



Back to the City

Newcastle 2008
an exhibition of collaborative projects
artists
architects
landscape architects
24 January - 17 February 2008

Back to the City is part of the Creative Cities series, initiated and curated by Professor Steffen Lehmann. The city centre will be transformed into a showcase for art and architecture through an extended series of public space installations. Back to the City aims to reveal the unique character of the city's urban space and suggest a different kind of urban experience through the interventions of 15 to 20 site-specific works all within walking distance.

The focus on collaboration calls for the creative input of interdisciplinary teams. The exhibition will be free to the public and all projects will be installed in accessible public spaces.

Concept

Back to the City will encourage:

- Site specific urban interventions
- The development of a culture of collaboration and artistic exchange for Newcastle
- The creation of urban place identity for the city centre.

The aim of the project is to investigate contemporary and relevant crossovers between the disciplines, as well as testing and experimenting with new forms of collaboration. The blurring of disciplinary boundaries and challenging of borders between contemporary city culture and creative disciplines has been increasingly relevant for artists and architects since the mid 1960s, leading to new arts practice and process.

Back to the City will provide a public forum for the sharing of ideas and offer new opportunities for artistic collaboration. The installations might be video events, light and sound installations, or more conventional interventions in the urban context. The current commercialisation of public space leads frequently to a loss of its symbolic and spiritual identity. We believe that ephemeral interventions can help to stop and even reverse this loss, and lead to a re-valuation of the qualities of public space.



Collaboration and Dialogue

An openness to collaborate stimulates dialogue, creates relevant crossovers and allows people to do extraordinary things. There are great opportunities for innovative outcomes of this exhibition project, to publicly demonstrate the benefits of collaborative work, and to raise the benchmark for improving the quality of design in our built environments.

For a long time, there has been an ambivalent relationship between architects and artists. However, the different disciplines have a great ability to share their working principles, and debate ideas about the public realm and contemporary city culture. It is time to contest, dissolve and reformulate those disciplinary boundaries.

Sites

Project teams are free to select their own sites, however; they must be key transitional points within the city centre. All proposals must take site into consideration as the starting point for design.

Some possible locations could include:

- The boardwalk Lee Wharf
- Wheeler Place
- Corner of Darby Street and King Street in Civic Park
- The former tug berths at Wharf Road
- Shortland Esplanade, Newcastle Beach
- Newcastle West along King Street
- Hunter Street
- Honeysuckle Drive
- Or other sites within walking distance of the city centre.

Back to the City has the scope to stretch from the harbour to the courtyards of heritage buildings in the centre; using prominent, public locations alongside little known 'charged' spaces like lane-ways. Such places can offer particular spatial experiences hidden in the urban fabric of everyday life.

The culture of temporary installations and interventions in public space are an important resource for urban renewal, generating new activities and making significant contributions to city life. *Back to the City* has the potential to activate the invisible spaces hidden between the centre and the harbour.

The four major curatorial themes

Back to the City will address the growing need to develop culturally rich, sustainable social environments. Therefore, the teams are asked to address the following key issues:

- People, public space and connectivity reclaiming public space in an environment of increasing commercialisation
- Urban renewal and interdisciplinary collaboration; mapping the site
- Coal, mobility and infrastructure along the waterfront - the PortCity and the scale of the incoming vessels
- Urbanity, density and lifestyle; Integrating Information Technology and working and living in the city centre.

The waterfront and PortCity: creating new opportunities for existing urban structures

In times of urban regeneration the city centre must rethink its position. The compact peninsula of Newcastle's city centre offers an ideal environment to reinvent the urban make-up of Newcastle, to recognise its urban infrastructure and street network and to reconnect the city with its water edges.

The curator is calling for bold interventions to bring life back to the city centre, to create a new dynamic in the city and along the waterfront. Such temporary urban interventions will transform public spaces offering unexpected opportunities for new encounters and activities.

Interdisciplinary proposals that reflect a general political / spatial awareness of culture, underpinned with a clear position about urban situations in post-industrial transformation processes, are most welcome.

Is there a connection and commonality between Newcastle and other port cities? How can you draw people's attention to all the qualities of Newcastle city centre, its cultural and industrial heritage, its urban diversity, the extraordinary topography and port landscape?

Schedule

- Call for Participation 10 July 2007
- Submission of Project Proposals until 2 November 2007
- Assessment and Selection 15 November 2007
- Planning stage final projects 30 November 2007
- Realisation of installation works December 2007 - 23 January 2008
- Opening Day (Launch) 24 January 2008
- The installations will be displayed for the period of 3 weeks 17 February
- One day symposium "Art in the Urban Context" 31 January 2008

An advisory panel has been established as a curatorium for the selection process.

This panel includes:

- Alexandra Bowen, Arts NSW
- Michael Cohen, Director, Live-Sites Newcastle
- Andrew Cole, Chair Newcastle Alliance
- Professor Anne Graham, University of Newcastle
- Klaus Krischok, Goethe Institute Sydney
- Professor Steffen Lehmann, University of Newcastle
- Nick Mitzevich, Director Newcastle Region Art Gallery
- Julie Rich, Honeysuckle Development Corporation
- Bridget Smyth, City of Sydney
- Glenn Spicer, Chair RAIA NSW, Newcastle Division

Advisor : Geraldine Bobsien

Prize

\$2,500 will be awarded for the 'Best Installation in the Urban Context' and will be selected from the realised installations on the opening day. There is also scope for the selection of one work with the potential to be realised and developed further as a permanent installation for one of the project partners.

Book

There will be a book published documenting all built work in late 2008



Submission and Selection criteria

We are looking for the most interesting and stimulating projects for Newcastle city centre. What is crucial is the quality of work and ideas, expressing an interdisciplinary approach. The most successful proposals combine extraordinary siting, striking form, scale and materials, and a determination to work collaboratively across the discipline boundaries. We are seeking teams with the best conceptual ideas and the ability to design buildable projects which can be delivered in a short timeframe.

The submissions need to address site, the broad concept, and the materials proposed. Proposals in electronic format and hardcopy can be submitted after 01 August 2007 to:

Professor Steffen Lehmann
School of Architecture and Built Environment
The University of Newcastle, University Drive
Callaghan NSW2308, Australia

Submission of Project Proposals until 5pm 02 Nov 2007

Participation is open to all artists, architects, urban designers, new media artists and students of those disciplines. Prior registration is not necessary; the teams simply submit their proposal (digital and hard-copy) before the deadline. The project is structured to provide opportunities for emerging and local artists and architects, which is consistent with the curator's approach to foster young talent and promote regional content.

Budget

Each team will have approximately \$3000 - \$4000 all inclusive.

Organisation

s_Lab Space Laboratory for architectural Research and Design, part of sLab (Australia) Pty. Ltd. For further information see: www.slab.com.au

Artistic Director and Curator

Professor Steffen Lehmann, The University of Newcastle

Dr. Steffen Lehmann brings a wealth of international experience and extensive knowledge of curatorship to the project. His curatorial work, teaching and writing demonstrate an enduring commitment to involve the local community in excellent exhibition projects.

For further information please email info@backtothecity.com.au