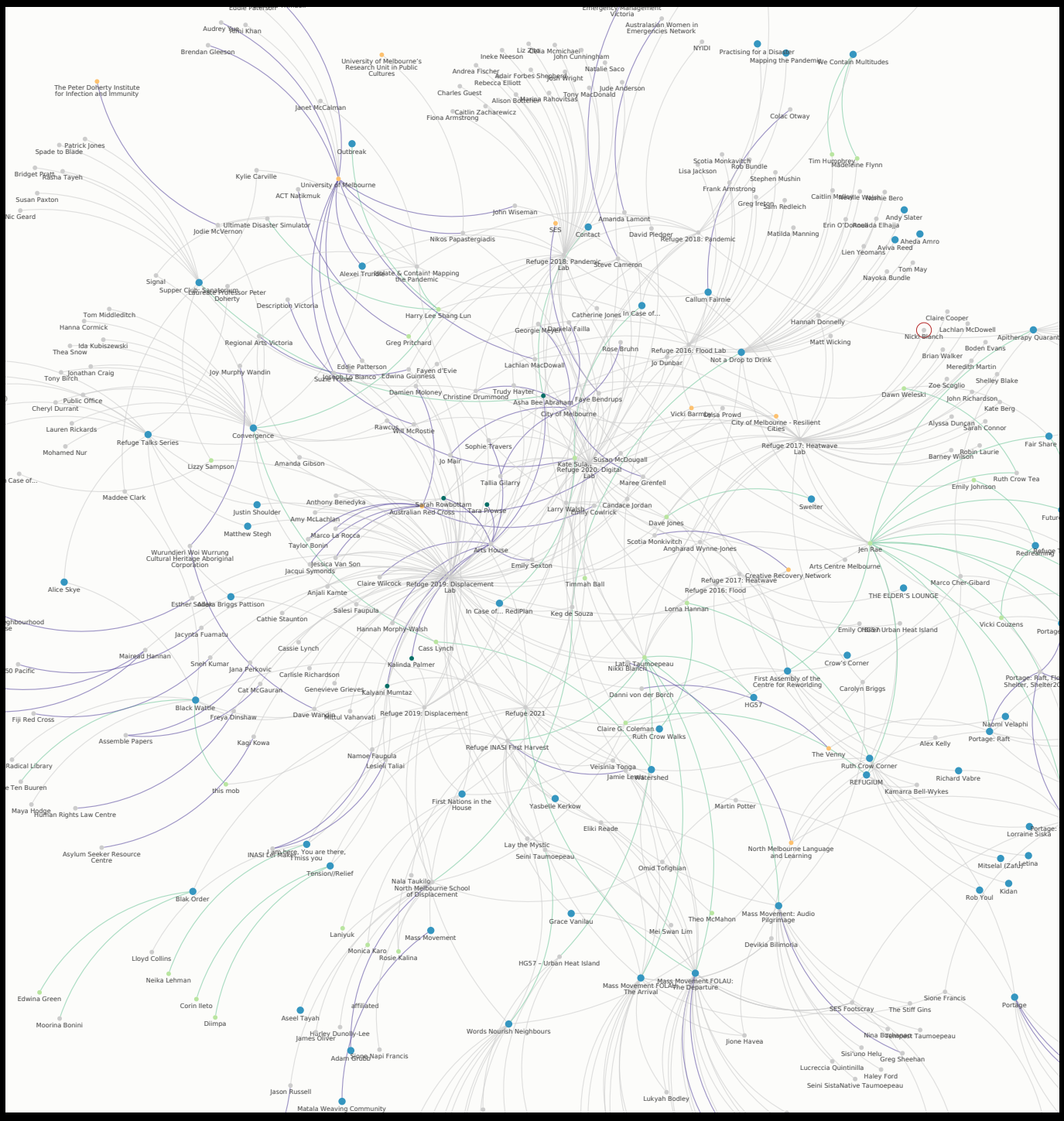
In the Time of Refuge

a collection of writings and reflections
on art, disaster and communities



Edited by David Pledger and Nikos Papastergiadis

Image: MASS MOVEMENT FOLAU: The Departure by Latai Taumoepeau, Refuge 2021. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: A group of people stand in a circle on Altona beach foreshore at sunrise. On the far right is a jetty, leading into still ocean water. Thick, fluffy blue and grey clouds fill the sky. There is a black greyhound standing central to the group.

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Imagining Refuge

Nikos Papastergiadis

Image: Isolate and Contain! Mapping the Pandemic by Harry Lee Shang Lun with PlayReactive, Refuge 2018: Pandemic. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: Several people sit and stand huddled around a table playing a game with squares of paper marked with English alphabet letters. There are other props on the table including a clear box filled with paper, balls and markers.

This timely book offers an expanded understanding of the importance of the arts and communication in dealing with disasters. It is based on Refuge a pioneering program of artist-led events held at Arts House (Melbourne) from 2016-2021 concerned with the intersection of climate change, emergency services and community. The first half of the book opens with a poetic reflection by Angharad Wynne-Jones, the former Artistic Director of Arts House (Melbourne) – the host organization of Refuge - and is followed by a range of contributions from core artists - Lorna Hannan, Jen Rae, Kate Sulan, Harry Lee Shang Lun - and Indigenous leaders - Boon Wurrung Senior Elder, N'arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM and Taungurung Elder, Uncle Larry Walsh - who steered the program. This section ends with a commentary by creative producers, Tara Prowse and Sarah Rowbottam. The second half of the book comprises a long, deeply reflective essay by David Pledger and concludes with Noongar writer Cass Lynch's beautiful work, *Convergences*.

Even before the COVID pandemic the financial cost of extreme weather events alone was projected to exceed $39 AUD billion per year in 2050 (Deloitte 2017; Glasser 2019). Imagining a disaster is recognized as a key part in developing responses and mitigating consequences. But building such an imaginary is challenging: communities need to be able to "imagine the unimaginable" in order to prepare for disasters (Fraser et al 2019). Experts in emergency services also recognize that in complex multicultural societies conventional communication strategies are ridden with distortion effects. Pledger has addressed the imminent urban challenges arising from climate change by focusing on the events and actors involved in Refuge but also by ruminating on the wider changes in the political landscape and the different philosophical ways for approaching the question of time. Refuge involved partnerships with the Australian Red Cross, Emergency Management Victoria, State Emergency Services and The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity as well as receiving direct engagement from community groups, Indigenous leaders, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Melbourne's Chief Resilience Officer and the University of Melbourne.

Refuge cultivated a wide network of stakeholders, generated a diverse range of experiences and events, and produced extensive documentary materials across a range of media. Through his observations, interviews with key participants, and a survey of previous documents Pledger offers a prism for appreciating the significance of this program. It also provides an uncanny window into the complex relationship between art and reality, life and the imagination. In 2018, two years before COVID, Refuge staged a pandemic scenario. Artists explored communication channels. The Red Cross proposed methods for connecting with the diverse communities. Volunteers made masks for the vulnerable. Health experts discussed hygiene and sanitation. Ethicists debated "who gets thrown under the bus" as infection rates surged. Aboriginal storyteller Uncle Larry Walsh explained the new pathogen as a punishment of creator spirit Bundjil (Fraser et al 2020). Looking back, it is hard to separate past, present and future. It is not just a temporal blur, it also carries the uncomfortable feeling of a supersaturated experience: the dimensions of reality have exceeded the predicted bounds of fiction. We are now forced to hold together apocalyptic elements that were not all there in the artistic accounts of the apocalypse. It has confirmed Oscar Wilde's maxim: "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitate Life" (The Decay of Lying 1889).

However, even more important than serving as an early warning device, Pledger has noted another compelling instance of the unique role that art plays in the world. Artists are not averse to crisis, trauma and disasters. In fact, as one artist put it, they have a proclivity to put their fingers in the wound. Art can also help us see changes that are not yet visible. It can clarify issues that are either latent or have been marginalized. Art does this by representing missing aspects of our society and bringing into view the

commons in our culture. It gives us a deeper or wider image of public life. This is crucial at a time when public services are in decline and the real costs of commercialization are hidden. A genuine audit of the public accounts is a duty that has been outsourced to global accounting firms. This in itself should make us feel uneasy. However, Pledger has identified another crucial role. He has noted that Refuge was not just offering a mirror for the public to see itself, but it also served as the ground upon which it could assemble. It did not just inform the community on how to conduct itself in a crisis, it became a community in the context of an imagined crisis: it brought forth the experience of being in public, it highlighted the sensory experience of holding something in common with others, it made 'publicness'.

There are also many practical lessons that Refuge offers. We are reminded that such lessons have not yet found their way into the macro world of public policy, but for the participants profound micro shifts have already occurred. Pledger writes with a tone of indignation and melancholy that is directed by an outlook driven by a patient optimism – a belief that the crisis will crack open with emergent signs of hope. The temporality of ruptures that evokes in this book is not a sign of collapse but rather a point at which different planes cross. At such junctures, he has faith that artists can seize the hint of new possibility, one that may already be experienced in people's ordinary life, but has not yet migrated into the domain of institutional politics. If change is to occur, it is not just as a result of the guidance of experts from above, for more importantly, it must be seeded from below and spread horizontally. It will creep up and then suddenly appear as if it was always there.

It is estimated that Australia spends 30 times more on rebuilding after disasters than it does on preventative measures. Since COVID we have learned that in times of disaster we cannot solely rely on the existing infrastructure. The existing emergency management arrangements are only provisioned for limited disasters (Fraser et al. 2020, 5). When the emergency is extended deeper into our way of life, we are forced to turn to new habits and ways of relating to each other. If we can listen to the stories in this short book, and spawn multiple other scenarios, then there is a hope that a preparedness is developed, not just in the infrastructure but also in the imagination, before the next wave.

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Introduction from an Intermediary

Angharad Wynne-Jones

Image: Boon Wurrung Senior Elder N'arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM and Angharad Wynne-Jones during Refuge 2016: Flood welcome. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: Two women stand on a staircase at the entrance of North Melbourne Town Hall. The woman on the far right wears a orange hi-vis jacket saying 'EXERCISE' and speaks into a microphone behind a lectern. The woman on the left is an Aboriginal elder. She watches the other woman speak with a smile and proud look, clasping her hands. She is wearing a long dark grey jacket and leather boots.

friends for life

Refuge is in my/our body/bodies now and before and again, later.

Turn always towards the first smoking in with N'arweet,
the cleansing eucalypt,
the naming of Bunjil,
of Waa,
the requirement to come with purpose.

Breathe each other in and out as we
Snore, toss and turn, fart, gasp and sigh,
In the first communal sleep over.

The crispy delicious pop of lemon on from the ants in Jen's protein balls.

Sweaty with Latai's hi vis exercise.

Queer, disabled and brown bodies on the line.
Again.

A gulp of Lorna's strong Ruth Crow tea
and
her devastating poetic one liners
and
Uncle Larry's deep reminders that keep us talking, laughing
and
planning through long days and nights.
and
amongst Kate's cubby making, the children design and
run a communication system for themselves
beyond adult vigilance, which they cannot trust,
because look where we have got to.

and over the years and through the open door and come
other guests, bringing different offers and skills.

From Natimuk, they bring their pragmatic knowledge of living on country,
of heat and drought, of shading windows,
saving water, observing the land, to share with city folk.

From Castlemaine, the evaporative clay pots of water and wet handkerchiefs
recalled from Jude's country childhood,
that calm us as they cool us.

and in between, and all around,
Tara,
dancing with the possibilities,
manifesting the connections,
booking the catering, the venues,
cold calling the Red Cross,
constantly clearly explaining the intent,
whilst making space for new directions,
holding the reality of everything.

and Cath and Meredith's careful charting of the institutional relationship with the University and the City of Melbourne, how to recognise and record the value of what's happening, how to share it, with whom.
What these two corporations, these two bodies can offer each other, delicately outlined beneath the contractual muscle.

and Emily and Sarah receiving and embracing the messy complexity and necessity of it

So many people,
so many artists,
making threads, loops, weaves of possibilities,
of questions to articulate,
experiences to share.
Over 6 years.

Give or take.

In the beginning, it seemed like such a long, indulgent time for an arts project.
But now we've made it, we know we are all here for the duration.

Every time I hear or tell Refuge stories a different version emerges,
a piece of possible wisdom to apply, poultice-like, on our new distress.
We carry it with us, amongst us.

It's how I know to turn to the Elders and listen.

It's how I understand that some of what I am (white, privileged) can be put to use.

It's what else I/we, am/are, was/were, could and will be in meeting what's ahead.

And between us all

Elders,
Makers,
Activists,
Artists,
Producers,
Production managers,
Designers,
Cooks,
Emergency managers,
Scholars,
the children
and others,
the animals, the birds, the trees and grasses, the waterways

We call each other in,
and we circulate the questions,
the curiosity, the intent, the responsibility.

Refuge is/was/will be the only place that I let my fear be fully visible, to myself and others.

The place where I can/will wrap it and place it down beside me
(a seeping hessian sack).

And take up, pass, share, give back, glances, hugs, leanings-in, laughter across the table,
the connections.

Not hope exactly.

But maybe something more substantial.

Friends for life.

Artists

Lorna Hannan

Jen Rae

Kate Sulan

Harry Lee Shang Lun

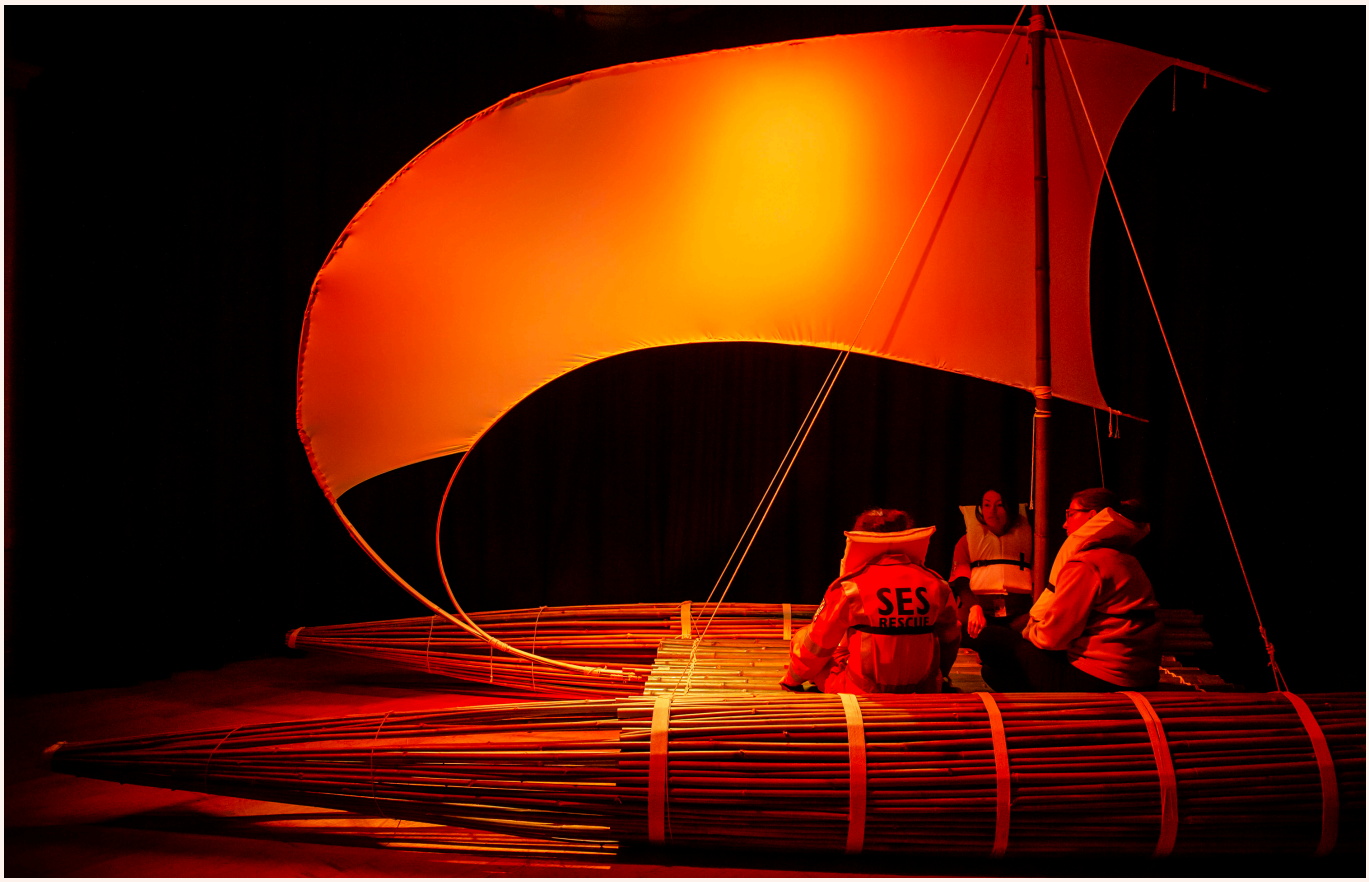

Image: Portage: Flotilla by Jen Rae in collaboration with Giant Grass, Refuge 2019: Displacement. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: Three people with life jackets sit on a bamboo flotilla with a large sail inside a pitch black room lit with warm orange and yellow lighting. On the back of one of the life jackets it says SES Rescue.

from Lorna Hannan

Some of What I Know

Time is the experience of sequencing events and ideas and how they mirror the multiverse.

Time is a clock whose hands are moving inexorably out of a past it's trying to understand,
into a future that has no shape.

Time changed the past. Time changed what the first Refuge had been.
Over Time, some of the threads grew into rope. Ruth Crow Corner was one of those ropes.
Ruth Crow Corner weaved storytelling, to capture experiences that could be recognised by all of us, personal life-stories, and how the stories gather people around their meaning.

Like my story.
Under my skin is the knowledge of the Irish famine and my body,
and my instinct calls on that knowledge and allows me
to empathise with First Nations Peoples
in ways that I am not otherwise conscious of.
Fundamentally, the famine is there.
Some of my fears and hopes are generated by that.
Even though I didn't personally experience it, the events of Time are in my blood.
Time is the way in which people play with it.
You can walk into a faeries' den and be there for 300 years.

Conversations are memorable because of the decisions that are made in them.
Some things are done by being said, over and over again, that's how I think about Refuge.
In our final Refuge, the futures were fading,
and the memories of the past came into that space and filled it up
with empathy.
Without empathy, you can't have hope and without hope you don't have a future.
Empathy is the foundation stone of the future.

My name is Lorna Hannan.
I am 87 years old.
And this is some of what I know.

from Jen Rae

Unfinished Business

Writing this reflection hours after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Changed released their Sixth Assessment Report - Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis, labelled by the United Nations Chief as a 'code red for humanity'. The evidence is irrefutable. Global temperatures are likely to rise by 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2030, a threshold where climate impacts will inevitably wreak havoc on humanity. Only drastic intervention in the next decade may limit the fallout of climate breakdown. We knew this news was coming. It is sobering and heartbreaking, nonetheless. I'll probably sleep tonight with a light on.

There is a black box in my studio marked Unfinished Business. Inside are components of projects past – notebooks from creative labs and productions filled with facts, ideas and questions; hard drives of documentation along with diagrams and instructions sheets representing six years of speculative experimental practice within the REFUGE project. It also offers insight to a trajectory of prescient thinking where we (the core group of REFUGE collaborators) imagined possible, probable and preferred future scenarios in a climate emergency disaster-preparedness-and-response context. Opening this box is alarming when we consider the contraction of time and the quickening pace of runaway climate change between 2015 and now.

Inside the box are ration packages and returned task cards from Fair Share Fare's Food Store and corresponding Underground/ Black Market (2016 with Dawn Weleski). The project was a data generator, providing intel into people's rationale and understanding of climate-related food security, and the provisioning of empathy and altruism in emergencies. There are over a hundred confession cards where people expressed their intimate sins, secrets and desires to the bee colony at Arts House before being subjected to 'therapeutic treatments' in Apitherapy Quarantine (2018); there are recipe cards from WWII austerity cooking programs for Fair Share Fare's Austerity Cooking Demonstrations (2016-17) that are collated with provocations and menus from 3 Meals to Anarchy or Revolution and Feral Feed (2017); there is a string-bound folder of interviews and diagrams scribed and collated for the Future Proof Survival Guide (2017 with Leisa Shelton-Campbell). You see, for the artists in REFUGE there were no rehearsals in the way we would prepare for a public performance or exhibition. Many of the works simply unfolded in a relational and improvisational manner. They were the testing ground for observation, experimentation and provocation alongside participants and audiences. New questions arose providing fodder for potential future iterations and refinement.

Each of the archived components represent works that at one stage I intended to develop further and resolve for exhibition or other art purpose…that is until 8 October 2018… when authors of the landmark report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) declared to the world that we had 12 years to limit climate catastrophe. The key word here is 'limit'. Time contracted in that moment when I read The Guardian's headline on that memorable Monday morning. No longer was runaway climate change something temporally and spatially distant and disconnected from our everyday. Climate catastrophe was on our doorstep and in our face. The reality sunk in….fade to black. I was gutted.

Everything exists in darkness. In waving my torch, I found that I was not alone. Others close in the REFUGE project were feeling the same. In reaching out, the obvious did not need to be said - the REFUGE disaster rehearsal/simulations as they were, were over. All of a sudden, the stakes were higher and the urgency greater with pressing questions emerging. Within a short time, some of the scenarios we imagined, mapped and practiced were materialising in real life with the Australian Black Summer and Covid-19 overwhelming emergency services, communities and governments here and abroad, including in my own suburb of Fawkner, Victoria.

The most food insecure suburb in the City of Moreland and heavily impacted by Covid-19, Fawkner had over 180 cases and 45 deaths in 2020, most within 20 metres of my home. From my experience with Fair Share Fare and the REFUGE project, I was able to recognise a potential crisis unfolding around food security and mobilised all of the local community food organisations into a Zoom call to discuss a collaborative response. This resulted in my partner and I co-founding and launching Fawkner Commons (The Age, December 14, 2020), a community-led Covid-19 response food hub operating out of the local bowling club. Between May-December, Fawkner Commons distributed over $116K of no-cost/low-cost food boxes and over 2,400 prepared meals amongst other community social cohesion and food justice activities.

In response to the initial sequence of lockdowns, Fawkner Commons was a highly energised, community-resilient activity with the majority of our volunteers identifying as women, LGBTIQA+ and/or CALD. As an artist, I saw its operation and communications as choreography. I drew upon my practice regarding audience experience, aesthetics, story and form to collaborate and participate with community in a meaningful way either through volunteering or consumption. I thought what we were doing was a stop-gap operation until the second wave of government and/or NGO-led support mobilised and we would be prepared for next time. In hindsight, I did not anticipate the heightened scale and ongoing need for food relief in our impacted community or that being prepared for next time would be illusive as we head into our 6th lockdown. Exhaustion is rampant.

Disaster-recovery psychologist Rob Gordon (OAM), explains that in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, a complex society will reorganise into a simplified survival-oriented social system often with a social cohesion or solidarity focus. People will set aside personal identities and boundaries in their initial response to help, but without the presence of structured and transitional social infrastructure to support the next steps of response and recovery, there is a risk of erosion to the social fabric which may lead to disillusionment, unrest and mental health deterioration (Gordon 2012, pp 125-130). Systems are strained and now, in 2021, as the pandemic disruption extends, we are all tiring of novelty and pivoting. Everyday frontline workers (e.g. teachers, nurses, childcare workers, food systems workers, disability carers, etc.) continue to do the heavy lifting in this long unfurling pandemic and I am reminded of a question from REFUGE 2016: Who cares for the carers in disasters?

As we move through and become more accustomed to living in a climate emergency impacted world, it is vital that we consider who are our everyday frontline responders and who are those who carry on the second, third,

fourth and fifth waves of response, recovery and support. You might have to hold the torch or you may have to light the way. From Future Proof (REFUGE 2017): What do you know, that you don't know that you know, that we all might need to know in a disaster?

My participation as a core artist in REFUGE has fundamentally changed how I practice and define myself as an artist and how to speculate on alternative climate emergency futures. The gift of six years 'playing in the dark' together in whole and in parts with other REFUGE artists, partners and collaborators, reflects a depth of inquiry and commitment to collaborate differently, knowledge-share and experiment outside of disciplinary boundaries and cultural comfort zones. Care is integral to the methodology.

It seems futile to return to my box of Unfinished Business. It is not solely about the art anymore.

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from Kate Sulan

Hope in the Unknown

In the 2016 Refuge Lab, my first encounter with Refuge, Susan Davies from Save the Children explained that, at that time, animals were better catered for in relief centres than children. This statement gave a focus to my work on Refuge and led me to primarily create offerings for and with children and young people.

Image: Places to go in a Crisis: Heart.
Image description: A collage of a teenage boy sitting inside a cocoon of white and cream tulle netting, wool and different textured fabrics. He has a bright and dark red arrangement of material draped around his neck and a cream woollen jumper wrapped around his head so only his face shows. The background is dark violet at the top, fading into light lilac at the bottom.

I have selected three images for this collection from the project In Case Of..., a collaboration with students from St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre, a school catering for young people who are disenfranchised and disengaged from education. The images were created by the students working alongside designer Emily Barrie and photographed by Lizzy Sampson. For the project, they mined their personal experiences of living in crisis and trauma to offer an alternative instruction manual for preparing for a disaster – one that focused on emotional and psychological preparedness.

Image: Places To Go In A Crisis: Red
Image description: A collage of a teenager sits inside a large makeshift cubby house structure of different coloured, textured and patterned materials and a polka-dot umbrella. The background is salmon pink in colour.

My time working on In Case Of… was guided by a quote from Rebecca Solnit in Hope in The Dark which continues to act as a moral and artistic compass for me in these challenging times.

Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty there is room to act.

Image: Places To Go In A Crisis: Coconut Island
Image description: A collage of two teenage boys draped in different patterned and textured material sitting on wooden stools gazing out. The boy on the left wears a red and dark green lei around his neck and leans his hand on his chin and the boy on the right holds a yellow cup up to his mouth. The floor is scattered with blue, yellow and white materials and pillows and there are three reals of wool placed either side of them. The background is bright sky blue in colour.

from Harry Lee Shang Lun

Play

We started Refuge by asking questions.
What is the role of the arts in preparing for and responding to catastrophic emergencies?
How do we utilize our resources, skills, and knowledge to ready our communities?
What kind of future do we want to build?
Now in its unexpected 6th year (thanks COVID), Refuge is still a container for urgent questions, slow answers, prescient hypotheticals, and wild experiments.
My contribution to the final program is a game called Convergence, written in collaboration with Cass Lynch.
Convergence came out of the piece I made for Refuge 2018 called Mapping the Pandemic, which explored what would happen if the world were to experience an outbreak of infectious disease. The work was the result of an artistic residency at The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity. Mapping the Pandemic communicated the science and politics of pandemics in an interactive lecture format, drawing on interviews with epidemiologists, historians, virologists, emergency management workers, and other experts. The interactive elements were designed to illustrate concepts and generate discussion:
How does disease spread?
Who is most vulnerable in a pandemic?
How should a government distribute vaccines?
So, we had a model, something we knew worked to educate and entertain. Initially, the idea was to replicate the experience, but with an expanded focus:
What does it mean to prepare for and respond to multiple overlapping or cascading disasters?
It felt like the natural culmination of the previous years of the Refuge program, which had examined catastrophes of increasing scale. But as I talked with Cass and my producer Sarah, a different question emerged:
How did we get here?
We might be convinced of what's going on, but what are the underlying values, mechanisms, and events that led to our dire situation?

Most people already persuaded of the truth of climate change are intimately familiar with the challenges we face, even if the broad dimensions eclipse our perspective. Floods, heatwaves, pandemics, displacement... all across the globe, we're experiencing the compound effects of our climate crisis. In some ways, the specific disasters are interchangeable. Our mental heuristics aren't suited for long emergencies, systemic flow-on effects, or scope multiplication. It's an exhausting uphill battle.

At some point, we handwave the hard stuff – and what are we left with? Fatalism.

It's so easy to be inundated with noise when we're unmoored. And this is no accident: our confusion and anxiety are manufactured by the same processes, institutions, and systems that are leading us towards collapse of various kinds and scales. We are disconnected and disenfranchised. What values will get us through this mess?

Early on and throughout the creation of the game, Cass stressed the importance of grounding the game in place and time as an antidote to abstraction. If the diagnosis is disconnection à cause de capitalism and colonialism, then connection is our cure: connection to country, connection to community, connection to culture. Cass' essay charts a continuous course from the appearance of homo sapiens 200,000 years ago through to the contemporary – and temporary – climate crisis. It is the contextual deep time backbone of Convergence.

Convergence invites you to sit in a room with other people and discuss the climate emergency. In some ways, that's the entire trick. The game serves as a facilitator and pedagogical tool, but the real utility is the connection between players: play as a powerful act of shared imagining and learning. After all, simply being presented with facts does not change your mind. Stories change your mind. People change your mind. Practice changes your mind.

Making Convergence changed my perspective, approaches, and values around the climate emergency.

In place of fatalism, I feel neither optimism nor pessimism, but determination. I hope the work might inspire the same for people who play it.

Elders

N’arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM
Uncle Larry Walsh

Image: Dr N’arweet Carolyn Briggs AM, Boon Wurrung Senior Elder, Refuge 2019: Displacement Welcome Ceremony. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: An Aboriginal elder stands holding her arms in the air, addressing the room. She has a microphone in her right hand and a black note book in her left hand. She is wearing a long brown coat and grey scarf. A cello sits behind her leaning against the wall and there is a blur of someone standing in the foreground

Beyond the bricks and mortar of North Melbourne

Excerpt from a conversation between Boon Wurrung Senior Elder, N'arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM and Refuge Artists Latai Taumoepeau and Keg de Souza.

Recorded on 19 July, 2021

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

I was created in North Melbourne, and I lived in North Melbourne. My family lived in North Melbourne, a lot of black fellas lived in North Melbourne. So, there was a sense of connection to that place. We had the opportunity to meet diverse groups of people that came in and how they wanted to express their views, their values, in a safe place. I made a lot of connections.

Knowing they were visitors on Country, gave me a stronger presence in that place, and other First Nations communities. I think town halls should be more for people, more for organisations to have productive outcomes instead of just meetings. It's a colonial construct that made its mark in place.

But now it's opened up to all diverse groups of people. It became a bigger meeting place and produced a presence…for me it runs deep. It's in the region that still has a major connection for lots of people, because it is in an area that a lot of Indigenous people came and settled. They had their different pockets around the circle of Melbourne. And some went to Eastern Melbourne, Fitzroy, Collingwood, they had made their presence there.

But North Melbourne started to change and grow and others, like our theatre group, ILBIJERRI, went there. I came back in the 90s. My children went to the school there on Errol St, my godparents lived there. A lot of our community members think about the place, very much a part of their merging back into their communities. We have a lot of Wurundjeri, Boon Wurrung all living and immersing… Aunty Marge Tucker… all these people were played out as activists in our group after the walk off from Cummeragunja.

The unlocking of the Town Hall gave us another way of creating our own narratives. I used to be very involved with street festivals in North Melbourne in Errol Street. Back in the 90s I was running my own catering business. It was a bridging process.

Latai Taumoepeau

I was reflecting back on a few different conversations that we've had over the years around your food work. I remember one time you described a warehouse that you lived in, in North Melbourne.

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

Yes, it's still in Bendigo Street, the next block over from Queensberry Street. When you come out, down the steps, you look through gates in that laneway. There's a pub on the corner and there's a place that sells recycled goods, furniture, office furniture. That was the bluestone I bought.

I started up my catering business from North Melbourne, then I went to Gertrude Street in the Victoria Stars gymnasium, and then expanded to buying a restaurant in Lygon Street and was running bush foods that came down from Warragul. I couldn't make it work in Melbourne so I turned it around and made it an active restaurant, fine-dine bush foods.

You can step outside of being that 'marginalized other', to finding your voice and creating a narrative. Listening and experiencing other people's processes, of their acts of growing into a Country, that gives a voice, whether they feel safe enough, or they can have a place with the freedom to express it, and with good people around them. That's probably what Refuge has done for me. And I believe this gives a sense of purpose -

makes that (North Melbourne Town Hall) building accountable. Because town halls are supposed to be for community. It's a colonial construct. I'm not here to disrupt it, but we can disrupt it in the inside and allow young people to feel that grounding can be done there.

And I suppose Refuge built a sort of a sense of family. You know, might be an organic family, but it gave me food, gave me insights into other people using it as an amazing platform.

Latai Taumoepeau

If I remember back to one of the first public events of Refuge, and your Welcome at the front steps of the Town Hall. I remember seeing you standing in your beautiful possum cloak…and the smoking ceremony. People were in hi-vis vests which said exercise on it. It was such a surreal beginning of a project. Your sense of welcoming and belonging created that sense of family for us. But also, it forged the necessity for Refuge to always have proper intergenerational relationships with people such as yourself. Your welcomes give us an understanding of things that happened well and truly before the bricks and mortar of buildings like the Town Hall.

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

It's taken that long to be able to create those Welcomes, without fear. And I keep adapting it, to put it into understanding what those values are. When I talk about yulendji, it strengthens me to speak some of my language, without fear, but it's also how I grounded it with purpose. It's also about knowledge, and about respect. It was also about embedding knowledge of the sacred ground on where bricks and mortar is now everyday present. How we reimagine what it would have looked like before, when it was wetlands, and that was how you navigated your world before the 200 years of settlement. You have to reimagine how people had to move through Country, how they had to go to high ground, how they had to build their refuge, and when they could come back for the resources. And it was having a way to be able to voice those thoughts to give people a different context about place. Because you can go anywhere in the world, and you'll find a place like that with bricks and mortar.

Keg de Souza

I think that intergenerational knowledge sharing that you're describing Aunty is so important and the way that you've been involved in so many different Refuge projects over the years. The way your knowledge has been able to come through in so many different forms and ways is so rich, and I think, that, thinking about the past, and learning from the past and looking to the future, and bringing that all together is such an important part of building the community around the issues that is happening through Refuge.

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

And that has been the highlight of my growing too. I grow with the process as well, as much as I can share, and then I think about things, go away, and then it starts to scaffold. I'm not the passive listener.

Keg de Souza

I think that type of knowledge sharing is the best kind - when it's shared. And it's not just a one-way depository.

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

That's right.

Keg de Souza

Co-learning is what makes the interaction really important, it makes that knowledge sharing really strong. I feel like that's clear through so many of the projects that have come out of Refuge in such different ways and intersecting with very different things.

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

That's right darlin'. And at the end of the day, we're all human, we can grow stronger with it. We bring different things, and that's okay. But somehow, bringing differences brings strength. And we can unpack, repack, and keep building, because you're building on other people's life experiences as well.

Keg de Souza

What you're saying reminds me so much of one of my favourite authors, bell hooks, who talks about how you build resistance in the margins. It's no surprise that Indigenous Australians are often ones who are supporting refugees, because those lived experiences of displacement are so real and so impactful, there's a real similarity. Displacement off your lands, wherever they come from. And welcoming other people who have been displaced.

Latai Taumoepeau

An objective for many of the artists in Refuge has been the idea that preparedness for the future has to come from understanding who's always been there. Something that I've really enjoyed learning from you, and the elders over the years, is how to care for Country, which includes all the people in it, all the life forms. It all comes down to the relationships and the connectivity that we have, through all the knowledge sharing over the years.

Keg de Souza

Yeah, being able to build projects that go over different years, gives a rare opportunity to continue to work with people again, revisit the same community, continue those relationships. When you build it from the actual community, rather than trying to impose it, it's such a different thing, which I think is such a strength.

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

I think it's the building of trust too. And it's been that building of trust, because you share a bit more about yourself at each stage.

Latai Taumoepeau

And that's why we're benefiting from the trust that you have in allowing us to collaborate and create new ideas around what you are sharing with us. That's the gift of having Elders…

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

You empower me too, it's always that reciprocity because your views or your worldliness is going to bring in other elements into my thinking, and you're not holding it back. You're bringing it forward. And it's how we listen to that, the depository I've built in here. I have to think about how I unpack that. And the mastery of knowing what's going to be important for me too and how that will be transmitted to other young people. I have to now listen to my grandsons' dreams and visions. They're always exploring, they're teaching me how they think about the world that they live in now.

Keg de Souza

Yeah, because they're part of that reimagining, right? So, they're reimagining how it is. Thinking about how you reimagine yourself in a world that you know, like Naarm, where it has the colonial imprint of a city on top of it. You have to reimagine how you can practice culture, how you are in your lived experience of every day to be able to be in that space, because it does have this attempted colonial erasure. And so, how do you fight against that? how do you exist within that and keep your culture strong and your identity strong? You have to reimagine things. Time goes on as well.

It reminds me of Mary Graham writing about Place and talking about place not just being the physical

Country, but it's also a time in place and space and spirituality as well. It's not a physical point. But it's also time and an event. It's so layered…

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

When we talk about Country, we talk about it in the context of it as a living entity. It's a living being. It's embedded in spirituality. It's embedded in stories. It's embedded in creation, you know. And what are these values that came out of that, that heal Country? So, we have to break that down? What does that look like? It's more than a word. It's…how do we take action? How do we know the Country we're on? Who were the people that lived and died before we were here? Do we know their names? We weren't just silent partners in the construction of this place?

Latai Taumoepeau

For more than six months, I constantly reflected on the story that you shared about the Birrarung. When they started dredging that space, scientists realised the river (Birrarung) under the Yarra was true.

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

…will always be… that river, that river journeys all the way through down to Point Nepean and there's a massive waterfall there between Queenscliff and Sorrento. You can't see it, but you can know it's there. And you can feel it when you're crossing between Naarm and Western Port… You can feel the force of that pulling you down, and how Naarm had come all the way up and then receded back 800 years ago, and how the grassland under that Bay is still present. Because you can see it in that island in the middle of the bay.

Latai Taumoepeau

We know it's there, because you tell us that it's there. And that's the way information has always been passed on from generation to generation. And now we can receive that information from you…

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

And it was already told, that story, and then I re-wrote it into today's narrative through the time of chaos. When we broke lore with each other, how we broke lore with our environment, how we broke lore with our fish, our ecology. And that all comes out. I didn't know when I was writing that story. Because it's the child in me who wants to find my way around the world. I didn't know it had purpose. You know, like, the time of chaos, we broke lore. We as humans have broken lore with Country and people. And we devalued each other till we were brought into line.

By the deity, you know, he took on the spirit of an eagle. But it's reminding us how we created our world from our worldview. I didn't know I was writing about the environment. But you're taught that you can only eat meat not in its birthing cycle. And you can't eat fish during the spawning season. And how you could read your Country. So that starts to come together, through stories. So how do you heal Country? Because if you can't heal the trees or the birds or the marsupials or your animal world… how do you build? How do you heal it? Water is our Country. So, I now think of it because people want to use it.

Latai Taumoepeau

It was very necessary, because it teaches us how we need to constantly be thinking, asking those same questions ourselves, to get on the same page as your imagining of Country.

N'arweet Carolyn Briggs

I think we do that. I think you do that. Keg does that. And we find an area that we can come together and look at that. Because solutions could be good at one certain time, of that period of time. And it will change, and we will be exposed to so many other ways.

Latai Taumoepeau

Aunty, thank you so much for all of this wisdom. (Thank you darling) I’m just thinking you must need a cup of tea or something.

N’arweet Carolyn Briggs

I do need a cup of tea and I’ll think I’ll go on to get a cup of tea. Strong. Everybody knows that one by now. I may change the order. Just to disrupt…

Building community over time

Excerpt from a conversation between Taungurung Elder Uncle Larry Walsh and Refuge Creative Producers Tara Prowse and Sarah Rowbottam.

Recorded on 5 August 2021

Tara Prowse

Can I ask you Uncle Larry about the first year of Refuge and what your memories are of coming into the project, even the sleep-over in that first year? And how you saw things shift over the six years that you've been involved?

Uncle Larry Walsh

Sleepover over was all right because everyone got to know each other. Because you're working on the whole project together. It's given (people) a broader understanding even amongst themselves. I think, if you were to rate it, there has been more talking now amongst some of those groups that may never have communicated (with each other). If you like, the first one set it up so that was a safe enough space for everyone to talk across each other about different things.

So that for me was a good bonding exercise from the first to the last. It helped to create more communities talking amongst themselves. It helped open the door to multi-ethnic groups - that's always been a very slow thing. The communities mainly stay within themselves, so you've got to have other ways of opening to communicate and I think that helps a lot from the beginning right through. So, it was how it was set up to make people feel they could relax and do that, maybe that's a good bit to do with it. Setting that in motion. That's one of the things I take from it: how the doors of communication are opening, not fully, but they are opening a lot more than they were before.

Tara Prowse

I remember Aunty Vicki sleeping under her possum skin cloak that night, because it was cold out in the warehouse.

Uncle Larry Walsh

In some ways it set the ground rules for future ones and more and more people coming up with their own ideas of what to do from their own cultural perspectives which helps some of those groups open the doors for them because they see similarities. So, on the first one, it actually helped set the tone for the whole lot. Different artists involved coming in with different ideas of what could be done because of their environment. The first one then the second one they've contributed more and the third contributed more, some of those communities got involved more each time. So, I think the first one opened the door to that.

Tara Prowse

There's nothing like 50 people sleeping in a small room all together to get to know each other, break down some of those boundaries.

What about the Refuge Lab? What was your experience of the Labs, and the way it played out?

Uncle Larry Walsh

Well, that was interesting. For me, I was more listening to people. That idea of having a mixture of artists work on a project over a few years is a good idea because it allows them to get trust and have faith in the others and their ideas. And a lot of artists, whilst they work collaboratively, they do not work collaboratively. Someone has an idea, and that's what's getting funded, and the collaboration means that you're all doing all my ideas. Whereas some of those Lab things is: why don't we build an idea that we can all work on separately that gets better working together over a period of time? Gives you a better chance to

know their skills and them to know yours, and to work those skills together, rather than sometimes coming out and designing and being the artist that has to design the work. And I think collaboration in the Lab helps them learn how to interact more. Sometimes artists are isolated because they are so caught in their own world. That idea of meeting these people who are wrestling a similar idea actually helps the artist release, that's my feeling on it.

Tara Prowse

That's a good point about the Lab as a way of people coming together around one idea or a series of ideas and then being able to do their own thing within that.

Uncle Larry Walsh

Yeah. Yeah. They create this structure around the idea from their own expertise. And then they start talking to each other about where we can take this idea next. So, it opens the door for expanding an idea but also expanding the way the artists think through an idea and it creates the interaction with the communities that's been built on from that first visitor program. You can look at it as a community-building exercise as well as an arts-building exercise because the idea is community art involves community, you create it, you run with the story, but it's about having the community involved and being comfortable.

Sarah Rowbottam

The phrase I keep hearing is opening the door. I feel like Refuge has tried to embrace the open-door philosophy for over six years, the door's always open, (people) always come back. And that's where that community trust is built. It's not built in just meeting one hour. It's spilled over days and years.

Uncle Larry Walsh

And as I say it's opening the communities and the artist to more ways they can do their art, people they can collaborate with, community members they might want to involve, all these things that come out of creating the Lab to create an idea, and yet artists seem to say ok how do you filter it through, and remember it has to involve community, so they learnt more about the community that they can collaborate with. So, I think while it's an exercise in planning a project, it's also a good exercise in planning resources for artists.

Tara Prowse

I remember in the Lab we did around the pandemic year when we were at the The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity, and we were working with those scientists, and you brought your memories of the story of The Breath of the Mindye to the Lab?

Uncle Larry Walsh

Yeah, yeah.

Tara Prowse

I wanted to ask you a little bit about that story. It was a part of Refuge 2018 Pandemic, and it was part of that publication and so on, but yeah, what were the connections with what you were hearing from scientists for example, in the Lab?

Uncle Larry Walsh

Most illnesses were viruses and viruses travel through air, not by skin contact but by breath contact. And it was recorded that all these people around different areas had what looked like smallpox scars. The story the Melbourne people told was that there was a great illness brought on by the Mindye because they had broken the rule. Now the description they gave, where the Mindye lives and how he does it, is he ties himself to a

tree in his own country, stretches out for many kilometres and then breathes in the direction that he wants to create death or disruption. And they liken the smallpox scars to the mark of the Mindye, the local Aboriginals call it. But in some ways, it's a really weird story because nobody's put the whole of the Mindye stories together. Usually, he's a punisher because you've broken Bundjil's lore, so he punishes the lot, not just the individual.

Sarah Rowbottam

I wanted to ask you, Uncle, a number of artists have talked about Refuge not ending. And I've heard you say that as well. I've heard Lorna Hannan also say Refuge not being finished. And well, would you think of it as a continuum?

Uncle Larry Walsh

Well, I see Refuge as having a few meanings. You know, like, in a way, on the political sense it's not been reached. Because we are going to get at least 50 maybe 60% of all the Pacific Islands people. Why? Because they've had families here for four generations. Going across all the time, and relatives visit all the time. I think the biggest challenge is making the word 'refuge' acceptable again. When it comes to people.

Tara Prowse

Because of the pandemic and the gathering, do you mean?

Uncle Larry Walsh

Well, partly because the government will use a pandemic to a certain extent to say, well, we can't have all these people coming in this country, we don't care if their islands are sinking, that's not our fault. Refugees, they've been trying to make that a dirty word for years. Why people seek refuge in Australia, is not being discussed. We'll discuss the refuge of all these illnesses and fires and floods and things but the essence of why people want refuge has never been discussed. It's easy to discuss wanting a refuge in a flood because we see them, it's easy to discuss with fire because Australia sees them all the time. Pandemics, not as much, but it's that we don't see ourselves as being, government-wise, responsible for international refuge. Whether it be caused by war that we created, caused by the Pacific Islands sinking, which we helped create.

Tara Prowse

Is that what the Displacement years of Refuge were kind of thinking through?

Uncle Larry Walsh

Yeah, it's not only in this place people we're getting now, and we're going to get more. We're also now going to get from the Pacific Islands and it also means we're going to get a heavier racism line from the police and the media on their behaviour, it also means we're going to get people locked up and be deported to where their country no longer exists. Now they're deporting criminals, well, the ones they're calling criminals. It's not just about them, it's about the fact that we still haven't processed the ones we've got locked up in Preston (hotel detention), and other states, and now because we're going to pull out of the Afghan War, we're going to have at least another couple of thousand refugees coming from Afghanistan, how many will get in, God knows. It's where I think as artists for arts funding, then you gotta be careful of the line you cross about political issues.

For Refuge to keep going, does it take on a political or a socio-political angle because, as I say, our next wave of refugees are going to be Afghans thanks to the Afghanistan war, and then within a couple of years of that, I suspect 50-60% from the South Pacific. I don't know if we're ready to handle that. The media and some politicians will make it into

a race issue. We are talking about a few South Pacific Islanders and White Australia's fear of fierce-looking, large people.

Tara Prowse

Well, wasn't that one of the conversations as well that, you know, all of these things are intersecting - displacement, heat waves, waves of epidemics, climate changes?

Uncle Larry Walsh

Yeah, but all I'm getting at is how do we, at the moment, do it? Because a lot of it now will become a political issue for Refuge because of the Afghan situation and gradually over the next four years, the Pacific Island situation. So, all I'm saying is, which way would Refuge go? Is it now about promoting the idea that it should be running more communities on pandemic, fire, floods, whilst at the same time, take a different focus to do with how it's going to affect the future of migration in Australia?

Tara Prowse

So true.

Uncle Larry Walsh

Well, if we're getting 60%, even 40% would do, it would change our migration policies from Europe and or other countries, if we had to take into account Pacific Islanders. So again, it's going to be people trying to apply for refuge from countries that are war-torn or politically the wrong way. So, I see it as a socio-political problem that's coming up. If Refuge was to keep going, it has to look at that angle, that the next lot of refugees are going to be a couple of thousand from Afghanistan. The next lot, after them, are going to be the Pacific Islanders. It means a lot more people being displaced. And the Australian Government will probably fight tooth-and-nail that they go elsewhere. Just my thought processes at the moment.

Sarah Rowbottam

Thanks Uncle.

Uncle Larry Walsh

I think it should go on, Refuge. It can help with building communities, having things where you invite communities across the board within an area actually helps improve relationships between people. So, if there's a way Refuge could not get into the political realm, but stay in the social realm, it would be good because the political realm ends up dividing people, the social realm doesn't.

Sarah Rowbottam

I also think the social realm is where a lot of our strengths lie as well.

Uncle Larry Walsh

Yeah. Well, that's where art works best. So, I could go along with that. Knowing what will be happening politically means that we don't want to get caught in that world, whatever our private and personal stances are. I support those that are going and bashing down at Preston, at the Mantra, but the minute you turn it (Refuge) into a political realm is the minute you start dividing communities.

Producers

Sarah Rowbottam

Tara Prowse

Image: Tara Prowse, Refuge 2017: Heatwave, Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: A woman wearing a high vis jacket with 'EXERCISE' written on it smiles as she hands out ice-creams from a white box marked 'Local' in black text. A young girl in a blue polkadot dress holds an ice-cream in one hand as another woman takes an ice-cream from the box. There are more people in hi-vis vests in the background

Re-directing: Producer Insights

A discussion between Creative Producers, Tara Prowse (Refuge 2016-18) and Sarah Rowbottam (Refuge 2019-21)

Recorded on 30 July 2021

Sarah Rowbottam

Being a producer in Refuge, you're the pivot point, the relationship holder, relationship nurturer, a conduit between artists and community, emergency staff. You're also the project manager, fundraiser, and a creative consultant. You're hosting, having cups of tea with community members…it's quite an expansive, diverse role.

Tara Prowse

Yeah, totally. I was thinking about the fact that out of that entire network, the only person who has those touchpoints with every single artist, every person, is the Producer – which has been Asha Bee Abraham, Kalyani Mumtaz and Gal Palmer, and us. A lot of what we do in our jobs in Refuge and as creative producers is see the relationships between things. And in seeing the relationships, whether that's people or ideas, or structures, we connect people and ideas; and that's where the whole network map takes life.

Sarah Rowbottam

Latai suggested a really great word to describe it - rhizomatic. The root system. A family tree. And I think you're right, the producer is, almost like a director. Not in a traditional sense of what a director is but seeing where that network or that family tree starts to have a pivot point out and around and down, and then maybe back again.

Tara Prowse

Directing is an interesting concept, because I think what I do is actually more "redirecting". I'm watching how things are happening and I'm not directing that individual project - but if something comes in, I'm able to redirect it to a point or to a place or to a person, and other productive things happen out of that.

Sarah Rowbottam

Because Refuge is a very distinctive project in the arts landscape in Australia, but also probably internationally, what do you think makes the role of the producer distinct compared to other projects?

Tara Prowse

Refuge exists across multiple disciplines and multiple spheres. It works with academics, with emergency services, and people who are quite far from our daily practice in the arts, but we have to be able to pick up on language, and almost use the language of different sectors to be able to bring them into a shared purpose together.

In those first two years, it was really experimenting together, which takes a lot of trust.

Sarah Rowbottam

It does take a lot of trust. I've also been thinking about what it means to engage in a conversation over a really long time. Going back to the idea of the family tree, when I first started producing Refuge, I remember being quite amazed that you're always invited back in. And it doesn't matter if you're leading a project or not, just acknowledging the importance of ensuring that people are always invited back in some way, to be part of this generative knowledge exchange people are doing together. Having that inquiry for six

years has meant that everyone involved has grown and changed in different ways. This impacts Refuge and then Refuge also impacts everyone in their own lives.

Tara Prowse

Being invited back in is really unusual. It's hard to set out on a five or six-year program and go, everyone who's involved at the start will also be invited to be involved all the way through. But I think that goes back to Angharad's comment about building a community around the problem - as it grows a community around this knowledge-building.

I think that's really evident with the people who've been involved from the beginning, they've grown that knowledge together. None of us came in, at the beginning, knowing all of this. It's not a typical economic model, or a tactical ticket sales model, instead it's actually going on the journey and bringing people with you. And these are philosophies that Refuge has had at its core.

As the creative producer, we have to be comfortable with the unknown, and the poetry and creativity, but then put a structure together. The rehearsal is the work and you're making it with the public.

Sarah Rowbottam

The first week that I started at Arts House was the 2018 Pandemic year. I still have strong memories of being in Lee Shang Lun's project and seeing him throw tennis balls to show how quickly a pandemic can spread. Even the simplest mechanism of throwing tennis balls and the learning I got from that moment was really powerful, and it's stuck with me.

One of the best ways to prepare for things is by doing. Moving beyond the pamphlets and the information and websites, etc.

Tara Prowse

Yes! That experience of literally being hit on the head with the tennis ball/virus! I remember we had had long conversations with Josh Wright, who was acting in the Artistic Director role at Arts House at that time and with all of the partners about – how do you bring people together in a scenario of a pandemic? And this is the conundrum for an experimental process, because in a pandemic, of course you don't bring people together. And so, we had consciously taken that decision structurally and curatorially to take a step back with the artists in the audience and look at a problem, rather than be immersed in the problem, which was the model of the first two years.

Sarah Rowbottam

I think it's interesting how Refuge set up a hypothetical. Also acknowledging that we're in an ongoing, long, climate crisis. Do you feel like the pandemic has shifted how we think about and articulate Refuge?

Tara Prowse

I think it's sped it up, if nothing else, but I also think that we were already talking about this before the actual pandemic.

If Refuge continues, or there's an evolution to it, it could never go back to being about or to looking at a single crisis. I think the Refuge: Displacement series articulated that tragically and beautifully in the years that you curated it: that we don't live in a world anymore where we can practice or exercise for individual events, rather that they are compounded one upon the other.

Because that's the world we live in now. So, what does that mean, for Refuge or for future iterations? I think you drew on this in Displacement and the conversation panned

out over two or three years. You were relating all of those other environmental factors to the impact on people and prioritizing the voices of those most impacted. Like thinking about the ongoing impacts of colonization, coupled with the impacts of the climate crisis, they can't be separated from each other. And Refuge takes an intersectional approach to the problem, and it takes an intersectional approach to the, to the knowledges, and to the art forms, and to the people involved. And I think that's a strength. Yeah, it makes me think back to the flood one as being very simple. It was "just" a localized flood!

Sarah Rowbottam

But I think it was important to start local! To really situate Refuge, and the scenario within a North Melbourne context, and how that really helped focus who it was for, and the community of North Melbourne - the many language groups, lived experiences, people who have been here for over 50 years, people who have recently migrated to Australia. And perhaps, as the years went on, it has also broadened out to a conversation that can be applied within lots of different city contexts as well.

Tara Prowse

I think that's a fundamental principle or ethical basis for Refuge isn't it? That it starts, and it always considers the local. If you're talking about whose land the project is happening on and engaging with elders and knowledges. If you're talking about the local community, as you've described them geographically, I think that's just part of the core ethics of the project in some way. And that you can't kind of macro out until you know where you are (locally). I think it's interesting to think about the evolution of language from the perspective of an arts institution like Arts House and how that shift from the language of audiences to the language of community has happened.

Sarah Rowbottam

Acknowledging that Arts House is not just an arts organization, it's also a Council program and venue. And what that means is a strength to connect into the different council departments, Christine Drummond and her team in emergency services, health and wellbeing, climate change, resilience, park rangers so many different departments. It's meant that artists have been able to go to the exercise scenario-planning and the writing teams, and really understand from the inside how a city is thinking about preparedness for those services, and also for community.

Tara Prowse

Really important. And the fact that Arts House as part of City of Melbourne has this civic responsibility, and even just the kind of fabric of the building like the North Melbourne Town Hall being a potential Relief Centre.

Sarah Rowbottam

I've heard the story of how Refuge started in so many different ways.

Tara Prowse

I have quite a strong memory of sitting at Arts House, having a conversation with Angharad and a couple of other people, looking at the City of Melbourne's Emergency Response Plan. And we had it open to a page which listed City of Melbourne relief centres. And Arts House, the North Melbourne Town Hall was on there. And we're all looking at it, thinking – "Ah, that's us!" What would that mean? What would that look like? I think we couldn't look away from that fact.

I feel like the second point that really sticks in my mind when I think about how Refuge came to be, was at the very last day of the first Lab. And we had had all these people like Steve Cameron from Emergency Management Victoria, Christine Drummond from City of Melbourne, the first year's cohort of artists, Arts House people and community members from local groups. We'd all been on this journey together, where we talked about this and unpacked it together.

I remember it was the last day of the Lab and it was just myself and Angharad and the artists left in the Warehouse at Arts House. And we all were looking at each other with this new knowledge and a sense of urgency and importance, but also responsibility of what to do with this new kind of intersection of knowledge that we had all been discussing for the week. And we almost couldn't process what it would mean. And it had no shape yet in terms of what it would evolve into later in the year for a public-facing component. And so, we had to role play it. As a group we had to literally step through what it would feel like, be like, if a member of the public entered the Arts House building in this scenario and imagine, for them, in order to make it real.

Sarah Rowbottam

What strikes me from what you're saying as being fundamental, when I remember Angharad saying is that you didn't set out to make experiences or works about climate change. It wasn't pointing at the problems. It was going beyond that. I still feel the sense of urgency. It still feels high.

Tara Prowse

Lorna Hannan has been a guiding voice all the way through and has constantly brought up a perspective that no one else in the cohort of Refuge has, from both local knowledge perspective as an elder, and also just fundamentally who she is as a listener.

I would say that Uncle Larry Walsh, has also been really pivotal in that way. And I think the presence of people with deep knowledge like Lorna and Uncle Larry, and the other Elders who've been involved over the years - it also shifts the focus from this kind of immediacy, to something that is a long conversation, you know? And it's a long, slow conversation and a privileged one. Their involvement has changed the conversation that we were having, fundamentally.

Sarah Rowbottam

A number of artists and even both for us, have talked about Refuge not ending, and that it's a continuum. And even if Refuge was to continue, or our task was to continue in some way - it may not look the same. But I think also, the conversations and learnings and networks and relationships will always continue well beyond.

Tara Prowse

Yeah, absolutely. And so they should. It was hopefully built into the way the project was devised, that the knowledge and the outcomes aren't just held by ourselves, that they've gone in all directions. That has been super central. The idea that it's not just artist-led, but also that it's held and owned by a huge amount of people who feel a deep investment in it. And that Arts House is not a gatekeeper to that.

Witness

David Pledger

Image: MASS MOVEMENT FOLAU: The Departure by Latai Taumoepeau, Refuge 2021. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: Latai Taumoepeau leads a group of SES and First Nations and Pasifika fāmili who walk single file along a pathway tracing the coastline of Altona Beach at sunrise. The ocean water is still in the background and thick fluffy blue and white clouds fill the sky. An empty asphalt road is in the foreground.

Image: North Melbourne Clock Tower. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: A sunny day. The building is Victorian style with a cream facade and several windows. Three levels are separated by ornamental cornices and at the top is a clock.

(1) Time, And the World Cracked Open

Metrics is an organising principle of our lives. Everything is measured. Our steps, our social credits, our family members, our screen time, our financial capacity, vaccination rates, food miles, productivity, trees felled, the tick-tocks before global warming reaches the tipping point-of-no-return. Measurement relates directly to time. How long did the steps take to walk, how long will our family members live, how long will it take to increase our financial capacity or food to get to our table, how long before productivity returns to sustainable levels, how long does it take for a tree to fall in a forest. Seconds. Minutes. Hours. Days. Weeks. Months. Years. Decades. Centuries. Millenia. Time. Measured in Western civilisation. By a single mechanism. The clock.

The clock co-ordinates our relations with each other and with other things. Its history is bound up in a transition out of an era in which the sun, the moon, the tides dictated our sense of the passage of time into the Industrial Age, in which the mechanisation of time served the great mission of Capital's relationship with Labour. The history of the clock is a history of humans exerting control over Nature, the seasons, the weather, the arcadian rhythm. That this exertion is often done for the benefit of extractive capitalism doubly compounds our relationship with Nature. Nature is not integral to our conception of ourselves as a species, it is supply for our needs and demands. The progress of Western civilisation is in large part due to our controlling Nature - bending it to our concept of time - and breaking with it - casting it as a backdrop to human activity. This rupture is at the heart of the existential crisis humanity now faces.

Environmentalist Bill McKibben frames this crisis in Western civilisation's experience of time and its relationship to change. The problem, he says, lies in there being two speeds of change:

> the pace at which the physical world is changing and the pace at which human society is reacting to this change. (Mckibben 2008.)

These are tectonic plates moving at odds, what McKibben calls a 'fatal confusion', beginning at the Enlightenment and coming to fruition in the Post-Industrial Age. Our struggle to read, accept and respond to the changes in the natural world is rooted in our decoupling from it across this timespan. We cannot 'feel' these changes because we are disconnected from their vibrations and so do not formally acknowledge them as consequences of our actions – extractive industry, fossil fuels-driven manufacturing, consumption, built-in obsolescence. The daily lives of a majority of the human species are out of sync with the daily lives of the non-human, natural world. In this gap, there is an ever-increasing torque that spins Culture and Nature on axes that put them on a collision course. It threatens to make the Anthropocene a brief spark in Time.

Economic and political architectures are interlaced in this dislocation of Culture and Nature. Essayist and art historian, Jonathan Crary, argues the disintegration of 'time' in the human world is a corollary of 'late 20th C Capitalism'. For Capital to maximise the time-labour equation, temporal distinctions must dissolve. Night, day, light, dark, no longer separate human activity from recreation and rest, leading to the ends of sleep. The organisation of labour according to any temporal unit has ceased. The 8-hour day is an anachronism, a footnote in history. Industry must prevail in order for human consumption to be satisfied. In this 'hyper-state', a relationship with Nature cannot exist. Its rhythms are no longer recognisable because the new order of time refuses their presence. Our only concerns are productivity and consumption. The affect in the human sensorium is compromised. We *do not feel* the ice breaking and melting, we *do not feel* the weather changing, we *do not feel* the Earth moving. The dissolution of time, the absence of any interval, so distresses the human fabric that we sever our evolutionary ties with Nature.

In the political space, there are similar perturbations. The ascendant ideology, neoliberalism, requires the maximisation of profit in all contexts and at any cost. In this formulation, the worker is no longer central to the social contract. She has been replaced by the shareholder and consumer. The shareholder's concern is: 'How much profit can I make?' The consumer's concern is: 'How much can I spend and on what?' This duality of the shareholder-consumer separates us from meaningful work, from intimate social relations, from the food chain. The financialization of all things has reduced meaning-making to profit-making. It does not matter what we do so long as we make money to spend money; it is a vicious, simplistic inversion of the circular economy, spawning a society built on self-interest, narcissism and isolation. Not only has it broken the traditional bonds on which capitalism is founded, it fractures the relationship between the civic and the political, corrupting democracy's social code programmed for access, equity, sustainability and justice. Democracy is trapped in the rip of neoliberalism, transported out to sea, flotsam and jetsam bobbing along with the plastics in the oil slicks atop the heating, roiling water.

These ruptures in our body politic, in our economic system, in our philosophical constructions are symptomatic of the interweaving of colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy that have driven Western political and economic culture and civil society, an Unholy Trinity that divides, disturbs and alienates us from each other, from Nature, from Time. They are our death rattle.

Clock-free Time

We must find a way out of this Truman Show, this Rubik's Cube of diminishing returns, this existential crisis of our species.

Try this.

What if a solution lies in the way we *tell* time? Sociologist Michelle Bastian has a fascination for clocks and the hold they have over our imaginary. She wonders at the persistence of humans *to continue to tell the time in the same ways (which) brings about the effect of not being in time, of being out of synch and uncoordinated (Bastian 2012, 33)*. She goes in search of a way out and asserts a new definition of 'the clock' or more aptly a better reason for measuring time. A clock should be *a device that signals change in order for its users to maintain an awareness of, and thus be able to coordinate themselves with, what is significant to them (Ibid., 31)* So not a clock at all. At least not of the tick-tock variety because *clocks do not provide an objective measure of the world, but rather orient us toward particular relational worlds (Ibid., 32).*

Okay. That's helpful. What if we were to view Time not through the lens of Western civilisation but through the lens of the species? What if we were to view Time not through the tick-tock of the clock but in relation to multi-temporality, a co-existence of the past, present and future? What if we learned how to understand First Nations people when they talk about 'time' in terms of tens of thousands of years, as a continuum, as 'deep time'? With our clockwork heart, we are ill-equipped to integrate this sophisticated concept of time in the organising principles of our daily life and so its riches, its knowledge and wisdom are beyond us. But if we are to continue to live on this planet, we must learn to find a way.

If we stick to the notion of 'rupture' we get to invoke the work of that intellectual escapologist, Jacques Derrida. Derrida's trick was to interrogate what is already there *to look for something within a particular context that goes against the dominant currents and yet seems to call for greater recognition or awareness (Ibid., 36).* It's common sense really. Also, good science. A vaccine to a virus must contain some element of the virus to consolidate itself as an antibody and build immunity. In order to collapse a system, look within. Be forensic. Feel for the different currents, that which *waits pregnant with a possible receivability (Ibid., 36).*

Sociologist Donna Haraway says that for there to be a force of rupture we need *at least some kind of displacement that can trouble identifications and certainties (Haraway 1991, 11)* In her case, she says, you'll find these *where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all of the force of lived reality (Haraway 2008, 4).* Art. Literature. Science. That's familiar. But if we create a rupture, what happens next? It's one thing to burst a thing; violence is easy,

casual, irresponsible. It's another to create a new thing. According to our amateur 'horologist' Bastian, Derrida reckons the task of rupture is not to create something new but to *entice others to produce new conventions, institutions, and traditions in response to it.* There's an activist impulse in that ambition. I like it.

So, how do we do it? How do we grow new conventions, institutions and traditions that are not simply the progeny of the old ones? Let's stick with science for a bit. In botany, there are plant stems that send out shoots and nodes - things heading somewhere, and points for those things to go through: rhizomes. Rhizomatic systems consolidate growth horizontally whilst having the capacity to shoot upwards. They're random, they don't behave in a centric way, they operate according to laws of Nature.

Philosophy's dynamic duo, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, are massive fans of the rhizome because of the inter-connectedness it establishes with *semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles (1980, 5).* Their rhizomatic model is a nod to the natural world and its reflection of our ways of being in that world. At this critical juncture, it actually describes what's happening in terms of organising, mobilising and activating civil society. It's a bit messy, it's relational, it's very human(e), it grows in a way that is tentacular (one of Haraway's preferred tropes). Activating the rhizome also means we don't have to invent a new system; we just amplify an existing, minor chord playing in the natural world (which echoes Derrida). What if we created a rupture whilst paying attention to its potential for enticement? Would that help us tell time differently? Could that provide a space and a place for deep listening, to open ourselves to imagining multiple futures, pasts and presents? What if we embarked on 'play'? Say, a version of that child's game of rubbing our head and tummy at the same time? Instead of separating the actions, we could do them simultaneously: producing Culture in the knowledge of Nature. What would such a thing look like?

In 2015, Angharad Wynne-Jones, the Artistic Director of Arts House, a cultural program of the City of Melbourne, was nervously scratching her head and patting her tummy after arriving at the realisation that our opportunity to stop the worst impacts of climate change had passed and a shift to preparing for the worst had become an essential cultural service. She had worked her way to this point after a decade operating pro-actively in art-and-climate change through the London International Festival of Art (LIFT) and Tipping Point Australia which she co-founded in 2009. She recalls:

> I was motivated by a desire to wrestle with my own deep fears and tendency to be drawn to individual survival mode as we descend into climate chaos to find/practice/rehearse a collective responsibility and capacity to look out for each other. With a secret hope that in the process of preparation for disaster we might also find the collective energy to take the radical steps necessary to halt further emissions…The intent was that in 5-6 years we could build a community around the problem.

Build a community around the problem. This is the dramaturgical trajectory of Refuge, build a community around the problem of climate change through a years-long inquiry into the nexus of art, community and emergency services. To succeed, it requires the accepted equation of time and human activity that governs these spaces to be contested and reconfigured.

A long-term, 5-year inquiry seemed to be the best format for framing 'progress' rather than 'success' given the profound and fairly terrifying artistic space of 'not-knowing' that the program chose to occupy. 'Inquiry' is a very useful descriptor for a project that aspires to operate across sectors; it's translatable to government, the academy, the arts. An inquiry produces recommendations or findings; an artistic inquiry aspires to produce a better set of questions.

Refuge performs the act of inquiry as a rupture because of the *new conventions, institutions, and traditions created in response to it.* Creation is the heart of its dramaturgical premise: to create responses, shoots and nodes, rhizomes that grow from the plant stem (the dramaturgy) that then evolve into new conventions, traditions and institutions. This is certainly the case in the emergency services sector and the local community. In both instances, new protocols have grown out of Refuge. These protocols are institutionally substantive and socially progressive, challenging command-control approaches in favour of horizontal networks and re-setting neighbourhood relations in the context of care. By framing the artistic program as an inquiry, it freely allows space for rupture and the responses that might arise given the various forms the impacts of climate change will/might/do take.

Rupture simultaneously *occurs in* time and *affects* time in each of the key sectors. For the arts, establishing Refuge as a durational inquiry over 5 years 'disrupts' the organisation of time in the traditional settings of cultural production in Australia. This is most apparent in the mechanism of the annual LAB that brings together an unlikely alliance of artists, cultural operators, experts and stakeholders from emergency services and local community, and Indigenous Elders. For community, Refuge asks that time is re-configured as a continuum, a place of constant motion that allows one to understand where one is and how one can go forward by remembering and re-remembering the past. It is an antidote to a culture whose present tense is defined by an inscribed practice of forgetting. And for emergency services, it is the introduction of play in new horizontal networks that disrupts the flow of time because when you lose yourself in time, imagination is activated, response becomes a reflex.

Finally, Refuge not only creates rupture; it has been subject to it. In 2015, the program began its life in the realm of near-future science fiction. By 2019, because of the cascading world events of flood and fire, it was generating narratives people were using to explain what was happening in real-time. By 2021, and in the shadow of the global pandemic, the program is rich compost feeding and nurturing institution, artists and society alike. In some ways, this publication is a reflection of that rare instance when a (speculative) arts program is overtaken by actual events occurring in accelerated time, of reality being outstripped by the far boundaries of fiction it proposed, of being mid-step through a portal of time, as we are now.

Image: Not a Drop to Drink by Keg de Souza, Refuge 2021. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: A large group of people sit around a circular glass table set inside a temporary structure made of transparent black netting material highlighted by a blue lighting glow. There are clear glass cups of tea on the table. Several people are reading a menu whilst others talk amongst themselves.

(2) A Fresco in a Cathedral...

Artistic

As an artistic endeavour, Refuge has multiple points of entry. It draws together artists from various disciplines, many cultures and histories. Its strength lies in its lack of clarity; it's clearly not clear what it is. Each annual program is difficult to read, and some individual years' programming is more difficult to read than others. The curatorial ingenuity lies in allowing the artists to find the program every year whilst creating an architecture highly inclusive of non-arts stakeholders from community, emergency services and eventually the public. This kind of programming is extremely difficult to 'get away with', perhaps only possible in the confines of a city council department where Arts House sits as a program of the City of Melbourne. It also represents a communications challenge. Sure, there are pressure points in the programming to pique cultural interest but the overall 'sell' in the initial years is the simulation of an emergency relief centre in a near-future scenario taking place at an arts centre dedicated to experimental, contemporary performance. It requires the valorisation of ambiguity in the face of confusion leading to forensic inquiry. And while none of these elements are unique on their own, once configured together in the one space, they become so.

From the outset, there was an intention to curate artists with an artistic empathy for the program's dramaturgical trajectory and the stamina to sustain long-term inquiry. There is an informal group of core program artists; there are core artists for each year's program and

there are artists whose tasks are not creation but collaboration and mentorship. These groups overlap as do their skillsets. Whether they are presenting a work in a given year, many of the artists from the three groups will participate in the LAB each year. In some years, an artist has taken up a residency and not made or presented a work. The refusal to foreground a 'result focus' in the dramaturgy is distinctive, even more so when the dramaturgy must be explained to non-arts stakeholders who tend to be result-focused. Also, because of the need to collaborate outside the arts, artists were chosen because of the skill they had in collaborating with other fields of expertise. We might call these artists inter-disciplinary; they might call themselves anti-disciplinary; they might not ascribe any descriptor whatsoever. So, in support, we refuse any categorisation; the ascription of categories to artists often confines one aspect of their practice and amplifies it above others. We note that such ascriptions are often made by academics, commentators and bureaucrats and rarely by artists unless they are dealing with academics, commentators and bureaucrats. We point to the descriptor 'creative arts' and ask what arts are not creative?

One of the key features of Refuge's dramaturgy is the artists' use of 'participation' as a mode for engaging publics in the annual programs. Participation may appeal more to audiences than artists. This is not to suggest any resistance by artists to directly engage with audience but a broader understanding of the creeping disavowal of participation in governmental democracy and its impact on the arts. Citizens have a participatory reflex that is now thwarted in the political space and needs to be satisfied elsewhere. In Western democracies, artists have become go-to people for sating this reflex. It's worth noting that the 'participatory' in artistic practice has risen concomitantly with the reduction of public services. As government divests itself of the responsibility of engaging citizens, 'participation' gets referred to the arts like a sick patient. In Refuge, the mode of 'participation' is simultaneously contested, implied, hidden, exposed and dis/regarded.

It's worth acknowledging the influential view of art historian Claire Bishop who argues that social participation in the arts is *merely participation in the task of being individually responsible for what, in the past, was the collective concern of the state (2012, 34)*. So, the artist becomes co-opted and thus complicit in the 'social contract' of neo-liberalism. The success of their art is measured by their ability to convince the participants in their project to accept its accumulating unfairness and inequality. This paradox underlies much contemporary arts practice which is a consequence of cultural policy in many Western democracies. An exemplar of this approach is UK New Labour's instrumentalist policy of the 2000s that put the arts at the service of government as an agent of social regeneration, the effect of which was to place artists in situations for which they had little training or expertise and, conversely, for that expertise to be lost from the public sector.

However, the instrumentalization of the arts and artists is not a corollary of projects like Refuge. It is down to a matter of methodology. Just as artists need to be involved in all forms of disaster planning and communications so, too, must representatives from emergency services organise "residencies" with artists. The flow of thinking, feeling and making change needs to be spherical *(Papastergiadis 2017)*. This is now a matter of urgency created by our precarious proximity

to the tipping point of humanity's efforts to avoid the cascade effects of global warming that threaten to plunge the world into a rolling disaster zone. In the context of art, the question now is whether this urgency re-frames the discourse around instrumentalization and social participation. More clearly, does the urgency of the artistic mission in Refuge dissolve, absolve, de-materialise the arguments of instrumentalization or does the intent and methodology combined with the urgency of the material transcend the discourse above social participation, above such arguments altogether? Does the immediacy of the catastrophic effects of climate change crystallise the purpose of art as method as opposed to art as a mechanism of government policy? Refuge forcefully asks this question.

Curatorial

The program's curatorial approach is shared, distributed and avowedly undefined. Over the program's course, artistic directorship of Arts House passed from Angharad Wynne-Jones to Josh Wright (acting) to Emily Sexton; senior management passed from Catherine Jones to Sophie Travers and key creative producing roles from Tara Prowse to Sarah Rowbottam. All of whom have respectively signed off on the Refuge program. Incumbent Artistic Director, Emily Sexton describes her approach as *not wanting to direct, shape or curate but to hold for a time.* There are many reasons for this. It is an approach that is faithful to the original curatorial concept, less of a program of arts projects than an artistic inquiry into the intersection of climate change, emergency services and community. Then there is the imperative that the program is 'artist-led'; the desire to share with and cede responsibility to artists in project and some programming contexts. Third, the conviction that the more open the program the more porous it will be to diverse interests and knowledges, artistic, sectoral and cultural, and in the latter case, specifically First Nations.

Governing these factors is the disruption Refuge poses to the organisation of time in the conventional settings of artistic and cultural production in Australia. The received temporality of a season of shows, a subscription package, a one-off event is dismantled by a program delivered over 5 years rather than an 'artistic product' to be consumed either side of drinks at interval. It is a sign to artists and arts workers that their practice needs to shift, and a signal to those participants outside the arts of the expectation that their commitment must be reconfigured for the adventure to succeed.

In this context, it is worth unpacking a key part of the program's dramaturgy which is both (highly) porous and (rigorously) protected (held). Each annual cycle usually comprises a laboratory (LAB), artist residencies, a program of public events including commissioned artworks, collaborations, forums, provocations and, in the first 2 years, an emergency exercise simulation. The key dramaturgical strategy here is LAB.

In the arts, a laboratory is standard operating procedure. Most artists and arts workers understand the concept of the laboratory before engaging in its methodology. An arts lab is open-ended, focussed on process, a journey of curiosity. Transposing this mechanism into a cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral landscape is not an easy task. It can polarise positions and

reinforce difference, meaning it can have the opposite effect of its intention. Considerable skill is required to ensure this does not happen.

In 2016, Arts House assembled a laboratory of artists, cultural operators and experts and stakeholders including representatives from urban planning, climate science, local community, Indigenous Elders and key members of the emergency services sector including Faye Bendrups, Controller of Footscray's State Emergency Services Unit, Steve Cameron, Manager of Community and Volunteer Development for Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), Christine Drummond, City of Melbourne's Emergency Management Services Co-ordinator and later, Damien Moloney, Australian Red Cross. The LAB became a field in which many seeds were sown – ideas for artworks, thematic navigation, concept development, curatorial framing, cross-sectoral collaboration, 'expert' exchange, knowledge transfer. It is where the foundations of the ensuing program were laid.

The arts and community have a rich, long documented heritage whereas the arts and emergency services may not, at first glance, have much in common. Dig a little deeper and you discover a critical cross-over from which a shared language can emerge - the heightened space that operators in both landscapes inhabit when they are in 'crisis' or in 'performance'. Artists and arts workers operate on adrenalin in the preparation, execution and aftermath of performance. It can be a gruelling, exhausting vocation often compared to the conditions of elite sport. Similarly, emergency services encounter circumstances that run from the banal to the risky and the very dangerous. Whether you're working a show or inside an emergency, you're inhabiting a space of not-knowing what is going to happen despite your preparation. Combine this shared aptitude with the very real sense of urgency all LAB participants expressed regarding climate change in 2016, and the potential for cross-sectoral success increases exponentially. Creative Producer, Tara Prowse, speaks of the mercurial dynamics of the first LAB,

> …of an arts organization that's focused on outcomes and presenting and 6pm shows and an emergency services manager who has to kind of find methods and ways to deal with chaos at the worst times of people's lives and for artists, who had been making work about climate crisis, but not necessarily in climate crisis. And for elders like Vicki (Couzens) or other First Nations knowledge holders to be seen, and for their knowledge to be considered as an urgent part of: where we might all go?... there was something about focusing on the process and not knowing what would happen in that first year.

The success of Refuge depends upon the interactions in the LAB, and those interactions are highly dependent on the alchemy of participants. Year on year, the LAB evolved, deepening practice, introducing new people and forming collaborative partnerships. According to Catherine Jones, this maturing began early. From the 2016 to 2017 editions, there was 'more of a level playing field', less instruction of the artist by experts, more an equal exchange of ideas. Core artist Jen Rae noted at the time: *this is what the challenge is, we now need to go deeper (MacDowall and Fraser 2018, 14).*

The LAB's progress is directly proportional to an absolute time commitment from all participants. Tara Prowse was surprised and delighted by the ongoing presence of the non-arts stakeholders throughout the 2016 LAB:

> …when I've done labs over the years, when you have a group, some are coming and going, and others are there the whole time, the people who build that new knowledge are the group that is there the whole time, and the people who come and go, they might have key pieces of information, but they never have as much buy in. Everyone (at Refuge) stayed the whole time. Steve sat through things, you know, he was invited to come and do his presentation. But he came back and came back and came back. And, likewise with Christine.

Refuge exemplifies how refusing traditional programming structures and resisting institutional and individual expectations of one's relationship to time at work can positively impact the creation of community and the practice of imagination.

For many Refuge participants, artists, community and service representatives, the LAB is both a mechanism to track the program's history and the key to its future. For core artist Lorna Hannan, the Lab provoked personal and professional revelations. It was *an intellectual and spiritual journey that I had been seeking all my life. In my mind, it becomes more and more like a fresco in a cathedral.* At 87 years of age, Lorna is considered and wise. She conceives of the LAB as a 'group mind': *people concentrating the intellectual and spiritual questioning on common problems and being really serious and dogged about it. It's seeking more than answers to problems, it's seeking meaning, and it has no cut-off point.* Much like the rhizomatic space of Deleuze and Guattari's model, it's a continuum of imagining. Core artist Kate Sulan agrees with Lorna about the intellectual and spiritual uplift. For Kate, the fact that *you're actually sitting with people that you'd never usually sit with* in an unlikely alliance that was instructive and expansive, having bigger conversations than the Groundhog Day discussions of sectoral survival that so debilitate artists and arts workers, was exhilarating. Steve Cameron puts it simply, *the Lab created community.*

It is a good problem to have: a methodology that immediately sticks fast with participants, accelerates imagineering, knowledge production and the forging of new relationships across sectors and disciplines. One might have expected this to have taken a couple of years, but it was well-formed early, partly because of the mix of participants and partly because of the urgency of the material. It is a classic example of good curation and timing. For the curatorial stewards, it begged the question: what do we do with this successful alchemy?

Arts House was committed to some kind of public outcome, to provide a shape that was deliverable to a public, and the Creative Producers' task was to realise that. For Tara Prowse, producing is a balance of the productive tension between poetics and structure. She was deep in the poetics of the LAB but understood the need for structure to mediate public engagement:

> how do we open up this process to more people and to the public, because the value of the LAB is so critical to the knowledge production, and then the kind of direction that everybody was going in. But it felt like a small group of people to be benefiting from that work. So, how does the process become public?

It's an excellent question to ask. Part of the answer lies in the relationship between place and time. When Tara first approached Christine Drummond about Refuge, she discovered that North Melbourne Town Hall was a designated Emergency Relief Centre of the City of Melbourne. This provided the Arts House team a place with a strong conceptual reason for being there. But what kind of experience would most closely simulate the conditions of an emergency relief centre in a flood (2016) or a heatwave (2017)? The answer lay in how to structure time. A decision was taken to conduct a 'performance' over a 24 hour-period. What kinds of actions would occur in this timespan? Food needed to be provided and a place to stay and sleep, activities to keep people busy. Dramaturgically, it was an inspired decision although fraught with risk. In this way, it mirrored the conditions many participants felt stepping into the LAB for the first time except in these circumstances the participants were not only 'stakeholders' but also a wider public that was gathering around the program.

To be invited for a sleepover is an acknowledgement of friendship, to accept is an expression of trust: for young people, a sleepover is a rite of passage. Physical proximity and social intimacy are a corollary of an event that is simultaneously imbued with trepidation and excitement. In Refuge, where the invitation is made to a company of strangers and, at best, new colleagues, these feelings are amplified. Artistic, social and cultural boundaries collapse; the shared experience of doing things together, of playing together, of dreaming together, of doing all these actions in a heightened state 'over time' creates community.

The sleepover is emblematic of how the appreciation of time runs deep in the dramaturgy of Refuge: refusing traditional programming time-structures, resisting institutional and individual expectations on one's relationship to time and work, embracing the possibility of sitting 'in time' with others. Through refusal, resistance and embrace, Refuge created a unique artistic and temporal space for participants, and importantly, one that enabled First Nations culture to move centre-stage.

The centring of First Nations knowledges, practices and people is a key curatorial platform of Refuge. Wiradjuri writer, Hannah Donnelly, was one of the lead artists of Refuge 2016 (Flood); Refuge 2017 (Heatwave) included The Elder's Lounge presented in partnership with YIRRAMBOI Festival and also featured significant artistic contributions from a number of artists including Dr Vicki Couzens, a Gunditjmara Keerray Woorroong woman and Emily Johnson of Yup'ik descent, Genevieve Grieves, a Worimi woman from Southeast Australia based in Melbourne and Mununjali author, Ellen Van Neerven; Tongan Punake, Latai Taumoepeau (ATP 2018), a lead artist in the 2019 Lab, was involved in the programs for 2020 (online) and 2021 (hybrid). From 2019, the producing team had a strong First Nations presence with Associate Producers Kalinda (Gal) Palmer, Nyikina/Jabbirr Jabbirr and Hannah Morphy-Walsh, Taungurung and then Kalyani Mumtaz, Trawlwoolway (2020-21).

A defining presence of Refuge is the involvement of Elders of the Kulin Nation including Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Elder Uncle Dave Wandin and Senior Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Elder Aunty Joy Murphy OA, Taungurung Elder Uncle Larry Walsh and Boon Wurrung Senior Elder N'arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM, whose reflections on Refuge form key interviews in this collection. All have provided a constant stewardship over the years and their influence on artists, programming, tone and sensibility has been profound.

For core artist Jen Rae who is of Canadian Metis descent, The Elders Lounge presented at Refuge 2017 (Heatwave) was a significant marker in this eldership. The Lounge offered a sacred space for respite, conversation, information and nourishment for all Elders and Senior members from all walks of life and cultures (Arts House 2017, 13).

> It was a gathering space. And there was a lot of care and community. There was no form, it was beautiful, things just sort of folded in, and there was a certain sense of value to having these conversations around disasters, and that, you know, our elders hold the key to the future. But nothing was being asked, you know, it was just to be.

To be. In time. And space. With others. Jen recalls Latai Taumoepeau's leadership in the 2019 Lab

> …bringing other First Nations voices to really talk about historical traumas, colonial traumas, but also, like, acknowledging the strength by uniting together and slowing processes down and not driving certain agendas.

Slowing down processes, readdressing time, its pace, its momentum, to a continuum. In the Refuge Talks Series (2020), Latai cites a Tongan proverb that provides a powerful dramaturgy for the whole Refuge program: pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava *(putting the past in front and moving backwards through to the future).* It is evident in Noongar writer Cass Lynch's Watershed commissioned for Refuge 2021, where time in the place now called North Melbourne is mapped back 20,000 years. Watershed is an extension of Lynch's research into colonial ideology and the intersection of Aboriginal cultural memory and the scientific concepts of Deep Time (artist's website). It is many kinds of instruction in the way that it speaks to the cyclical nature of climate change and the knowledge drawn from the experience of the Boonwurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation and the pertinence of this knowledge to our current cycle. Written with permission from N'arweet Carolyn Briggs to share and discuss Boonwurrung cultural heritage and including Boonwurrung words and history from N'arweet's *The Journey Cycles of the Boonwurrung,* Watershed is one of a number of N'arweet's collaborations with artists in the final edition of Refuge.

Looking back on the six years of Refuge, there are many artworks and propositions that fall into the framing of Latai's reference to the Tongan proverb and its corollary of holding multiple time-tenses simultaneously. Given the reality of our current lives and the likelihood of them being determined by the global pandemic for the foreseeable future, it is worth considering Uncle Larry Walsh's offering, The Breath of the Mindye (Arts House website). A story of all Kulin people, it tells of the great Bundjil who, in the event of the people not following his lore, would send the snake Mindye to breathe out an illness that could kill or harm them.

> Bundjil's laws/lores were everything from how you treat your children, your visitors, old people to your land, to observing that fact that you were from different skin groupings and therefore there are certain animals you cannot eat or animals that you must hunt or eat in a certain way.

It speaks to the displacement of Culture from Nature and resonates deeply with the material and philosophical conditions which govern many of our lives. Specifically, it connects our treatment of land to the pandemic and teaches us that such ruptures are not novel and those who hold the knowledge of past events (tears in time) can also hold the knowledge of how we might understand it to chart a path to a sustainable future.

Image: Lorna Hannan and Uncle Larry Walsh pictured in Ruth Crow Corner, Refuge 2017: Heatwave. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: Two elders stand side-by-side between two small eucalypt trees. There is a large cut-out of a black crow above them. The woman on the left wears a red jacket, has white hair and is clasping several red books. An Aboriginal man on the right wears a black and red checked jacket, has a long white beard, a red beanie with the Aboriginal flag and is holding a white tea cup.

(3) Re-remembering Community

(1) In 2001, Belgium's Royal Flemish Theatre (KVS) re-located to the now-infamous suburb of Molenbeek on the west side of the Brussels-Charleroi canal for three years whilst their theatre in the centre of town was being renovated. Artistic Director, Jan Goossens, tried to find ways of engaging with the large-minority Muslim population, committed to the idea that a theatre should be connected to its neighbourhood. Despite his best efforts, he could find no constant way into the community. However, on return to the city-centre, he reoriented KVS's mission to contemporary, multilingual, multi-racial and multi-disciplinary creation building strong links between artists based in Belgium and those in Africa and the Global South. Goossens once told me that it no longer made sense to be engaged so profoundly in the international scene when the international was so present in his backyard. Why travel over the seas when across the canal was another world altogether?

(2) In 2014, on assuming Artistic Directorship of La Boite Theatre in Brisbane, Queensland, Todd MacDonald started from a similar place of inquiry to Goossens. He asked: what if the theatre's audience was drawn from within a kilometre-radius of the venue? The question operated as a North Star for his six years leading the company and his programming altered accordingly, including the creation of a verbatim theatre piece, *The Neighbourhood*. MacDonald wanted to address the fact that the relationship between local community and a metropolitan

performing arts entity is often overlooked in its artistic ambitions as is the effect the community can have on its artistic identity and programming.

(3) When Arts House operated both North Melbourne Town Hall and The Meat Market as performance venues from the early 2000s, it was renowned for presenting high-quality, experimental, contemporary performance. The programming was well-regarded nationally and internationally. And yet their audiences would not have reflected anything but incidental membership of the local community. In this regard, they were not anomalous in Australia's cultural scene. Historically, Australian contemporary performance culture is a predominantly white, middle-class activity. Its audiences reflect this composition and even over the last 30 years as the dynamics of cultural diversity impacted on those that make, manage, produce and present, audiences still tend to reflect the dominant demographic.

(4) In 1991 I was standing outside the Victorian Arts Centre with Thomas Le, a graphic artist whose recent exhibition at Footscray Community Arts Centre charted his extraordinary journey from Vietnam to Australia as a 'boat person'. Thomas was advising me on a multi-lingual production I was preparing for the Melbourne International Festival for the Arts and we were scouting for venues. When I said it might be possible to use The Playhouse, he said we could pretty much kiss goodbye any Vietnamese audience. The Arts Centre was too forbidding for his community, too formal, too official. I never liked it much for its red carpet, gold balustrades and low ceilings but seeing the Arts Centre through his eyes I understood it had an ambience that could viscerally deter a whole community from walking through its doors.

(5) Scroll forward 30 years and as I enter North Melbourne Town Hall I am reminded of my long education about architecture and art spaces that Thomas set me on. It's not an easy building; its emotional temperature is cool; its Victorian architecture is austere; its interior design is the antithesis of open plan; the experience of the foyer verges on the inhospitable; hierarchy oozes out of its plaster pores; the building's footprint shouts colonisation; power resides behind imposing wooden doors. It's not an easy building. And yet, it's a designated emergency relief centre. And somehow the building makes sense. A Town Hall, a hall for the town, the community, to assemble, a neutral space, a haven, a refuge, a place that ensures one's 'state of being safe or sheltered from pursuit, danger or difficulty'. If you change the function of a building, you change the public's relationship to it. If North Melbourne Town Hall is only a contemporary performance space, then it struggles to project meaning into the local community. If North Melbourne Town Hall is a performance space *and* an emergency relief centre, its meaning changes *for* the community and its identity is changed *by* the community.

(6) It's a hot summer's January day. Angharad and I are walking and talking our way around Melbourne's Botanical Gardens navigating a path through shade. She's very animated. We are one year on from the first of Melbourne's rolling 2020 lockdowns. There was a lot that went wrong. Particularly in the hard lockdown of the North Melbourne and Flemington public housing towers in July. The learnings that had accrued in the Refuge program seemed apt for just such a situation. Why weren't they incorporated in Government responses? Undoubtedly, there is a significant gap between such learnings and embedding them in policy. Perhaps also the global

pandemic came a year too early for those learnings to be lifted up out of the program into hard-nosed policy discussions. Angharad recalls a conversation with Josh Wright who sat in her chair after she left Arts House. He'd said that Refuge had changed how he behaved in his community during the lockdowns. I said it was similar for me. I told the story of elderly neighbours in our surrounding streets whom we properly met as a result of a what's app group we set up in the first (soft) lockdown in March. The neighbourhood had committed to watch out for the elderly and vulnerable, checking in to see if anybody needed shopping or assistance getting to medical appointments. I saw these exercises of mutual aid through the prism of Refuge, in particular the gatherings that Arts House had called in January 2020 around the extreme bushfires that had touched all Australians. Impact, what we have been hard-wired to measure in the arts so as to justify funding, cannot always be measured in policy and revenue. Impact occurs at a much more granular level, in community, in society. In fact, you need the tendrils of impact (rhizomes) to be growing in the community in order to respond to growth in policy. If community is already growing new behaviours, then policy acts as a lattice that facilitates its pace. If there's no growth, the lattice is just a piece of wood.

(7) A general perception of the arts in Australia is that they are not integral to society and therefore not connected to community. They are *either special, or they're elite, or they're weird*. This is partly a function of politics. It suits the politics-of-the-day for the arts to be perceived in this way; it diminishes their power and social agency; the arts can be more easily controlled as a force for dissent if they are perceived to be elitist.

However, it's a perception that is, in part, a function of reality. The rhetoric of the arts hovers around social inclusion, but major cultural institutions are peopled by the predominantly white, middle-class, privately schooled and 'Go8' educated. This does not prevent those institutions from creating community, it's just that community tends to reflect this profile.

The outer echelons of artistic production - the small organisations and independent sector - tend to be more inclusive, motivated by a desire to represent society more fairly or to pursue missions of social justice and equity and are peopled by those who are attracted by these values. Similarly, the community created by these groups and social actions tend to reflect this make-up. Arts House is one of these institutions motivated by a desire to generate community around its public program and cultural activities. Refuge is a key protagonist in that process. But what is that community?

(8) For Emergency Services Manager, Steve Cameron, the Refuge LAB is the community,

> …a unique community where people can connect and be creative in developing a shared purpose in context. This is achieved by building knowledge and relationships through listening, learning and understanding many different perspectives. The maturity in these complex and sometimes uncomfortable processes are also enablers for more people to join and learn to work together by contributing in different ways. This is also an important demonstration of how we (diverse communities and supporting organisations) can support each other to share, seek guidance and respectfully challenge one another to overcome perceived fears and barriers, while continuing to navigate the unknown.

Over time, Refuge created an ongoing, evolving community of artists, cultural operators and emergency services stakeholders. In the 2019 iteration of *Refuge: Displacement*, members of the North Melbourne community were drawn into the program proper and First Nations artists and elders led the proceedings constituting what many felt as a vital, temporary and genuinely unique community. It was a trend that had been established as a program ambition from the outset.

These perceptions should not be taken lightly because they refute a prevailing view that society is in a process of atomisation. They also suggest that community means different things for different people. Faye Bendrups, who traverses the worlds of artistic and volunteering communities in Australia and overseas, has a view of community characterised by an absence of boundaries:

> It's somehow people who come together to form communities, those communities might be virtual, you know, your community might be online. And we look at things that happened where people set up Facebook groups, or they set up a local community garden, or they set up, you know, some kind of other market or whatever it might be. They're not all necessarily in the same geographic area, people come in and out of those spaces. So, it's very fluid, the way communities can be set up or can be regarded. So, I think that communities can be multiple, and you can be a part of many different communities at the same time.

It is an open and productive way to think about the versions of community created by Refuge with the Lab at its heart. Fulfilling Angharad's ambition, Refuge built a community around the problem of profound changes to our climate. But it is the corollary of that ambition which underpins the program's trajectory to take *the radical steps necessary to halt further emissions.* Which begs the question: how do you turn that community into a force for change?

(9) Conversation. That's how you do it. Or more precisely, talking with and to others. Conversation. Lorna Hannan's oeuvre for Refuge, *Ruth Crow Corner*, is built on the art of conversation. The duet. The trio. The quartet. Lorna talks of the 'community mind' wherein conversation triggers memory; the community mind is about sharing understanding, cultivating trust, behaving respectfully, all inscribed in memory. In the first iteration of Refuge, Lorna assembled a whiteboard of post-it notes as she recorded the concerns of community members who had come to speak with her. She noticed that the process was both cognitive and kinetic. People thinking about their concerns, writing them down and placing the post-it notes specifically in relation to the empty board space and other notes already stuck. At a point, she was struck by the shape and movement of the notes; they appeared to be a swarm, like a swarm of bees, but instead of bees, of ideas.

> So that was a really big message, as far as I was concerned… we hit on something strong and useful. But not just useful in the immediate sense, but useful because it was fused into memory.

Lorna found that her project was remembered because of the physical act of posting notes (objects) and the representation of those notes as a kinetic thing (a swarm). It was a gift she re-made each year and activated in her conversation space. In 2017, she melted an oversized ice-cube; in 2018, she wore a mask; in 2019, a spinning globe hung from the ceiling. The combination of object and movement enhanced the process and quality of conversation, inscribing its content into a common experience, weaving its actions into the memory of the community mind.

(10) In 2021, this effect amplified in her collaboration on Ruth Crow Corner with Taungurung artist, Hannah Morphy-Walsh. Deftly presented in 2021 with Creative Producer Sarah Rowbottam as a series of walks and talks, they created a Speakers Corner at the North Melbourne Community Centre Oval, inviting the public to witness and participate in an homage to renowned communist, political activist and long-time North Melbourne resident, Ruth Crow. At Ruth Crow Speaker's Corner, a parade of local artists, activists and storytellers spoke of local matters: food production, urban development, the life of water, and community assistance for an international student.

On the surface it's a meandering through the community life of North Melbourne, a deceptively disarming way to pass an afternoon abetted by generous rounds of Ethiopian coffee. As the hours pass and the mind wanders, the idea burns that the event is in and of itself a performance of community. There is a slow enticing dramaturgy at play here and once surrendered to, I catch myself re-remembering that my mother lived in North Melbourne for 15 years, from when she arrived as a 5-year-old from Italy in 1931. Giuditta Stellato, her older sister Maria and my Nonna, Elisabetta (born Passarelli) were met at the port of Melbourne by my grandfather Luigi (Louis) Stellato who 5 years earlier had stowed away on a ship from Napoli to escape the Fascists who had threatened to jail him for his socialist sympathies. The family lived in a house with a dirt floor, my mum went to the local school, St Joseph's Primary and my Pa ran a fruit-and-vegetable store down the road at Victoria Market. The memories come in a rush and I am transported back to multiple points in my family's history. I re-remember all of this because of the stories told by the residents.

Re-remembering re-creates community, reaching back in time, time and again. It is this performance of community that activates the process of re-remembering through oral histories being passed on across generations. Refuge performs this function constantly and in many different ways and forms. As Steve Cameron says, it is a community, of artists, collaborators, stakeholders, a community made by art that, by its very presence and continuity, by reaching back in time and looking to create just, sustainable futures, constitutes a force for change.

Image: Street Plan, Faye Bendrups SES, Refuge 2019: Displacement. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: A woman wearing an orange SES uniform directs people walking on the footpath outside North Melbourne Town Hall on Queensberry Street. On her right are two SES workers in uniform and on her left is several people including Australian Red Cross volunteers following her instructions.

(4) The simulation is real, rehearsal is over, play's the thing.

In the non-Indigenous world, modern-day disaster management began in the mid-20th C with the advent of the Civil Defence era, originally activated to deal with the conditions of the Second World War and maintained under the shadow of the subsequent threat of nuclear war. Also described as civil protection in some territories, civil defence corps and extra-governmental instrumentalities were charged with protecting citizens from external military action and the threat of natural disasters. Nation-states developed and customised such instrumentalities to local conditions which, after the Cold War (1947-1991), formed the basis of national disaster agencies. These agencies were globally connected through successive plans and frameworks largely adopted and implemented by the United Nations (UN).

In 1987, the UN declared the 1990s to be the International Decade for National Disaster Reduction, the progress of which was reviewed in Yokohama in 1994 where a Plan of Action for a Safer World was drafted. (Coppola 2007, 5-6). The Plan informed the creation of an International Strategy for Disaster Reduction which in 2015 was superseded by the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) and overseen by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. In the same year, the Australian Government signed up to the Sendai Framework. The Framework guides Australia's approach to disaster risk reduction both in Australia and in our actions overseas (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2021).

In Australia, the national body responsible for disaster risk reduction is Emergency Management Australia. Seeded as an agency within the Australian Defence Force and then the Department of Defence until 2001, EMA was transferred out of the Attorney-General's Department in 2018 to become a division of the super-ministry, the Department of Home Affairs. Whilst constitutional responsibility for the coordination and planning of disasters lies with states and territories, in the event of necessity, they can call on the EMA for assistance (EMA 2021).

Each state and territory configure their emergency management structures according to relevant arrangements and local conditions. In Victoria, the ecosystem of emergency management comprises more than 60 organisations covering emergency, health and community services, local industry, public and private organisations including the State Emergency Service, Red Cross, Resilient Melbourne and local government such as City of Melbourne (EMV 2018). The oversight of that ecosystem falls to Emergency Management Victoria established in 2014 in the wake of significant organisational failures identified during the 2009 Victorian bushfires and the 2010-2011 floods. This kind of evolution of emergency management is not uncommon - from strident criticism of poor management of a natural disaster, in this case bushfires, to the setting up of a new, capable, competent entity. Worldwide, many countries, states and territories have been forced into establishing new, institutional protections as the direct result of a mismanaged disaster. This was especially so in the latter part of the 20th century (Coppola 2007, 4).

For example, in 1970, the Great Peruvian Earthquake killed more than 70,000 people. Ice and landslides did the most environmental damage, causing the greatest loss of life. On average 400 quake events occur each year but this one had a magnitude of 7.9 at the quake's epicentre 35km off the Pacific Ocean coast where the Nazca Plate smashes up against the South American Plate.

In response to this disaster, the Peruvian government developed a national emergency management strategy that went through a number of iterations before being formalised in 2011 as the National Centre for Civil Defence (INDECI). INDECI stages a maximum of four national emergency earthquake and tsunami simulation exercises every year. These exercises involve over 70% of the population; additional exercises are held in schools. Hardwiring emergency response reflexes into the civic DNA is key to the survival of Peru's vulnerable people. It is a remarkable mobilisation of the citizenry, embedding emergency protocols at a granular level in society. Disaster simulations involving large sections of the public or selected members across the emergency services sector are now an accepted practice in Peru and complement table-top exercises for key emergency management personnel to test various scenarios in a risk-free environment.

In 2014, Faye Bendrups, then Controller of Footscray's State Emergency Services Unit, was awarded a grant by the Victorian Emergency Services Foundation to observe and participate in the activities of INDECI during the National Earthquake and Tsunami Simulation in the capital of Lima. Her interest centred on community involvement in the simulations and the principle of participative responsibility:

> In Peru…community is not necessarily just a geographic community… for example, a suburb, it's managed by breaking it down into very small parts...So, one school is one community. One office block is one community. One high rise apartment building is one community. One business precinct or street is one community, and so forth. So that when there's an exercise or an emergency, those people in that relatively small location, if it's an office block, or you know, apartment building, will basically help each other...Those people are looking after all the people they're closest to physically, get them all out to a designated area, get them evacuated.

As an emergency services volunteer with almost 10 years' experience, the Peruvian model was a revelation and helped identify gaps in Faye's experience of the State of Victoria's approach. Despite a significant shift in emergency services rhetoric over the preceding generation, one that eschewed command-and-control practices for community-led participation and response, her view was that no-one had informed the community.

> …actually, the community don't know that, really, they haven't been told how, how do they do that? There's no real kind of universal community buy in. It's just said, it's there in all the literature, it's there in all the brochures and the forward planning and you know, but the community don't really know that.

Not long after returning to Australia and primed to discover genuine models for participative responsibility in emergency management, Faye was introduced to the Arts House Team through City of Melbourne. Aware that the social and geographic conditions of Peru and Australia were vastly different, the prospect of simulating an Emergency Relief Centre in an artistic context appealed as a left-of-centre approach to engaging the community as well as drawing on her extensive knowledge of artistic practices given her long association as a performer, theatre director and academic.

> …the thing about practice was really terrific for me because of course, in the performing arts you rehearse before you go and do something, you know, you've rehearsed something. So, when a really major event occurs, you're not panicking because you know what to do. You've been rehearsing it all your life.

Simulation is remarkably akin to 'rehearsal'. In the performing arts, we iterate until a performance is inscribed, embodied and repeatable: a musician must know where and how her fingers play an instrument to achieve virtuosic precision, an actor learns the position they must occupy before a light cue is activated, an operator must wait for a change of scenery before cross-fading sound-states. These are learned behaviours within proscribed parameters. Once the basic elements of a performance are learned, we simulate. We practise their order in time, calibrating emotions and physicality in order to create and re-iterate meaning over the course of a season. Simulation in disaster-preparedness similarly requires the repetition of protocols and codes to test scenarios, personnel adaptability and learning speeds in a safe environment. In real-life situations, the potential for actions to endanger lives is high whereas in a simulation mistakes can be made, and new, productive habits learned accordingly. Refuge 2016-2017

offers a unique instance in which ‘rehearsal’ is a key dramaturgical strategy of the ‘simulation’ of an Emergency Relief Centre in an emergency setting.

One of the more disconcerting pieces of media produced in the six years of Refuge uncannily demonstrates this relationship. Made for Refuge: Pandemic (2018), the Contagion video is a scene-setting tool for emergency management exercises in Melbourne that imagines reportage and media commentary of a global pandemic. It simulates the story of a worldwide spread of a zoonotic virus and the ways in which it is transmitted by human contact. Quarantines, travel bans and changes to workplace protocols are communicated with the gravitas which we, in Australia, are now all too familiar. Well-known protagonists in Victoria’s response to the 2020-21 COVID-19 Pandemic - Brett Sutton, Chief Health Officer, and Julian Druce, Head of the Virus Identification Laboratory, Doherty Institute – ‘perform’ themselves in the unfolding fiction of 2018. It’s an eerie experience to watch a video that so accurately depicts the mood, tone, characters and content of a world-changing event that actually occurs 2 years later. It creates in the viewer a dissociative response, as if the thing that is now in our lives was and forever will be there, and that the lives we lived previously were nothing more than simulations, rehearsals for reality.

This blurring of fact and fiction is key to the value of Refuge as an artistic inquiry and to its value for emergency management because while learnings may be familiar, they can also be freshly delivered.

In her job at City of Melbourne as Co-ordinator of Emergency Management, Christine Drummond organises simulation events annually; they bring together all the emergency management services relevant to Council operations. When Christine was approached about Refuge in 2015 by Creative Producer, Tara Prowse, a kind of dance ensued as Tara developed a language for the project through their conversations, one that could be understood in the paradigm of emergency management. Through these conversations, Christine was able to identify certain people in the field who would be receptive to an engagement with the arts. One of these was then Emergency Management Commissioner, Craig Lapsley, who attended the first *Refuge: Flood* in 2016. Core artist Kate Sulan’s project, *Nest*, invited children to play a game, dropping letters and messages of hope to adults in a letterbox. Christine remembers saying to the Commissioner it was the first time she’d heard children laughing in an Emergency Relief Centre. Of course, children should be able to laugh in an Emergency Relief Centre, and it wasn’t the first time the issue of child welfare had surfaced when planning one but here was a clear proposition to make it happen: establish a safe space for ‘play’.

One of Refuge’s key dramaturgical strategies is ‘playing in the dark’, an approach Angharad prosecuted from the get-go.

> For me ‘playing in the dark’ meant that our knowledge and expertise and our questions (as artists, emergency first responders, residents, citizens, children, neighbours etc) had equal value, and that we tried not to jump to conclusions, but let the experience of making the work, creating the experience together teach us. We needed to be alert and curious to better respond to the “unintended consequences” (sometimes described as ‘failures’ in

> outcome focussed processes) of the collaborations. This was often where new capacities were uncovered. Where hope was discovered.

Because of her background, Faye Bendrups could read the artistic landscape of Refuge but it didn't provide any guarantee that she could process the learnings back into the practices and interactions within her Unit. Her starting point was to bring along to Refuge those members of her team who happened to be rostered on over the weekends that North Melbourne Town Hall was turned into an Emergency Relief Centre. It was important that her team of volunteers approached the program as necessary training in the same way that they might approach boat rescue or the removal of dangerous debris. She discovered early that Refuge shares a philosophical empathy with the way in which she managed her unit; she promoted inclusion and attributed equal value to the tasks of chainsaw operation and community engagement. Refuge reinforced that philosophy, but it also catalysed thinking around how her Unit might better engage the community, particularly around the employ of 'play'.

> So, we've got games that we play, so that when we go to do children's events, or even adult events or local festivals, we've got a series of games that we play with people, and which kind of educate them, you know, in a different way... By participative engagement, we are teaching them about emergency, but it's through games and game playing… it's just that thing of, at a very local level, and a very simple level, we've changed the way we look at how we engage with community.

In 2013, Steve Cameron, Manager at Emergency Management Victoria commenced drafting the 'Community-based Emergency Management (CBEM) approach'. In doing so, he effectively challenged traditional top-down emergency management processes by proposing that the community lead with the support of others when needed. At the first LAB, he outlined the strengths-based approach as 'an exercise in navigation' to the assembled stakeholders - artists, cultural operators, emergency management and council representatives - to which Lorna Hannan, leading a chorus of artists, said 'oh we do all our projects like that.' In time, Steve came to realise that Refuge was an exemplar of his approach, what artists and arts workers often refer to as a 'structured improvisation' taking the form of deliberative play.

Play helps re-wire our behaviours, disrupts our habits, opens up new spaces for doing, thinking, creating. Play is fun. It engages and activates the imagination. It creates forward momentum. Core Refuge artist Harry Lee Shang Lun is something of a 'play specialist' observing a troubling correlation between the social practice of 'play' and the conditions of climate change: *the system that undervalues play is one that is leading us towards the disasters that we're experiencing.*

In Shang Lun's framing, play fulfils multiple functions. It gives people the agency to renegotiate and re-navigate the systems we find ourselves bound by; play provides an opportunity to practice skills in a safer environment without permanent consequences - similar to the experience of simulation - and play allows us to be someone else for a moment to indulge in role-play, a place where we can be confused and delight our senses: *play becomes not actually a verb, but an approach or a modality.*

Transcribing this to the artistic fields of Refuge, he distinguishes between the concepts of navigation and configuration.

> …playing is an act of navigating, not configuring… the psycho geographical analogy would be walking through a city where you can't take every pathway, and you don't necessarily know where every pathway leads. So that's the playing in the dark analogy, so to speak. And that's what it feels like to be acting in the face of climate change, to be making art on stolen land. To do any of these things feels like navigation, much more than it feels like configuration, right? we don't know the full system, we don't know the possible outcomes in their entirety. And we don't know until we try.

A critical difference between navigation and configuration is the engagement of reason. Configuration is a process based on reason whereas navigation is entirely subject to response. It's a key trope in gaming, particularly single-player, quest-oriented games. It's what makes the experience visceral, kinaesthetic. As you navigate your way through various landscapes and epic narratives, you are aware of an atmosphere of story in which many landscapes and narrative spaces exist simultaneously to the one you have chosen to pursue. And by pursuing it you are creating a unique experience. For Shang Lun,

> play is a natural way for us to understand and navigate systems on a level that can speak to people's hearts, rather than their minds. The process of playing together well is hopefully what leads to better outcomes.

A common thread in conversations with emergency management personnel involved in Refuge is that if you've had the experience of imagining a disaster scenario in a way that is fun, in a way that activates 'play', then the stress of a real emergency is significantly diminished. The integration of 'play' in disaster-preparedness can manifest genuine positive outcomes for people and shift attitudes to planning. The two are intimately connected.

Damien Moloney, formerly an emergency field logistician for Medecins Sans Frontieres and now at Australian Red Cross, worked as a collaborator on artist Kate Sulan's project with St Joseph's Learning Centre, In Case Of… (2016-2019). He has extensive experience of people operating, coping in and surviving emergency situations. Critically, the quality of disaster-preparedness is directly proportional to the quality of response and recovery. This relates to the economy, to the health system; it is particularly pertinent to people. When people feel empowered in an emergency situation, they deal better with grief and loss. When they don't, they struggle. Speaking to ABC Radio National's Life Matters, Damien maps a direct relationship between preparation and response:

> People who are prepared *for* an emergency recover better *from* emergency and they respond better *to* an emergency.

In 2018, the same year Refuge turned its attention to a pandemic scenario, Christine Drummond ran a 'traditional' simulation, Exercise Contagion. Not so much a coincidence, as Refuge scenarios had been drafted from Council's Emergency Management Plan.

> …having done Exercise Contagion actually helped us because after the exercise, everybody reviewed their pandemic plans… So, it prompted people to do stuff. And so we didn't have a blank page last year when it hit us, people had actually turned their minds to it. So, it is the value of training and exercising in a traditional sense, but also events like Refuge, it's like a fun way of looking at something, you know, it's more interactive, and the artists with a creative overlay can make it, I think, less threatening or confronting in a way to look at it through that prism.

In emergency planning, management often manufacture templates, ways of doing things that can be applied across multiple scenarios: classic managerialism. For Steve Cameron, every community is complex and different, as is every emergency.

> People can have very different experiences from the same emergency. We are also often tempted to simply apply what some have observed or experienced from simulations and real events, to better manage future events. This can be attributed to hope and a misleading assumption that these processes will assist us to better manage what we believe are similar situations.

Valorising process, Steve Cameron pushes back on any desire for the Refuge program to create an ongoing set of protocols:

> Please do not create a template of how we did it last year (as this creates) structures and templates that won't work (in new situations): there are too many variables and challenges in any disaster (MacDowall and Fraser 2018, 4).

You're better off preparing the people than producing a plan.

> Our whole thinking process and ability to be safer, more resilient, as people and as a community is about understanding and adapting and learning and taking on the situation, according to what we know, and the collective skills, experience and potential that we all bring.

People with the capacity for understanding, adapting, learning and playing are integral to emergency management. They are also key attributes in an artistic practice. Always be available. Always be responsive. Always be prepared to start again.

A hard lesson one learns as a performer is to shed the skin of the previous performance and begin anew every time. Forget the success. Forget the failure. Begin with a blank canvas. Stand on the technique you have developed and acquired through weeks of playing in rehearsal and trust that you will be ready for the unique conditions of every performance. Refuge teaches us that it is the same in emergency management. The conditions of each emergency are unique. The degree of preparedness, the education and capacity of the individual, the community, the people to put that preparation to effect through the experience of play in simulation over time is key to our survival, to the continuity of our species.

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Convergences

Cass Lynch

Image: Harry Lee Shang Lun with SES and Australian Red Cross during Refuge 2017: Heatwave. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: Five people sit in a semicircle watching a man placing yellow toy blocks on butchers paper with the word 'UTOPIA' written at the top. They are surrounded by plants and behind them is a waterhole and a stage with several large salvation army boxes.

We—Homo sapiens, or humans—appeared as a distinct hominid species approximately 200,000 years ago. We emerged in a geological epoch called the Pleistocene, a time of glacial and interglacial periods; where the Earth oscillates between ice ages and warm times. Humans appear at the end of a warm period, and most of our history has been that of a cooling world. We developed tools, pottery, hunting, art, and language against a backdrop of lowering sea levels, expanding deserts, shrinking rainfall and dropping temperatures. Humans spread around the world, taking advantage of low seas and exposed land bridges to move from the African continent into Eurasia, and to reach other continents like Australia, and North and South America. Humans arrived on the Australian continent at least 60,000 years ago.

The climate continued to cool, and 22,000 years ago the Earth entered the Ice Age: the coldest period in the 150,000 year interglacial cycle. Ice sheets covered North America, Britain, Northern Europe and Russia. The sea level was 120 metres lower than it is today, Australia was connected to Papua New Guinea and Tasmania, New Zealand was one long continuous mountainous island. The worst of the freeze lasted 4,000 years, and humans around the world fled south from their newly colonised northern lands as the ice spread. Ice sheets didn't cover Australia though, and the humans who settled here didn't have to leave. The Indigenous people of Australia suffered through 10,000 years of cold and drought, watching the megafauna die out, but kept the fires burning, and survived.

It takes a long time for the Earth to cool down to an Ice Age, but when conditions change, the transformation from cold to warm is rapid. 18,000 years ago the cold cycle was done, and the rapid warming began. The climate warmed by 8 degrees celsius, and from 15,000 years ago to 7,000 years ago, the sea level rose by 120m. The land bridges disappeared, Australia lost 23 percent of its landmass to rising seas, and humans all around the world faced a huge climate shift. The sea level didn't rise uniformly in those 8,000 years, and during some periods Australia was losing 3m of coastline a year. It is theorised that a large negotiation went on all around the coastal areas of this continent, of saltwater communities negotiating with inland mob to migrate their families inward and to higher ground.

The world has transformed in the time that humans have been around. We live in a drowned world compared to our ancestors. Indigenous values and ideas around land care were forged in this period of upheaval, of watching country disappear, along with burial sites, ceremonial places and hunting ground. Mob knew the value of having dry land that sustains you, and the value of diplomacy and interconnectedness with neighbouring communities. Because there were no major ice sheets in Australia and the continent is so vast, Indigenous people here waited out the climate shift, learning how to co-exist in the new conditions, learning how to care for country in this new inundated world. The Ice Age and the rise in sea level that followed it are imprinted on Indigenous oral storytelling; many communities tell the story of The Cold Times and the Angry Ocean that rose and took country many grandfathers ago.

There have been extreme climate changes in the past that have been catastrophic

to life. The five mass extinction events of Earth's history were caused by catastrophic climate change, photosynthesising bacteria, volcanic activity and meteorite impacts. By comparison, the glacial-interglacial of the Pleistocene and now Holocene period are relatively gentle climate shifts, caused by rhythmic variations in Earth's orbit. The cooling down to the last ice age caused the megafauna to die off, but humans have just hung on.

Worldwide humans enjoyed the warmer climate of the current geologic era, the Holocene, and our populations expanded and new technologies were developed. Europe has some of the most fertile soils on the planet, and productive agriculture led to large, concentrated populations. It got competitive for land and resources, and humans in Europe did something that Indigenous people in Australia didn't when faced with a land and food shortage. 500 years ago, a select few European peoples became colonising nations. They took control of the land, plants, animals and human bodies of other communities, and exploited them for their particular benefit.

233 years ago, the humans who call themselves British arrived and extended this colonial methodology on the Australian continent. They commenced to massacre, displace, enslave and steal Indigenous people, and clear land, dig up minerals and extract large amounts of water for European agriculture. The British didn't have memory of the last Ice Age or the rise in sea level that followed it. Their memory of the rise in sea was lost in time; as the European peoples conquered each other their cultures and languages mixed. The notion that the climate could change or that land could be lost to sea level had been forgotten.

European colonial practice transformed into capitalism: an abstract money-based system of trade reliant on global fossil fuel burning, proliferation of consumable products, and livestock husbandry. This has produced huge amounts of carbon emissions, methane gas, and pollution, along with mass clearing of trees and shrinking of waterways. These practices became the norm of world trade, and those who can't engage suffer marginalisation and poverty in the shadow of powerful, capitalist nations.

Ice cores taken from the Arctic indicate that we should be entering a cooling period. The temperatures are supposed to be going down, gradually cooling for another 150,000 years, down to another Ice Age. But the warmest 50 years of the last 2000 were the last 50, with increases each decade. Human activity is unnaturally warming the climate, and we are pushing temperatures up higher than we have ever experienced. We are heading into unknown territory, unofficially named The Anthropocene: the era of human-made climate.

The last super warm period was the Eocene, 50 million years ago, when a shallow ocean filled with plesiosaurs covered central Australia. The Eocene was caused in part by the uplift of the Himalayas, which being capped in limestone, exposed huge amounts of calcium carbonate to react with the atmosphere and make carbon dioxide. This rapidly warmed the planet, melted all the ice at the poles, and raised sea levels higher than they had ever been. The opalised fossil remains of the plesiosaurs of Australia's inland sea sit out in the deserts north of Adelaide.

To call this era The Anthropocene is to pin the blame of rising temperatures on all

humans equally. The name suggests that as a collective, humans are responsible for the warming climate through overpopulation, rearing billions of livestock and our love of conveniences. However European colonisation has not created an equal world, and capitalism in fact requires inequality to extract profit. The vast majority of the world are not meant to benefit from capitalism, and the ones who do benefit produce the vast majority of climate pollution. We are not all in this together, and we are not all equally responsible.

Indigenous people know that bad ideas have been brought to our shores: bad for community, land, and spirit. We've watched bad masters take control of country and fail us all miserably. It's gone wrong in just 200 years, after 60,000. To survive climate change we must get specific about which beliefs and values are about survival, and which are about profit and power. Mob have the long view, we survived climate change before, and we survived colonisation. We've survived apocalypse twice over as a continuous culture. We have a continuity with the past that is eons older than the notion of capital and profit. We have oral storytelling of resilience in the face of climate crisis, where coming together saved us, not splintering apart. Human-made climate change is not a temporal cliff but a cultural cul-de-sac. Let Indigenous beliefs, values and knowledges re-steer the course.

Image: MASS MOVEMENT FOLAU: The Departure by Latai Taumoepeau, Refuge 2021. Photo by Bryony Jackson. Image description: A large group of people walk in single file along a footpath. Several people hold blue flags made from tarp material and there are SES people in bright orange uniforms scattered throughout. On the right of the footpath are several tall trees and on the left an empty bitumen road. The ocean foreshore of Altona Beach is behind them, and in the far distance, the silhouette of Melbourne cityscape surrounded by golden glows of yellow and blue.

Acknowledgements

Arts House acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land, the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation, and pay our respect to Elders both past and present and, through them, to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Supported by
Refuge has been supported by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts and funding and advisory body, Emergency Management Victoria, State Emergency Services, Resilient Melbourne, University of Melbourne and The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity and Australian Red Cross, St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre, Creative Recovery Network and the City of Melbourne through Arts House. In 2017 and 2018 Refuge was supported with funding provided by the Australian Government in partnership with the States and Territories under the National Partnership Agreement for National Disaster Resilience and the Victorian Government through the Natural Disaster Resilience Grants Scheme (NDRGS). In 2017 Refuge was supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

Special thanks
N'arweet Carolyn Briggs, Uncle Larry Walsh, Uncle Dave Wandin, Aunty Joy Murphy, Angharad Wynne-Jones, Catherine Jones, Sophie Travers, Faye Bendrups and SES volunteers, Damien Moloney and Red Cross volunteers, Steve Cameron, and Emergency Management Victoria team, Nikki Blanch and North Melbourne Language and Learning, Christine Drummond, Meredith Martin, Nikos Papastergiadis, Lachlan MacDowall, Suzie Fraser and the Uni Melbourne team, David Pledger and Not Yet It's Difficult team, Arts House and City of Melbourne team, and all participating artists, community and friends who have been part of Refuge.

Refuge Artists

2021
this mob, Latai Taumoepeau, Harry Lee Shang Lun (PlayReactive), Keg de Souza, Cass Lynch, Lorna Hannan & Hannah Morphy-Walsh, Jen Rae & Claire G. Coleman, Neika Lehman, Corin Illeto & Diimpa

2019
Keg de Souza & Claire G. Coleman, Jen Rae & Giant Grass, Seini Taumoepeau & guests, Kate Sulan & Red Cross, Moorina Bonini & Edwina Green, Lorna Hannan, Theo McMahon, Cass Lynch, Laniyuk, Monica Karo, Timmah Ball, Rosie Kalina

2018
Madeleine Flynn & Tim Humphrey, Harry Lee Shang Lun (PlayReactive), Jen Rae, Kate Sulan, Ellen van Neerven, Lorna Hannan, Michele Lee, Asha Bee Abraham & Lizzy Sampson

2017
Asha Bee Abraham, Lorna Hannan, Emily Johnson, Vicki Couzens, Dave Jones, Jen Rae, Latai Taumoepeau, Punctum Inc.

2016
Jen Rae, Dawn Weleski, Latai Taumoepeau, Hannah Donnelly, Kate Sulan, Harry Lee Shang Lun, Lorna Hannan

Convergences (previously The Story So Far…) was originally commissioned for Refuge 2021 as part of Convergence by Harry Lee Shang Lun (PlayReactive) and is reprinted with kind permission of the author.

Refuge Publication Project (not yet it's difficult)

Project Lead	David Pledger
Editors	David Pledger and Nikos Papastergiadis
Administration	Ying Zhang and Sophia Marinos
Design	Ying Zhang
Conversation Subjects	Uncle Larry Walsh, N'arweet Carolyn Briggs, Lorna Hannan, Latai Taumoepeau, Harry Lee Shang Lun, Keg de Souza, Cass Lynch, Lorna Hannan, Jen Rae, Tara Prowse, Sarah Rowbottam, Kate Sulan, Faye Bendrups, Angharad Wynne-Jones, Steve Cameron, Christine Drummond.

Refuge Publication Project was commissioned by City of Melbourne through Arts House in partnership with the Research Unit of Public Cultures, Melbourne University.

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