



Palimpsest Performances #1 #2 #3

Woodford Academy 2015



About an hour and a half drive west of Sydney, through the urban sprawl, across the Nepean River and into the depths of one of Australia's most vast national parks, The Blue Mountains, sits the Blue Mountains' oldest surviving building now known as the Woodford Academy. The historic legacy of this building has had vast indigenous and colonial ramifications. The site which features a natural spring and has traces of rich Aboriginal heritage typical of the mountains was taken over by soldiers looking for a place to water horses. The site then became an Inn that was a popular rest stop on the mountains between Sydney and Bathurst on the way to the gold mines. Later it became the first private residence, then the first guesthouse, briefly a sanatorium, and later a boys school. The site was even used as a temporary observatory. Today the building is a National Trust property, used as a historic museum, place for paranormal ghost tours, chef-hat dinner parties, and most recently a site for contemporary art performance.

Palimpsest Performances, supported by the Blue Mountains City of the Arts Trust Cultural Grants Program 2014, is the first series of contemporary art performances at Woodford Academy, exploring ways of simultaneously drawing forth the past and layering present interpretations of the unique site. Rather than seeing the re-telling of historic knowledge of the site as paramount, three sets of contemporary artists will create alternative narrative constructs that sit at the threshold between the real and imaginary, the experiential and ideatic, the human and machinic. Through various communication techniques with and through the site, the performances question notions of belonging, and the complexities arising from the creation of new narrative structures when the recorded historic significance of a site is so vast. The chosen performers all have a sensitivity of working with site and an agility in using various communication devices that at once engage and question the role of the spectator within the site as part of the alternative narrative construct.

This project draws upon the ideas of *immaterial architectures*, where sounds from the site, voice and instrumentation create acoustic layerings that alter experience of site.ⁱ

It explores ideas of *critical spatial practice*, where various historic layers are re-interpreted through ritual, and myth making.ⁱⁱ It examines notions of *atmospheres*, how the experience of site is not just informed by the architecture, or the known history, but also by what each of the practitioners and audience members brings to the project. Where they have been and what they have done is seen as contributory in the process of meaning making, and experience of site.ⁱⁱⁱ

This project aims to document the responses of these three pairs of contemporary artists to the Woodford Academy. An analysis will be drawn forth on the way that alternative narrative structures are derived from site through the different mediums including voice work and body movement, walking trails and machinic interventions, instrumentation and mapping. The project will question how the past is rubbed away to make room for new narrative structures, how elements of history come forth through this action and the new forms of meaning making contribute to site experience. Observations will be made of how the different audiences respond and contribute to each of the works, where they are directed on certain paths with implied narrative structure or free to roam and generate narrative structures of their own.



Palimpsest Performance # 3 – on May 16th 2015 Clare Cooper and Monica Brooks will engage in a conversation between instruments in different rooms of the Woodford Academy. Each audience member is given a unique map through which to explore the sounds in building so that the dialogue between the instruments can be heard throughout and in shifting context with different parts of the site. The audience is encouraged to form their own meaning making of the site and the performance through the combination of both. Cooper, a co-founder of the NOW now Festival and Splinter Orchestra in Sydney and Splitter Orchester Berlin, is ferocious with strings and sticks, her sound inspired by natural occurring patterns and knots. She plays the Chinese guzheng and pedal harp - more often than not with drumsticks. Brooks hails from the mountaintops of the western plains, primarily focusing on the relationship termites have to astronomical phenomena such as the aurora australis. She is often found playing conglomerate melodies on piano or few notes in slow succession on the piano accordion as an artist/sound sculptor.





Palimpsest Performance #1 on January 17th 2015, by WeiZen Ho and Alan Schacher is a roving performance, where the viewer explores the architecture of the Woodford Academy, stumbling upon presences and discovering scenes and sounds emerging out of corners and crannies. This is a performative exploration of ghosting, appeasement and ritual for place, habitation and imagined histories. Schacher and Ho currently reside in the Blue Mountains. Schacher is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice traverses dance, live art/performance art, and installation. Ho is a deviser of performances that explores voice and body relationships as a way of communing with the land and its histories.





In *Palimpsest Performance # 2*, on March 21st 2015, Ben Denham and Honi Ryan explore the land around the Woodford Academy and its resources as communication device. Through an examination of walking as art practice Honi Ryan communes with the site, exploring and revealing its traces and history as a navigation tool. While Ben Denham uses water from the land to create sound instruments which are calibrated to the geometries of site. Denham grew up in the Blue Mountains and works with performance video and makes machines that engage different parts of the body in the process of drawing and writing. Ryan is an interdisciplinary artist based in the Blue Mountains and Berlin, her social practice draws on many disciplines: [including](#) performance, sculpture, sound, video, and installation. She is interested in socially engaged art for its capacity to reveal and explore alternative models for living.



About the Curator

SARAH BREEN LOVETT is currently engaged in being an artist, curator, PhD candidate, and sessional academic at The University of Sydney and The University of Technology, Sydney. As an artist Sarah works with permeations of moving image in order to explore boundaries between self and surroundings. As a curator Sarah looks for unique architectural opportunities for contemporary artists to respond to. As a researcher Sarah has a particular interest in 1920s light projection, the 1960s-70s expanded cinema movement and contemporary spatial art practices. Sarah has completed a B.Des (first class honours), B.Arts & M.Arch. The working title of her practice-based PhD research is EXPANDED ARCHITECTURAL AWARENESS: Through the intersection of expanded cinema and architecture. www.sarahbreenlovett.com

List of Figures

As the performances are yet to take place at the time of writing this brochure, the images of the performances are not available as yet, in place of these, images of previous works by the artists have been used. The performances, their development and documentation will be recorded in a publication at the completion of the three performances. Email sarah.breenlovett@sydney.edu.au to receive a copy.

Cover: Woodford Academy Exterior – image by Camille Walsh
Cover: Woodford Academy Interior - image by Sarah Breen Lovett

1. WeiZen Ho and Alan Schacher, *Unappeased on St Paul's Hill*, 2013 - image by Steve Chong
1. WeiZen Ho, *Divining Upright*, 2012 - image by Horst Kiechle

2. Ben Denham, *In Flow*, 2010 - image from digital video by Ben Denham
2. Honi Ryan, *The Passage Of Water*, 2014 - image by Honi Ryan

3. Monica Brooks Oslo 2014
3. Clare Cooper – *Mapped Intimacy for Harp and Carpark*, 2014 - image by Clare Cooper

ⁱ Jonathan Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*, 1st ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006).

ⁱⁱ Jane Rendell, "Site-Writing: Critical Spatial Practice," in *Expanded Spatial Practices: A symposium exploring the conditions and possibilities for cross-disciplinary approaches to spatial practice* ed. Linda Walker and John Barbour (South Australia: UniSA, 2009).

ⁱⁱⁱ Gernot Böhme, "Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics," *Thesis Eleven* 36, no. 1 (1993).

Many thanks to the Artists, Woodford Academy Management Committee and Volunteers.

This Project is supported by the Blue Mountains City of the Arts Trust Cultural Grants Program 2014.

