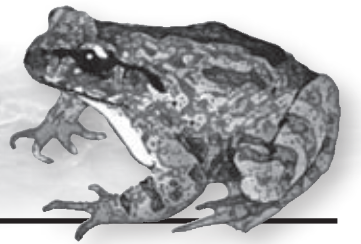


# The Stuttering Frog



THE WILLIAMS RIVER VALLEY ARTISTS' PROJECT NEWS

OCTOBER 2010

## DAM SHAME Tillegra Dam To Wreck The Williams River

*The NSW Government's proposed Tillegra Dam would drown 21 kms of the Williams River and destroy the last healthy river in the Hunter region with a dam the size of Sydney Harbour.*

Announced in 2006 it appears to be an ad hoc, politically expedient proposal, with inadequate planning or costing. As we go to print it has yet to be approved by the NSW Department of Planning.

The Williams supports a valuable aquatic ecology and is precious habitat for the iconic platypus and the endangered stuttering frog, as well as many other species of native fish, and native flora. Unlike the other rivers in the Hunter, it is not yet degraded by industry, dams and weirs. The dam would also drown a total of 4000 hectares of rural land, 2000 hectares of which is irreplaceable agricultural land which helps keep our food supplies on shore.

Numerous independent reports have dem-

onstrated that the dam is not needed to secure Hunter water supplies and that the reduced flows to the Hunter Estuary and its Ramsar listed wetland, Kooragang Island, are likely to lead to the ecological collapse of the Williams River system and the Hunter Estuary Wetlands it feeds. These reports demonstrate that, due to lower water consumption and increased supply through previous augmentation of existing dams, drought security is at a 30-year high. They show that sustainable alternatives, such as recycling, rain water tanks, water efficiency and water conservation awareness, would cost hundreds of millions less and that the Tillegra Dam project should be abandoned immediately.

### POLITICAL MANOEUVRES

*What next for the Williams River valley?*

*Will the Federal Government protect the Williams River?*

*Will the current NSW Labor Government wake up, see sense and stop the dam?*

*What will be the outcome for the valley after the next state election? The NSW Coalition has committed to stop the Tillegra Dam if elected in March 2011, but only if contracts have not been signed.*

*As we go to press the fate of the Williams River valley lies perilously in the hands of the Federal and NSW State Governments. If the NSW Department of Planning approves the project it will then go to the Federal Department of Environment for final scrutiny. The Federal Environment Minister has the power to stop the proposal on the grounds that it would fundamentally destroy the RAMSAR listed Hunter Estuary Wetlands, recognised as World Heritage value under the International Treaty.*

## The Williams River Valley Artists' Project comes to Sydney

*Cry Me a River at the Tin Sheds Gallery, Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning, 148 City Road, The University of Sydney.*

*To be opened by John Kaye MLC (Greens) 30 September 2010. Exhibition Dates: 1-23 October. Gallery Hours: 11.00-5:00pm Tues-Sat.*

Williams River Valley Artists' Project (WRVAP) brings together a group of environmentally-displaced Australian contemporary artists developing work through a series of on-site residencies in the Williams River Valley, Dungog, NSW, the location of the proposed Tillegra Dam. They aim to add to a movement to protect the Williams River, and to preserve the locality's unique heritage, community and productive

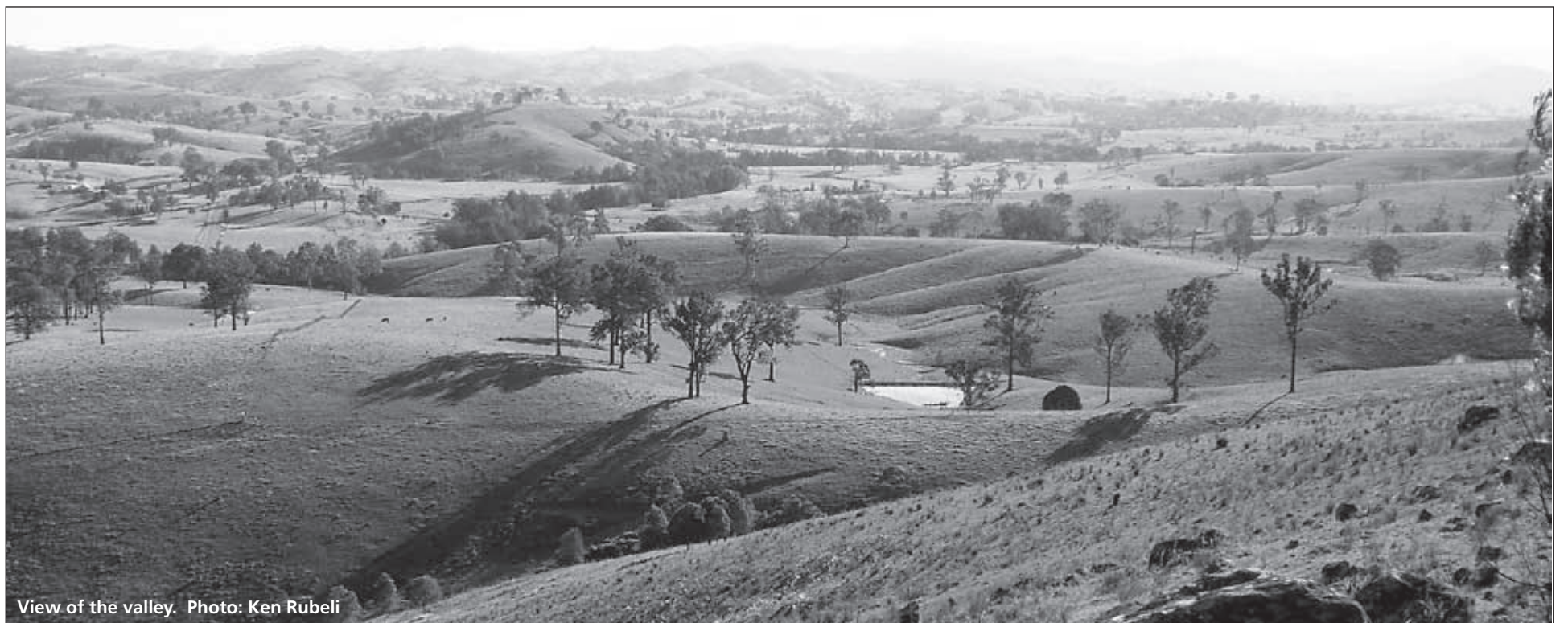
agricultural land. The project is an initiative of its curator Juliet Fowler Smith, whose family have farmed in the valley for generations.

The project has had two exhibitions in rural locations over the past fifteen months: at Muswellbrook Regional Art Centre in October 2009, and at the Tocal Homestead Barn as part of the Tocal Agricultural College's "field days" in May 2010.

*Cry Me a River* brings the project to city audiences at a time of heightened political uncertainty regarding the future of the Williams River valley.

It will show the work of artists Suzanne Bartos, Neil Berecny-Brown, Bonita Ely, Juliet Fowler Smith, Noelene Lucas, Bridget Nicholson, Margaret Roberts, Toni Warburton and David Watson.

<http://williamsrivervalley.blogspot.com>



View of the valley. Photo: Ken Rubeli



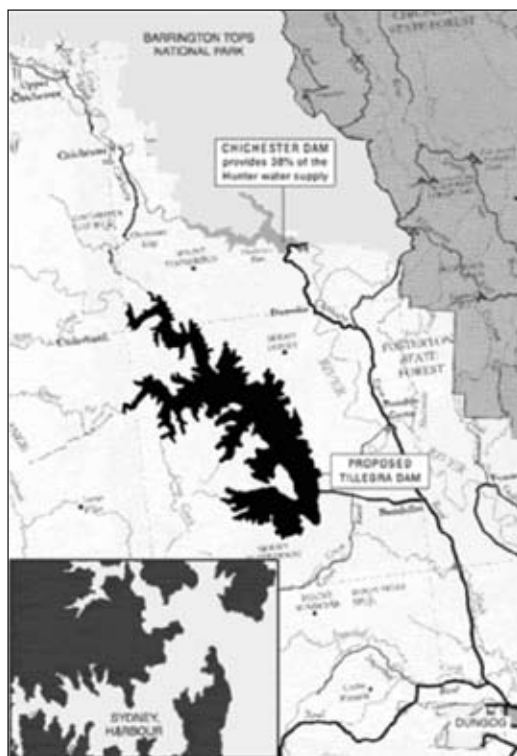
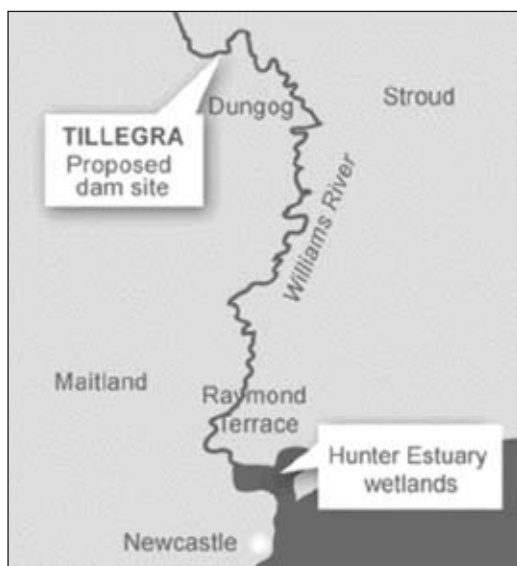
## Location

The proposed site for the Tillegra dam is just north of Dungog, 76 kms north-east of Newcastle.

Dungog has a rich tourism industry, with its historic buildings and charming country-town appeal. Dungog is also one of the "gateways" to the World Heritage listed Barrington Tops National Park.

If constructed, Tillegra dam would capture and store flood waters, denying downstream wetlands their usual regular, life-giving flooding – devastating complex ecological processes and spelling disaster for the animals and plants that call them home.

Copies of reports about Tillegra dam are available for download from: [www.wilderness.org.au/articles/further-reading](http://www.wilderness.org.au/articles/further-reading)



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# Activism & Aesthetics

IT IS proclaimed from a tower in Sydney that a Big Dam will be built across the Upper Williams River valley. To paraphrase a great satirist: "Believe it or not we looked out the window one day and thought 'screw Williams River'."<sup>1</sup>

The people react in horror. Artist, curator and descendant of local farmers, Juliet Fowler Smith fights back and gathers the skills, connections and nous of artist colleagues to integrate issues and put the doomed river's case. A neo-Dada collective of 'stutterers' named after the call of the endangered stuttering frog – distinctive bursts of 'ugh' or 'op' – is heard in privileged exhibition venues and temporary sites. The frog's fate hangs in the balance.

WRVAP is simultaneously a metaphor, a passionate campaign and an art project. The journey is one of local curation and workshops, national convergence and global projection. The comrades' art flows across conceptual, environmental, feminist and community art practices and across media in harness with environmental science and grassroots politics as much as with postmodern cultural theories.

This vision of art as a diorama of productive social forces lays out the theme of enclosure and loss of the common estate as the natural realm is dressed for market. Cultural history and ecological bounty are big business. Despite global warming we imagine that somehow technology or another Big Dam can restore nature. The glittering tower's occupants evoke the word 'crisis' to confer legitimacy: to 'guarantee' our glass of water in Newcastle or Sydney. Never you mind that Big Dams can cause floods, waterlogging and salinity or the fact that the reservoir is, most likely, reserved for industrial use (coal washing and the like).

The works in *Cry Me a River* – sublime, pleading and reasoned – parallel local experience with a global schema where Big Dams displace millions of vulnerable people and kill rivers indiscriminately for dubious public benefit.<sup>2</sup> Big Dam decrees, by cartels of politicians, compliant officials and construction and banking lobbyists, hijack redress. To build fragile platforms where none are forthcoming for the powerless, artists, scientists, educators and impacted communities forge common purpose: from local Green Bans to, decades

later, World Social Forums.

The interdisciplinary shift in the late 1990s to a mode of working to make art 'make a difference' is changing how the cultural world too does business. From the Venice to Sydney Biennales, as in the collaborative Utopia Station (2003), artists use their mighty visual crafts to raise awareness about wilful cultural and environmental damage. Words, too are pressed into service by the likes of Nobel prize winning novelist Arundhati Roy, who condemns the dams across India's longest river The Narmada and argues for 'The greater common good' in *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002.)

Australia has a strong tradition of interventionist curatorial practice led by indigenous curators who maintain productive relations between poetic-aesthetics and targeted campaigns. Many artists, including several WRVAP comrades, have taken a longterm forensic view on nurturing ecological themes in their practice. Others uphold a critical distance. While they often disagree on degree, the critical continuity in these art manifestations, exhibitions and individual artworks fights greed's drive to eliminate the final loopholes of nature.

This plea for the Williams River rests on these rich ideas and the poignant awareness of disproportionate resources. The Bickham Coal Victories – stopping a degrading open cut mine – don't come often, but others elsewhere can take heart, from farmers on the Liverpool Plains to custodians of Sydney's pristine water catchments, both fighting coal mining. Briefly, *Cry Me a River* holds in glorious suspension the dialectic of aesthetics and collective action. The fog clears and we see the ideal of the common good, or democracy, contradicting brute belligerence.

### Jo Holder

The Cross Art Projects

1. Thanks to Larry Pickering's drawing, 'BHP/Screw Newcastle', 1984. In Craig Judd, *Artists and Cartoonists in Black & White*, exhibition catalogue, State Library of NSW, 1999.

2. See: Report by Survival International, 2010, on the serious damage to Indigenous Peoples displaced by Large Dams. [www.survivalinternational.org](http://www.survivalinternational.org)

## The Stuttering Frog\*

Published by the Williams River Valley Artists' Project (WRVAP) to accompany the exhibition *Cry Me a River* October 2010. For further copies, please contact [jfs@pacific.net.au](mailto:jfs@pacific.net.au)

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## Tin Sheds Gallery



SALON CALLAN



The publishers recognise and pay respect to the Indigenous nations and traditional custodians of the land on which this publication was produced. We express solidarity with the ongoing struggles for land rights, self-determination, sovereignty and the recognition of past injustices.

### \*The Stuttering Frog

*Mixophyes balbus*

KOOK KOOK KOOK KRA-A-AK KRAK KRAK

An endangered species listed in Part 1, Schedule 1 Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 (NSW).

Former catchment covered 110,000 km<sup>2</sup> – now extinct in Victoria. NSW numbers estimated at 5-10,000. To hear the stuttering frog (could be your last chance!) go to <http://www.threatenedspecies.environment.nsw.gov.au/tsprofile/profile.aspx?id=10536>





# The Williams River Valley Artists' Project

Morning mist across the river. Manns Hill 2009.  
Photo: Juliet Fowler Smith.



## An introduction

The Williams River Valley Artists' Project was established in early 2009 in response to renewed plans by the NSW Government and the Hunter Water Corporation to construct the Tillegra Dam by flooding the Williams River Valley, just north of Dungog in NSW. For 50 years the local community has successfully resisted similar plans, with the result that today the Williams River is one of the few healthy rivers in NSW.

The project is the work of an artists' collective including Suzanne Bartos, Neil Berecny-Brown, Bonita Ely, Noelene Lucas, Bridget Nicholson, Margaret Roberts, Toni Warburton, David Watson and the initiator and curator, Juliet Fowler Smith.

It was formed by artists wanting to add to the growing resistance

to the Government's plans and to raise awareness of the need to protect the Williams River, so preserving its unique heritage, rural community and productive agricultural land.

The project reflects the contribution that personal commitment and identification with particular physical places can make to the ways in which forms of planetary care could develop to restore and maintain the inhabitability of the planet. It is predicated on the idea that support for place-based communities such as that of the Williams Valley may counter some of the environmental neglect that flows from the historical devaluation of place in modernity as theorised by writers such as Anthony Giddens.

The collective members have held a series of residencies on the land to be flooded since March 2009, including visits and meetings with local

groups and individuals.

Concerns that have emerged from these visits include memory and loss, respect for the places that hold those memories, and the historical and continuing disregard for the attachment and responsibility shown for places in which people have constructed their lives. This contrasts with the bureaucratic instrumentality of plans made at a distance that increasingly seem to take the 'urban' as a default for cultural expression and analysis.

Some artists in the project already have long-term connections with the Williams Valley, while the residencies are enabling others to rapidly develop an appreciation for what makes the plans for the Tillegra Dam such an emotionally devastating and divisive experience for the rural community of the Williams Valley area.

While each artist has his or her own interest in the different aspects

of the environmental and community cost of this 'inundation', all share the understanding that this damming is one of many instances of the larger global environmental crisis facing us.

The project has carried out a series of exhibitions in rural locations over the past fifteen months. The first was at Muswellbrook Regional Art Centre in October 2009. Muswellbrook is a town significantly impacted upon by mining and environmental degradation. This was followed by an invitation to exhibit in the Tocal Homestead Barn as part of the Tocal Agricultural College's "field days". The field days occur every year over a three-day period in May and attract large audiences from across the state.

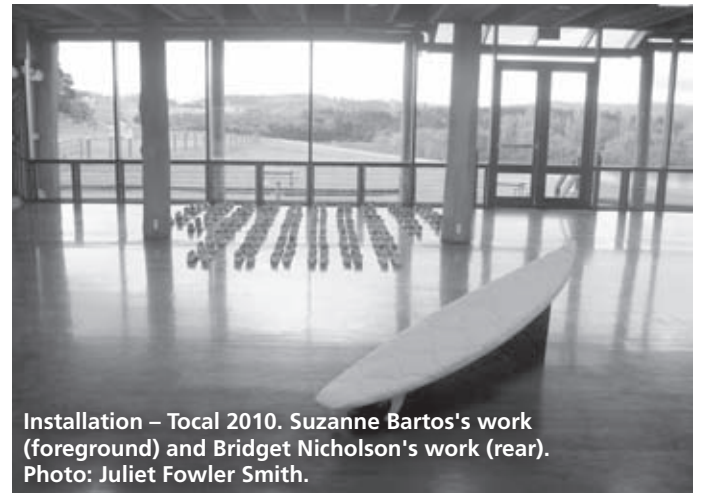
*Cry Me a River*, at Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney University, brings the project to city audiences at a time of political upheaval which holds the future of the valley hostage.



Video projection by Noelene Lucas, Water cushion couch by Juliet Fowler Smith, Muswellbrook Regional Art Centre 2009.



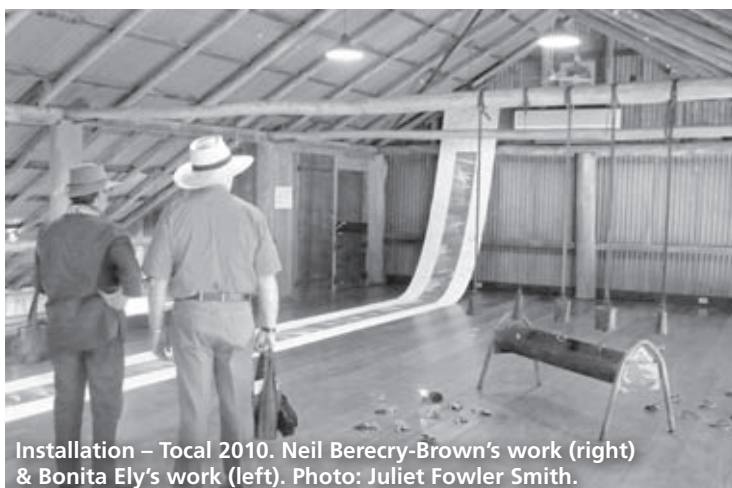
Artists' Camp.  
Photo: David Watson 2009.



Installation – Tocal 2010. Suzanne Bartos's work (foreground) and Bridget Nicholson's work (rear).  
Photo: Juliet Fowler Smith.



Riverbeds by Suzanne Bartos  
Photo: SuzanneBartos 2009.



Installation – Tocal 2010. Neil Berecny-Brown's work (right) & Bonita Ely's work (left). Photo: Juliet Fowler Smith.



Manns Hill Fenceline.  
Photo: Toni Warburton 2009.



## Juliet Fowler Smith WRVAP Curator

# A place called 'the farm'

### Some background

My father is from Munni, on the Williams River, near Dungog. His family have farmed in the region for five generations. He is one of six children born to Grafton and Marjorie Smith. His older brother, the 'first son', took over the family property and Munni House (the family homestead) when he came back from the war. Dad went to uni on a cadetship with the NSW Department of Agriculture and then worked for them until his retirement. He bought a piece of the farm, paying it off with instalments to his mother. His four sisters got married and moved away, but under their father's will, retained a small dairy farm of their own. They returned regularly for visits. The family has always been close and deeply attached to the valley and its community.

When I was young we moved around a lot. The one place we always came back to was dad's farm, Manns Hill, which neighbours the Munni property. Manns Hill is named after John and Samuel Mann, who had the first European land grant there. Prior to this there was a thriving Aboriginal community, going back 40,000 years. The Gringai people (a sub-group of the Wonnarua people), lived in local groups or 'urras' in villages about eight kilometres apart consisting of eight or nine families occupying a defined area of land.<sup>1</sup>

The arrival of Europeans in the area had a devastating effect on the local Aboriginal population. By the 1830s the original Aboriginal community had been irrevocably damaged through conflict and disease brought by settlers. The last survivor of the Gringai people died in 1905.

You can see why the original indigenous communities thrived in the valley; plenty of food (fish and native animals) and water, a natural environment conducive to settlement.

This is a place in which I also came to settle. As we moved around with Dad's work we always came back to this dairy farm with the river running through it, enclosed in rolling hills and with cousins nearby. It was the container of my evolving self and a place which is interwoven with my being. When I think back to my childhood what stands out are times at the farm when the weather could be intense, being with my three sisters and cousins/friends in the river, and other moments which may not have seemed special at the time but somehow just got caught in memory. Often they were quiet times, even if others were around.

The first threat of a dam was in the 1950s. Unfortunately the valley, which is extremely fertile with good rainfall, was attractive to engineers and bureaucrats. In my first year at Art School in the mid-1980s the Liberal Government of the day announced they would dam the valley. My aunts and uncles and 16 cousins rallied along with the community of Dungog. It was a great campaign. But the plan for the dam was still passed through cabinet. Luckily, due to mea-



1925. Grandmother Marjorie Smith with my father, Grafton (Snow) as a baby and sister Judy, Munni House.



1968. Mum, family and friends, Manns Hill.



1999. Cousin Jules (left) and Dan, Juliet's son (right) Manns Hill.



2002. Dan (Juliet's son) kayaking Williams River, Manns Hill.

sures put in place to conserve water in the Newcastle region, the dam was put off. The promise was that there would be no dam before 2020. We figured that meant never – surely no one would be building dams by then!

My art practice has its roots in this place in the hills near Dungog. Materials and ideas have flowed from here. For some time now it has led me to explore ideas about the richness of a relationship to place and how memory is embodied – like remembering the feeling of lying on a hot rock face watching lizards by the river when I was twelve years old.

My work continues to be informed by these interests but has, once again, been overtaken by the threat of a dam which would destroy this fertile valley and the lives it contains.



1968. Dad and from left me and sisters, Jude, Pen and Lou, Williams River.



1995. Mum, top of Manns Hill.



1968. Sisters (from left) Penny, Jude, Juliet. Williams River.

### The dam

We are told (again) by the bureaucrats at Hunter Water that they will dam the Williams River. The top of Manns Hill, which holds the ashes and memorials to family members, will be an island. From all the evidence (read it in this paper), the dam is the wrong thing to do.

There are 90 farming families being directly dislocated. Most have sold to Hunter Water with the threat of compulsory acquisition and, to my observation, Hunter Water Corporation's "carrot and stick approach", splitting and dividing the community. A few hold on, either refusing to sell or leasing back. In the meantime the valley has changed. Pastures are no longer cared for as they were in the past and the weeds are getting out of control.

Driving through the valley now, it feels (and looks) unkempt, a shadow of its former self.

*There is something really awful about the idea of drowning a place.*

*Dad tells me they take the roofs off the houses so they don't float.*

*Shame about all the other things that don't float.*

**SOME thinking**

Glenn Albrecht, the environmental philosopher has developed a concept to try and help understand the distress that "comes from the lived experience of unwelcome environmental change to a person's sense of place". He calls this 'solastalgia,' a term which draws from the meanings of solace and nostalgia and is an attempt to "describe the specific form of melancholia connected to lack of solace and sense of desolation in the everyday and lived experience of people within their 'home'".<sup>2</sup> As is the case with the dam there are *existential and emplaced feelings of desolation and loss of solace*<sup>3</sup> ...reinforced by a sense of powerlessness.

He has also coined the terms: '*Eutierria*' which he defines as a positive feeling of oneness with the earth and its life forces (eu=good, tierra=earth, ia= suffix for member of a group of {positive psychoterratic} conditions). and '*Soliphilia*' which is the political affiliation or solidarity needed between us all to be responsible for a place, bio-region, planet and the unity of inter-related interests within it.

In 2006 he co-authored a paper using Dungog as a town not affected by Solastalgia in comparison to Singleton which is affected (as a result of mining). In his letter in support of WRVAP, published in this paper, he acknowledges that Dungog is no longer Solastalgia free.

In his view "*Solastalgia will be overcome only when sufficient of us act in solidarity to defeat the forces of desolation. A cultural and political movement based on soliphilia is now needed to protect the possibility of that wonderful psychological state I call 'eutierria' being experienced by future generations.*"<sup>4</sup>

The Williams River Valley Artists' Project began out of talking to people about what was happening. Artists who have joined the project have a commitment to and a concern for the environment. Some know the place well, others are new to it.

The project aims to bear witness to, and raise awareness of, the plight of the Williams River Valley in the unique way art can do. I am grateful to the artists who have joined the project and provided their unique expression and enquiring minds to the experience of the Williams River valley.

1. <http://www.dungog.nsw.gov.au/about/1003/1010.html>

2. <http://healthearth.blogspot.com/search/label/Solastalgia>

3. <http://healthearth.blogspot.com/2010/06/solastalgia-soliphilia-eutierria-and.html>

4. <http://healthearth.blogspot.com/2010/06/solastalgia-soliphilia-eutierria-and.html>



## Suzanne Bartos

# Who counts the emotional cost?

### WHO COUNTS THE EMOTIONAL COST?

*The financial and environmental costs of flooding the Williams River Valley are hotly debated in the press but meanwhile the personal heartache and devastation of the local community goes untallied.*

**P**ATRICIA Middlebrook is a salt of the earth country woman with a heart of gold. I first met Patricia, dahlias in bucket, visiting her mother at the local cemetery. Patty tells me that she comes up regularly to have a chat with her mum, telling her what the grandkids are up to and to ask advice. The dahlias that she's brought to put on the grave came from her mother's bulbs.

Quart Pot cemetery where her family is buried will be flooded and inaccessible if the proposed Tillegra Dam goes ahead. Who can calculate her loss at not being able to visit and talk to her mother? Where are the costings? Hunter Water in their wisdom sent Patricia copies of the latest anthropological research describing in graphic, forensic detail the findings of 'successful' exhumations.

Water minister Mr Phil Costa says that he doesn't see any reason why Tillegra Dam shouldn't go ahead. But locals say that nobody has ever bothered to tell them why it



*R.I.P. - no chance. 2009-10*

My work has developed from reflecting on a powerful image shared with me by local resident Patricia Middlebrook. Patricia's mother is buried in Quart Pot Cemetery which will be under-water if the dam goes ahead. She said to me: "I sleep with a surfboard under my bed". It spoke to me of a threat that invades even sleep, the constant aware of an imminent flooding.

*Materials:* Old bed head and bed end, mattress cover, surfboard..

Total Agricultural College, Paterson, May 2010.

should go ahead.

Patricia says that she is not someone who would deny a person a glass of water if they needed it, and that while it would still hurt terribly if the dam was necessary, it would make her loss easier to bare. But the problem is, that is not the case.

## Letter to the editor

*Glenn Albrecht, Professor of Sustainability Murdoch University, Western Australia. Previously (until 2008) was Associate Professor, Environmental Studies, University of Newcastle NSW.*

**From:** Glenn Albrecht [mailto:G.Albrecht@murdoch.edu.au]

**Sent:** Thursday, 5 August 2010

**To:** Juliet Fowler Smith

**Subject:** The Silence of the Frogs

Hello Juliet, all power to you and your group and I wish I could help more. I have wanted to write formally to the NSW Govt opposing the dam but have been totally enveloped with WA issues like mining in Margaret River and coal in Collie (plus a solid work load at Murdoch University and caring for an aged mother in Perth).

It would be good if you could use some of the material from my Blog. The link: <http://healthearth.blogspot.com/2010/06/solastalgia-soliphilia-eutierria-and.html> ... covers some of the issues that relate art to solastalgia and soliphilia. That essay will appear in an Art magazine called *Mammut* sometime soon.

We have published a paper that used Dungog as a non-solastalgia town when compared to Singleton

(attached). I appreciate now, with the Dam issue, there are many who would see the area affected by the dam and its infrastructure as a deep source of solastalgia. I need to come back to Dungog and do some more research!

As for The Stuttering Frog I would want to say that it is a myth that frogs will continue to sit in slowly heating water then die as the temperature gets too hot for life. It is also a myth that they quickly jump out if placed into a pot of boiling water. They just die as their delicate and moist amphibian skin is instantly stripped by the boiling water.

However, what does kill frogs is loss of their habitat, and dam building for a frog that lives and breeds in flowing streams is as bad as boiling water for them.

As the stuttering is silenced there is solastalgia for the loss of a voice in nature's symphony. Along with the stuttering we no longer hear the sounds of free flowing water.

With the silencing of the frogs ... humans become deaf to life.

Lots of stuttering prevents solastalgia and deafness.

There is eutierria in stutters' songs and the streams.

Regards,  
Glenn.

### How will this disaster be recorded in the Dungog Museum?

Visitors to Dungog Museum come upon all sorts of history: photos showing the logging history of the area, beautiful embroidery, stuffed birds beautifully encased, pegs made to last generations, mystery farm machines and antique butter presses.

There has been some interesting thinking in museum curation lately about the important role local museums play in helping communities deal with trauma and catastrophe. And indeed Dungog has a room dedicated to the losses in both world wars, showing the burnt-out boarding house and lives lost, the helicopter that survived Chichescue in Rumania only to crash rescuing an injured bush walker in the Barrington Tops.

I wonder how this damming and flooding of the Williams River will be recorded in Dungog Museum? Unlike the other disasters recorded in the museum this disaster has split the community rather than uniting it. How does a museum record the division and disintegration of community? What is happening is a catastrophe, but will it be recorded?

## Neil Berecny-Brown

# things fall apart; the centre holds in the space between

*I remember things from before I was born.*

*I see things that are no longer visible.*

*I sit at the centre of time.*

*I hear distant sounds as loudly as near ones.*

*The smell of this place is my smell.*

*Who-I-am cannot be removed from here.*

*I see me from afar.*

*I see you.*

*Coming to kill me.*

### Tillegra

Once again the dynamic conflict between power and knowledge; of political expediency, peddled in the guise of “the public good”, overriding the wisdom of natural processes; needlessly erasing lives and land.

When destruction is done, farms lost forever, generations of family history and community heritage obliterated – no longer linked to a sense of place, we are all diminished.

In the Williams River valley, another battle in a timeless struggle is being waged. Instrumental power and arrogant authority, versus, knowledge, natural wisdom and understanding distilled from living with country for generations: knowledge resisting power, rather than power implementing knowledge.



Stuttering towards meaning, stumbling steps on the verge of clarity,  
Carrying certain knowledge held in uncertainty, suspension and abeyance,  
In Silence  
articulated

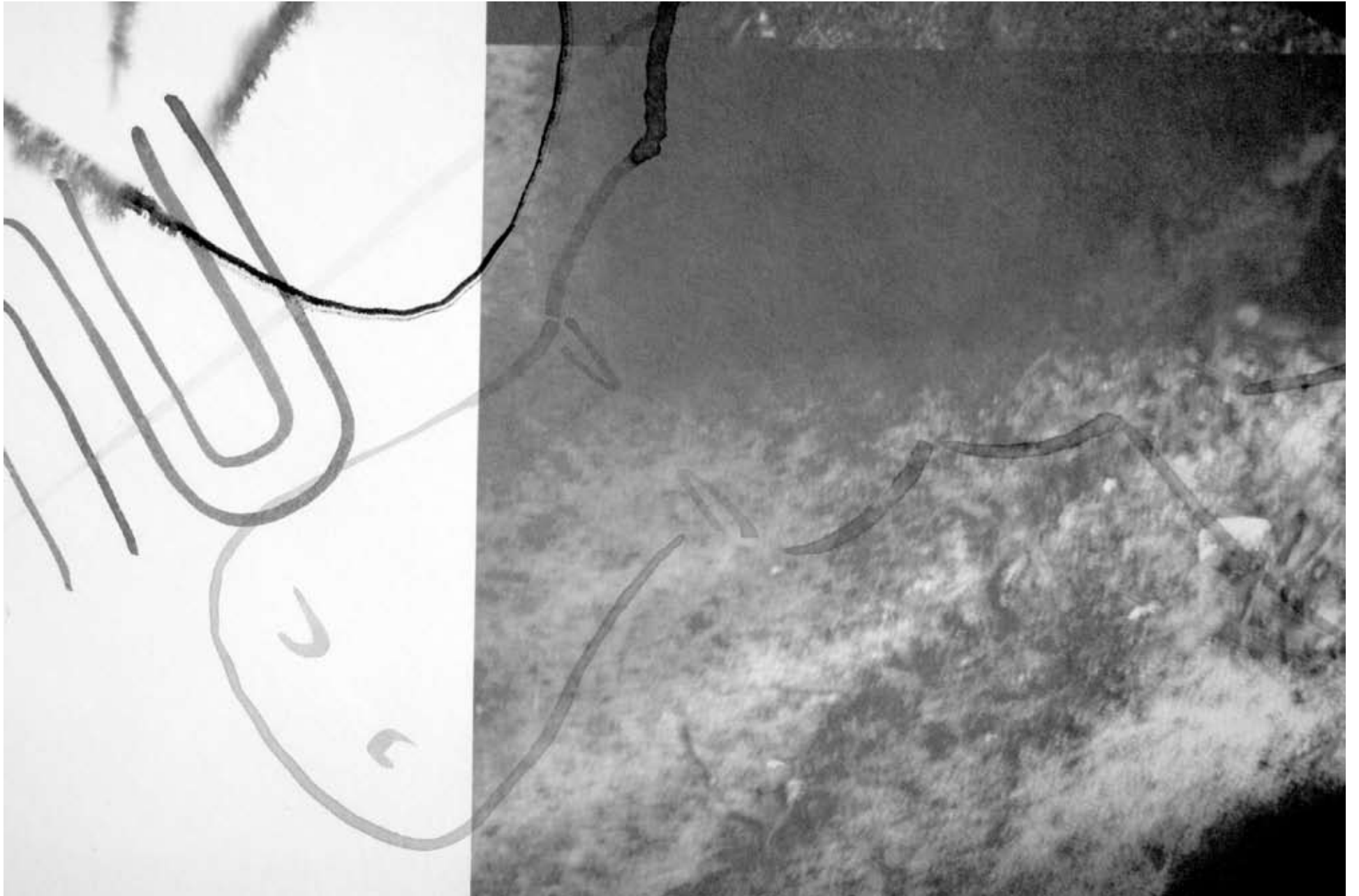
Voiced between the stutters of politics and self-interest.

When the m' moon shines, on the c' cow shed,  
(to be continued)



## Bonita Ely

# DelugeDrown



Bonita Ely, *DelugeDrown*, 2010 (detail). Ink jet print on rice paper, ink, silk, wood. 1000 cm long x 92 cm wide.

**R**ESearching the consequences of damming a river makes grim reading. Weighed with great caution, consequence suggests the social and environmental losses outweigh any material gain in the construction of the proposed Tillegra Dam in the Lower Hunter region.

The Hunter Valley is a well-endowed water catchment not known for its drought conditions. The dam on the Williams River will permanently flood rich agricultural soil that sustains year round food production - a rarity in Australia. The proposed dam will inundate the habitats of endemic creatures such as the platypus, the endangered stuttering frog; downstream the ecological balance of the wetlands is threatened. It is argued that water harvesting, recycling and efficiencies that are now commonplace for the conservation of water in the Sydney region will accommodate the projected increase in population in the area.

Building a dam of magnitude across a river is a permanent rupture. In her novel, *The Winter Vault*,

Anne Michaels draws profoundly affective analogies by poetically juxtaposing memories of the Holocaust with the extraordinary engineering feat that preserved the Abu Simbel Temple during the building of the Aswan Dam on the Nile alongside the Nubian people's devastating heartache as they witnessed the ever rising water, their vanishing homeland.

Using this dam as a precedent, we know the fertility of the Nile Valley's agricultural land has declined as the refreshing cycles of silt delivered by the river is now backed up inside the dam, useless. Similarly, nutrients lost to the Nile River's flow deleteriously affect the marine ecology and fish populations of the estuary and Mediterranean Sea. The soil quality downstream is threatened as the rising water table draws up salt. The Aswan Dam does generate electricity and provides a predictable source of water for an enlarged agricultural sector, but at great cost.

The Nubian people's loss of identity, hope and culture as adaptive practices replaced the tradi-

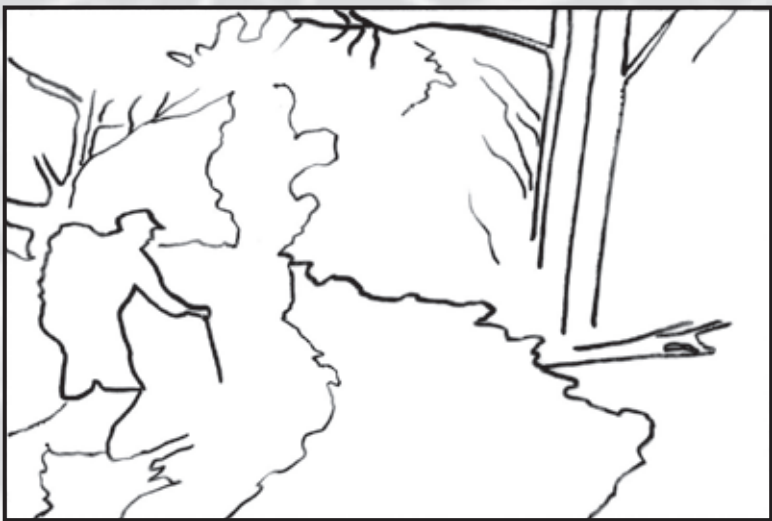
tional is a classic case of the social, human consequences of the invasive engineering of the natural environment. Similarly, the farming families along the Williams River have suffered prolonged distress, anticipating, then losing homes and livelihood, animals and farms, their family heritage, dispossessed.

The Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River, situated near six active fault lines, has displaced millions of people, inundated important cultural sites, and changed the ecology of the river upstream (turbidity, sedimentation), and downstream (erosion), exacerbating species extinction and increasing water pollution. It generates electricity.

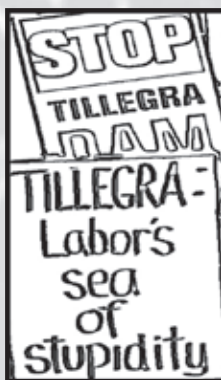
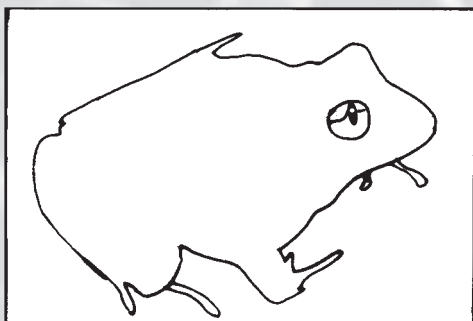
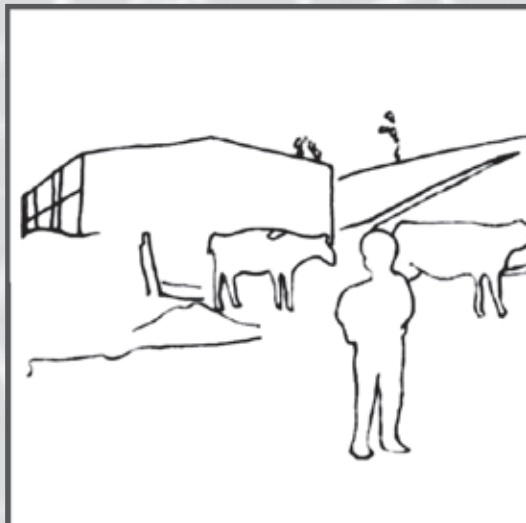
Is artificial water storage on the Williams River required? Will the Tillegra Dam be yet another instance, like the Murray Darling Basin, the Snowy River, of irreversible, critical attrition, a further degradation of Australia's fragile environment?

What are we about to lose? For what? *DelugeDrown* is a pause for thought ...

Barrington Tops



Tillegra



The Williams is the last free-  
It rises in the Barrington Tops  
the Hunter River  
The proposed dam at Tillegra would





flowing river in the Hunter region.  
and winds its way south-east to join  
just outside Newcastle.  
drown 21 kms of the river and its rich valley.

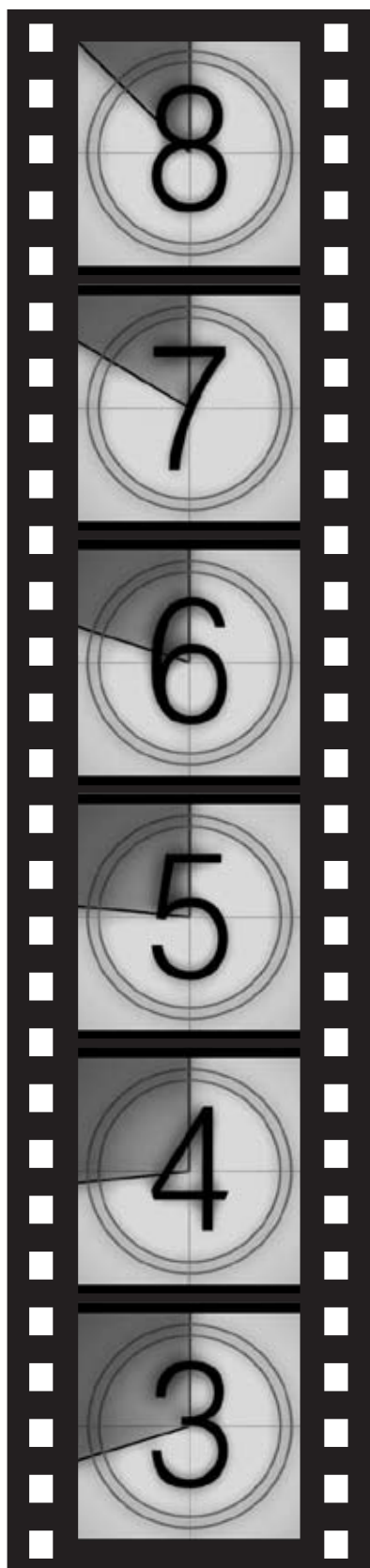


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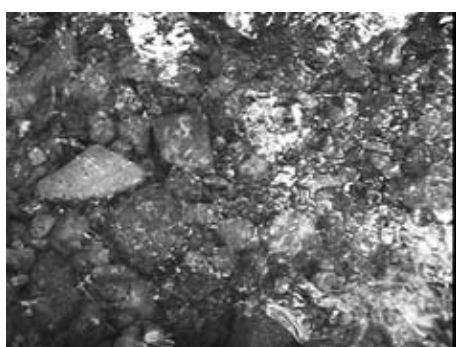
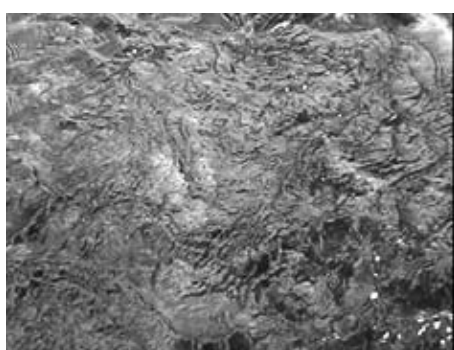
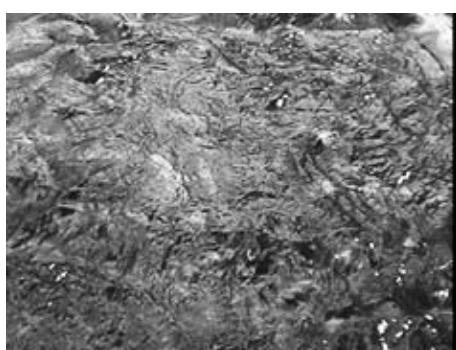
Noelene Lucas

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# Inundation!



*ARCHIVE: 12 SAMPLES OF CLEAN CLEAR WILLIAMS RIVER WATER. 2010.*  
One twenty fifth of a second times 12 from August 22nd 2009.  
Video stills.





## Bridget Nicholson

# *touch this earth lightly*

***We can urge each other to 'care more' about the environment, but until we have revised our sense of identity to include the natural world our best intentions may be in vain. The cure for our ecologically disastrous abuse of the earth and for our culturally debilitating racism is the spiritual renewal of consciousness.***

— David J. Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred - Transformation in Australia* 1995, P. 175

*Touch this earth lightly* is an installation of shoes made by wrapping people's feet in clay to form a pair of personal shoes that emphasise our link with the earth. The idea came during weekends spent at the Fowler Smith dairy farm in the Williams River Valley in 2009. We stayed in the old hut, and when we took our shoes off at the back door, we lined them up with the existing collection already there. Then,

as I sat shoeless on the veranda, I watched the cows traipse in and out for milking, their feet embedded in the mud or dust of the track, making me wonder how people would think of the earth if they too wore its shoes like that. So I thought of wrapping people's feet in clay, hoping that that would also be a means of making time for contemplation of the mark we leave on the earth, and how heavily or lightly we interact with the world around us, and the effect that this may have on the way that the land is regarded. Now I have been making clay shoes for people for two years and also recording our conversations about our connection to the environment, our feet, shoes, loves and losses. The growing number of clay shoes adds a lament for the loss of our connection to the earth that is felt by people from all over. *Touch this earth lightly* is an ongoing process with increasing numbers of people becoming part of the work through the clay shoes they line up

with those that came before.

The work is also a response to the experience of having moved to the Hunter area. It was the emptiness of the place that struck me in the beginning, and my inability to define and describe that feeling of loss. It felt like loss of a friend, the loss of my carers and protectors, not just mine but everybody's. But I also felt that I must be almost alone in wanting to animate trees and hills, rocks and animals to give them personalities and engage with them in my imagination, as the necessity of coal mining, the diversion of water for electricity generation, the devastation of the landscape seemed everywhere to be an inescapable necessity in the Hunter. I felt myself feeling becoming surprisingly apathetic rather than angry, and wondering whether my initial sense of emptiness was just because it was a new environment to me, and in time I too would acclimatise and accept the inevitable.

I think of the power stations and open cut mines I have seen in the

LaTrobe Valley in Victoria. Yesterday I drove through plantations of both pines and eucalyptus. This was the clincher. I felt overwhelmed by the manipulation of the landscape, nothing is natural, nothing is allowed to exist, to just be, it has to produce, has to make money. The river has to be made to change course to provide access to a new mine. There is no end to the churning, clanking, eating up of the landscape. I think of the desert, of the places I have been in Arnhem Land and WA, where the power of the land is palpable and the sense is not of people having power over the land but of the land being in charge.

Somehow I would like to provide an access point for people to touch that something inside themselves that puts them in contact with the earth and the elements, that values them, respects them, looks to them for the answers. Seeing ourselves as part of something much bigger - as humans, not an isolated group, but as part of the whole.



Above: *touch this earth lightly* installation, Tocal 2010

Right: *River Walk, backyard playing* 2010





## Margaret Roberts

# Concern residents may soak off

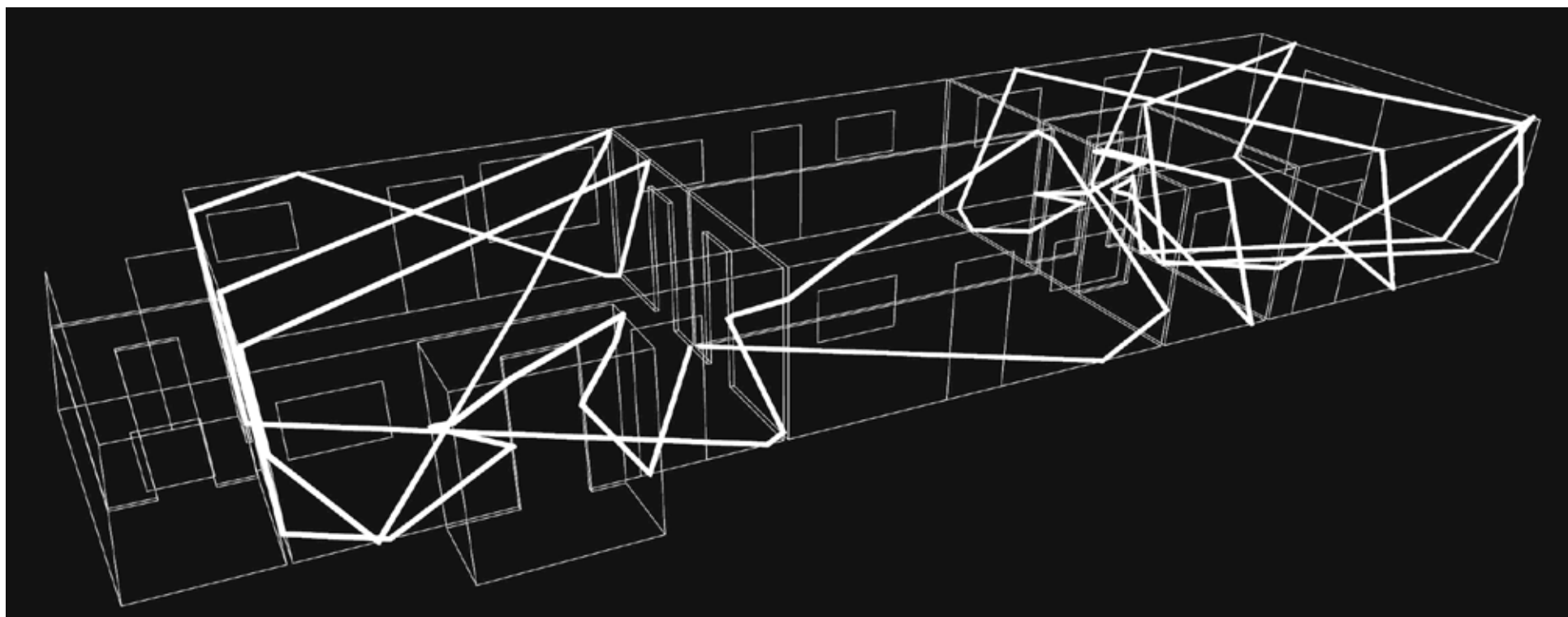
**C**ONCERN has been expressed that residents proposed for a possible underwater site may soak off over time, and end up on the surface of Tillegra Dam, risking entanglement with platypuses and water-skiers. This concern was raised by members of the Williams River Valley Artists' Project (WRVAP) when they met to decide whether to accept a proposal from the Straight-Line Residency Project (SLRP) for two straight lines to take up residence in Manns Hill Hut. This Hut is currently the dry residency site for the WRVAP, but, as it is one of the Munni buildings due to be submerged if the Tillegra Dam is built, WRVAP members wanted reassurance that the residency would survive prolonged submergence, i.e., that the lines would stick to their location and not float off as soon as the water started lapping around their edges. It rejected advice provided in the proposal from oil companies claiming experience in underwater attachment-control, and asked the SLRP to rethink its methods of attachment.

The proposed residencies are for the two straight-lines to occupy Manns Hill Hut in the shapes and lengths shown in the model below. The shapes are determined by where the lines start and the direction in which they begin to lie across the inner surface of the Hut, both of

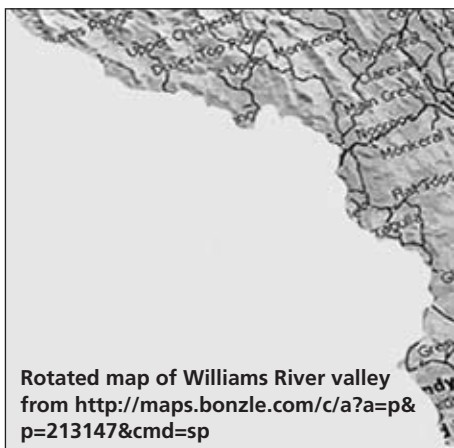
which determine how the Hut would bend them so they fit its own shape. The lengths are determined by the distance taken for them to return to their starting point, or somewhere close by. These proposals were produced by the computer program designed by Horst Kiechle, and selected from many possibilities because of their spatial economy—both residencies were preferred because they would enable the lines to occupy the Hut so that they returned to their starting points with the least disturbance to the Hut's other occupants.

The proposals are available on a 3D Sketchup program which enables viewers to twirl the modeled Hut and see, from any position or dis-

tance, how the lines would occupy the Hut. Two dimensional versions of these proposed residencies have been extracted from the program and model so they can be printed as flat lines. They show how they would appear (if they could be seen) from the top of Manns Hill, the only part of the planned inundation area that is expected to remain as an island if the dam wall is built and the valley filled with water. When these flattened lines are also filled-in to their outer edges, they become so abstract that they reveal little of their origin in Manns Hill Hut, just as the Tillegra Dam would erase its origin in the Williams River valley once it is filled.



Proposal for two Straight-Line Residencies in Manns Hill Hut by the Straight-Line Residency Project, an ongoing collaborative project by Margaret Roberts and Horst Kiechle. For more detail of the project see <http://straightlineresidencies.blogspot.com/>

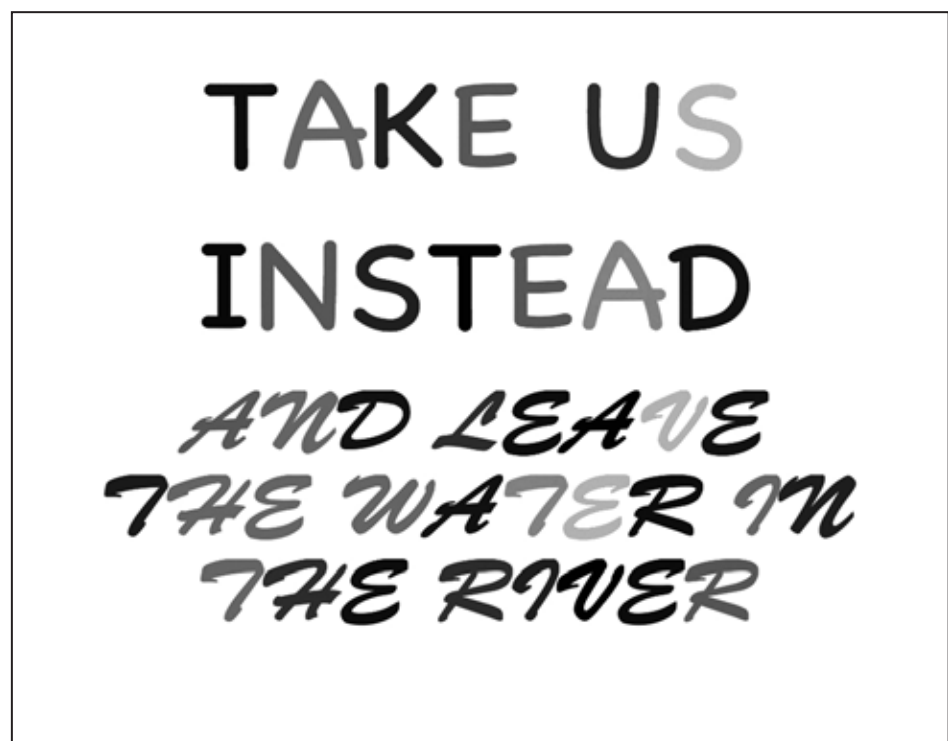


### Split Valley

*Split Valley* is made from maps of the Williams River valley split along the line of the river. The early stage of the project can be seen when a *bonzle* map of the entire Williams River valley is rotated counter-clockwise in Photoshop sufficiently so that the line of the river splits a square in two diagonally (as shown).

### The No Williams River Collection

*The No Williams River Collection* is being formed to help keep the Williams River alive and flowing from the Barrington Tops to the Hunter River near the sea. The collection is of Williams-objects that have been won or lost on ebay, in auctions that are a distant mirror of the bigger battles the community has fought since the 1950s over the collection of Williams River water to dam the valley at Tillegra and Munni. 'We are a ready-made collection of hardy Williams-objects and far less rare than healthy rivers', they say. 'Take us instead and leave the water in the river'. The collection continues to grow and is documented in a traveling slide show and on <http://nowilliamsriver.blogspot.com/>.



Title page of *The No Williams River Collection* slide show.



Toni Warburton

Prognosis

**House:** My fami-  
lies have  
left, but they  
have not all gone.  
I have learnt that  
when a valley is flooded  
to make a dam, they take  
the roofs off all the wooden  
houses. Otherwise the houses  
will float up and make trouble.

**Roof:** Maybe they won't remove me from my house of brick  
before the flood, I hope they let me be, then my wooden raf-  
ters will float me to the top of the hill behind my house,  
where I shall perch like a silly hat, a relic, an ark. But I  
won't be saving any living creatures. Of course they  
will have been digitally documented, and listed. I  
don't think a platypus can live at the bottom of  
a very deep dam with speed boats and water  
skiers scudding along the top and inhab-  
ited by farmed fish, fed on crushed up  
pellets of over-fished marine life.

Because I am old and charm-  
ing, created gradually over time  
from bricks made on my site, the  
dam people said they would relo-  
cate me: deconstruct and recon-  
struct me, brick by brick. Now  
they have decided against that.  
They are going to build a new  
visitors' centre. It will feature nos-  
talgic photographic prints of me and  
the lives of my families and a his-  
tory of the river valley. Beautiful  
pictures of birds  
and stuttering  
frogs and platy-  
pus and river oaks  
will be printed  
by designers onto  
backlit Perspex  
screens. There will  
be a sound scape.  
There will be tea  
towels, imported  
souvenirs and  
soap. I will go  
down in history.

**Fence:** I was put  
up by local tra-  
ditional owners  
who were em-  
ployed to fence  
off their land from  
themselves. I will  
burbule a deep  
echo to the new  
border, the risen  
shore. Man made  
of course, with gi-  
gantic machines.

**Valley:** I have been  
from the air, imaged  
surveyed and  
mapped, printed and modelled. My life-  
blood of rivers and streams has always sus-  
tained plants, people, animals, birds and  
insects. The first people and their webs  
of connection authenticate my processes.  
Science catches up. Ecology gets the point  
and the 'can do' of technology overrides  
insight. I have been loved for my generos-  
ity by the settlers with their land grants.  
My river and streams kept on running to  
provide for crops and dairy cows. Farming  
changed my face. My brow is a protected  
forest in a National Park, but my river  
and my shape are threatened with deluge.

**Wetlands:** I am a house of sorts a, habitat,  
a home, a nursery, a conjurer of freshwa-  
ter and saltwater: a place of purifica-  
tion and balance where reeds, shallow  
waters, islands and currents create a  
magical food bowl and habitat for  
many creatures. Migratory birds  
connect my obligations to far  
off lands. If the valley of my  
river is dammed, the flow  
that sustains my life giv-  
ing balance will rupture  
and my labyrinthine  
systems will un-  
ravel and stagnate.

**Hill:**  
I will just manage  
to keep my head above  
water as I become a dam wall  
to hold water in. My catchment  
duties, to run my streams and rivu-  
lets into the river that winds through  
the valley, will be over. Nonetheless,  
I may wear a rakish roof over my  
head, as the dam laps greedily at  
my chin. I may just float away.

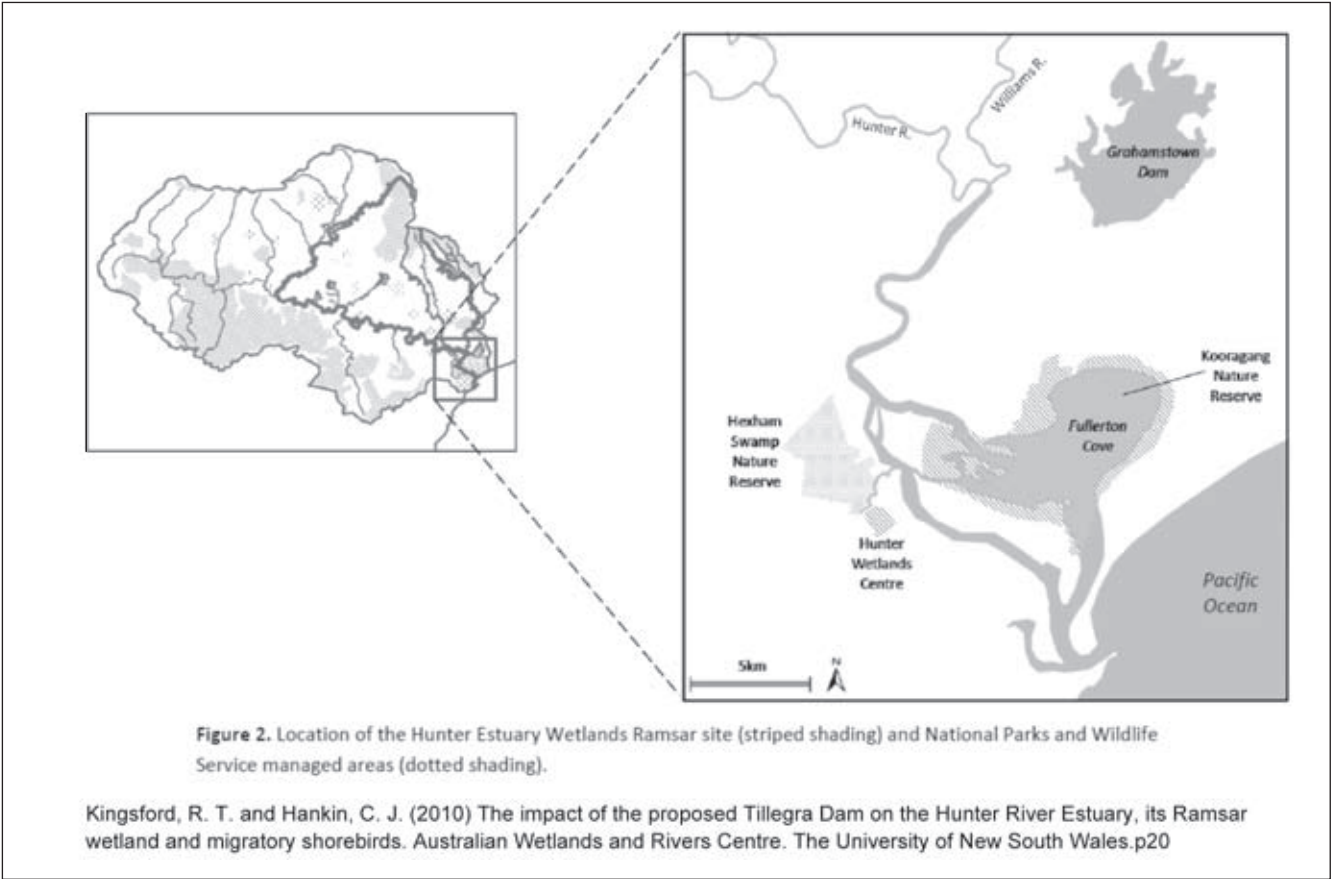
**River:** My banks are knit-  
ted with the roots of an-  
cient river oaks and home  
to the platypus, and other  
creatures. They are sheltered  
and shadowed with the dap-  
pled light that beams though  
leaves and branches. My cur-  
rents sound with rock holes  
and river stones, sandy  
banks and wind, of the  
voices and splashes of chil-  
dren swimming. My cool-  
ing waters come from above  
and below: rain, land water  
running from surround-  
ing hills, and groundwater  
springs. My fresh waters flow  
to the estuarine wetlands on  
the coast where they mingle  
with the salt to create nur-  
turing habitats for new life.



New South Wales- coal clay  
water wood-study11  
Media: glass, clay, water,  
laminated paper,canvas on  
wooden trestle.  
Dimensions about 1000mm  
x 400mm x 400mm  
Tocal, Paterson, NSW 2010



Munni House.  
Photo: Ken Rubeli.





## David Watson

# Who Cares Wins

I'D LIKE to tell you a couple of stories. At first glance they're unrelated. The first is about a living death with which many of us are unfortunately acquainted – the devastatingly slow yet inevitable demise of a parent. The second is a tale of a living death which might yet, with your help, be averted.

It's a beautiful crisp afternoon in Sydney. Late cicadas serenade the pale autumn sun. It seems inconceivable that anyone should spend this day sedated beneath antiseptic white cotton blankets on morphine, battling a tenacious life-threatening cancer, or shuffling in slippers beneath fluorescent light along a dank institutional corridor.

Until just before Xmas my 87-year-old mother struggled for the best part of a decade to live with and look after my slowly deteriorating father, at home. Although the casuarinas, the jacarandas, his favourite graceful Leopard Wood and slender waving wattle ('Goldilocks') brought him daily solace, Ken had never been an 'easy' man and the frustrations of age only made him more brittle.

Increasingly irascible, irrational and depressed, Dad was finally diagnosed with dementia at 91 and placed into permanent care, his despair thinly veiled via medication and memory loss. For a year, he shuffled about and remained extraordinarily glad to see me when I reminded him who I was. Val (his wife of 66 turbulent years) appeared thankfully to have evaporated almost entirely from his consciousness. So we spoke not of Mum, nor cancer, but of nature, the seasons, and his new favourite tree - a giant urban eucalypt whose alabaster limbs spread high beyond its rough-barked base and the polite green bars of Ken's kindly Christian corral.

Although (incongruously) for many years Dad had managed a heavy earth-moving equipment franchise in Silverwater, selling graders and dozers to cockies and councils up and down the East coast – his true love was the 'unimproved,' untrammelled bush. Birds particularly.

And though he couldn't remember many of their names – as long as he could look up at the sky

and dream of the Wimmera (where he camped and canoed as a boy) he'd keep the Alzheimer's at bay (the 'living death' the carers call it). Or at least that was my little delusion. Somehow, though, I didn't have the heart to tell him about the Williams River.

WHILST caring for my sick old folks throughout 2009 I'd become involved with a group of Sydney artists concerned to draw attention to the 'living death' of another fragile organism - the glorious Williams River valley, up near Barrington Tops, north of Dungog. Threatened with inundation by damming since the 1950s, the valley's lifeforce was eroding, fragmenting. Hope that its rich soil, verdant pastures, undisturbed wildlife and precious human histories might be saved was fast evaporating under the slick corporate spin of Hunter Water, a tributary of the NSW Government, about to hit local residents hard with rate hikes to pay for a dam they didn't need.

Today, as the public awakes, opposition to the Tillegra Dam swells. The Williams River Valley Artists' Project has mounted two modest exhibitions up in the region to protest the folly of the development; and now a third, in Sydney, a little closer to the 'decision makers' in Macquarie Street.

Because losing a river is NOT – unlike losing a parent – INEVITABLE.

As aboriginal Australians have long known - the river, the land, 'country' IS us. By caring for our special places we respect and honour the spirits of those who have inhabited and will inhabit them. By repairing and loving 'country', by tightening our belts, mending our ways and living more sustainably, much is possible.

I'd like you to listen to my elders, as their voices, raised now in protest, carry on the wind: to Val, who died peacefully in hospital in May 2009 and to Ken, for whom Xaron and his ferryboat returned soon after. Kindly parents who loved read-



*River Mourn, David Watson, 2008.*

ing and raised a wombat (the best pet a boy could have) in suburban Sydney. People who lived simply and loved the bush. Who knew its trees, its birds and walked and camped its wilds. Who passed these pleasures on to me, and to my children.

Such voices flow more loudly now. They are chattering and chinking, pouring and spilling. Listen carefully - together they form a gentle roar - not unlike the rapids at Tillegra after rain.

If we are to escape 'the living death' of environmental disregard, Governments must begin to listen to these voices. With apologies to Mike Whitney, I would like to suggest a fresh mantra for us all ... WHO CARES WINS.



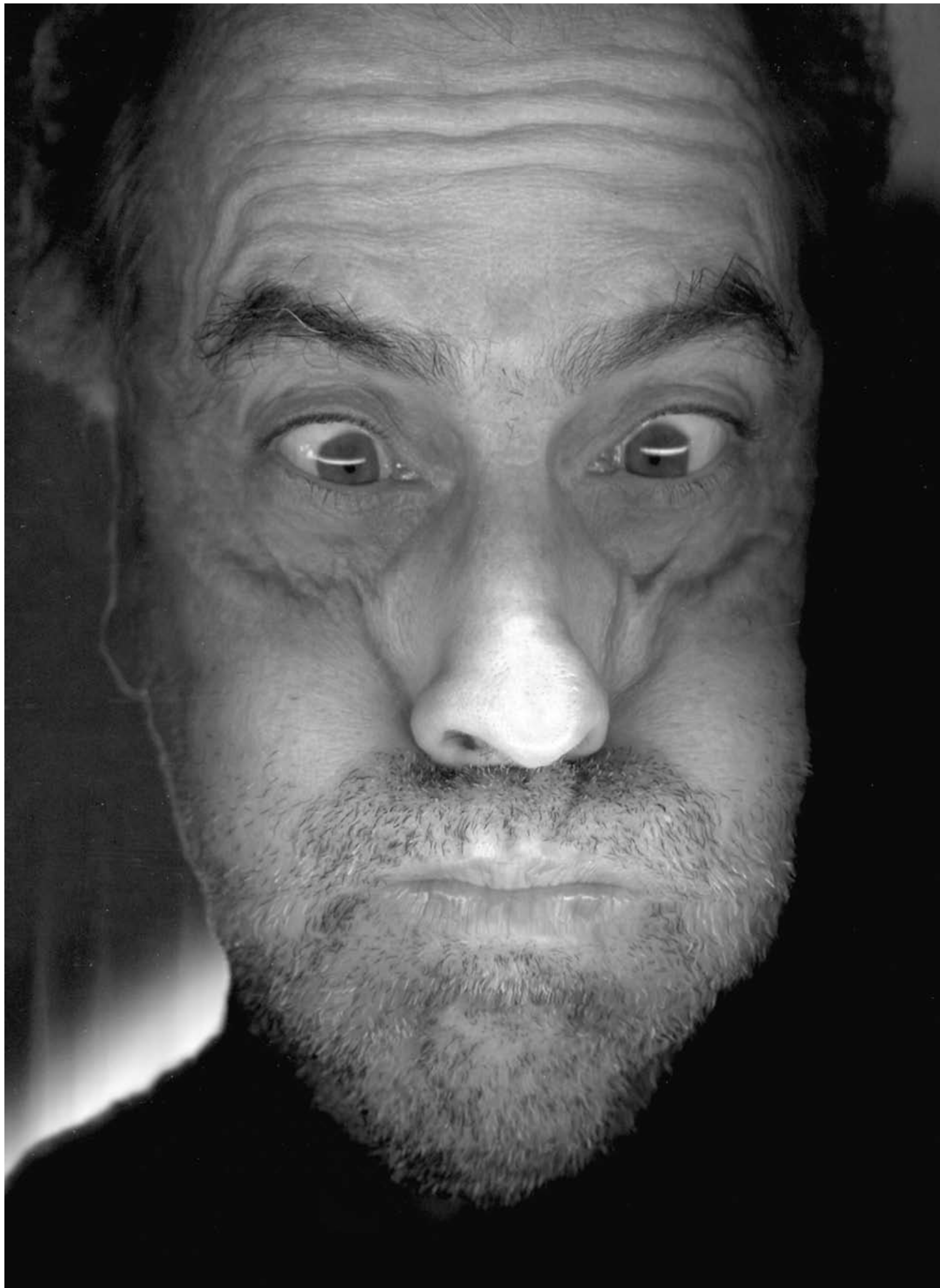
*Crying Man*

Ken Watson – self-portrait drawn in condensation on the living room window, in Dundas, 2007.



*Vanishing Point*  
David Watson, 2009.





*Holding Breath*, David Watson, 2010.



# Dam the Williams River?

**B-B-B-B-B**

**BUT**

The Tillegra Dam would inflict significant and unacceptable environmental and biodiversity impacts on the Hunter Estuary and its Ramsar-listed wetland sites.

**BUT**

The Environmental Assessment fails to adequately model the complexities and potential impacts of the building of Tillegra Dam

**BUT**

It would drown the Williams River which is the only river in good condition along almost the entire length of the Hunter and Paterson system.

**BUT**

Reduction of flow at Kooragang Island is likely to further impact on the declining shorebird population.

**BUT**

There will be significant impacts on the transportation of nutrients and sediments downstream, essential to downstream ecosystems and biodiversity.

**BUT**

Reduced frequency of larger floods due to river regulation will reduce aquatic food webs, potentially causing invasion of exotic species.

**BUT**

There will be significant risks to the survival of threatened flora and fauna protected under the EPBC.

**BUT**

There will be a loss of 4000 hectares of land to Hunter Water control, including prime agricultural land.

**BUT**

Twelve 'threatened' flora species, 7 listed under the EPBC Act, could be lost.

**BUT**

Forty four local 'threatened' fauna species, 12 listed under the EPBC Act, could be lost.

**BUT**

Seven endangered ecological communities (EEC), including one EEC listed under the EPBC Act, and 200 hectares of River-Flat Forest on Coastal Floodplains currently protected under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995, could be destroyed.

**BUT**

A 'significant' platypus colony of 30+ would be destroyed, and a koala population lost.

**BUT**

Threatened frog species, including the stuttering and giant barred frog, green-thighed frog, green and golden bell frog could be lost.

**BUT**

After the initial construction of the proposed dam there will be a significant and permanent reduction in jobs.

**BUT**

There will be significant impacts on the Hunter seafood industry and the supply of fresh seafood to the Sydney seafood markets.

**BUT**

Lower-cost water efficiency and management projects, and the upgrading of existing infrastructure would not only secure the future of the Hunter's water supply, they would also provide a much greater boost to the economy and create many more jobs.

**BUT-BUT-BUT-BUT**

It is a model of infrastructure planning that is technically and philosophically anachronistic. It has been around for fifty years. It works against the emergence of New Ruralism and the Creative Rural Economy, developments that foster an integration of environment, heritage, new enterprises, culture, food security, and knowledge-based activities, in forging new alignments appropriate to the urgent needs of sustainability we are encountering now, and which will become critical in the very near future.

The New Ruralism model is gaining currency both here and overseas, but our politicians seem to be steering into the future looking in the rear vision mirror, a problem Marshall McLuhan warned about fifty years ago.

Kingsford, R. T. and Hankin, C. J. (2010) The impact of the proposed Tillegra Dam on the Hunter River Estuary, its Ramsar wetland and migratory shorebirds. Australian Wetlands and Rivers Centre. The University of New South Wales.

## Forum in the Shed

### Currents and Reflections

A Forum to coincide with the *Cry Me a River* exhibition at the Tin Sheds Gallery, 148 City Rd, Darlington, The University of Sydney, NSW 2006.

**2-4pm, Saturday 16 October 2010**

Join the artists for a round-table discussion in the gallery to talk about the Williams River Valley Artists' Project. Admission free

## What can you do?

By the time you read this paper there may well be a determination from the NSW Dept of Planning.

**Please TELL the State Labor Government to STOP THE TILLEGRA DAM**

**Water Minister Phillip Costa** mail to: office@costa.minister.nsw.gov.au

**The Premier, Kristina Keneally** mail to: premier@nsw.gov.au

**Link to signing the Wilderness Society online petition** to NSW Premier Kristina Keneally <http://wilderness.org.au/tillegra>

**If you live in the Hunter contact your local member.**

**Maitland area:**

**Mr Frank Terenzini**, PO Box 212 MAITLAND NSW 2320. email: maitland@parliament.nsw.gov.au

**Newcastle area:**

**Ms Jodi McKay**, PO Box 1816 NEWCASTLE NSW 2300. email: newcastle@parliament.nsw.gov.au

**A few good points to raise with politicians or in letters to newspapers:**

- The Williams River is one of our last free flowing and healthy rivers in NSW, we don't want another Murray-Darling catastrophe
- There are cheaper and less environmentally destructive options to secure water supply, such as water efficiency, demand management and recycling.
- Why are Hunter residents already paying for this expensive dam prior to State or Federal Government approval through increased water rates?
- The recent Kingsford report clearly outlines huge risks to our internationally recognized Ramsar listed Hunter Estuary Wetlands if the dam goes ahead.
- Independent water planning analysis shows the dam is unnecessary; the Hunter has plenty of water supply to support the projected population increase.
- Please withdraw Tillegra Dam as an option immediately.

### Non-Violent Direct Action.

**Are you prepared to put your body on the line to Save the Williams River?**

If so, please contact No Tillegra Dam group: [www.notillegradam.com](http://www.notillegradam.com) and leave your details (email addresses) so that if it comes to Non-Violent Direct Action there will be lots of people to call on.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

**No Tillegra Dam Group**  
[www.notillegradam.com](http://www.notillegradam.com)

**The Wilderness Society**  
[www.wilderness.org.au/williams](http://www.wilderness.org.au/williams)

Copies of reports about Tillegra dam are available for download from: [www.wilderness.org.au/articles/further-reading](http://www.wilderness.org.au/articles/further-reading)

