

**Art As Ecological Communication: An Application of  
Site-Specific Installation Art to Marine Ecosystem  
Degradation**

by

Jane Quon BFA (Hons), TDA (Hobart)

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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

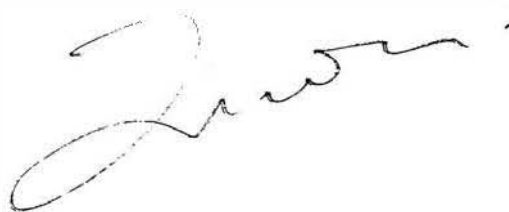
University of Tasmania  
Hobart  
November, 2002

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the potential of fine art to communicate ideas and values pertaining to ecological issues, in particular the marine ecosystem. The research is founded upon the historical function of art as a social, educative and, at times, activist cultural force. It investigates the potential of a variety of art modalities to fulfil this historical function. The different modalities comprise sculptural installation, large-scale video-based installation and printmaking. In addition to their diversity in terms of media, the majority of the works produced have been site-specific in character. Though presented in settings of vastly differing kinds, the common denominator of each site is that it provides exposure of the work to a broad public audience. Since the notion of art-as-communication is central to the research, the presentation of works in non-gallery, highly-frequented public contexts is an important objective.

The major influences on the author's ideas and art practice are described in the exegesis. Some influences are of a personal nature, and are advanced within the paradigm of phenomenology, within which experience and subjectivity is privileged. They include childhood experiences, pivotal encounters with works of art (notably with Anish Kapoor's 1988-89 work, *Adam*) and powerful underwater experiences. Other influences include ecophilosophy and environmental thought in general, with the fields of 'deep' ecology, ecological spirituality and the ecologically-grounded art theories of Suzi Gablik prominent.

The research is underpinned by reference to artists for whom an artistic praxis of social change is central. A number of 'public' artists who have utilised art as a socio-political instrument are addressed, including Joseph Beuys, Shirin Neshat, Krzysztof Wodiczko and Jenny Holzer. The ideas of philosopher John Dewey are also considered, particularly his position on the arts' role as a central force within culture: on what Ernst Fischer has described as 'the necessity of art'.

The research presents a concept of 'ecological' art which can be differentiated from 'environmental' art conventionally so-called, the

latter represented by Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson and Christo. Exemplars of the 'ecological' art proposed include Beuys, Andy Goldsworthy, Jill Peck, and Robert Gschwantner.

Each art project has arisen out of partnerships and collaborations forged by the researcher's establishment of strong links with key local, national and international organisations and specific personnel from within the realms of marine science, private industry, local government and the maritime industry.

It is posited that this research has contributed not only to broader public awareness of marine-ecological issues, but also to an enhanced appreciation of the significance of contemporary art – and of the contemporary artist – within the community.

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