

Institution: Falmouth University
Unit of Assessment: 34 - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
Title of case study: The Art of Sustainability: the impact of the RANE group at Falmouth University
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Falmouth University's RANE (Research in Art, Nature and Environment) research group, led by Dr. Daro Montag, interrogates nexus points between the visual arts, the environmental sciences and ecological philosophy. Established in 2004, RANE has held high profile public exhibitions, lectures and events and is a leading figure of the global art and environment field. During this period, RANE has raised public awareness of environmental issues nationally and internationally; though creative practice RANE has led public engagement and debate on questions of sustainability.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The RANE Group examines the relationships between the visual arts, ecological thought and environmental sciences, so contributing to a sustainable world. With ever-increasing pressure on the natural environment, RANE employs the arts to develop alternative models of engaging/enacting. An inclusive membership - academic staff, PhD students, MA Art & Environment students and external affiliated members - is key to its success by ensuring simultaneous dynamism and continuity. In 2010 the RANE-linked Art and Environment Masters' degree programme was launched to capitalise on the group's success; leading the only UK course of this kind, RANE has established as a leading site of study and research.</p> <p>A central premise of RANE is that the growing environmental crisis is, in large part, a systemic failure and so cannot be tackled solely through the scientific disciplines. The arts are seen as particularly valuable in this arena as they readily use flexible, open-ended, non-linear methods to examine, explore and engage with issues and ideas. The scale of the changes requires a radical reassessment.</p> <p>The members' creative methods are not restricted to any specific media. For example, Montag's pioneering 'bioglyphs' visualise the activities of soil microorganisms, indicating their abundance and their ecological importance. Andy Webster incorporates humour into performances unpicking perceptions of sustainability. Sustainable thought transcends the boundaries of systemic dianoias. RANE is trans-disciplinary, drawing from artistic, scientific and philosophical methods; this approach extends RANE into praxes of scientific application.</p> <p>RANE utilises a broad range of highly innovative practice-based approaches, producing innovative artefacts, mesologies and praxes. RANE is part of an expanding global network of creative practitioners, with members in Europe, America, Australia and the Middle East, which produces critical responses to environmental and social crises. As a founder member of the Arts & Environment Network supported by the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management, and a key partner of the worldwide Eco-art Network, RANE shapes cultural responses to environmental issues.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p><i>Dialogues with Nature</i> – this was a solo exhibition by Daro Montag at Noosa Regional Gallery, Queensland, Australia, June-July 2013. Selected and curated by Lisa Chandler the exhibition was designed to coincide with and contribute to the Floating Land Festival and the Balance/Unbalance conference, also in Noosa. A catalogue of the exhibition was published: Montag, D & Lisa Chandler. <i>Dialogues with Nature</i> (Queensland, AUS: Noosa Regional Gallery, 2013). http://rane.falmouth.ac.uk/pdfs/dialogues_with_nature_catalogue.pdf</p>

RANE-Char – is an on-going project initiated by Cape Farewell and supported by the Eden Project in which the artist creates and distributes biochar as a means to mitigate climate change and raise discussion on the subject. After its launch and performance in 2009 its sculptural component has toured the following venues as part of the Cape Farewell exhibition *Unfold*: University of Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria (May-June 2010); Kings Place Gallery, London (Aug-Oct 2010); University Gallery, Northumbria (Oct-Nov 2010); Newlyn Art Gallery, Cornwall (Dec2010-Jan2011); Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, USA (Feb-April 2011); Parsons School of Design, USA (Sept –Dec 2011); Liverpool John Moores University (Mar-April 2012); The Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) Beijing (May-June 2013). <http://www.capefarewell.com/art/unfold.html>

Leafcutter Learning – is an artwork consisting of drawings and a video, and a chapter by Daro Montag in the publication, *Expeditions*, Chris Wainwright ed., (London: CCW Graduate School, 2012) pp 29-39. The essay articulates questions behind the drawings and the video, originally made in collaboration with leafcutter ants in Peru, which are touring as part of the same Cape Farewell exhibition listed above. <http://www.capefarewell.com/people/arts/daro-montag.html>

This Earth – The project, originally commissioned as part of Future Palette that links chemistry to art through microbiological creativity, was first exhibited at Sherborne House, Dorset. It has subsequently been the subject of a publication Montag, D. *This Earth* (Falmouth: Festerman Press, 2007) and numerous public talks and lectures. The work was also featured in Wilson, S. *Art & Science Now* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010)

Dawn Chorus - Andy Webster was selected from 100+ international applicants for a solo exhibition at Waterfront Gallery, University College Suffolk, Ipswich UK. The exhibition, held Feb / Mar 2012, had approximately 2500 visitors. As part of the exhibition Dr Webster gave a public talk at the University about the project and wider practice, and was awarded a prize by KLH Architects, London. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue, Webster, A. & Jon Bird, *Dawn Chorus* (Falmouth: RANE. 2012). http://rane.falmouth.ac.uk/pdfs/Dawn_Chorus_online_version.pdf

Unsustainable? – Andy Webster was selected from 150+ international applicants for one of four solo shows at the Ruskin Gallery, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK. The exhibition was held Nov-Dec 2012. The show attracted approximately 1500 visitors. Dr Webster gave a public talk in collaboration with Global Sustainable Institute, Cambridge, about the exhibition and wider concerns about sustainability.

Action – Andy Webster was selected, from over 300 international applicants, to undertake a residency at Salina Arts Center Warehouse, Salina, Kansas, USA. The work was exhibited between Mar-Apr 2013 to approximately 500 visitors. Dr Webster gave public talks at Salina Art Center and the Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, Kansas, and an interview was published in Salina Journal 30th March 2013.

4. Details of the impact

Cultural barriers exist between public attention and environmental science. RANE recognises people rarely respond to dire messages about climate change and dwindling natural resources with due vigour; using a creative approach, however, the visual arts provide for public engagement with troubling information and alternative strategies or behaviours. Art research projects produced by members of RANE and exhibited at major venues throughout the UK, Europe, the US, Australia and China all respond to these cultural and environmental issues by stimulating critical thinking and debate about our relationship with the natural world.

In 2006 and 2008 the group hosted two conferences, *Artful Ecologies 1 & 2*, attracting 180 international artists, writers and environmentalists, and subsequently published the conference papers. RANE organises and promotes the series '*Comprehending Nature*', public lectures by world-renowned artists which examine contemporary interpretations of nature from artistic

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perspectives, and have attracted over 2,000 attendees. A RANE yearbook documents activities and outputs of individual staff members and students.

RANE is linked to key international players through dedicated digital networks and participates in the eco-art networks *ecoartnetwork.org* and *greenmuseum.org* – two of the most significant international networks of eco-artists from around the world. RANE's own email list extends over 600 subscribers.

The group has developed strong links with external organisations such as Cape Farewell; the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management's (CIWEM) Arts & Environment Network; and the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World (CCANW). RANE now works with the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). In 2013 the Cornwall AONB produced their annual, and widely circulated, calendar using artworks made by RANE members as a alternative to normative depictions of protected landscapes.

Cape Farewell, the leading eco-cultural organisation, currently partner to the Environmental Change Institute at University of Oxford and the Cambridge University Programme for Sustainable Leadership, invited Montag to join the expedition to the Peruvian Andes and Amazon researching the impact of climate change. The resulting works are included in the international touring exhibition *Unfold*, which toured with a global audience of over 26,500. Montag and members of the RANE group have also contributed to Cape Farewell's education and outreach programmes, *Shortcourse* and *Sea Change*. Launched in collaboration with the Eden Project, the programmes' exhibition drew over 20,000 visitors (mainly families with children).

CIWEM is the leading professional body for the people who plan, protect and care for the environment and its resources, providing educational opportunities and independent information to the public and advice to governments. As a member of the steering group since its inception, Daro Montag has helped shape this network, which aims to influence national policy and promote cross-sectoral coherence. In 2007, CIWEM formally recognised the importance of the arts for engaging these audiences by initiating a major new strategic programme, the Arts and Environment Network.

CCANW is a community interest company providing exhibitions, artist-led projects and educational activities to address urgent social, environmental and scientific issues; CCANW is listed as a key organisation in The World Nature Art Catalogue. In 2013 Daro Montag was appointed co-director of CCANW which, in collaboration with RANE, initiated a four-year project entitled 'Soil Culture'. This project, to raise awareness about the urgent need to protect soils globally, has received £30,000 from the AHRC to establish the research network and £49,000 from Arts Council England for exhibitions, residencies and outreach. As part of this project RANE has so far participated in the Living Soil Forum, Jarna, Sweden, and the European Network for Soil Awareness, James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen and in October 2013 contributed to the Action Forum at the Global Soil Week in Berlin. This event, led by the FAO of the UN and the Global Soil Partnership, recognises the value of the arts for raising awareness around the importance of soil for environmental sustainability.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

In 2011 the RANE-char project was shortlisted for the COAL Art & Environment Award, Paris.

Dr Daro Montag has been invited to give the following public lectures:

- *Soil Culture: Art & soil*. Public lecture, Schumacher College, Devon. 2013.
- *Dialogues with Nature*. Guest lectures at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane & The University of the Sunshine Coast, QLD. 2013.
- *Knowing my place as a multitude of events*. Research symposium, University of Wales, Cardiff, 25 June. 2012.
- *Soil Culture: Don't soil your home, make soil your home!* The Home and the World Conference, Dartington, 21 June. 2012.
- *Looking to the Future*. Sustainable Practice in Public Art, Manchester Metropolitan

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University, 15 April. 2011.

- *Knowing my place: the creative unfolding of place through indexical traces* Creativity & Place – University of Exeter conference, School of Geography. 2010.
- *Art as Ecological Thinking* Art & Ecological Thinking – AIAS conference, University College Falmouth. 2009.
- *The Global Environment* – CIWEM conference, The Oval, London. 2007.

Dr Andy Webster has been invited to give the following guest lectures:

- *This is a Protest!* Public lecture, Ulrich Art Museum, Wichita State University, Kansas, USA, 2013.
- *Action*. Public lecture, Salina Arts Center, Kansas, USA, 2013
- *Unsustainable?* Public lecture, Global Sustainability Institute and Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge School of Art, Cambridge, UK, 2012.
- *There Used To Be A Plan*. Guest lectures at Omi International Arts Center, New York, USA, 2012.
- *Dawn Chorus*. Public lecture, Waterfront Gallery, University College Suffolk, Ipswich, UK, 2012
- *A Minor Miracle*. Public lecture, Lanternhouse International, Ulverston, Cumbria, UK, 2011.
- *Crazy Tourist*. Guest lecture, Cape Farewell and University of Arts London Graduate School, Wimbledon, UK, 2009.
- *Finding Fluid Form*. Public lecture, Emoção Art.ficial – Emergência! Itaú Cultural, São Paulo, Brazil, 2008.
- *Better Living Through Karaoke*. Artful Ecologies 2 Conference, University College Falmouth, Falmouth, Cornwall, UK, 2008.