

Petri Dish Pink

Julie Wilson-Foster

Petri Dish Pink is an exhibition that puts forward questions which discuss the sustainability of our environment and planet. How do we maintain earth's booming population? And provide every living being with nourishment or the necessities of life? How do we maintain our earth so the planet can continue to produce the crops needed by the masses? How do we stop contamination of our environment within these parameters?

Our soil is now degraded by constant rotation of crops yet once it was rich with organic decay and unconsolidated products of rock erosion. Now the soil needs to be constantly replenished with fertilisers to enable crops to be grown and thus provide for the world.

Salinity is caused by the removal of native vegetation and trees that once kept the groundwater levels down. When trees are removed it allows the groundwater to rise and releases salt that has been deposited over the years by the wind and rain.

As of the year 2000, 4.7 million hectares of arable land in Australia alone has been affected, we need to seriously look at how to sustain our earth. Globally since 1945 we have lost 23% of productive land area...Most of this loss is permanent as it takes 200 years to restore one centimetre of soil via natural processes.

The five metre long sea of red lights bulbs softly illuminate the salt circle underneath creating a large Petri dish in which a strange new terrain is forming - the terrain of our future, if we are not careful. We are in a state of suspension, an eerie position. The ghostly forms of the suspended Super Phosphate bags echo again this strange new world.

Humanity urgently needs to acknowledge the damage that has been done in such a short period of time in relation to the age of our planet, and progressively set about putting into place preservation of what little remains of our natural world. With consideration of the earth and future generations, and with wise land management, the human race could learn to live in harmony with nature.

Thank you,
"I celebrate nature".
Julie Wilson-Foster 2005.

References:
Nielsen, Ron, 2005, The Little Green Handbook, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, Australia.

Julie Wilson-Foster is recognised nationally and internationally for her environmental artwork. She has shown her sculptures and installations in numerous solo and group exhibitions throughout the world. Julies has been acknowledged by Clean Up Australia, which has used her artworks in public campaigns and web sites, to discuss nationally the urgency of environmental awareness.

Julie Wilson-Foster lives in the far north Queensland and has her studio on a rainforest property in Kuranda. This region influences many of her artworks and she celebrates the magnificence of nature in her art.

Julie has a Bachelor of Arts with Honours from Curtin University, Western Australia. Her work is represented in the collections of: Kerry Stokes, Australia; Sir James & Lady Cruthers, Australia; Jack & Ellenor Bendat, Australia; Gomboc Gallery and Sculpture Park, Australia; Central Metropolitan College of TAFE, Australia; Ministry for Fair Trading Perth and Royal Perth Hospital.



Petri Dish Pink (detail), 2005, electrical components & salt, 600 x 500 x 500 cm

Thankyou to all who made this exhibition possible
Photography: David Campbell



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Petri Dish Pink (detail), 2005, 32 x 1000kg superphosphate bags and red light, 800 x 900 x 250 cm

Ecological Inscription

When we think of a work of art it is often in the context of how it is presented, a work on paper or canvas, perhaps in a picture frame or a sculpture on a plinth. With *Petri Dish Pink* Julie Wilson-Foster contradicts our common perception of art and engages with the specific space of the gallery, transforming it into an environment. In the tradition of Installation Art, Wilson-Foster deals with the nature of space as an essential component of expression.

Navigating your way through the gallery becomes an expedition.

Petri Dish Pink engulfs the gallery space, totally compressing its circumstance, creating external physical conditions that affect individual nature. It is an artwork that surrounds and influences its witness, soliciting a questioning response.

With red light the artist imbues the installation with an ethereal energy that remains ambivalent to the greater meaning intended. It permeates the installation like a stain, suggesting hidden alchemical forces are at work. The electrical components suggest the struggle of energy on the scale of a terrestrial sphere, but it is the struggle between humanity and the natural sphere that has informed Wilson-Foster. The threat and reality of ecological disaster is central to the artist's concern and one that has become an important subject in contemporary art. In particular Wilson-Foster presents questions aimed at large-scale agricultural monoculture and Australia's dryland salinity problems.

Over the last decade, Australians have gained greater awareness of the causes of salinity, the risks they pose and what needs to be done to manage or prevent them. Without intervention, biodiversity and fresh water supplies will decline, severely eroding agricultural production and infrastructure. Australia's salinity problems are the result of decades of widespread land clearing, agricultural monoculture and irrigation practices. There is no single solution to this ecological

crisis. However, new hydrological and agricultural practices are reintroducing species that tolerate saline conditions and combat rising water tables and levels of salinity.

In the gallery, 32 suspended, empty, 1000kg fertilizer bags lined up in drill formation are a slightly hostile expression of agricultural monoculture. Like walking through the furrows and stands of a crop field, the installation engulfs and disorientates. All the senses become active as receptors for meaning.

Monocultures are criticised by ecologists because of the large amount of chemical inputs often required to sustain them, and for their lower biodiversity. The environmental movement seeks to change popular culture by redefining the "perfect lawn" to be something other than a turf monoculture, and seeks greater encouragement for more diverse cropping systems.

Akin to sounding an alarm, Wilson-Foster has directed her practice to art that is more socially and environmentally defined. Her engagement is based on the realisation that we live in a world in crisis. Unwilling to participate in a practice where success is based on monetary values and individualistic complacency, her work substantiates different ideals and a different philosophy of life. The familiar commodity of the art object has been decommissioned and in its place transgressive ideas have been poetically investigated.

For *Petri Dish Pink* the gallery is a vehicle for social and political inscription.

Russell Milledge November 2005