spaced: art out of place
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Here is a map of our country:
here is the Sea of Indifference, glazed with salt
This is the haunted river flowing from brow to groin
we dare not taste its water.
This is the desert where missiles are planted like corms
This is the breadbasket of foreclosed farms
This is the birthplace of the rockabilly boy
This is the cemetery of the poor
who died for democracy  This is the battlefield
from the nineteenth-century war  the shrine is famous
This is the sea town of myth and story  when the fishing fleets
went bankrupt  here is where the jobs were  on the pier
processing frozen fishsticks  hourly wages and no shares
These are the other battlefields  Centralia  Detroit
here the forests primeval  the copper  the silver lodes
These are the suburbs of acquiescence  silence rising fumelike
from the streets
This is the capital of money and dolor whose spires
flare up through air inversions whose bridges are crumbling
whose children are drifting blind alleys pent
between coiled rolls of razor wire.
I promised to show you a map but you say this is a mural
then yes let it be these are small distinctions
where do we see it from is the question

AN ATLAS OF THE DIFFICULT WORLD, ADRIENNE RICH 1990
Like Rich’s mural poem that maps an America of changing places, IASKA’s spaced: art out of place artist residency program created an idiosyncratic, momentary cartography of the social, cultural, spatial and economic lives of 15 scattered regional and remote Western Australian communities, highlighting their strengths and losses, their longings and belonging. In Leonora on the eastern desert goldfields, artist Kate McMillan created photographic images of lonely graves shown to her by a local historian and raised funds to initiate local art programs. Finding no space in town to show her work, she borrowed an empty shopfront, ran leads from the next-door hairdressing salon to light the room, swept up years of dust, and welcomed perhaps 30 community members to the opening.

A month later, on the far south coast in ‘the forests primeval’; among the ancient twisting paperbarks of the Denmark Wetlands Education land, some 50 local residents and guests trooped through the rain falling from low winter cloud to view the Ornitarium, a bird-hide constructed over a ten week residency using many local locally unique timbers by Richard Saxton and David Wyrick, visiting American artists from the M12 Collective based in Colorado. As they worked through extreme southern winter storms, the wetlands water rose around them so that they needed thigh high high boots and a rowing boat.

The Narrogin community showing of the Banksia Tower created by Polish architect artist, Jakub Szczęsny, and the short accompanying documentary film made by Matylda Salajewska attracted on a freezing late October night a crowd of 150. For over 6 months, Szczęsny, Salajewska, and curator Kaja Pawelek had deeply immersed themselves with locals, and many community members had been involved in imagining and contributing to this locally controversial work. The Narrogin project perhaps involved the deepest engagement with local issues: the haunted river; the drought; the breadbasket of foreclosed farms; the myth and story of where the jobs were... on the railways.

In Northam, Bennett Miller spent sharp cold Monday afternoons with trainers and punters at the greyhound races; while Sonia Leber and David Chesworth abandoned a cemetery to follow and record the herding of cattle and sheep. In Mukinbudin, Julia Davis created salt sculpture on an ‘inland sea’, works on paper that traced the voices of the farming communities and a video saluting their recognition of her presence. Makeshift (Karl Khoe & Tessa Zettel), Nigel Helyer,
PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES
the Abrolhos Islands
Albany
Dampier Peninsula
Denmark
Esperance
Fremantle
Jakarta
Kellerberrin
Lake Grace
Leonora
Mandurah
Moora
Mukinbudin
Narrogin
Northam/Bakers Hill
Roebourne

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS
Art Orienté Objet (France)
Julia Davis (NSW)
Sohan Ariel Hayes and Michael Woodley (WA)
Ritchie Ned Hansel (Indonesia)
Nigel Helyer (WA)
Sonia Leber and David Chesworth (VIC)
M12 Collective (USA)
Makeshift (NSW)
Kate McMillan (WA)
Bennett Miller (WA)
Wouter Osterholt and Elke Uitentuis (The Netherlands)
Kaja Pawelek and Jakub Szczęsny (Poland)
Philip Samartzis (VIC)
Michelle Slarke (WA)
Roderick Sprigg (WA)
Takahiko Suzuki (Japan/Taiwan)
Mimi Tong (NSW)
### DENMARK: M12 COLLECTIVE

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<th>PROJECT TITLE:</th>
<th>Ornitarium</th>
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<tr>
<td>ARTIST:</td>
<td>M12 Collective (Richard Saxton, Kirsten Stoltz &amp; David Wyrick)</td>
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<td>COMMUNITY:</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<td>PARTNERS:</td>
<td>Denmark Arts &amp; Greenskills WA (Centre for Sustainable Living)</td>
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<td>RESIDENCY DATES:</td>
<td>1 June–1 August 2011</td>
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<td>EXHIBITION DATES:</td>
<td>Permanent Installation</td>
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**ORNITHOLOGY IS FOR THE ARTIST—AESTHETICS IS FOR THE BIRDS***

**MARGO HANDWERKER**

In June 2011, artists Richard Saxton, Kirsten Gerdes Stoltz and David Wyrick of the Colorado-based M12 collective travelled to the southern town of Denmark in Western Australia. Paired with Denmark Arts and the Green Skills Centre for Sustainable Living, M12 set out to derive what they call ‘local knowledge’ about the region’s landscape (both built and natural) by connecting with as many additional community members as they could.

They quickly identified two main collaborators at the Wetlands Education Centre: Green Skills Program Director Basil Schur and bird expert Tina Smith. Together with other partners, M12 immersed themselves in the area: they attended (and bid at) an auction in Albany, visited the Museum of Natural History and Academy of Taxidermy in Guildford, planted trees at the Centre for Sustainable Living with a local agricultural college, and went in for extensive birding and bushwalking. Most of their walks were in forest and wetland areas, and water and wood eventually emerged as critical themes for their final project, the **Ornitarium**: a functional bird hide at the Wetlands Education Centre.

The artists have said that constructing the **Ornitarium** at the Wetlands Education Centre was a conscious effort to highlight the educational programming that Green Skills offers there. For years, Schur had been revegetating the wetland and cultivating a small day-use area. Smith had identified several bird species nesting at the site, including the Australian Shelduck, Common Bronzewing, Pacific Black Duck, New Holland Honeyeater, Ringneck Parrot and Straw-necked Ibis. M12 and their partners collectively designed the **Ornitarium** and, undeterred by heavy rainfall that season, constructed it with the help of some local WWOOFers (Willing Workers on Organic Farms). The environment they created is multifunctional: it contains comfortable seating, a cot [won at the auction in Albany] and a trunk filled with such bird-watching necessities as binoculars, books and Wellington boots. These amenities
Sonia and David learnt a lot about our community, history and environment as well. They were able to learn about our local indigenous culture too. I have a number of good friends who are Aboriginal—Stolen Generation—and so we got to go to places we would not have had the opportunity under any other circumstances. We were privileged to go there, hear the stories, and discuss it with them.

Can you talk about your understanding or opinion of the artwork?

Personally, viewing their work for the first time evoked an emotional response from me. The quality of their work really managed to capture the local environment beautifully. From an artistic viewpoint, it is visually absorbing, the dual screen and the accompanying sound that David composed is very powerful.

What does making art from that particular subject matter mean for local people?

Sonia and David have put forward this artwork that is open to individual interpretation. I understand the abstractness of it but some local people may view it almost like a documentary.

What difference has having had the artists made in your community?

Both projects offered an opportunity and experience to people who may not normally get involved in art, arts projects, or even walk into our gallery. It has given them an enriching experience that has been very positive.

The pattern, repetition and form of the herding places an ambiguity on any outcome, yet there is an overarching sense of direction which draws us into the group action of the crowd.
i. I must confess, there was a time when, on certain occasions
and if pressed on certain issues, I used to enjoy paraphrasing
Goebbels—or was it Goering?—and quip that whenever I hear
the word community I reach for my revolver. What I reacted
against, and I was by no means alone in thinking in this way,
was not the idea of community per se but the over pervasiveness
of a certain notion of it, namely what social theorists call
gemeinschaft or ‘organic community’. These are supposedly
‘natural’ communities that are described as homogeneous,
connected by natural bonds, endowed with a clear sense of
their own identity and able to manage themselves through
consensus. This ideal is ubiquitous: one finds traces of it
in curatorial rationales for community arts projects, press
releases of mining companies, government policy documents
and commercial advertisements. It is also equally visible at
both extremes of the ideological spectrum: both Goebbels and
the founders of countercultural communes of the 1960s longed
for the embrace of the quasi-mystical body of a seamlessly
integrated community.

Gemeinschaft’s popularity is often a symptom of a nostalgic
longing for a lost pre-modern social utopia which glosses
over the social relations that characterise modern, urbanised
and industrialised societies. It is a subtly coercive construct
harbouring an implicit injunction to join in its celebration of a
harmonious ‘us’, or else. Its appeal to unity neuters diversity and
hides class, gender and racial conflicts and power imbalances. And how does one reconcile the natural social bonds and univocal sense of identity that characterises *gemeinschaft* with the postmodern emphasis on hybridity, anti-essentialism and radical pluralism?

But in recent times, new and more progressive approaches to the idea of community have emerged. The resurgence of socially engaged practices is certainly a sign of this change and so are several recent strands of social and political theory that are attempting to rethink the meaning of the communitarian bond beyond the idealised essentialism of the organic community. For example, in *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Anthony Cohen argues that the enduring force of the idea of community derives from it is fundamental indeterminacy. His argument is that community is a symbolic construct that is shareable by a social group for which it becomes a source of cohesiveness exactly because its meaning is highly variable. Different social sub-groups can give radically divergent interpretations of the same idea of community without compromising the latter’s ability to function as a social connector and identifier. The implication of this position is that community is not so much an ontological given but a project, a program or an intention.

This view clearly has implications for socially engaged art, in so far as, from this perspective artists working with communities are not dealing with a unitary communal identity core, but negotiating the conflicting symbolic constructions of the idea of ‘us’ that motivate those who are recognised, and are recognised by others, as members of a certain community.

ii. The idea of the close interdependence between the social and the aesthetic is certainly not new to the current art scene, on the contrary, it presents itself right at the heart of the foundation of the modern philosophy of art, namely in Kant’s discussion of *sensus communis* in the *Critique of Judgement*. *Sensus communis* is Kant’s translation in ‘sociological’ terms of his fundamental philosophical claim that taste, or aesthetic experience, transcends the merely subjective:


5 Cohen does not mention it, but his argument brings to mind Levy Strauss’s concept of the ‘floating signifier’