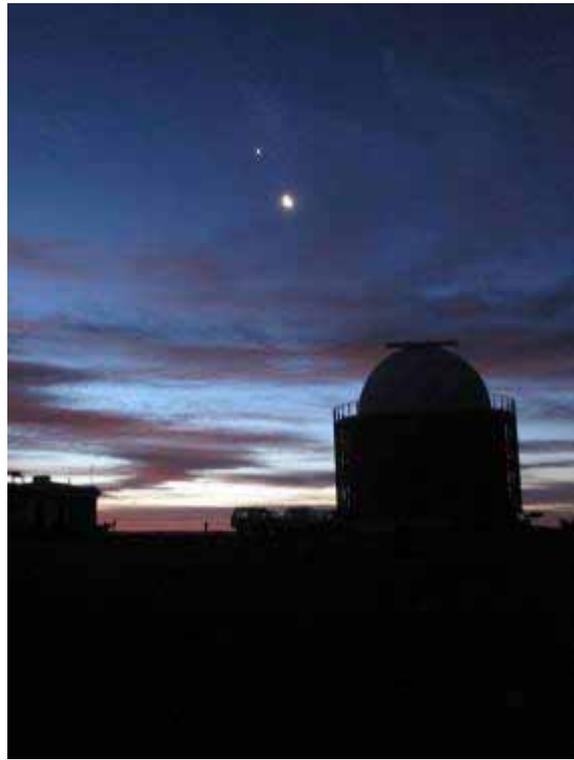


Sutherland Reflections

A project by Bronwyn Lace and Marcus Neustetter



INTRODUCTION

Bringing in 2009's International year of Astronomy together with the South African Astronomical Observatory in Sutherland, artists Bronwyn Lace and Marcus Neustetter launched their project with experimental interventions during the night of New Year's Eve 2008.

These interventions on the evening of 31st December were a precursor for the following two weeks of activities that resulted in a land-art and kite flying spectacle up to and on the 14th January 2009.

Sutherland Reflections aimed to create an experience for participation, artistic interventions and a creative spectacle in the form of a community driven kite flying artwork.

The artists' intention was to address the current attitude and relationship between the seeming "distance" of the disadvantaged communities in Sutherland and the international neighbouring telescopic observatory. The resulting artistic interventions employed a playful activity to fill the liminal space between these two communities and where their reality lies - between the earth and the stars.

Together with youth of the Sutherland community, Lace and Neustetter played with ideas of perspective, reflection, shadows and reaching for the stars, with the intention of developing outcomes that are meaningful and thought-provoking while being spectacular, aesthetic and enchanting.

While the *Sutherland Reflections* project was only a two week programme, the donated kites and creative skills that were transferred hope to stimulate opportunities for regular kite events as part of a Kite Club and an annual festival.

GETTING TO KNOW SUTHERLAND

Through the assistance and introductions of Kevin Govender (South African Astronomical Observatory) and the Sutherland Tourism office, Lace and Neustetter were orientated to Sutherland and the SAAO. Town walks and conversations informed the artists of possible ways forward for the next two weeks.

RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN

On a daily basis Lace and Neustetter would fly kites in an open field between the town and the informal area to attract participants. Each day within minutes between 30 and 50 children would arrive to join in the afternoon activities. Towards the end of the project 30 dedicated children formed the basis of our kite club with about 200 participants joining the final event on 14 January.

LOCAL COLLABORATION

Through the South African Astronomical Observatory and the Sutherland Tourism Information Center Lace and Neustetter were introduced to the Venus Sisters, a community development project guest farm where they stayed throughout the project and to Kamammas, a community development project coffee shop where they held the daily workshops and the final event. Both projects are sponsored by the National Development Agency and support individuals within the local community who have shown incredible initiative. Venus Sisters and Kamammas assisted in making the *Sutherland Reflections* project possible. The municipality also came on board and assisted in the clean-up of the kite-flying field.

DAILY WORKSHOPS

The artists provided all the necessary materials and tools for each days planned activities. With this they guided the process while allowing individual interpretation and initiative to inform the final outcome. With the intention of encouraging collaboration and team work, credit and support was also given to individual participants who showed potential and dedication to the process.

OUTCOMES

The overriding themes through the two weeks activities were focused on notions of perspective, our observations of the world, the impact of the elements, imagination and potential. While individual initiatives and activities were inspired on a daily basis, the workshops fall under the following titles:

Aerodynamics

- > Body and performance exercises: soaring through the skies.
- > Learning how to fold paper aero planes and choreographing 50 flight paths.

Ribbon installation

- > Untangling a ball of chaos to create a structured web on the side of the road adorned with origami paper cranes and aero planes.

Kite building

- > Experiments with various materials to make kites no bigger than a hand to kites larger than a person.

Packet sculptures

- > Shadow games using easily accessible materials.

Partner flying

- > A dance between the imagined flyer and kite connected by a piece of ribbon.

Fabric landscapes

- > Painting with fabric on the stark landscape to create scenes of spectacle.
- > The same fabric providing walls and cocoons of colour and eventually material for making kites.

Drawing home

> Collaging and drawing own homes and streets and placing them in relation to one another.

Parachute child

> Creating small versions of self to imagine parachuting out of a plane.

Sutherland maps

> Imagined aerial perspectives of Sutherland from the perspective of the parachute child using tape, wire, nails, paper, dowel sticks, glue, straws and string on board.
> Creating star constellations above the maps using longer sticks and cotton.

Flag Parade

> To attract audience and community participation, personalized, colourful and reflecting flags were made for a parade through different areas of town.

Kite flying

> After daily kite-flying practice, a culmination of over 50 kites took to the sky on the 14th January.

Projections in Kamammas

> As part of the final event, images from the previous two weeks were projected in Kamamma's Coffee Shop together with the maps made and the kites used for the event.

Night Lights

> Once the sun went down around 200 participants created a colour-field of light and constellation drawings using over 600 glow sticks.

CHALLENGES

While the project implementation had minor daily challenges the following need to be addressed:

Age differences

Because of a lack of any formal structure and the artist's approach for recruiting participants, the age variations ranged from 2 to 18 years. While this was challenging it also led to amazing initiative and collaboration across age groups.

Social realities

It was fairly evident that the realities of poverty, alcoholism and resulting domestic abuse were part of many of the children's daily lives. The project could not tackle these issues directly but rather sought an approach which focused on instilling a sense of achievement and aspiration within the children and creating a safe space of play and imagination.

Child resources

The lack of activity and resources for healthy child entertainment made it difficult to access existing energy and support for projects such as this one. During the workshop it also became evident that the children had their own wish list of what they would like to see in their town one day, such as a playground, pool and planned activities.

Safety during the final event

Even though the police were made aware of the event on the 14 January, they were not able to assist with safety and security. Individuals that assisted the project took it upon themselves to ensure the safety of the children and were prepared for any medical emergency. We were fortunate not to have any incidents but the risk could have been reduced with appropriate support.

HIGHLIGHTS

While the highlights are evident in the outcomes, as mentioned above, there are broader highlights that need to be mentioned:

Dedication and play

The energy and capacity for play within the children was a major driving force. At the same time many of the children showed a surprising dedication to the process with attention spans far outreaching what is normally expected from children.

Respect

Very little discipline was required. The children showed a respect for the process, the artists and the materials and tools. The children showed their appreciation and understanding of the value of these activities through assisting in cleaning up, letters thanking the artists and returning tools and left over materials.

Public response

While few of the children's parents involved themselves in the project some did arrive for the final event to watch their children fly kites.

The involvement of the ladies working at Kamammas Coffe Shop was invaluable to the project.

The artists were fortunate to have photographer Lien Botha from VISI Magazine and her partner Raymond Smith join them and assist in the final event.

Photographers Mike Carelse and Claire extended their stay to witness and assist in the final event.

Shelagh and Rufus Lace assisted in the workshops for 5 days and ensured the safety of the children crossing the road during the event.

Comments made to the artists by some of the Sutherland community were very positive and supportive.

Kevin Gonvender, the Municipality and Tourism Office supported the project were possible.

Media coverage

SAFM and K-FM both hosted interviews with the artists about the project.

Visi Magazine will be featuring a 6-page article on the project.

Personal growth of the artists

Not only did the artists learn a lot from astronomers at SAAO and about the Northern Cape, but their experience provided insight into an artwork production process that now informs their own artistic practice. Both Lace and Neustetter have intellectually and creatively grown through the interaction with the participants of this project.

FUTURE POTENTIAL

Based on the project's success and networks, future opportunities have been identified:

Kite Club

Over 50 kites were donated to the establishment of a Kite Club which aims to be run in parallel to the already existing DVD and Star-gazing Clubs.

Park

It became evident that there is a need for a safe open play space. The police-owned land on which the kite-flying took place is an ideal spot for such a park. It is recommended that this space, currently used for public star-gazing events is transformed through artist interventions.

Kamamma's Coffee Shop

Kamammas location opposite the potential park and Kite-flying site, lends itself to various opportunities for hosting projects and programmes. It is recommended that Kamammas is engaged for future projects.

Venus Susters

The Venus Susters guest farm is an ideal space for artists and scientists residency projects and programmes. Some ideas have already been discussed with the SAAO/SALT (Kevin Govender) and the Venus Susters.

- > Hosting Artist and Scientist collaborative workshops
- > Developing the Sterre Pad to the observatory
- > Hosting a telescope at Venus Susters for visitors
- > Developing an information service pack of the guest farm and surrounding activities

An annual event

This project hopes to develop an annual event attracting artists and visitors to Sutherland, but also making a creative impact in the Sutherland community.

Project Awareness

Posters

Lace and Neustetter have developed a series of permanent posters that are displayed within the various relevant sites in Sutherland presenting the project through photographs and captions.

Exhibition

To create an extended profile of the project and the outcomes created in Sutherland, Lace and Neustetter intend to develop an exhibition in collaboration with the three participating photographers. This will include photographic and installation artwork. The exhibition will be an opportunity to market Sutherland, the sponsors, the outcomes and the potential of *Sutherland Reflections* in the future.

SUPPORTED BY:

The National Arts Council

South African Astronomical Observatory (SAAO) and Southern African Large Telescope (SALT)

The Karoo Hoogland Municipality, The Sutherland Tourism Board and the people of Sutherland



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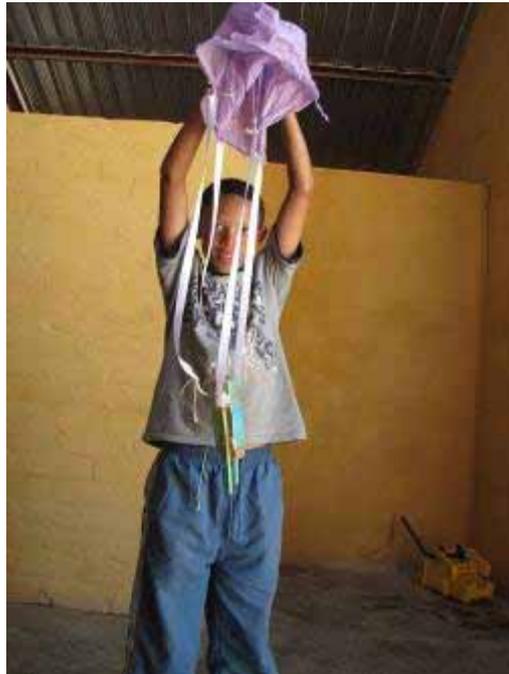
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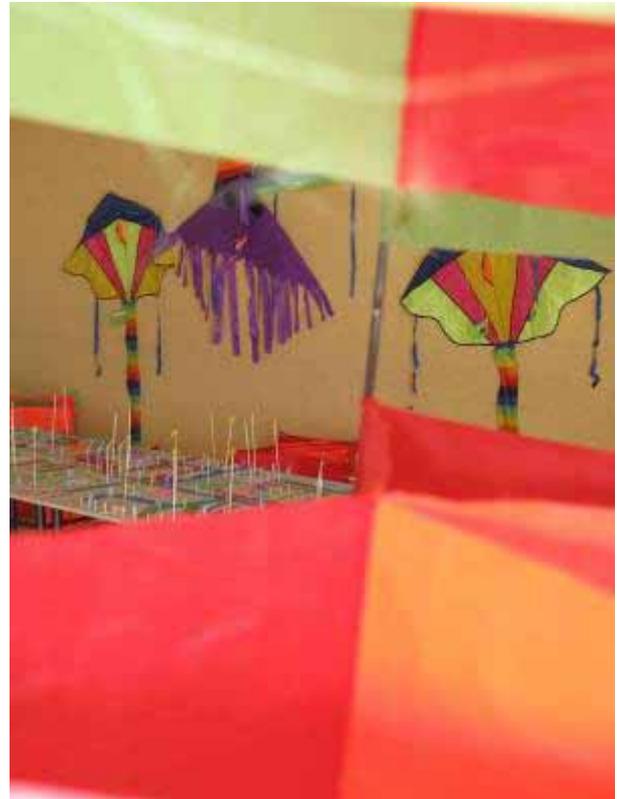
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