David Stephenson & Martin Walch: The Derwent River Project
Collection CAE2109

Introduction/Abstract

The Derwent Project, a collaboration between Australian artists David Stephenson and Martin Walch, visualized in new ways the complex natural and cultural history of Tasmania's Derwent River system.

Biographical Note: David Stephenson

David Stephenson was born in 1955 in Washington, DC, and studied at the University of Colorado and then the University of New Mexico, completing an MFA in photography in 1982. He moved to Australia that same year to take up a position teaching photography at the University of Tasmania School of Art, where he completed a PhD in Fine Art in 2001. A fascination for the vast in space and time has led him to travel and photograph extensively around the world, with journeys to Europe, the Himalayas, and both the Arctic and Antarctic.

Stephenson's photographs have been exhibited extensively internationally, including solo exhibitions at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (1993), the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (1994), the Paisley Museum and Art Gallery, Scotland (1995), the National Gallery of Victoria, (1998), the Cleveland Museum of Art (2001), and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (2001). His work is represented in many public and private collections including the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Art Gallery of South Australia, the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Queensland Art Gallery, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, the International Museum of Photography and Film at George Eastman House, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Biographical Note: Martin Walch

Martin Walch was born in 1965, and teaches at the University of Tasmania, where he is Lecturer and Course Coordinator for the Art and Natural Environment Field trip units, whill also occasionally lecturing in Photography and Electronic Media and conducting Honors supervision. Martin was educated at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania attaining a Bachelor of Fine Art with Honors in Photography in 1994. He also completed a Master of Fine Arts by Research, in Digital Stereoscopic Photography and Landscape, in 1998, and has completed a PhD at the Tasmanian School of Art in 2009. Martin was Artist-in-Residence with Copper Mines of Tasmania at Mount Lyell, Western Tasmania between 1998-2003. Awards and bursaries include joint-winner Siglo magazine's National Collaborations Prize for Writers and Photographers (with writer Lisa Morissett) 1997; New Media Fund Development Grant, Australia Council for the Arts 1999; Arts Tasmania artist grants 1997 and 2000. Martin has recently completed a three-year appointment to the Visual Arts/Craft Board of the Australia Council for the Arts. Walch also was awarded the 2017 Australian Antarctic Arts Fellowship. Dr Walch, who specializes in time-lapse and still photography, traveled to Australia's Mawson research station where he spent 3 months capturing the unique icy environment on camera. The archive of that project resides at the Center for Art + Environment.

Walch has participated in 18+ group exhibitions including: Photographica Australis Asia Tour, Naarden Photo Festival Nederlands, ARCO Madrid, 2002 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art; Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney; SOFA, New York; ARTV, Australian Centre for the Moving Image. Walch is represented in public and private collections including the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of South Australia.

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Scope and Content

The Derwent Project, a collaboration between Australian artists David Stephenson and Martin Walch, visualized in new ways the complex natural and cultural history of Tasmania's Derwent River system. This vast and often inaccessible environment includes Aboriginal and colonial heritage alongside ten hydroelectric developments; its multiple layers of space and time present opportunities to synthesize artistic and scientific paradigms of representation by drawing on geography, history, and archaeology.

The aim of the Derwent Project was to produce a new aesthetic of experiencing a multilayered landscape over time, conveying its rich layering of information with clarity and impact. This was achieved through the development of a highly portable means of image and sound capture that created a powerful immersive, multi-channel representation of an intimate experience of remote environments; a means of layering additional environmental and historical information within these immersive representations; and a display approach that presented these immersive experiences in a range of different exhibition spaces. The visual outcomes were new forms of immersive time-based digital imaging that evocatively reveal hidden layers of environmental information to both specialist and general audiences, by creating a comprehensive immersive 360° representation of an entire river system.

The Derwent Project commenced in 2010 and was supported by two University of Tasmania research grants before receiving funding from the Australian Research Council as a 2014-16 Discovery Project. With the support of Hydro Tasmania, a major exhibition was on display from July to November 2017 at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

From its headwaters in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, the Derwent River flows through ten hydroelectric energy developments before entering the urban estuary at Hobart. The Derwent Project developed a mobile system of 360° video and sound capture and display that virtually immersed the viewer in the environment at water level, thus conveying an embodied experience of the river. To complement this mobile platform, twelve fixed cameras were arrayed across the system in characteristic environments, each recording a photograph every five minutes. This data was reconstructed in a variety of ways, from multi-channel video to still photographic matrices to visualize environmental phenomena and histories across the 180-kilometre expanse of the Derwent watershed. The Derwent Time-Lapse Array (DTLA) produced 3,456 images per day and 1,258,000 images per year.

This archive is in process.

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