

Chrysalis Arts: GAP Guide Case Study : Collaboration with other Disciplines
Interview with Veronica Sekules

i) What is your professional area of expertise?

My formative career was in the environment movement. I also studied an art history degree and doctorate. I then worked as a curator and educator in art galleries. I was involved in and ran many international projects. I now run my own art gallery specialising in art+environment and place equal emphasis on showing art and discussing its implications in the widest possible framework. I am a published author in all 3 of my career areas.

ii) How do you think the arts can increase awareness of the climate emergency and Sixth Extinction, or encourage behavioural change?

I think the arts can be most effective in stimulating and capturing people's imagination. The arts can be visionary and artists good at thinking laterally and coming up with extraordinary ideas beyond the conventional. Per se the arts don't change behaviour, however people can be inspired to change and shown the way by the way issues are raised in the arts. The arts operate at both ends of the ways in which people respond to stimuli - they have great shock value and they encourage quiet contemplation. The arts can make people understand the urgency of the need to act (through XR's street-theatre approaches for example). Or, eg. quiet images can show the effects of ice-melting in compelling ways.

iii) What do you see as the most important aspects of artists' engagement with the climate emergency? Eg High profile presentation of artwork e.g. Major public gallery exhibitions and commissions, Working with people e.g. Community engagement projects and artists residencies, (Collaborative/ cross disciplinary) Research projects either leading to the creation of new knowledge or artwork , and/ or new ways of presenting different kinds of information

I think all 3 are important. It is no longer possible for high-profile galleries to ignore the climate emergency. However their approaches need to embrace their current very wasteful cultures and change them to be more climate-friendly. For example, the whole production behind displays, and especially touring exhibitions - transport & building installation / furniture can be very wasteful (albeit touring spreads the cost). The trouble is though, if every place turns to considering the climate emergency with art-works and exhibitions, people will quickly tire of it, so it needs to be approached in a light-touch way.

Working with communities is vitally important. Many people are entrenched in their ways of life and expectations and often reluctant to give up treats, like cheap foreign travel. So the messages from art can be very useful in helping people to change their aspirations (see ii above) Artist's residencies are different from community engagement - unless they have engagement built in.

The danger is however, that artists will be required to do everything and that does not make for very good art - & it makes for a confusion & possibly dilution of purpose. I believe that community-engagement needs to be galvanised from within communities, by people specialised in doing that, and that is not necessarily artists. The audience has a responsibility.

- iv) If you have worked with artists before, please tell us about this experience and any ways in which you think this was of benefit.**

Public Participation, Skills, Reach, Legacy.

- v) Were there any aspects of the collaboration that you would do differently in the future? If so, please explain.**

All my work in the last 4 years has been working with artists on climate/ environmental initiatives, as that is the purpose of my gallery. To some extent I have maintained a thread of environmentalism way before that too - viz my Cultures of the Countryside project and book (Routledge 2018) However I see my own role as very much working at the side of the artist to help people (including the artist) to talk about the implications of the work. I am in the gallery every day talking to visitors - or more accurately, often listening to them as they do have a lot to contribute. Also each season there is an open occasion for people to meet the artist directly and talk with them about their motivation. I like these events to be run by young art students as they learn most. I run big conference-discussion events which are cross-disciplinary. I curate these very carefully and make sure they are expertly chaired so that discussion is facilitated. This is what I am developing in different ways for the future, to enable them to be more open for sharing of ideas and practice.

- vi) Do you think that any aspects of your future work could be enhanced through collaborating with artists? What form might this take?**

I want to open up my programme to be more collaborative from the ground up with artists so we work in partnership on developing environmental programmes with other agencies. I also want to diversify and globalise my programme overall and create wider partnerships to facilitate better environmental campaigning.

