

ACUADS
[Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools]

RESEARCH 07/08





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Calligraphy and Slowburn,
production still from *Busan Diptych*,
Shaun Gladwell, 2006.

Courtesy the Artist & Sherman Galleries, Sydney

Cate Blanchett as Tracey in
Rowan Woods' film *Little Fish*

Neil Brown, Dennis Del Favero, Jeffrey Shaw, Peter Weibe
T_Visionarium II, 2007
Immersive interactive environment .
Interior view with groups of figures.

INNOVATION, LEADERSHIP, IMPACT →

Art, Design and Digital Media in Australian Universities

Contemporary Australian Arts make a special and substantial contribution to the health and wealth of the nation. Their impact is felt at home, in the Asia Pacific region and worldwide across the broad range of innovation in art, design and new media. Australia's art schools are the drivers of this success. Together they have an excellent track record in producing internationally renowned practitioners, many of whom increasingly travel from overseas specifically drawn by the attraction of the leading-edge artist and designer education on offer. A Research Masters is the minimum qualification that most aspire to, with increasing numbers of our brightest artists and designers, theorists and art educators completing Doctorates. This success is testament to the high caliber of students the sector attracts. It is also unthinkable without the central contributions of staff within university art and design departments, schools and faculties who are leaders in their own areas of research practice. As in any other discipline, research-led teaching is crucial to its continued renewal and cultural impact. And now, more than ever, the leadership and innovation of our artist-academics and theorists impacts significantly and, often, directly on the end users of art, design and new media.

In the past the sector has found it difficult to secure broadly based and significant research grants, especially from the Australian Research Council, although there have been notable exceptions, some of which are outlined in this publication. However as the discipline gains further in confidence and experience, an upward trend in the number and scale of funded projects is inevitable. Contrary to popular belief, contemporary arts research is not some side event to 'real' research. University based artists, designers, art historians and art educators are leaders in their fields. They are making a difference, inspiring, altering and moulding the culture of the nation, and contributing to the global economy like any other research community.

This report gives a taste of how the sector's achievement is being shaped across a range of its activities: from substantial

research centres exploring advanced digital media; to innovative individual PhD projects; from relational experiments in space; to the advancement of visualisation materials, techniques and processes; from artists working with history, memory and site; to the role that art and design plays in the formation and representation of identity and culture; and not surprisingly, to an examination of creative practice itself as a research methodology.

The Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools (ACUADS) represents all of the nation's leading tertiary Visual Arts education providers, enabling a focus for collegial communication and a high level forum for the ongoing development of best practice in the sector across the areas of research, teaching and service, indeed, providing leadership to our industries.

It might be that we are the custodians of a still maturing research culture, in comparison to the much longer established ones in science, medicine and the humanities. However it is a very vibrant, necessary and fast developing culture whose nurturing is the responsibility of all stakeholders, not just ourselves and the institutions in which we work, but also government and its research support agencies.

Put simply, the nature and quality of our personal and collective experiences, not to mention the underlying strength of the creative economies of the future, will depend increasingly upon the viability and impact, locally and globally, of our artists and designers. The Australian Higher Education sector carries both a lead role and a primary responsibility for guaranteeing the success of this endeavour.

Associate Professor Su Baker

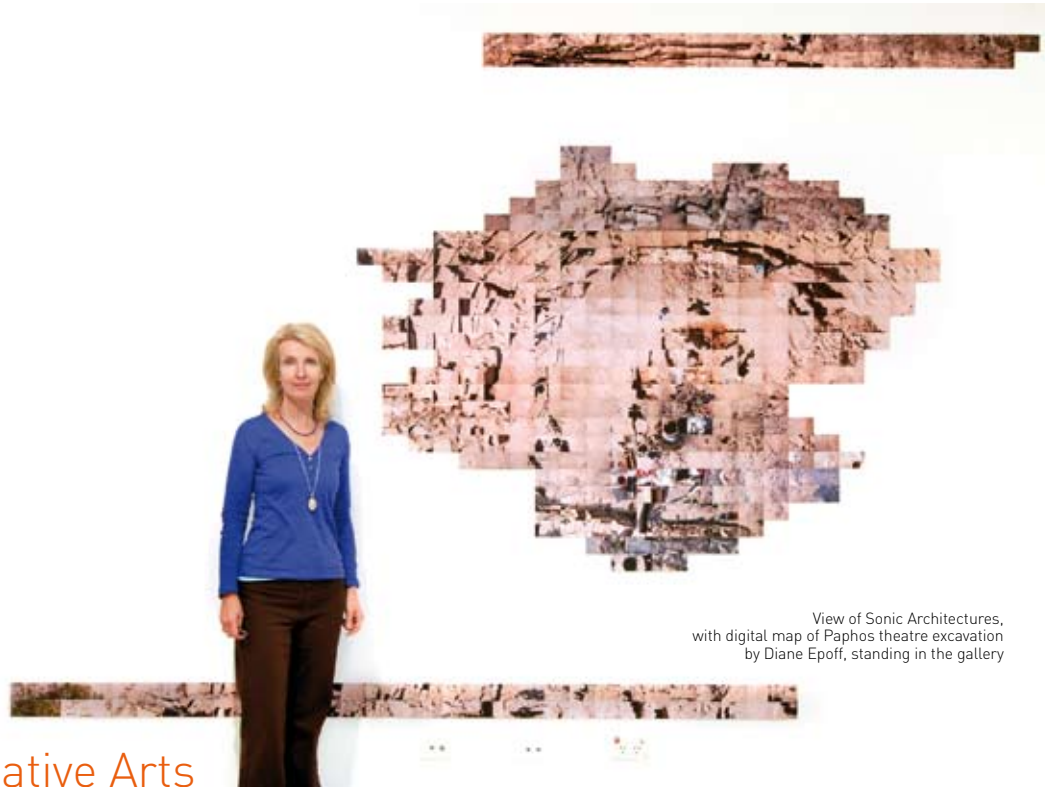
Victorian College of the Arts,
University of Melbourne

Professor Ian Howard

College of Fine Arts,
University of New South Wales

Professor Colin Rhodes

Sydney College of the Arts,
University of Sydney



View of Sonic Architectures, with digital map of Paphos theatre excavation by Diane Epoff, standing in the gallery

Faculty of Creative Arts University of Wollongong

www.uow.edu.au/crearts/GalleryFCA/sonicarchitectures.html

The Sonic Architectures project: Mapping the ancient theatre in image and sound →

The *Sonic Architectures* project asked: How might an understanding of the ancient theatre give contemporary artists new imaginative insights into working with electronic technologies?

With staff and students of the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong I have contributed since 1996 to the University of Sydney's *Paphos Theatre Expedition* in Cyprus. The disciplines of art and archaeology came together through the leadership of Professor Richard Green, director of the excavation in more than a decade of excavation. Artists from the School of Art and Design, and Dr Ian McGrath from the School of Performance participated in fieldwork at the theatre in Paphos in April–May 2006.

The theatre in antiquity brought together all the arts (architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, music, song, drama) as the central point of communication and ritual.¹ By investigating aspects of visual and sonic mapping of the ancient theatre, the five artists in *Sonic Architectures* constructed a parallel cross-disciplinary exhibition across the senses of touch, sound and sight, in the 21st century.

"The object brought forth from the depths of forgetfulness and history burns with the memory of the senses" wrote Nadia Seremetakis.² Making graphite rubbings of the textures of the ancient theatre related to my work as a textile artist with a long preoccupation with

the 'haptic' or tactile qualities of materials. The sense of touch is of primal importance in the understanding of space and may be overlooked through the dominance of the sense of sight, especially in the virtual realm. The nuanced markings of the surfaces have their own visual 'grammar' of expression, especially the newly discovered inscriptions unearthed in 2006, creating a visual and sonic pattern of light and dark, with 'touching' emotional overtones.

Ian McGrath investigated the resonant sound signature of the Greco Roman theatre, formed by the innate hardness, density and even crystalline structures of its architecture. Sandy limestone (as bedrock and cut blocks), marble, granite, at least three distinct grades of plaster for seating and walls, pebble and marble mosaic floors combine in the curved architecture of the semicircular theatre. Every element in a theatre, either ancient or modern - from plastic to plaster, concrete to stone, plywood to solid timber - provides a specific affinity for sound. The theatre and its material surfaces is itself the instrument upon which the actor or musician plays.³

Taking the various rubbings of the theatre textures as a starting point, Stephen Ingham (composer) created sound textures from the scanned rubbings through merging innovative computer programs with musical thinking. While the fields of electroacoustic composition and spatialised sound diffusion are not in themselves new, the composer's ability to harness recent digital technologies to generate and spatially diffuse sound output from vast quantities of scanned (or otherwise derived) data - sonification - is

an exciting new field of creative investigation. The twelve minute soundscape Akou played continuously in the exhibition.⁴

To map the topology of the Paphos Theatre site in Cyprus, Diane Epoff, doctoral candidate, held her digital camera close to her body. She wrote: "The process of photographic map-making was a journey of understanding the site as a 'work-in-progress'. Over two days I moved up and across the whole area of the theatre, fifty metres by eighty metres of uneven ground, taking more than two thousand photographs. I stayed aligned to the theodolite's position held by the excavation surveyor. The map is informed by the archaeological grid of the site, and the camera frame. The mapped textures reveal multiple histories in the physical matter of the earth."⁵

Brogan Bunt, media artist, made a set of twenty temporal studies at the margins of the excavation of the theatre in Paphos. He described the work as exploring the coincidence of the mythological, the historical and the contemporary in Paphos, focusing on small scenes in which time becomes space, and space shimmers in time. The set of Quicktime VR panoramas of two closely related sites in Paphos show the variety and complexity of the ruins. One cluster of 360 degree panoramas came from the theatre (in mid-excavation) and another from the Early Christian basilica known as Ayia Chryssopolitissa, less than a kilometre south of the theatre.⁶

To conclude, I had been influenced to form this cross-disciplinary alliance by discovering the drawings of Iannis Xenakis, a Greek composer, who worked with Le Corbusier as an architectural engineer in the 1950s and 60s. He often visualised a model in mathematical forms, animated it, and then fitted different sound components to recreate essential characteristics of the structure.⁷

In continuing research through the Sonic Arts Research Network we are exploring the overlaps between texture, sound, sight and touch through new tools, as well as freshly perceived traditional craft processes.

Professor Diana Wood Conroy, Visual Arts
with Dr Brogan Bunt, Senior Lecturer, Media Arts
and Ms Diane Epoff, Doctor of Creative Arts candidate

* This research was funded by a Vice-Chancellor's Challenge Grant and the Sonic Arts Research Network, University of Wollongong.

View of Greco-Roman theatre, Paphos, Cyprus.
Interactive Panofile by Brogan Bunt,
Senior Lecturer, Media Arts



View of Sonic Architectures
with wall of rubbings by Dr Diana Wood Conroy
Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery,
University of Wollongong

¹ Green J.R. and Handley, Eric: *Images of the Greek Theatre*. British Museum Press, London, 1995.

Diana Wood Conroy: *The Fabric of the Ancient Theatre*. Moufflon Publishing, Nicosia, Cyprus, 2007

² Nadia Seremetakis [ed] *The Senses Still: perception and memory as Material Culture in Modernity*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1996, 144.

³ Ian McGrath. *Echoes in Stone*. Unpublished research paper, Sonic Arts Research Network 2006

⁴ 'Akou' is being developed for performance by Stephen Ingham as an instrumental as well as a digital piece.

⁵ Diane Epoff. Research presentation for Doctor of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong 2006.

⁶ Brogan Bunt. *Risking code [manuscript] : software art : dilemmas and possibilities*. PhD thesis 2007

⁷ Nouritsa Matossian. *Biography of Xenakis*. Moufflon Publishing, Nicosia, second edition, 2005.



Kate Daw, *The Between Space (cups and saucers)*, 2005, (detail) photograph by John Brash

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