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Faculty of Arts

Research Unit in  
Public Cultures

Research Unit in Public Cultures

A report on behalf of Arts House and  
the City of Melbourne

# REFUGE 2017 EVALUATION: HEATWAVE

## Refuge 2017 Evaluation Report

The University of Melbourne in Association with Arts House and the City of Melbourne.

Prepared by the Research Unit in Public Cultures in the School of Culture and Communication.

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# INTRODUCTION

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There is a prescient paragraph in the book *Rules for Radicals* (1971) in which the author Saul Alinsky summarises a basic premise of his work advocating for community action in overcoming the failings he observed in society:

‘[People] cannot be denied the elementary right to participate fully in the solutions to their own problems. Self-respect arises only out of people who play an active role in solving their own crises and who are not helpless, passive, puppet-like recipients of private or public services. To give people help, while denying them a significant part in the action, contributes nothing to the development of the individual. In the deepest sense it is not giving but taking – taking their dignity.’ (Alinsky, 1971, 123)

While Alinsky was writing with the particular socioeconomic concerns of disadvantaged, twentieth-century Americans in mind, the relevance of his ideas extends beyond the sphere of 1970s grassroots activism and into the very anatomy of modern, policy driven societies in the West. If we grant the premise that people need to be active participants in their recuperation or advancement in order to satisfy their roles as social and intelligent beings, we might then ask:

- *To what extent should we all be given the opportunity to aid ourselves in times of crisis and emergency, rather than relying solely on public services?*
- *And can we also be valuable participants in processes of mass, collective recovery?*

These questions are investigated and, to a large extent, answered in the ongoing program of cultural and community-oriented events taking place under the banner of *Refuge* at Arts House in North Melbourne. With issues of climate change, disaster preparedness and equity at its core, *Refuge* engages contemporary art practice to explore how communities and their diverse members can be effective operatives in their own survival and recovery. The focus on creative practice in the program also foregrounds the ways in which artists can offer unique, imaginative insights into some of the most pressing issues in our contemporary lives; and, in turn, propose potential solutions. The principal event of *Refuge* in 2017 was a 24-hour relief centre simulation which encompassed art installations – alongside community and emergency services displays and presentations – designed to involve members of the public in a proscribed disaster scenario. In 2017, this scenario was a catastrophic heatwave.

The annual cycle of *Refuge* is multipart with an emphasis on knowledge exchange at various levels and through many avenues, including: the LAB, a preparatory workshop involving artists and stakeholders held some months before the public events, with the aim of facilitating a critical exchange of ideas on questions related to the conceptual underpinnings and format of the year’s emergency scenario; the public events of *Refuge*, which welcome local community and city-wide attendees to participate in art, cultural displays and emergency services demonstrations based around the designated

emergency scenario; and the Evaluation Day, where artists and stakeholders are invited to make presentations on their experiences and learnings from the current year and consider, between themselves, what they hope to achieve from the project in the years ahead.

*Refuge*, which began in 2016 and will continue until 2020, is supported by state and local institutions, public sector representatives and community leaders, brought together in this project through a shared recognition of the need for alternative models for managing public crises. This collective drive for change signals a contemporary shift away from established systems of top-down, centralised disaster management towards emerging models which encourage communities to assume greater responsibility for not only alleviating systemic crises like climate change, but also managing sudden emergencies in their neighbourhoods, such as floods and heatwaves. Partner organisations in the program are City of Melbourne, Emergency Management Victoria and Red Cross Australia.

As part of its involvement in *Refuge*, the Research Unit in Public Cultures (RUPC) at the University of Melbourne has been tasked with undertaking annual evaluations of the events in the five-year program, with the goal of contextualising findings within the broader perspective of arts and humanities scholarship. *Refuge 2017 Evaluation: Heatwave* draws on evidence gathered through detailed observation during key events, interviews with artists and stakeholders, as well as surveys administered to public attendees on the day of the 24-hour relief centre simulation. A primary aim in the evaluation process is to track critical areas of change and growth in the program across each of its annual iterations. The evaluation is also designed to assess whether changes to the framework of *Refuge* which occur between the program’s yearly cycles deliver outcomes that are beneficial to the requirements and experiences of both project stakeholders and public participants.

This report begins by offering an executive summary of the 2017 findings and an overview of the purpose and design of the current evaluation, before isolating and discussing key themes foregrounded in the evaluation using methodologies and recent scholarship in the fields of the arts and humanities. Where applicable, this report will highlight areas of change or transition in the format of *Refuge* between the inaugural cycle in 2016 and the following year’s iteration. It will then conclude by proposing select recommendations that might be trialed in the cycles to come, while linking these recommendations to the specified targets and growing accumulation of learnings produced by the program’s stakeholders and participants across the ongoing *Refuge* program.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The different spheres of knowledge brought together in *Refuge* – creative, scientific, governmental and logistical – are rarely given such pronounced liberty to interact with each other.

It has become increasingly clear that this is one of the greatest values of the program: it serves as an exceptional site for the exchanges of ideas.

Responses to *Refuge* in 2017 painted a picture of a valuable cultural experience and an innovative experimental exercise in preparedness. Feedback from artists and stakeholders foregrounded the benefit of the growing sense of community and communication they experienced in the second iteration of the project; while attendees of the 24-hour event emphasised how the specific interactive artworks they experienced were helpful for acquiring new skills and practical information related to withstanding a heatwave. The art created for the event ranged from the highly dynamic and scientific, such as Latai Taumoepeau's energy-generating work located in the main hall of Arts House, to the more contemplative and conversational, like Lorna Hannan's installation in the basement of the building, which encouraged reflection through tea-drinking and poetry. Indigenous artists Vicki Couzens and Emily Johnson used their art-making to enact cultural welcome and explore 'how we might practice potential crisis responses in different ways that bring actual healing, so that our actions shift and change the future.'

The evaluation found a number of practical areas that could be improved, in line with the project's ambitious community engagement goals. These include giving greater attention to the public narratives and shaping visitor expectations of the event, and the need to enhance visitor flows around the many spaces of the Arts House venue, as well as considering greater access for visitors with disabilities. One survey respondent noted of the layout of the relief centre simulation: 'Some areas, especially the main hall, appeared to be a bit complicated.' This feedback is particularly valuable in revealing what information was being received by attendees and where there were gaps in the information flow, related particularly to the activities and art works they were being asked to participate in. Nevertheless, *Refuge 2017* was shown to be a remarkably inclusive, coherent and well-planned series of events. All of the survey responses completed during and immediately following the 24-hour event held at Arts House were emphatically positive, with language such as 'thought provoking' and 'supportive' being used repeatedly alongside descriptions of attendees' experiences and the new knowledge they acquired on the day.

*Refuge 2017* built strongly on the learnings, experience and relationships that were initiated in 2016 (Yue, Trimboli and Biase, 2017), developing forms of technical, conceptual and social knowledge that will aid our preparedness for the near and far futures. It is clear from the interviews conducted during the evaluation process that, as the artists and emergency management stakeholders have worked more closely together during the discussions and events in the first two years of the

program, conceptual boundaries and preconceptions about convention and traditional processes have been proportionally challenged and extended and, as a result, new ideas concerning community resilience, participation and preparedness are being tried and tested. There was shown to be much greater emphasis on horizontal learning in 2017, with the variety of knowledges afforded equal standing in exchanges which took place between the program's stakeholders.

General Manager of Arts House Catherine Jones views this as an important development in the growth of *Refuge* between 2016 and 2017: 'Artists are well positioned to navigate the complexity of wicked problems, and there was real understanding of this from emergency service organisations evident in this year's LAB. In year 1 the LAB was a one-way exchange between emergency services and artists, but the LAB in year 2 was more of a level playing field.' Such outcomes, which demonstrate a building recognition of community in the program, endorse the decision to stage *Refuge* not as a single event, but as a maturing program of annual cycles.

The five-year *Refuge* program represents a conceptually complex cultural undertaking, bridging many fields in an effort to establish fundamentally new approaches to the growing threats of climate change. The outcomes and lessons from *Refuge 2017* are necessarily complex, as they deal with the nexus of two complex systems: diverse communities in which spatial proximity does not map easily onto social relatedness; and extreme climate events, which are increasing in scale, frequency and duration. This will continue to be a highly complex bind of interrelated issues sitting at the heart of the program as it progresses towards the final iteration in 2020. With a key objective being an emphasis on creatively-led experimentation, it is the suggestion of this evaluation that the program will be best served by rejecting staid convention in the format of its yearly cycles and embracing a malleable and changing set of events and agendas each year.

As Steve Cameron from Emergency Management Victoria noted as part of the 2017 evaluation process, each disaster that occurs in the world around us presents its own challenges. He further advised:

'Please do not create a template of how we did it last year, [as this creates] structures and templates that won't work [in new situations]: there are too many variables and challenges in any disaster.'

# EVALUATION PURPOSE AND DESIGN

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The purpose for undertaking a critical, scholarly evaluation of *Refuge 2017* are manifold, but it is important to directly dismiss the notion of the evaluation process as being judgemental, intrusive or bureaucratic.

This evaluation sits within a broader network of linkages between university research and public institutions in Australia and, more particularly, within an ongoing affiliation between the Research Unit in Public Cultures (RUPC) at the University of Melbourne, the City of Melbourne and Victorian state services. The current evaluation report is the second publication to be produced in a five-year investigative project which began in 2016 and, consequently, it serves a function both as an extant analysis of the events and learnings of *Refuge 2017: Heatwave* and as a record of shifts and developments that have occurred at this stage in the five-year project. These developments related not only to how the *Refuge* program changes from one year to the next, but also to any modifications in the analytical processes and frameworks used in the annual evaluations.

The 2017 report utilises theoretical methodologies in the arts and humanities to situate *Refuge* – both the ongoing program and the recent iteration *Heatwave* – within the current landscape of scholarship in the areas of participatory practice, community-based policy initiatives, climate change and socially engaged art. This approach allows for a critical understanding of the contributions and innovations of *Refuge* in relation to historic, national and global patterns in art practice and public policy, thereby allowing for an expansive view of what the program is achieving on a local, national and international level and the learnings that are being produced through the many strands of the program (preparatory, performative and evaluative).

The evaluation also serves as a mechanism for bringing together individual participants' and organisations' interpretations into one narrative. In his introductory remarks during the Evaluation Day at Arts House on 23 November, 2017, Dr Lachlan MacDowall from the RUPC described for the artists, stakeholders and other individuals who were present the role of the evaluation process as a means of gaining a more cohesive view of the 24-hour relief centre event:

'Just because we are at something, doesn't mean we know exactly what happened. Sometimes we have an experience, but the meaning of that experience doesn't always follow. This [evaluation] isn't just about going through the various components of *Refuge*, it's also about helping us to get a shared understanding of what was effective about the things that actually happened on the day.'

In preparing the evaluation of *Refuge 2017*, the RUPC carried out a series of interviews with participating artists and stakeholders from the partner organisations, City of Melbourne and Emergency Management Victoria, immediately prior to and following the 24-hour event. Responses from interviewees have been woven into the current, thematically-arranged report and have been used to generate a experiential reading of *Refuge 2017* from different perspectives; factors pertinent to these perspectives include: the role of the interviewee on the day of the 24-hour event; their location in the Arts House building during different portions of the day (i.e. were they mainly situated in the basement area, on the first floor, in the main hall); and their desired outcomes, motivations or objectives in participating in *Refuge*. For example, the North Melbourne-based artist Lorna Hannan was located in the basement during the daytime segment of the event, overseeing her exhibit *Crow's Corner* (2017), so her reading of visitor engagement and information flow would have been limited to her exhibit and to that area of Arts House. Dave Jones, also an artist in *Refuge 2017*, acknowledged that the distinct separation of spaces in the Arts House venue meant that a full understanding of how the event functioned was outside of his knowledge: 'I was upstairs and down the hall this year, so I wasn't sure if [all visitors who attended *Refuge*] had come in – I wasn't sure if people just stayed downstairs. [In the future] it might be necessary to take people by the hand and guide them to areas.'

Alongside interviews with artists and stakeholders, the RUPC also administered a survey at the 24-hour relief centre, with visitors directed by both Arts House staff and RUPC representatives to write responses, at their leisure, to a series of set questions related to their experiences at *Refuge 2017*. These anonymous responses from members of the public have also fed into the present evaluation and have been utilised particularly in the section of the report reflecting on visitor experience and information flow (section 8.1). The final avenue of data collection employed by the RUPC comprised primary observation and photographic documentation carried out by research unit representatives; considered closely alongside the interview and survey responses, these close observations have contributed to the findings of the 2017 evaluation and have been critically analysed through the frameworks of arts and humanities scholarship.

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF CREATIVE PRACTICE

## 4.1 EXPLORING THE ROLES OF SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART

The structure of this evaluation reflects a core impulse of *Refuge* in that it aims to consider, first and foremost, the role of creative practice and artist-led decision making in devising new pathways for applied processes in society. *Refuge* involves contemporary artists not as conduits of secondary communication and imagery, but as agile thinkers and agitators whose methods may advance ideas into regions otherwise inaccessible in conventional dialogues on a public platform. As noted by Angharad Wynne-Jones, who first conceived of *Refuge* during her tenure as Creative Director of Arts House: ‘Artists are phenomenal synthesisers and observers ... they’re uniquely positioned to be provocateurs, analysers and revealers to the system, to those of us who are imbedded in the system.’

Artists may also provide an exceptional service in involving members of the society in these discussions, by creating art works that both challenge existing opinions and situate audience participation as at the nexus between creator and creation. Community participation can be seen as a primary goal of *Refuge*, not only in the program’s concern for encouraging greater individual and group responsibility in times of major emergency – in particular, as this relates to the global crisis of climate change – but also in its remarkable emphasis on accessibility, cultural inclusiveness and local experience. In the 2017 relief centre simulation at Arts House, provisions were made to ensure that marginalised and disadvantaged members of society were given access to activities and art works and

that a diversity of ethnic and cultural communities were represented, with a critical emphasis on the representation of Indigenous and First People cultures (see section 6 of this report). The creative practices of the artists involved in *Refuge* were used in this process as a means of getting community members involved, foregrounding the range of cultures and identities that comprise a contemporary community (in the case of *Refuge*, with a focus on the environs of North Melbourne), and ensuring that a diversity of voices is heard in discussions of public policy and community resilience.

During the second half of the twentieth century, participatory art began to expand as a creative practice which was able to engage audiences in issues of social justice and activism; causes represented in artists’ works during the 1960s and 1970s included feminism, punk counterculture and civil rights (Finkelpearl, 2013, 7-9). In such practices, the emphasis shifted away from the role of the artist as author to the role of the audience as co-author. The art historian Claire Bishop variously defines this strand of art-making as, ‘socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based and collaborative art.’ (Bishop, 2006, 179) It is vital to consider these terms not as synonymous, but as subtly variable definitions of a type of practice which, since its emergence, has been adapted to accommodate any number of aesthetic, social, political and economic motivations. The current evaluation uses a combination of Bishop’s stated terms to assist in defining the art works included in *Refuge 2017*, which are not only unanimously participatory, but also community-based and



socially engaged (see section 4.2). Certain works included in the 24-hour relief centre simulation could also be defined as collaborative, including *Redreaming* (2017) by Emily Johnson (Yup'ik descent, Alaska) and Vicki Couzens (Gunditjmara Keerray Woorroong woman, Western Districts of Victoria), in which the artists created spaces for reflection, healing and sleep in the relief centre, calling attention to the capacity of Indigenous and First Peoples cultures to facilitate recovery, cooperation and multicultural wellbeing in situations of emergency.

In close alignment with the ideas of French curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud, outlined in his book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), the creative practices represented in *Refuge* reject the traditional tenet encapsulated in the sign 'Please do not touch the art' – which, nevertheless, continues to characterise art-going experiences in the present day – and instead ask the audience to 'live through' the art while they are experiencing it. What is important to note about the works included in *Refuge* is that they are only partially scripted by the artists, relying on members of the public to take hold of the indications, information and aesthetics they are provided with and assume the role of shaping the work for themselves. For example, Asha Bree Abraham's *Contact* (2017) provides the audience member with a table, chair and wired-in telephone, located at the end of a darkened corridor, along with a series of prompts, and then invites them to participate in a conversation with another member of the public who will be at the other end of the line; this individual will be homeless and, in the scenario, has not gained access to relief centre. The ensuing conversation is unscripted and impromptu and represents a lived-through experience for the participants, both the caller and the called.

It is here that we can locate a clear intersection between the themes of community participation and horizontal communication that are crucial to the *Refuge* program. By using participatory, relational and socially engaged approaches in their art-making, the artists involved in *Refuge* are signaling the importance of a move away from vertical, command and control methods of communication, which are known to result in reduced community preparedness. Instead, the artist's works reveal for the audience the capacity they each hold to shape a

situation through their participation. Since the subject matters of the art works are specific to the context of an emergency, they can be seen to provoke in the audience member a greater degree of individual autonomy both in situations of crisis and in the recovery processes that follow.

## ARTISTS AND WORKS IN *REFUGE* 2017

This report will now look at the individual artists involved in *Refuge* 2017 and consider the role of each of their contributions in the context of the ongoing program and in relation to the themes apposite to *Refuge*, including climate change, resilience, indigeneity, equity and community engagement. As discussed above, all of the art works created for *Refuge* may broadly be described as participatory, since the works are only fully realised by engaging the audience in an action or dialogue which has been partially scripted by the artist. While this characteristic is a common thread in the exhibits included in the 24-hour relief centre simulation, each of the art works at the event employed a distinct approach to engaging the audience and a unique message or set of knowledge prompts that were available to the participant through their involvement in the process. This emphasis on multiplicity accords with the rejection of formulaic convention that distinguishes *Refuge* as an exploratory cultural enterprise.

***Contact* by Asha Bree Abraham**, referred to above, centres on the function of verbal communication and, in particular, the act of making contact with people whose welfare would be most at risk in an emergency because of their inability to attend a relief centre. It asks participants to sit down at a table in front of a corded, landline telephone; the physical environment around the work is darkened, with a single red light illuminating the telephone from above. The participant is then asked, at one of numerous fixed times in a schedule throughout the day, to pick up the receiver and have an extemporized conversation with the person on the other end of the line. That person is not an actor or an artist's assistant but a homeless person, and the conversation they are directed to have is not necessarily about the emergency simulation but about, and comprised of, personal interaction and information sharing.





# THE CONTRIBUTION OF CREATIVE PRACTICE

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This process engages with questions of vulnerability and accessibility in society (i.e. who is most at risk and why?), but also highlights how the innate resources of a community, such as the time and energy of its members, can be utilised in emergency situations to bolster the resilience of the collective body.

In developing this participatory piece, Abrams was influenced by the concept of the communications system used by the Red Cross to keep in contact with vulnerable individuals on a daily basis. The artist notes of this system: 'Telecross requires set volunteers to ring people every day. I was interested in how we could do that in a relief centre, so that the people who seek refuge are also those who check on the people unable to come to the relief centre.' As a key stakeholder in *Refuge*, Red Cross Australia participated in the preparatory conversations leading up to the public events of *Refuge 2017* – as well as featuring prominently in the relief centre simulation itself – and it was through this extended participation of representatives in discussions with the artists that Abrams was able to learn about critical methods of community support used by the organisation, which she then incorporated into her art work *Contact*. The emphasis on horizontal communication and information sharing that sits at the core of *Refuge* – and is particularly evident in the structure of the annual LAB which takes place in advance of the public events, when artists and experts engage in extended conversation related to the year's theme – allows for such advantageous synergies between practical expertise and artistic impulse.

**Lorna Hannan** has been a resident of North Melbourne for over 50 years and her work for *Refuge* draws on her interest in and accumulated knowledge of the local community, its people, history and surrounding environment. In 2017, Hannan created an installation titled ***Crow's Corner***, named for North Melbourne resident and environmentalist, Ruth Crow AM (1916-99). This work comprised a series of collaborative and process-oriented activities held in the basement area of the Arts House building; the activities – which ranged from making and sharing a cup of tea to writing a poem and hanging it on a schematic tree structure in the room – were designed to encourage conversation and reflection around the topics of heatwaves and self-care between public participants, stakeholder representatives and residents of North Melbourne. The artist emphasises the insights and experiences of elders in her work, shifting established discussions of withstanding a major public emergency from a macro and procedural level to a conversational and intimate level, in which the stories of senior residents are utilised as tools for survival and wellbeing.

Once they entered *Crow's Corner*, participants were invited to share a cup of tea, sit down at one of several tables and talk over, with other people at the table, how they would act to alleviate the effects of a heatwave and offer anecdotes based on their experience in the community and in their own lives. This conversation represents a process without a beginning or an end, as participants at the table come and go without a dictated temporal structure from the artist. Structures that typically direct and delimit conversations in a public forum – for example, meeting times and durations, the word lengths of issued reports, and fixed contributors – are dismissed in a setting that demonstratively promotes comfort and storytelling.





Despite this social ambience, the topics under consideration at the tables concern the vital and pressing idea of human survival in the context of a crisis, as the artist imagines a new forum for enhancing community participation in the public domain.

A key characteristic of *Crow's Corner* is the combination of discussion and an emphasis on physicality and activity, such as writing a poem on a paper leaf and hanging it on a tree beside the tables. For Hannan, this is a valuable arrangement for ensuring the participant is not simply passively engaging with the work and the topics being considered: 'I sought experiences that are active and result in a product, so there's more than the memory of the day to hang on to. Pushing understanding beyond listening and agreeing is crucial.'

One feature of this installation when it was staged during *Refuge's* simulated relief centre was a big block of ice, which gradually melted as the day progressed and the activities proceeded around it. This tactile object drew attention to the physical environment of the room, including the temperature of the air, the participants' breathing and the passage of time – all of which are sources of stress during a heatwave, when air temperature and the process of respiration become the subject of conscious thought. But an additional and highly pertinent reference is available in the inclusion of a block of ice in Hannan's installation; namely, a reference to the global effects of climate change as witnessed in the melting icecaps at the world's poles. In 2015, the Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson staged an installation in the Place du Pantheon in Paris comprising a dozen chunks of free-floating iceberg collected from the Nuuk Fjord in Greenland. Titled *Ice Watch* (2015), this art work was made of gradually melting ice deposited in the streets of Paris. It served as a point of firsthand realisation and intellectual recollection for pedestrians, who were induced, after witnessing the work, to have an immediate encounter with the current environmental crisis of climate change. While the public is ordinarily sheltered from the presence of melting sea-ice in their daily lives, by the mere reality of physical detachment, Eliasson brought the tangible and diminishing forms to the urban sphere.

The inclusion of a block of ice in the space of Hannan's *Crow's Corner* also gestures towards the effects of climate change on the world's ice caps and glaciers, with the gradual melting of the block functioning as an elegiac allusion to the growing crisis and the need for public action as a course for remedy and recovery. The smaller scale of the dissolving block of ice in Hannan's installation (in contrast to the icebergs used in Olafur Eliasson's work) mirrors the emphasis on community, humble conversation and storytelling at the heart of her practice. The facts and statistics of scientists and politicians are brought down to an intimate level, engaging the participant on a human scale and asking them to contribute insight and action in return.

#### **Redreaming by Emily Johnson and Vicki Couzens**

encompassed various spaces and activities across the Arts House building during *Refuge 2017*, with all of the activities converging on the themes of health, healing and the benefits of an immersive, restorative environment. As part of the relief centre simulation, an overnight component was staged in the Arts House building for artists, stakeholder representatives and a selection of community members who had registered to be part of this segment of the 24-hour exercise. The overnight stay was designed and supervised by Johnson and Couzens as part of their creative contribution *Redreaming* and it was during this segment that the role of indigenous cultures – with an emphasis on Australian Aboriginal and Native American practices and customs – was foregrounded as a key component in the methodologies of the *Refuge* program. *Refuge 2017* established itself through both the preparatory and public events as a space for the recognition of Aboriginal Traditional Ownership, seeking the participation and insights of Indigenous Elders during the planning stages and opening the main public event with a Wurundjeri Smoking Ceremony and Welcome to Country delivered by Aunty Joy Murphy.



# THE CONTRIBUTION OF CREATIVE PRACTICE

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In designing their collaborative project, Johnson and Couzens brought learnings from their respective cultures to the creative landscape of the simulated relief centre. Johnson is an artist and choreographer of Yup'ik descent, originally from Alaska, who is based in Minneapolis and New York City; Couzens is a First Nations artist from the Western Districts of Victoria and a descendant of the Gunditjmara and Keerray Woorroong clans. The overnight stay began with a gathering of participants in Studio 1 of Arts House, which had been transformed into a meditative space filled with trees and plants, as well as areas to sit and recline (the space was also open to public visitors during the day component of *Refuge*). In this environment, overnights were firstly prompted to readjust their understandings of how an emergency situation might be handled, using approaches learned from Aboriginal cultures, as they were asked to decelerate, to reflect and to be fully aware of their position in the assembled community of friends and strangers at the relief centre. Conventional command and control methods of organisation were rejected, with an emphasis instead placed on group discussion and the exchange of stories, such as describing how you came to be at that time and place in the Arts House building. Vital to this process of collective environment-building and kinship was an active recognition of Traditional Ownership of the land on which Arts House stands, a perception which necessarily de-centred Western methods of emergency management and shifted the tone of the assembly to one of mutual visitantness. In other words, everyone there who was not of Indigenous descent became a welcomed guest.

in emergency situations – such as negatively affecting the wellbeing of evacuees and victims – have been prominent in global media reports over the past two decades, in part due to a rise in extreme weather emergencies across the world. The instance of the Louisiana Superdome during the Hurricane Katrina weather event in 2005 represents the starkest example of this adverse management of ‘refuge’. While subsequent studies have found that media commentary at the time of Hurricane Katrina, which reported atrocities and rampant criminal behaviour in the makeshift camp, were rife with hyperbole and indicative of popular media’s racial prejudices (Dyson, 2006; Grano and Zagacki, 2011), nevertheless the environment of the Superdome as a place of refuge during the disaster represented some crucial failings in preparedness and injustices in the distribution of resources across society. In both the shocking media portrayals and the actual neglect of evacuees’ wellbeing during Hurricane Katrina, the larger society became culpable in vilifying an underprivileged population at a time when they most required assistance and support. Daniel Grano and Kenneth Zagacki characterise this as a process of rendering citizen-evacuees as ‘outsiders’, noting: ‘victims and survivors were blamed through confluences of poverty, race, and criminality that constructed “them” as an irresponsible, burdensome, and blameworthy threat to the social body.’ (Grano and Zagacki, 2011, 206)

Instances of relief centres contributing additional traumas





By foregrounding Indigenous ownership of the land on which Arts House stands and, in turn, welcoming all participants as equal and valuable, Johnson and Couzen's *Redreaming* presents an interrogation of how shelter and assistance are dictated by hierarchies in advanced Capitalist society, whether related to social, racial, ethnic, disability or gender prejudices. This can be seen as particularly pertinent in the content of contemporary Australia related to asylum seeker and new immigrant populations, whose position in society is often presented as more precarious than that of other members of the population. In the microcosm of *Redreaming*, their position is as vital as anyone else's.

The overnight segment of *Refuge 2017* also further developed the methodology of horizontal communication, asking participants to decide together how to arrange their sleeping environment, to contribute to the workload of the relief centre and to embrace a communal and supportive exchange of knowledge throughout the night and into the morning. Trees and plants from Studio 1 were brought into the main hall of Arts House, passed along a line of participants who were arranged on the stairs and in the hallways; air mattresses, sheets and pillows were distributed across the hall in the same manner, positioned at angles and in circular groupings throughout the greenery. An Indigenous soundscape played in the hall as participants talked and slept, with groups gathering at times around the temporary billabong created at one end of the hall as part of *Redreaming*. It became clear, through observational evidence and the responses of participants, that the billabong was one of the most revelatory physical motifs of the relief centre simulation, serving as a calming and restorative space that spoke to the range of objectives in the conception of *Refuge*, including promoting inclusiveness and wellbeing, equality in discussion and horizontal communication, the importance of protecting the natural world from climate change, and the recognition of Traditional Ownership of the Australian land.

On the first floor of Ars House, **Dave Jones' *Swelter*** was installed and active during the daytime segment of the *Refuge 2017* simulation. The design of this installation brought a palpable sense of heatwave to the relief centre environment, as it replicated immense temperatures in a room which was filled with a maze of model buildings made of cardboard, around which visitors could walk, observe and experience the transitions from immense heat to cold in the atmosphere. This work investigated how urban heat islands form through the absorption and exaggeration of high temperatures trapped in tall buildings and laneways. *Swelter* also used small robotic figures to demonstrate how human beings in an urban environment become physically distressed at certain levels of heat, thereby requiring cooling methods to mitigate the effects of the environmental stress. While this installation presented the theme of heatwave from an urban perspective, in-keeping with the context of the North Melbourne-based *Refuge* program, Jones' brings a rural perspective the topic of resilience to his creative practice, since he is based in Natimuk in Western Victoria. In an interview for this evaluation, Jones explains how of his experiences of living in country Victoria directed his practice to be hands-on and experience oriented:

'Out in the country people are more aware of the good and the bad side of natural forces – some kind of catastrophe is an almost annual event. My work is shaped around that experience, to build a greater awareness of that ... I feel like being more aware of something and knowing basic strategy to minimise effects can go a long way to minimising the risk of such events. To have people discover these things, rather than just being told about it, is a far better approach to preparedness.'

Jones engaged younger members of the community in the production and execution of the *Swelter*, including the 6th Melbourne Scout Group in Kensington and pupils from Natimuk Primary School. For the artist, this is a key demographic to consider, engage with and cater to in *Refuge*, as their involvement presents an opportunity for greater outreach as the program continues until 2020. Especially related to issues of resilience and combatting climate change, younger people are crucial links in communications networks when preparing





# THE CONTRIBUTION OF CREATIVE PRACTICE

for extreme weather events and future disasters. When asked if he thought anyone was missing from the public event of *Refuge 2017*, Jones stated, 'Possibly [we] could have connected with some of the local schools a bit more ... maybe, in future, we could look at how we could get more involvement from a wider representation of the public through the doors. A school group and parents coming in could help get the knowledge out where it needs to go.'

Melbourne-based artist and researcher **Jen Rae** created ***Future Proof*** for *Refuge 2017*, extending her ongoing, multi-platform project *Fair Share Fare*, which was also part of the first iteration of *Refuge* in 2016. Rae's creative practice foregrounds collaboration, ethics and sustainability (Rae, 2015) in the production, consumption and knowledge of food. For this year's relief centre simulation, Rae once again provided the food for participants during the overnight stay, as well as presenting demonstrations of sustainable and ethical approaches to food production and consumption throughout the 24-hour event. With an awareness of the immediacy of climate change and its affects at its centre, *Future Proof* exhorted relief centre attendees to engage directly and productively with a responsibility for managing their approach to food with integrity and mindfulness. One activity asked participants to contribute to cultivating a 45-year old yoghurt culture, Martha's

Yoghurt. This part of the project incorporated not only the distribution of a living culture through the engagement of participants, but also the dissemination of the story associated with Martha, who immigrated to Australia from Lebanon in 1970 and, after some time of being unable to find a suitable yoghurt for her cooking, received the gift of a culture from the proprietor of a milk bar. This culture, having originated in Egypt prior to 1970, is still used by Martha, who subsequently shared it with Jen Rae; this same culture is also shared as part of Rae's creative project, along with the transfer of knowledge related to Martha's story, yoghurt production and sustainable food consumption. This knowledge share is then monitored by the artist and her collaborators, including artist Dawn Weleski, using the contemporary communications method of social media hashtags, with participants asked to share their progress with the yoghurt culture using the hashtags #fairsharefare and #marthasyoghurt. Knowledge transfer is thus promoted as an organic and ambient process, accessible to all, even when situated in the synthetic domain of platform technology.

In her provision of nourishment for attendees during the relief centre simulation, Rae proposed radically new approaches to food while simultaneously foregrounding support, comfort and familiarity in the serving of the food. She created meals and snacks which used ingredients that many people would



be unfamiliar with in their experience of food consumption – such as camel, venison, flowers and weeds – but she presented them in formats and designs that would signal familiarity; for example, serving the camel in a traditional ‘Aussie meat pie’. The artist notes of this emphasis on the participant’s experience and psychology: ‘audience experience is what’s most important for artists. We know that storytelling, analogy, trusted messengers and the mode of delivery has to be multifaceted in order for there to be uptake.’ *Future Proof* also eschewed customary utensils and furniture used in Western societies when consuming food, as part of the artist’s goal of ‘decolonising the way we sleep together, eat together, live together ... I was adamant that there would be no tables and chairs, all the food could be eaten without the need of a table, all the food during the day was handheld.’

During the evening meal at the 24-hour relief centre, participants sat in a circle on the floor of the main hall; a large platter was then carried around the circle by two assistants, with people invited to take what they wanted from the platter but no more than they thought they could eat. It was advised that everyone could go back for second helpings if they still felt hungry. With a clear spotlight on minimising waste, this approach to serving the evening meal put the onus on the individual to regulate their portions and also allowed for discussion, socialising and activity as part of the dining experience. Each participant at the overnight stay of *Refuge 2017* was positioned as playing a vital role in a communal experience of *Future Proof*, not least through being assigned key tasks, from hand-grinding coffee to cultivating yoghurt at 2am which would be eaten at breakfast. In this uses of food-related participatory practice as a mode of creative exploration – which can then contribute more broadly to ethical and sustainable approaches to food across society – Rae emphasises the role of individual agency in managing issues of collective concern, such as climate change, severe emergencies and collective recovery.

During the day component of the relief centre simulation, the main hall of Arts House was used to stage **Hg57 – Urban Heat Island** by Tongan-Australian artist and activist **Latai Taumoepeau**. Taumoepeau’s practice represents a dynamic

interweaving of body-centred performance, cultural activism and an exploration of Indigenous methodologies in the contemporary socio-political context. Her work for *Refuge 2017* provided an exceptional site of motion and activity at the heart of the public event, inviting participants to sign up to a pseudo-fitness circuit which involved walking and running around a designated path, carrying containers of water and riding fixed bicycles. This process asks the visitor to be a physical contributor to the collective energy of the relief centre, allowing their bodies to supply organic power to the overall vitality of the assembled community. Occurring as part of the creative landscape of *Refuge*, this output of energy necessarily stands in contrast to non-renewable sources of energy which not only result in the harmful effects of climate change that are central to the *Refuge* program’s investigations, but also result in a demonstrable global lethargy through the mechanisation of daily life. By requiring participants to be highly active in their involvement with *Hg57*, the artist activates the latent potential of the individual to be powerful and energetic, while providing service to the community. Taumoepeau draws upon the Tongan concepts of *maāma* (light) and *māfana* (warmth) as a framework for *Hg57*, which further entrenches the emphasis on Indigenous cultures and knowledges in the larger program of *Refuge* and its ongoing investigations.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ARTS-LED?

The projects and activities of *Refuge* utilise creative practice not as a tool for merely communicating or supporting emerging discourse related to climate change and emergency response – as would traditionally be expected in a collaboration between artists and public-sector professionals – but as a means by which the discourse is shaped and propagated. The acknowledgement from all stakeholders involved in *Refuge* that entirely new approaches are now required to effectively deal with major crises in a contemporary setting, both in terms of immediate management and subsequent recovery, has led to an unprecedented synergy in *Refuge* between the capacity of artists to imagine and the capacity of experts and professionals to carry-out.



# THE CONTRIBUTION OF CREATIVE PRACTICE

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The LAB is an annual, multi-day forum in the *Refuge* calendar which allows for extended conversations and sharing of knowledges among all key contributors to the program and it is this context in which the lion's share of cross-pollination between the artists and the stakeholders takes place. In interviews with key contributors undertaken as part of this evaluation, it was commonly acknowledged that marked progress was made between the LAB proceedings in 2016 and 2017, with a primary development being the increased precedence given to artists' opinions and proposed strategies during the second iteration of the LAB. According to Catherine Jones, there was 'more of a level playing field' in the second year; the dynamic was not characterised by experts and professionals instructing the creatives, but rather of sharing and collaboration among all contributors. This evolution in the group's dynamic signals a growing entrenchment of horizontal communication and arts-led discussion in the infrastructure of *Refuge*, as well as an increasing tone of ease and community-building among artists and stakeholders as the program develops. Participating artist Jen Rae notes that this is something which should be developed even further with each year: 'This is what the challenge is, we now need to go deeper together.'

## THE TENSION BETWEEN ARTISTIC AND EXERCISE COMPONENTS IN *Refuge* 2017

In considering the value of *Refuge* as an arts-led simulation, this evaluation found that a question sometimes arose as to whether the artworks made for the event could be rolled out as resources in an actual crisis. This is one of several strands of *Refuge* that distinguish it as a unique conceptual inquiry.

The public events of *Refuge* 2017 were presented around the central point of a 24-hour relief centre simulation, which was staged at Arts House on 11 November, 2017. This event incorporated demonstrations from Red Cross Australia on maintaining health and wellbeing during a heatwave; presentations from Emergency Management Victoria related to new GIS (geographic information system) mapping strategies used to improve community resilience; as well as involvement by State Emergency Services representatives from the Footscray Division and representatives from the City of Melbourne's Resilient Melbourne project. This official stakeholder presence combined neatly with the arrangement of the relief centre simulation on the day, as public attendees were greeted by Arts House staff in hi-vis jackets and directed to visit the Red Cross sign-in desk, while being given information on what to expect from the simulation. However, a crucial tension underlying the event was the involvement of artists and the centrality of art works across the simulation, which presented

an interesting conceptual dilemma underlying the event: to what extent were the art works part of the configuration of the imagined emergency relief centre and to what extent were they part of a creative arts performance? In other words, could the art be conceivably and practically applied in a future relief centre context?

These questions were posed to artists and stakeholders during interviews as part of the evaluation and opinions were almost entirely undecided on the issue, with several artists nevertheless offering ideas as to how their art could feasibly be used in an emergency relief centre context. As discussed above, Jen Rae's *Future Proof* is part of the ongoing project Fair Share Fare, which provided the meals for the relief centre event and staged demonstrations of ethical, sustainable food consumption. Rae sees her art as a means of recuperating comfort in an environment of catastrophe: 'The food delivered in disaster relief is ordinarily catered, they bring in caterers. It fulfils a need – combatting hunger. But it can do a lot more, it can provide comfort, distraction. Bringing people into a kitchen can provide a sense of community.' Reflecting on the preparation and delivery of food at *Refuge*, other artists were sceptical as to whether entirely ethical food consumption would be practical in an emergency situation. Participating artist Dave Jones, who has extended experience of living in a country environment prone to extreme heat and annual bushfires, noted: 'I think in an actual disaster, it would be less holistic and there would be plastic thrown around more.'

What such debates highlight is that *Refuge* functions as a site of imaginative and open discussion, in which art can provoke without needing to be immediately practical. In *Refuge*, creative practice encompasses a range of activities, from modes of aesthetic experimentation and investigation, social practice and performance strategies to cultural traditions and practices. *Refuge* 2017 was particularly successful in blending forms of logistical knowledge and planning with the social, affective, transcultural and Indigenous knowledges stimulated by artists. Arts House's experience as a commissioning agent for experimental performance and live art was critical in selecting and supporting artists who had the skills to collaborate with other fields of expertise. The experience of the 2017 LAB was also decisive, with extended conversations between scientists, policy-makers and artists creating what Catherine Jones, General Manager of Arts House, called 'a genuine space of interdisciplinarity'.



# URBAN PREPAREDNESS AND RESILIENCE

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Resilience has become a feature of disaster preparedness in scenarios of limited resources, in which communities must become key agents.

The artists who contributed to *Refuge 2017* addressed the aesthetic, social and cultural dimensions of urban resilience through imagined scenarios and simple skill-sharing, such as the demonstration of a Coolgardie safe in the basement of the 24-hour simulation and information about how to counteract the stresses of extreme temperature in the works of Latai Taumoepeau and Dave Jones. Resilient Melbourne's Maree Grenfell, who participated in the daytime and overnight segments of *Refuge 2017*, sees this project as an accessible way of exploring and communicating some of the immense issues that affect society: 'Resilience provides people with a language to deal with something like climate change, which is otherwise too big, too hard to understand.' Established in 2016, Resilient Melbourne is a strategy of City of Melbourne, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities (100RC). The *Refuge* program is an 'aligned action' of Resilient Melbourne, which highlights the standing of the arts-led program in both local, national and international discussions on urban resilience.

The importance of activating the role of the individual to prepare for emergency situations – in contrast to a reliance on public services, which has been entrenched in the methodologies of modern society and yet is seen to be increasingly inviable – has been a repeated theme across the activities and discussions of *Refuge 2017*. Individual and community participation has been closely linked to an increase in community resilience in recent studies. This theme reflects a broader shift in emergency management strategies in Australia towards foregrounding community participation, as part of the process of strengthening resilience and preparedness. Antonella Cavallo examines this shift in her article 'Integrating disaster prepared and resilience' (2014), in which she explains:

'[A] traditional approach refers to the delivery of expert services to recipient communities. A proposed complementary approach would see ... community members in an active collaboration to prepare for disasters. This would contribute to 'community resilience' defined as the engagement of community resources by its members to face 'uncertainty, unpredictability, surprise and change.' (Cavallo, 2014, 46-7)

In both the group discussions between artists and stakeholders at the LAB and the Evaluation Day and during the main public events, *Refuge 2017* strove to expand understandings of how individual participation can be facilitated and strategised through creative practice; these discussions were initiated at the very outset of the program in 2016. Section 4.2 of this report examines the multifarious approaches of the *Refuge* artists in exploring this theme in their respective practices. The value of personal/local knowledge was also a key area of exploration for artists and stakeholders. The demonstration of GIS mapping approaches from Emergency Management Victoria during the 24-hour relief centre simulation served as an engaging example of how the emergency services are developing strategies to build resilience in communities through the mapping of social and cultural material alongside conventional scientific and environmental data. Callum Fairnie from EMV, who participated in the events of *Refuge 2017*, positions the utilisation of multilayered cartographic processes as an imperative development in building resilience in the face of disasters and extreme weather escalations:

'My role within EMV looks at community-based emergency management – including the assets, values, local stories and knowledge of communities. I was invited to the *Refuge* event because it was community driven ... Using maps as part of this enables communities to put information into maps, many types of information, including stories and histories.'

Fairnie used the template for maps made of communities in country Victoria by EMV, such as Harrierville, and applied this to the environment, history and stories collected through *Refuge* related to the urban site of North Melbourne. With 50-years of accumulated knowledge and networks in her home suburb of North Melbourne, *Refuge* artist Lorna Hannan has worked closely with Fairnie to incorporate local insights into the GIS mapping of the area and thereby create a resource might be used to increase the resilience of the community when faced with future crises.

# EQUITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The activities of *Refuge 2017* closely considered those community members first and most severely impacted by disasters.

As well as exploring how marginalised members of communities can be included in disaster planning and preparedness so that forms of exclusion, disadvantage or marginality are not amplified in urgent and life-threatening situations.

Catherine Jones notes, 'a key objective of every iteration will be to go deeper into this area.' More broadly, *Refuge* aims to tackle issues related to cultural power imbalance and the continuing impact of colonialism in contemporary society. Former Arts House Creative Director, Angharad Wynne-Jones, discusses this theme within the program's founding objectives:

'[T]hat's both the challenge and the opportunity with this project. To work more with community members who aren't as visible or not as easy to reach by white institutions and white paradigms. I think, in a situation like *Refuge*, it becomes very evident.'

At the relief centre event in 2017, Will McRostie from Description Victoria assisted people who were blind or had low vision to move around the exhibitions and experience the art works, demonstrations and participatory activities. The efforts of this organisation have a particular relevance in discussions of accessibility regarding arts-based programs like *Refuge*, since the creative arts is traditionally centred on visual or aesthetic components.

The growing involvement of equity-centred organisations in *Refuge*, and the feedback and advice they provide, foregrounds the value of extending disability access facilities and technology in future years of the project. With an awareness of the need to provide an accessible, beneficial and safe environment for the diverse range of individuals and group identities in an urban social context like North Melbourne, artists and stakeholders must continue to reflect on this key question as the program moves forward: how can access to *Refuge* be expanded further?

Arts House Producer, Tara Prowse, notes that the design of the 24-hour relief centre in 2017 was especially geared towards facilitating widespread accessibility and a tone of hospitality for visitors. Prowse explains:

'[The] aesthetic is a huge component, even when people might not notice it or be able to point to it, especially. By aesthetics, I don't just mean the physical design of the space, but the ethics of how people are invited to enter the space and the expectations we are framing for people, including the interfaces of knowledges...In a relief centre we do not know who will walk through the door. It's important that they have an experience that feels accessible and welcoming.'



# POLICY ENHANCEMENT

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This program is among the first in the world to engage artists and creative practice in preparedness and response in the area of emergency management.

With leaders of key policy bodies attending *Refuge* events and bringing the project's ideas into their planning, such as the disaster simulation held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 2017. A key feature of the program has been the attendance and support of local and state leaders and policy-makers, such as Toby Kent, the Chief Resilience Officer, Maree Grenfell, Resilient Melbourne's Learning and Network Manager, and Christine Drummond, the Emergency Management Coordinator at the City of Melbourne. The recognition that highly centralised models for emergency management are increasingly redundant in a changing contemporary society and that new approaches are needed was also strongly emphasised by Lord Mayor, Robert Doyle, and Emergency Commissioner, Craig Lapsley, in their opening remarks at the 2017 relief centre simulation.

*Refuge* has provided an invaluable site for constructive discussion between creatives, community representatives and policy-makers on issues of climate change and disaster preparedness since its inception. In 2017, these discussions – and the activities and events that eventuated – bore the fruit of increased public awareness regarding catastrophic heatwaves at the 24-hour relief centre and more embedded relationships between the artists and stakeholders involved in the program through the LAB and Evaluation Day conversations. Many

new collaborations emerged from *Refuge 2017*, including the aforementioned teamwork between EMV representative Callum Fairnie and North Melbourne artist Lorna Hannan to map the environment, culture and history of North Melbourne. Moreover, through these processes of knowledge-sharing by different individuals, groups and organisations in Melbourne, *Refuge 2017* has allowed artists to further diffuse their imaginative strategies through the public sector and into the discourse of policy-making at a local and state level. For example, as noted above, *Refuge* is an 'aligned action' of Resilient Melbourne and consequently both feeds into and benefits from the strategies of this government project (Resilient Melbourne, 2016, 54). It is expected that the policy influence and yield of *Refuge* will continue to build as the program progresses to 2020.





# CONCLUSION: LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The complexities of *Refuge 2017* – logistical, conceptual and methodological – mean that a simple, condensed review of the contributions and efficacy of this year’s iteration, *Heatwave*, would be impractical.

This report offers an expansive view of the themes, art works, people, groups and events that comprised *Refuge 2017*, with each of the constituent parts presented as equally as critical to the evaluation as the next. The 2017 evaluation undertaken by the Research Unit in Public Cultures has embraced the process of horizontal communication in its approach to both research and the synthesis of findings, which intentionally mirrors the methods of the *Refuge* program, with its consistent and equal privileging of diverse knowledges and identities. Despite the density of components in this report, several key learnings and recommendations emerged from the 2017 evaluation:

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND INFORMATION FLOW

This presents an area which would benefit from further examination and refinement as *Refuge* progresses. Owing to the conceptually complicated nature of the 24-hour relief centre event – which straddled emergency simulation, theatrical performance and art exhibition – it was found that visitors were at times unsure as to what their experience was ‘meant to be’. While the responses from all visitor surveys collected on 11 November, 2017, were resoundingly positive and communicated valuable encounters with the displays and activities at the event, some notes were made indicating slight confusion as to where they were meant to go in the building and how they were required to interact with the exhibits. One survey respondent – who indicated that they had found out about the event on ABC Radio Melbourne and had never attended a *Refuge* event before – noted that, ‘some areas, especially the main hall, appeared to be a bit complicated.’ One solution to this in future might be to present a descriptive map on the wall at the entrance to the public events of *Refuge*, or else to design a map in hardcopy or app to be distributed to visitors when they arrive.

Additionally, some of the *Refuge* artists, interviewed following the relief centre simulation, conveyed an uncertainty as to whether visitors were reaching all of the sections of the event and areas of the building. Since most of the artists were stationed on a specific level or in a certain room during the daytime segment of the event – while managing their respective art works – their perception of visitor flow was based largely on either expected visitor numbers on the day or comparisons with visitor numbers in 2016 (which were slightly higher than in 2017, owing in part to the involvement the previous year of Scout and community groups in the art works and activities). Artist Dave Jones notes of his visitor flow on the day:

‘I was upstairs and down the hall this year, so I wasn’t sure if people had come in; I wasn’t sure if people had just stayed downstairs. It might be necessary to take people by the

hand and guide them ... It would be valuable if we could ask [local] parents to bring their kids as part of a school activity – something to think about in the next few years.’

## MAINTAINING AND EXPANDING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

For the second year, *Refuge* successfully engaged the public in a dynamic event combining preparedness demonstrations and participatory art displays, communicating new ideas and approaches related to climate change and community preparedness to a diverse pool of visitors. Attendees to the relief centre simulation in 2017 represented cultural identities, disabilities, ethnicities, races and genders which comprise the breadth of the contemporary urban society. Using a sleek and engaging advertising campaign in advance of the main public event – which included a flyer which eschewed a conventional minimal aesthetic in favour of including multiple languages on both the front and back of the flyer (arranged in 3 vertical sections showing English, Mandarin and Arabic) – key information related to the event reached a broad audience.

Following the *Refuge* relief centre event in 2017, however, several artists and stakeholders noted the absence of certain local groups and invited guests who were expected to be in attendance on the day. Most notable among these absences were a greater number of North Melbourne family groups and an invited group of primarily Sudanese women approached through North Melbourne Language and Learning (NMLL). EMV Project Manager, Steve Cameron, suggests that this might be a key opportunity for improvement in the next iterations of *Refuge*, stating:

‘there was a realisation that some of the community didn’t participate this year. Some of those of who are more vulnerable were missing, some of the people in the high-rise buildings – new migrants, for examples – and these are the people who might benefit from [Refuge] the most.’

Cameron further suggests the value of ‘a trusted source’ in communicating invitations to participate in *Refuge* in future years, especially when involving people experiencing language barriers or belonging to ethnic minorities in an Australian urban context. Growing relationships with community groups is not a process which is achieved quickly and cursorily, particularly where trust is first needed to be established. This evaluation anticipates a proportional increase in open, relaxed communications between *Refuge* and the residents of North Melbourne as the program progresses, developing the social networks already established in 2016 and built on in 2017.

## NO SINGLE TEMPLATE

This evaluation finds that there is an opportunity for *Refuge*, as a necessarily experimental space, to reinvent itself each year in response to the scenarios and the expectations of visitors. This recommendation is based on feedback collected from artists and stakeholders during the 2017 Evaluation Day, as well as extended analysis on the conceptual underpinnings of the ongoing program by members of the RUPC. The format of the 24-hour *Refuge* relief centre in 2016 and 2017 contributed a great deal to the investigation of how creative projects can have a viable place in emergency simulation environments. This format also radically blended the typically strict divide between theatrical performance and realistic simulation, further extending the theoretical enquiries of the *Refuge* program. For example, the format asks if the difference between an arts performance and a public service simulation is so very different and, if not, why is there a traditional segregation of art and artists from the practical undertakings of the public sector? These questions are highly relevant both in conversations concerning *Refuge* and in larger debates around the role of the creative arts in contemporary society.

With these investigations having taken place in the relief centres events in 2016 and 2017, *Refuge* might now choose to expand its methodological experimentations through the trialing of new public event formats in 2018, 2019 and 2020. Moreover, the rejection of a fixed template for *Refuge* reflects the very nature of emergency situations as fluid, unstable and oftentimes unknowable circumstances in which to operate. To again quote from Steve Cameron's reflections during the 2017 Evaluation Day:

'Please do not create a template of how we did it last year, [as this creates] structures and templates that won't work [in new situations]: there are too many variables and challenges in any disaster.'

## WHAT ARE THE FULLEST IMPLICATIONS OF A HORIZONTAL MODEL?

As already noted in this conclusion, a distinguishing characteristic of *Refuge* is its rejection of command and control approaches to decision-making and vertical communication systems in favour of horizontal communications and the embrace of collective decision-making. An emphasis on the role of individual agency and diverse knowledges is crucial to the latter approach. In recent years, emergency services and policy-makers are increasingly recognising the need for new strategies to engage individuals and communities to assume a greater degree of responsibility in preparing for and managing emergency situations. It is widely acknowledged across the stakeholder bodies associated with *Refuge* that there are no longer resources enough for everyone in society to be spoon-fed assistance in a public sector context which is experiencing both increased populations and increasing weather and health crises.

This evaluation aims to foreground a horizontal methodology by using group discussion, participants' stories and observations, rather than statistics and analytical rhetoric, as the primary sources of information in building a robust assessment of *Refuge 2017*. In this way, the approach of the academic evaluation has been guided by the creative and conceptual investigations of the arts-led program – just as it is hoped that those same investigations will have a wider influence across the public services landscape in Melbourne and beyond.

The implications of this methodological feedback loop can be anticipated in the research of the Director of the Research Unit in Public Cultures, Professor Nikos Papastergiadis, whose writings on ambience and ambient communication relate closely to the methodologies employed in *Refuge* (Papastergiadis, 2013; Papastergiadis and Barikin, 2015). It is expected that as a reliance on horizontal communication develops through the events of *Refuge* and through the evaluation process – and the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism are increasingly harnessed in this process – the function of ambience will become more prominent.

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On a hot day  
the sun is shining  
and the children are playing  
in the park.













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