

Hanna Hoyne: Our Spirit Recharge Vessel is the Earth (Part 2)

By [Hanna Hoyne](#) & [Anna-Sophie Jürgens](#) | Series: [Street art, Science and Engagement](#)

Abstract: Hanna Hoyne is a multifaceted visual artist who explores and shapes public space through sculpture, installations and street art murals with the aim of raising awareness about both the urban environment we live in and global issues around sustainability and environmental responsibility. In the first part of this conversation, Hanna reflects on how her academic background and research experiences have shaped her creative public artworks and her understanding of public art in general. The second part focuses on her environmental concerns and the power of street art to tap into, and stir up, our environmental consciousness – and inspire biophilic action.

Welcome back to our conversation on street art, research and engagement! Hanna, in the first part of our article - *Interpretative-Knowledge Making by Means of Public Art* - we discussed the lasting influence of your academic background on your art and where you situate your work between street art and public art. In this second part, we will continue the discussion on public space and focus on the environmental dimension of your public artworks.

Research, (Environmental) Knowledge and Art

How did you become interested in sustainability as an artist?

My attitude was shaped over time, by seeing different countries and landscapes and acclimatising to different cultural spaces. When I was a kid, I used to say that when I grow up, I wanted to work for Greenpeace. But my work has really skirted around environmental consciousness and only in recent years has become a key driver. From early on my works were underpinned by a deep interest in cosmologies and cross-cultural understandings, fuelled by my life as a migrant and parents with a keen interest in Asian philosophies, architectures, aesthetics and spiritual traditions. My shifted approach really mirrors the collective psyche – from the once-compelling question of “where do we come from and how are we here?” to before-we-destroy-our-planet questions of “why are we here and how do we get to stay here?”!

I think I have always been a bit of an *eco-hippie*. I think I saw the extreme discrepancy between city and nature from an early age. Coming from middle Germany in the 1980s, I knew pollution, smog and acid rain. My town on the Rhein River was not only surrounded by traditionally idyllic winegrowing country, but also downstream from heavy industry. I have memories of washing the oil slick off my body after swimming. I remember the radioactive rain from the Tschernobyl disaster ... Moving to Australia, I could not understand how people in such a beautiful country could be so apathetic, destroy the forests and mine the deserts. But I guess over the next 35 years, I learnt a lot more about how Australian culture is built on repressed colonial history, and has very clever tacit ways of ignoring burning political issues. The public conversation has changed dramatically since the 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires and Covid isolation on this island. Australians seem to be less hoodwinked by big industry interests and more genuinely invested in caring for their country environmentally. That and the global spectre of nuclear war suddenly means both sides of politics are coming to the undeniable fact of the climate emergency

and the necessity for clean energy.

How did your interest in exploring sustainability themes in public space develop?



Hanna Hoyne & Amelia Zاراftis: *Echidna (Apron Project)* (2015). Photo: Hanna Hoyne.

The Australian land and landscape compelled me since I set foot here in 1987. It has a magnetism that has remained unequalled for me. In Australian art there is an on-going, strong preoccupation with relationships to land and identity, its incredible Indigenous cultural histories and the place/displacements of settler culture within it. The shared lenses of other people, in particularly artists, is what has deeply impacted my connection with it. The artistic languages of my closest colleagues (Amanda Stuart, Amelia Zاراftis and Byrd) have become deeply embedded in my psyche. Those guys are all either involved with or leading the Environment Studio of the School of Art and Design of the Australian National University; and its founder, the artist John Reid, still mentors and works with us on projects.



Hanna Hoyne & Byrd: *Byrd with Nesting Helmet* (2015). Photo: Hanna Hoyne.

The other influence towards sustainability has been my connection to Canberra Landscape Architect Justin Kalinowski (Redbox Design Group), who I met on my first public sculpture project *Crying Dinghy* by Lake Burley Griffin. We share so much conceptually about environmental concerns and wanting to create healing environments – from Indigenous heritage preservation in landscape architecture, to playground design, sculptural garden design, biophilic urban design, sculpture and spatial installation, atmospheric and green sculpture, waste recycling and reclaimed resources, urban street art and even fashion. We sit and chew the fat about the rampant roll out of suburban development of Canberra: the built environment on steroids – it's a Lego wasteland. Flatpack architecture desolate of imagination or inspiration. We dream and conspire to reimagine those spaces and insert beauty and whimsy and hopefully some more trees and plantings.



Hanna Hoyne: *Crying Dinghy (A Spirit Recharge Vessel)* (2018). Photo: Joey Wilton.

What artistic goals do you pursue in your engagement with environmental themes and knowledge?

Away from academia, my lens has metamorphosed, pressurised as freelancer engaged in the competitive public space 'place-making' market and trying to survive. My materiality has been transitioning. I am exploring new ways and means. In my gallery works I made large sculptures with paper and cardboard, and my themes were embedded with the ideas of transience, impermanence and the experience (not product) as central to the work.

But in making sculptures for the public space, the materials I have needed to use so far have been unsatisfying. Sustainability has moved to the forefront, and I still got stuck with concrete and steel. So, I am researching new materials, for example concrete that grows moss, or steel made with carbon from recycled car tyres, or aggregate using our unrecyclable glass (that normally goes into our road asphalt), or ceramic made from clothes waste. Veena Sahajawalla is inspirational in this space. My project progress feels so slow, and perhaps I am always dreaming too big. And there is a lot to know about how to create tender submissions; contracts and fabrication is massively expensive.

But seeing as you ask about goals, I would love to not just plonk sculptures on plinths in the plaza or on the side of the highway. If you ask me, I just want to make sculptures out of living things, grow them. Embed our cities in gardens.

Sculpture as a form of urban design?

I believe that artists, architects and landscape architects should work together on city masterplans and be at the table with city planners. I think every aspect of a public space can be creatively designed. Artwork can be embedded in the very structures of the public space – every horizontal and vertical surface can be inspired – be it the paving, the building facades, the car-park structures, the high-rise glass fronts, bike-racks, street furniture or parking meters... and there should be so much more green infrastructure as part of socially conscious designing. Our rooftops across the whole city should be forests and gardens and all of our glass should be photovoltaic; our bridges across motorways should be forested for animals to cross.

Artists could be part of so much of the design processes. This would really inspire and lift our aesthetic standards from the flat-pack Lego-land boxy cookie-cutter suburb that is soulless and desolate for so many people. It could make a real difference for our kids that grow up in those radiant heat islands, forced to stay in the air-conditioned interiors because there is not a tree in sight outside and their proteins will cook in the heatwaves (that we are already seeing).

In this regard my artistic dreams and goals are inspired as contemporary versions of what the Austrian-New Zealand artist Hundertwasser was starting to do 40 years ago. He created family apartment buildings in which the trees were 'co-tenants' – he included interstitial floors for their tree roots so they could grow out of the side and along every horizontal surface of the buildings (like his Waldspirale in Darmstadt, Germany, or his Hundertwasser Apartment in Vienna, Austria). He believed in buildings where our toilet sewerage gets filtered through natural systems and becomes our drinking water again, and humus to feed our rooftop trees. He also created a whole precinct, a kind of spa complex, where all the buildings were emerging like green hills in the landscape, called Rogner Bad Blumau.



Hanna Hoyne & Justin Kalinowski: *Reimagining the iconic Canberra bus stop as garden refuges to cool commuting citizens on a warming planet* (2019). Photo: Hanna Hoyne.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS, PUBLIC SPACE AND STREET ART

You work with different media, which - as we have seen - includes murals and public sculptures. What are the respective characteristics of these media in terms of how they convey knowledge and engage the viewer on sustainability issues? How would you describe the environmental message or eco-spirit of your art?

My work does not show a message in a literal, illustrative way, like a mural might do. And my themes and interests have evolved over time. Now the carbon footprint of everything and the source of materials are at the forefront of everyone's mind. It's not just about slavery-free chocolate, sneakers or clothes, it's also about slavery-free art! Also in Australia there is the added complexity of the necessity for artists to be sensitive to the emerging histories of sites and Country as well. For my current public sculptures, I am still working out fabrication methods and materials so that they are more

biodegradable, more ethical and less evil, basically.

As I mentioned earlier, before I made outdoor works that had to be durable, I did work with ephemeral, transient materials – I made paper clouds to inhabit (*Clouds* 1995-1997), paper sculptural garments to wear (*Empapered Bodies* 1998-2000), paper protection suits for the psyche and the soul (*Protectornauts*, 2000-2005) and finally “Plug-In Stations for Cosmic Recharge” (*Cosmic Recharge Series*, 2009-ongoing) that were made of reclaimed cardboard rendered with old worldly stucco. In a sense, the message was embedded in the materials; the fact that the works were not permanent objects and not more products added to a planet suffocating in mountains of plastic and products – defying the idea of capitalist and art market value.

Aside what the artworks communicated by their structures and fabric, they addressed our vulnerabilities and pitfalls as humans on the whole – what we aspire to, our potential and how we fail to measure up to it or delude ourselves. For example, the protection suits also talked about our skewed sense of safety and security that we need as humans – but that we really can’t hide from our feelings. I made fanciful hazard utility suits for extreme environments like the moon or the deep sea, but to protect our hearts from sorrow, our ears from insults, provide absurdly long snorkels to deep dive under a tidal wave of emotional overwhelm. Whereas the “Plug-In Stations for Cosmic Recharge” are interactive sculptures for contemplation – spirit recharge vessels for the human that you can dock into, similar to plugging your mobile device in to charge the battery. Cosmic energy, instead of electricity. My sculpture *Soul Mine* (2020) is a moon-shaped boat vessel made for the Wolli Creek (Kingsgrove, Sydney) site that talked to how, for millennia, humans have navigated those waterways, using celestial bodies, atmospheric phenomena and the seasonal cycles of resources.

My murals talk about our connectedness to Mother Nature in this way too, usually cosmonautic figures traversing space, contemplating and moving around in the universe. My works don’t *illustrate* environmental messages directly but *talk to* the connectedness to all living beings and our mother planet Earth.



Hanna Hoyne & AEODE: *For Our Rainbow Children* (2021). Photo: Hanna Hoyne.



Hanna Hoyne & AEODE: *For Our Rainbow Children* (2021). Photo: Hanna Hoyne.

Why is it important to bring environmental knowledge and art together in public spaces?

Environmentally connected materiality is less about virtue signalling as it is about modelling innovation, ingenuity and a hopeful way forward in a deeply-challenged, built environment where everyone feels implicated and helpless at the same time. Our imagination is what can help us through the mess we have made on our planet.

If someone were to ask you to invent a science, what would it be?

The science of undoing human mistakes – healing the mess we have made – and the science of being light-footed on the Earth. The science of turning profit into love.



Hanna Hoyne: *Soul Mine (Moonvessel & Horn)* (2020). Photo: Bethan Donnelly.

Thank you for this wonderful conversation.

For further reading

- ▷ [Hanna Hoyne's Website](#)
- ▷ Hanna Hoyne on Instagram – [@hoondactor](#) – and [LinkedIn](#).
- ▷ Hanna Hoyne, [Canal to Creek](#).
- ▷ Hanna Hoyne interviewed by [ArtsACT](#), May 2022.
- ▷ Hanna Hoyne interviewed by [City Renewal CBR on "Crying Dhingy"](#), 16 August 2018.

Details of the cover photo: Artwork by Hanna Hoyne.

Hanna Hoyne & AEODE: *For our Rainbow Children* (2021). Photo: Hanna Hoyne.

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