

NENA ARTS & CULTURE HUB PRESENTATION Catherine van Wilgenburg August 27 2020

I want to tell you why I am working to set up this NENA Arts& Culture Hub which will be about connecting Arts & Culture to Economics - to ask 'How can Art be an Economic Proposition? My purpose today is not to pick apart the existing government or philanthropic cultural and arts economic policies - (that will come later Hub gathering).

My purpose is to tell you something about myself through my Arts practice, what shaped it and what continues to shape it and where I think it's going. All of this in light of national and global crises, bushfires, pandemics and general system collapse and transformation.



Above: Chimbu Dancers
Below: Mt Hagen Dancers



I hitch hiked around Europe between 16 - 18 years and at 22 arrived in Papua New Guinea teaching and staying in villages participating in Sings Sings, Courting ceremonies, Weddings, Bride Price ceremonies and Funerals. Everyone carved, sang, danced, wove, sculpted made gardens grew and traded food. I saw clearly the connection between the land, the arts and the economy, somewhat changed since settlement in the 1930s .

I was deeply culture shocked, waking me up to what colonisation really is - the theft of land and resources to benefit the colonisers at the expense of the colonised.. Since arriving in Australia my Arts practice has been about connecting to this land in my own backyard and throwing off my colonial and patriarchal mindset while acknowledging the benefits of Systems Thinking encompassing all bodies of Knowledge which maintain ecosystems on the planet!



Left: Plinth at the entrance to Sears Park, Cheam, Surrey, made from Portland stone and carved to resemble two outward facing heads. It used to be topped by a drinking fountain with a statue of a boy, and bore an inscription thanking the Seears for their generous gift of the park – however, over the years, bits have disappeared, leaving only the plinth standing. WIKIPEDIA

I grew up in this English Park - my father had trained as a horticulturist at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in Surrey. Dad worshipped the Royal Family and the aristocracy and was steeped in the English Garden Tradition; with all its Colonial baggage. He valued the Western European paradigm of the Arts as the highest form of thinking along with Science and the Church.as the



Since 2008 as a Director of Living Colour Studio Art & Architecture Studio in Yarraville I volunteered at Iramoo Grassland Reserve connecting with the land walked by Hume & Hovel and learning about the truer Australian History through connecting with Wurundjeri and local ecologists and environmental scientists. Along with artists and volunteers we are developing this artwork for ten years. I am being transformed by this land. See project details below.



Cover Photo of EcoArts Systems Australia 'Eastern Barred Bandicoot /Marsupial Masterpieces 2016 2026'—Collaborative Ecoartwork with Friends of Iramoo Grassland, Reserve, St Albans Cairnlea Victoria. After corrugated iron was laid down and removed after two years, the weed serrated tussock was eradicated and replaced with Chyrsocephalum Apiculatum (Common Everlasting or Yellow Buttons) and Buttoned Wrinklewort becoming nurseries for Indigenous wildflowers of

I have found my way to becoming a 'real' Australian knowing the truer history, by acknowledging the darker side of my colonial heritage . At last I am able to value my gardening heritage, my arts and cultural transformation within the New Economy in which Arts & Culture connect to *this* land in our own backyards becoming allies to First Nations Elders in Traditional Ecological Knowledge..

I have been a Collaborator in the Chain of Ponds Collaboration of Moonee Ponds Creek Melbourne for four years. I am the only artist at this stage in the Collaboration because all the other interested artists can't afford to work without pay. I am privileged as I run projects within Living Colour Studio. But after four years I have demonstrated the value that embedding EcoArts within capital works, revegetation, community participation, Indigenous cultural heritage will have. Most of these other collaborators are science based and there are only two other members from Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek. Other collaborators include Flood Mitigation and Civil Engineers, Revegetation Land Management, open space planners, and this project demonstrates step by step how to embed the arts in cross sectoral collaboration with Wurundjeri Tribe and Land Council, ecologists, operations management, capital works, revegetation, community engagement and education.

EcoArts Systems Australia designs games, templates, jigsaws, toolkits for creative collaborative community solutions for working with small groups towards shared governance, shared decision making, having difficult conversations about protecting habitats and repairing ecosystems.

What do I see the Arts & Culture Hub will look like?

1. Identify dilemmas in our individual Arts Practices
2. Work together in Working Groups to address these dilemmas and offer solutions
3. Mentoring and peer support
4. Show and Tell Individual Arts Practices
5. Articles /Videos in Arts Culture and Economics/ Cultural Economy / Enterprises /