridge 'Dining Room', art: S. Eisler / arch: A. Stenn