

Introduction

Kerrie Poliness

“The concept of the region as the Museum, and the Museum as the region, relates to a certain space – the physical environment of Melbourne’s West. But the focus is essentially on people. The region/museum is seen as an activity, a living organism, a process of exploring and investigating the history and heritage of a complex region or particular sites and neighbourhoods within it. Participation in heritage activity increases understanding and a sense of identity and value. Not only objects, but people, are seen in context, a context of time and space, which may include the heritage of countries overseas, as well as the more immediate heritage of a particular local or regional environment. Our heritage is complex and diverse. The process of becoming aware of our heritage goes on at a number of levels and through different activities.

*Melbourne’s Living Museum of the West is inseparable from the life of the people of the region. Its continuance and growth is important for the region and its people. Strong government support is needed to build on the heritage programs and activities already undertaken and planned.”*¹

Olwen Ford, 1986.

When geologists read the landscape, they see a very different world to that of other people: they see the land as a series of layers and events, the current world surface as a relatively brief moment in an ongoing process, an ongoing story.

Understanding context is about understanding time. This requires research, experimentation and documentation, and finding ways of successfully passing on this knowledge. Through oral history Aboriginal people established a working relationship with geological time, passing down stories that remained intact from generation to generation that trace phenomena such as volcanic eruptions, the end of the

¹ Olwen Ford, *The Region is the Museum: The Museum is the Region – An Introductory Paper*, Melbourne’s Living Museum of the West, Melbourne Western Region Cultural Heritage Study, 1986, pii; 1986.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Avni Dauti would like to thank Tom Parsons, Rob Sinclair and David Thomas. Sam George and Kim Munro and Lisa Radford would like to thank the Living Museum of the West volunteers and members: Peggy Cole, Sara Coward, Olwen Ford, Bill Gillies, Peter Haffenden, Roger Holloway, Marie Kehoe, Kerrie Poliness and Phoebe; the actors: Brendan Barnett, Laurie Fildes, Emma Hall, Rosa Nix, Frank Otis and Rik Stowman; as well as Amanda Kerley, Taree Mackenzie and Isabelle Sully. Geoff Robinson would like to thank Helen Grogan, Peter Haffenden, Liang Luscombe, Kerrie Poliness and Benjamin Woods for their assistance and contribution to his project.

ice age and the forming of Port Phillip Bay.² They impart knowledge of, not only how to survive, but how to synchronise life and work with an extremely complex physical environment. Through oral history, Aboriginal people acquired a highly detailed understanding of their environmental context. One of many important lessons we might take on board from this tradition is the strength and importance of oral history, and what it can accomplish.

Oral history has significantly shaped our environment in ways we do not fully understand. Many landscapes assumed to be ‘natural’ are now considered to be human-made.³ These landscapes of pre-European Victoria were slowly and carefully constructed, and because that was not recognised or understood at the time of first contact between Indigenous Australians and white settlers, much was brazenly destroyed through rapid foreign invasion. Despite several hundred years of occupation and modern technology, we are yet to re-establish a sustainable and effective working relationship with our local land. The importance of understanding time – how to work with a timescale beyond our own lifespan – is something that is fragile and difficult to imagine. History and continuity can easily be lost. The pace of life and work leaves little time to understand the mechanisms, layers and meanings of time.

In the western suburbs of Melbourne in 1984 a pioneering museum experiment began, applying contemporary (European) museum theory to the western region of Melbourne to establish an inclusive museum.⁴ As Australia’s

² Gary Presland, *The First Residents of Melbourne’s West*, 1987.

³ Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, 2011.

⁴ An experiment influenced by the research and writing of Sven Lindqvist who in the late 1960s travelled to Latin America researching social and economic conditions and history for his book *The Shadow: Latin America Faces the Seventies* and found that: ‘practically every factory history has been written for them, by writers selected by them, and paid by them to produce results that would then be approved of by them’. He came to the conclusion that ‘factory history could and should be written from a fresh point of view – by workers investigating their own workplaces’. In a burgeoning climate of active participation in culture (DIY, making your own music, theatre and art etc. in the late 1970s early 1980s) and considering the fact that there were thousands of companies whose histories needed writing he decided to write a manual for oral history research

first ‘Ecomuseum’;⁵ the Living Museum of the West began collecting the stories, photographs and memories of ordinary and extraordinary people who lived and worked in the region.⁶

Hundreds of people’s stories were recorded on to audiotape with the intention of beginning to establish a broader community connection to time, to place and to each other. The aim of this collection was to enable a greater and ongoing community understanding of context.

These stories have helped to shape and to transform the abandoned Hume Pipes factory site into Pipemakers Park. The History of the Land Gardens, the Pioneer Women’s Shelter and the Pipestacks were built by the Living Museum, and the landscape and wetlands were re-vegetated by Koorie Gardening Team apprentices via the Living Museum in the 1990s. Pipemakers Park is a human-made landscape carefully constructed through interpretation of oral histories and the Living Museum archives.

Contemporary art practice is an active process of contextualisation that involves exploring meaning and context, and questioning where we are and what this means, as well as finding ways to communicate this to others. It requires having time to do nothing; time to play with time; time to think, observe and to listen.

The exhibition *The Museum is the Region, the Region is the Museum* presents a group of contemporary artists engaging with the Living Museum of the West’s archive. Today, the collection of 800 audiotapes, 20,000 negatives, and many kilometres of video and film footage are fragile and unique; rapidly disintegrating messages that could potentially enable us to connect to the voices of our ancestors. This exhibition actively makes new these connections, helping the Living Museum’s project to continue.

that would encourage an enable people to research the history of their own job and wrote Dig Where You Stand: How to do Research on a Job (1978).

⁵ The concept of an inclusive museum was developed and the term ‘Ecomuseum’ first used by Georges Henri Rivière and Hugues de Varine in 1971 at the ICOM conference in France.

⁶ In 1984 the Western region of Melbourne included the municipalities of Altona, Bacchus Marsh, Essendon, Footscray, Keilor, Melton, Sunshine, Werribee and Williamstown.

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The Museum is the Region, the Region is the Museum

Avni Dauti, Lisa Radford and Kim Munro and Sam George, Susan Jacobs, Mikhail Karikis & Uriel Orlow, Kerrie Poliness, Geoff Robinson.

Curated by Danny Lacy, Liang Luscombe and Patrice Sharkey.

A West Space Project presented at the Living Museum of the West.

7 September to 5 October 2014

The Museum is the Region, the Region is the Museum is an exhibition project envisaged as a way of beginning to re-establish West Space’s connection with the western suburbs of Melbourne, where West Space was founded in 1993. Presented off-site from West Space at the Living Museum of the West—and drawing upon the rich history of the western suburbs, as documented in the Living Museum’s own archive—this exhibition features newly commissioned work by a range of local artists that each respond to the geography and built heritage of this unique site. The exhibition also features artworks that have a strong visual connection to the rich industrial history of the site.

As the starting point for their project, Sam George and Kim Munro and Lisa Radford interviewed the volunteer committee of the Living Museum of the West – the people that keep the place running day-to-day. The committee is predominately made up of those that have both recorded and archived the wide-ranging material from the Western suburbs; some had conducted interviews, others photographed events or researched the area that forms the Living Museum’s archive. Through their interviews George, Munro and Radford archived the Living Museum’s archivists, detailing their relationship to the Museum and their desire for its presence as a document of the Western suburbs – or, as Radford described the process, ‘[recorded] the labour of the labourers who recorded labour.’ These interviews will be given to the Living Museum, so that they too become part of the archive.

The trio’s resulting video work *It has to be more than just two foxes and a hen deciding what to have for lunch* (2014) is a consideration of how the desires of individuals can result in the foundation of organisations such as the Living Museum. The video documents a number of subjects (whom range in age and gender) addressing the camera directly. Jumping from speaker to speaker through a quick series of cuts, the video presents a vocabulary of personal

longings and personal reflections on the nature of desire, collectively hitting a range of notes: the melancholic (‘a sense of purpose’), the all too common (‘a holiday’) and the humorously necessary (‘sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll’). While these jumble of desires are described to the audience, each speaker’s dialogue is broken by a beige-out that creates a moment of space or a pause within the work, perhaps a moment of doubt. This stopgap is amplified by the numerous times we witness the speakers pause, uncertain as to what to say next.

Mikhail Karakis & Uriel Orlow’s video work *Sounds from Beneath* (2010-12) is set in the desolate post-industrial landscape of an old coal mine, a similar barren landscape to the site of the Living Museum of the West (before it was rejuvenated as a park). The first part of the work features old Kentish coal miners reproducing the sounds of their former mining activity, which came out of a lengthy work-shopping process that Karakis undertook with the ex-miners. Over a period of several months, he asked them to recall and vocalise the sounds they heard when they worked in the mines. Partnering with filmmaker Uriel Orlow, Karakis created a film in which the men stand on top of a desolate mine (where some used to work) and sing these sounds under his direction. The area of Dover (where the film is shot) has beach-toy sellers and the video also

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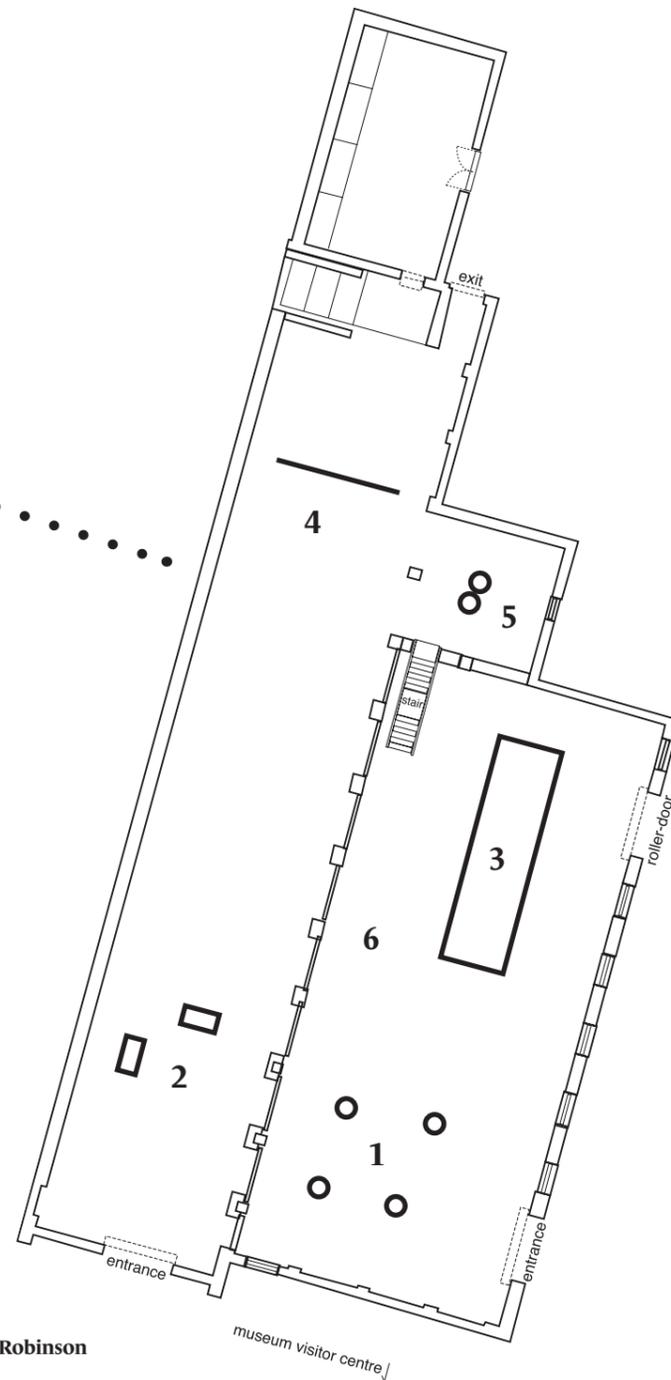
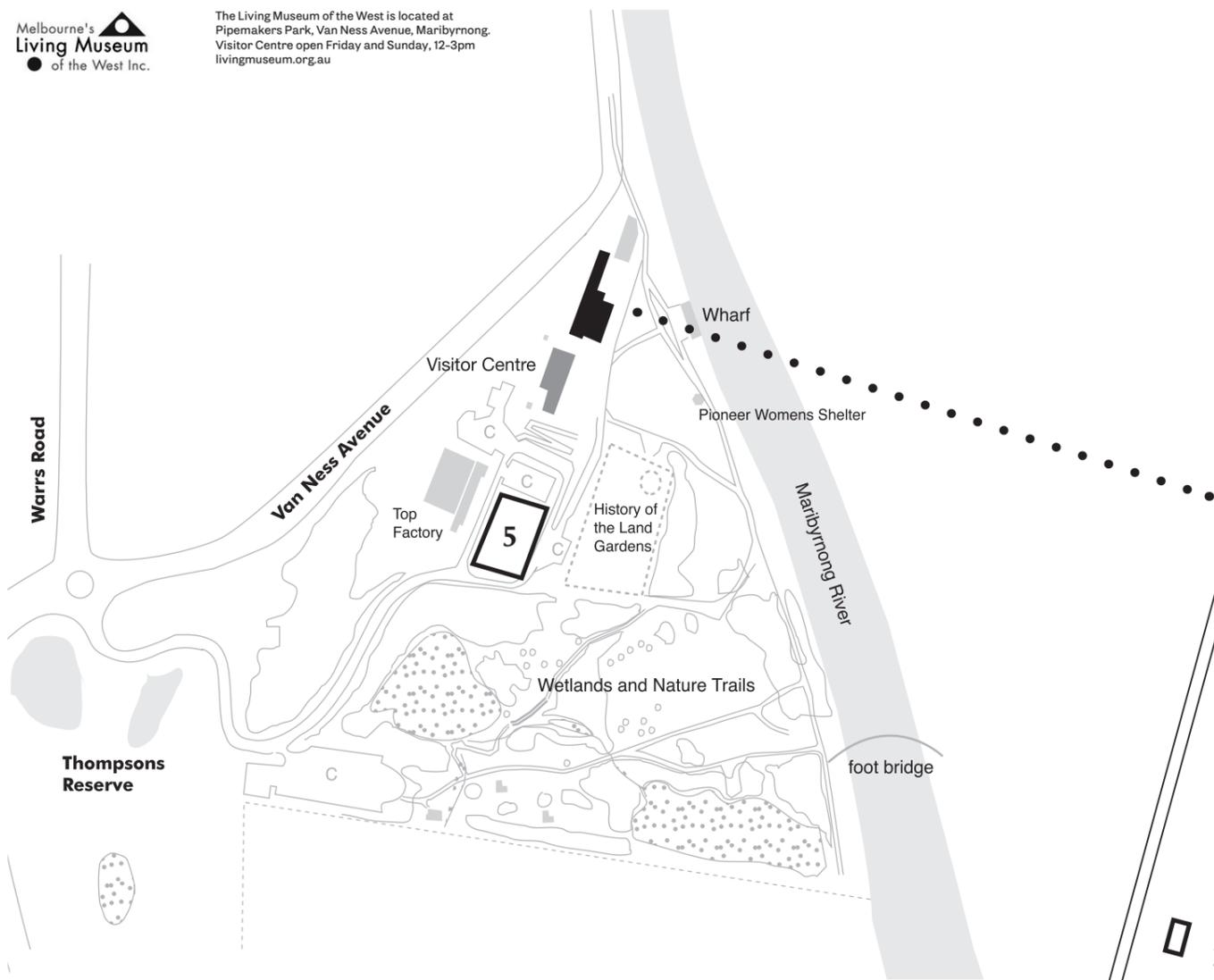
Proudly



West Space

Level 1, 225 Bourke Street, Melbourne 3000
Tuesday-Saturday, 12-6pm
westspace.org.au

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LIST OF WORKS

1. Avni Dauti

Four Hundred Feet 2014
concrete pipes, reinforcing mesh,
archival materials, DVD, HD video
dimensions variable, video: 13
minutes
courtesy the artist

2. Sam George and Kim Munro and Lisa Radford

*It has to be more than just two foxes
and a hen deciding what to have for
lunch* 2014
video, extension cords, chairs,
manila folders
dimensions variable, videos: 4:23
minutes and 5:13 minutes
courtesy the artists

3. Susan Jacobs

Frontier 2012
epoxy modeling compound, cast
hydrostone, brass, bronze, steel,
graphite, clay, metal polish, bowling
balls, found objects, bone, bismuth,
neodymium magnets, metal ball
chain, copper, lead, particle board,
bornite, iron, timber
700 x 180 x 300 cm
commissioned by Queensland Art
Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art,
Brisbane Australia, for the 7th Asia
Pacific Triennial of Contemporary
Art, 2012
courtesy the artist and Sarah Scout
Presents, Melbourne

4. Mikhail Karikis & Uriel Orlov

Sounds from Beneath 2010-11
single channel video and stereo
sound
6:47 minutes
courtesy the artists

5. Kerrie Poliness

The Pipestacks 1997
147 remnant concrete pipes
dimensions variable
constructed by Bruce Duff and Stan
Rowlett, 1999

40 Pipe Paintings 2014
acrylic on concrete pipes
dimensions variable

Top Factory 1997
CD Rom, computer
design and production Kerrie Poli-
ness and Joe Guario
digital installations by Stephen
Bram, Marco Fusinato, Melinda
Harper, Rose Nolan, Kerrie Poliness
and Gary Wilson with Joe Guario
archival film editing, super 8 film
and sound by Joe Guario, interview
with Reg Hume by Kerrie Poliness
published by Melbourne's Living
Museum of the West

all works courtesy the artist and
Anna Schwartz Gallery

6. Geoff Robinson

*The overlay of the Maribyrnong
River between Braybrook and
Avondale Heights onto the Living
Museum of the West bluestone
building as interpreted by Helen
Grogan and Benjamin Woods
through the oral history of Henry
Dempster and Bob Simpson, 15
March 1984 / 6 September 2014*
2014
oral history of the Maribyrnong
River and Braybrook by Henry
Dempster and Bob Simpson inter-
viewed 15/3/84 onto audiocassette,
digitised and played back on
iPod and headphones on plastic
bucket chair, 30 coloured timber
spatial markers (configured by
artists Helen Grogan and Benja-
min Woods)
timber: 9 x 9 x 50 / 100 / 150 cm,
dimensions variable
courtesy the artist

makes reference to the waves of migrating
labour forces that haunt this particular
landscape. The song toward the end is the
Miner's Lament, which the men sang on
the last day of strike as they left the pits
and walked home, having lost their battle
against the Thatcher government

Geoff Robinson's installation and sound
work uses an interview conducted in 1984
between two elderly Braybrook residents,
focusing on life by the Maribyrnong
River, where both men had lived since
they were boys.¹ Their descriptions give
a vivid and personal account of the time
spent swimming and fishing by the river,
whilst also providing a rich geographical
picture of the Maribyrnong River in the
Braybrook area. Using these descriptions
and a number of physical maps of the
particular geographical region, invited ar-
tists Helen Grogan and Benjamin Woods
have interpreted these two distinct forms
of mapping through a performance that
sees them attempt to plot the Mariby-
rnong River (as demarcated between
Braybrook and Avondale Heights) onto
the Living Museum's bluestone building.
In this process of overlaying one physical
site onto another, Grogan and Woods use
brightly painted wooden blocks of varying
lengths as spatial markers that are placed
across the interior of the building. In this
way, the overlay is informed by both the
abstracted geography of the Maribyrnong
River and the physical interior architec-
ture of the bluestone building to form a
composite map that allows for both spaces
to inform one another in a site-responsive
diagram.

Susan Jacobs presents *Frontier* (2012)
for the first time in Melbourne, a collection of
found and constructed sculptural objects,
rich in materials and form.
Displayed across a large floor-based plat-
form and able to be viewed in the round,
the work can be experienced as a series of
flattened vignettes, with objects overlap-
ping and transitioning through anamor-
phic alignment as the viewer's perspective
changes. This composition alludes to the
framing and compression that occurs with-
in photographic documentation, flattening
depth into a single viewpoint. The objects
in *Frontier* are themselves spliced, cut,
fragmented and fractured, revealing layers
of materiality and history. Located on the
floor of the bluestone building, some of
them look like remnants of past industrial
production; off-cuts and detritus from the
munitions factory that once operated in
the area.

Please note that all works are
located within the Bluestone
building except Kerrie Poliness'
The Pipestacks and *40 Pipe
Paintings*, which are located near
the carpark adjacent to the Living
Museum of the West.

Geoff Robinson's, 30 coloured tim-
ber spatial markers are located
across both levels of the blue-
stone building.

Four Hundred Feet (2014) by Avni Dauti is
a filmic installation that weaves togeth-
er multiple narratives that speak to the
history of Melbourne, and specifically to
the Living Museum's industrial past.
Beginning with a found 16mm film reel
that documents factory workers making
pipes on the Living Museum site when the
Hume Pipe Company was in operation,
Dauti embarked on a journey to have the
film digitised onto a DVD via the modern
technological process of telecining.

Interspersed with this documentation is a
series of static shots of the Living Museum
site as it appears today, accompanied by
a narration taken from James Flemming's
journal – which was written aboard
Charles Grimes' survey of Port Phillip in
1802-03 and arguably contains the first
few sentences in the story of the Europe-
an settlement of Melbourne, as well as
observations made while travelling along
the Maribyrnong River.

In bringing together different moments of
the Living Museum's past and present, the
film takes form as a 'quasi-documentary'
that is not quite an objective document
nor simply a personal reflection. In this
way, *Four Hundred Feet* suggests that inter-
pretations of history are never definitive.
The title of the work is taken from the
total length of single reel of 16mm film,
which happens to translate to 13 minutes
of moving image. As an ode to the origi-
nal, outmoded medium, Dauti's own film
is also exactly 13 minutes long.

Kerrie Poliness is an artist well versed in
the history of the Living Museum of the
West, having been intimately involved in
the running of the Museum for the past
twenty years. This exhibition provides as
an opportunity for Poliness to present a
number of projects she has completed at
the Living Museum that serve to
interpret and conserve the buildings in
the Museum's park.

Each of her works pay tribute to the
sites' previous use as a concrete pipe
factory, Hume Pipes, and the revolution-
ary advancement made by its founder
Walter Hume, whom developed a way of
producing centrifugally spun pipes which
revolutionised water supply, sewerage
and drainage systems globally. *Top Factory*
(1997), an interactive CD Rom program
that provides a virtual walk-through of
the now-derelict factory site where con-
struction of the pipes took place, features
a number of 'hidden' artworks by many
of Poliness' contemporaries, including
Stephen Bram, Marco Fusinato, Melinda
Harper and Rose Nolan. Poliness' own
contribution to *Top Factory* is a digital
sculpture made by re-arranging the huge
pile of remnant pipes left behind on the
site after Hume Pipes operations moved
to Laverton.

The Pipestacks (1997) and *40 Pipe Paint-
ings* (2014) are a permanent installation
presented adjacent to the 'top factory' that
make real the design featured in *Top Fac-
tory*. Here Poliness has assembled a series
of pipes in the manner they were stacked
to cure when the factory was operating;
her particular configuration appears to
be systematic but has been made without
a conclusive system – in Poliness' words,
the pattern 'make senses and also makes
no sense at the same time'. A coloured
diamond that responds to the number
of pipes in each stack – also featured in
Top Factory – has been applied atop each
monument.

¹ The interview belongs to the Living
Museum's audio collection.