

## Remediation as art

Is caring for the environment a kind of artwork? Stephanie Radok talks to Gavin Malone in South Australia.

For a decade the art practice of Gavin Malone has been concerned with ecological rehabilitation and cultural interpretation including collaboration with Indigenous people. Projects include photography, billboards, urban interventions and sculpture as well as The Tjirbruki Gateway



*Tjirbruki Narna arra'* in 1995 with Sherry Rankine and Margaret Worth at Warriparinga, working with engineers on a weir on the Sturt River and the re-alignment of Angaston Creek in the Barossa Valley.

Malone suggests that the combination of artworks in the landscape and revegetation that Greg Johns and he are undertaking at Johns' 185 ha property at Palmer, on the escarpment overlooking the plains of the River Murray, 75 kms from Adelaide, is not just a sculpture park within a Landcare project but actually reconceptualises art as ecology.

**SR:** What has been happening at Palmer that could be called art as remediation/regeneration?

**GM:** Remediation/regeneration is about both social processes and ecological outcomes. A symbiotic relationship is therefore being established between art and ecology. Firstly there is a change of land management from primary production to cultural production. Cessation of stock grazing enables natural regeneration of grasslands and some tree species. This is assisted, in collaboration with Bush for Life, by a revegetation program involving direct seeding, hand-planting and feral pest control. Permanent and temporary sculptural works have been installed to be engaged in this specific place, a former grazing property thus a degraded ecosystem. Over 400 people visited the inaugural exhibition by nine artists in March 2004 and were exposed to the artworks as well as the ecological problems and solutions. This was not just viewing art but experiencing place and being part of a broader change in values. With increasing climate, ecological and population pressures all human activity must be measured against critical issues of social and ecological sustainability. Arts practice is also affected. Art has a long history of change, of re-imagining itself and society. It now faces the challenge of limiting its resource consumption and impact as well as imagining a new situation which incorporates active participation in ecological remediation.



**LEFT:** Gavin Malone *Earth spirit softly erodes ego* (detail of *Chthonic Voices*) 2004, one of six engravings on River Redgum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), 1.9 m high.

**RIGHT:** Greg Johns *Corridor 2* 2004, steel, stainless steel, burnt wood, stone, 1.8 to 3.0 m high (ea.)

**SR:** How many trees have been planted?

**GM:** 6000 plants have been direct seeded and 1000 hand-planted, mainly wattles, sheoak and red gum to mimic 'landscape memory' but survival rate is low. Natural regeneration is therefore most important with native pines, golden wattles, grass trees and shrubs, along with grasses and bulbs, about 500 plants altogether noticed to date. Seed material supplied by Trees for Life is sourced within 5km of the property.

**SR:** How is the regeneration at Palmer different from any other regeneration project?

**GM:** In a physical sense the methods and outcomes are similar. Palmer is different in the intent which is to create a three way interaction between art, audience and ecology, to broaden the arts discourse and facilitate connectedness between the intellectual, the sensorial, the educational and the ecological. Without the regeneration the art would be mere folly. 🙄

An exhibition of twenty artists is planned for March 2006 at Palmer. It will also be a host site for the *Murray Darling Palimpsest 2006*.