

MOSES AND MARSHES

Wetlands in Focus 2021/22

Introduction

Fenn's Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses (UK) and Macquarie Marshes (Australia) are internationally significant wetlands, rare habitats vital for combating climate change and supporting biodiversity.

The Mosses and Marshes project is an exciting collaboration between artists, land managers, environmental specialists and local communities in the UK and Australia using art to transform how we think about a place and changing environment and to imagine how interdependence between humans, land and ecosystems might build sustainability.

In this document, the two lead artists Andrew Howe (UK) and Kim V. Goldsmith (AUS) review the Mosses and Marshes project delivered in collaboration with other artists and practitioners during the 12 months from 1st January to 31st December 2021.

The review focuses primarily on activities within the scope of the project funded by the Arts Council England (ACE), Australian Regional Arts Fund Grant and crowdfunding from the Australian Cultural Fund, with additional activities funded from other sources. We then take a look ahead into the events scheduled for 2022.



Alidade, sculpture by Elizabeth Turner and Keith Ashford

“In a time of world misery, it’s a delight to find two artists who are adding both constructive intellectual content and aesthetically creative mind-food to the world. We need artists to inspire us and flood our minds with healthy, exciting, intellectually engrossing things of beauty in an otherwise consumerist, greedy world.”

Dr Liz Charpleix, editor of the MOSSES AND MARSHES book

“As a long term student of environmental art with close contacts among leading practitioners from Andy Goldsworthy to John Wolseley, this is important and beautiful work.”

Max Bourke AM, former scientist and former General Manager the Australia Council for the Arts

Aims

Key aims for the project were for people to:

- be more curious about the natural environment
- feel more connected to nature
- think about the relationship humans have with wetlands, and nature
- know about the values of wetlands in addressing climate change, biodiversity, water management and in less tangible ways, such as cultural and aesthetic importance

What did we achieve?

The project resulted in new artworks and documentation in a range of formats for local, national and international audiences, online and in physical exhibitions in each site's catchment. Key outputs:

- New artworks transforming how we think about and respond to a place and changing environment and exploring how interdependence between humans, land and ecosystems might build long term sustainability.
- Exhibitions (gallery and online) to engage local and international audiences.
- Project with Wem Youth Club in partnership with local artists and Shropshire Wildlife Trust for site visits and workshops to create new artworks and help build confidence and sense of ownership in the landscape for the young people.
- Self-guided public art trail using locative media for sound trail and temporary sculptural way markers along the trail to promote engagement with the landscape.
- Public events including artist talks, panel discussions, and art workshops.
- Documentation in a book, video recordings and web resources.

My memory of the one past visit was of a landscape of much less interest to me than others I'd visited. This gives me a different starting point - not just what the area looks like.
Jennifer Wallace, Qube exhibition visitor

"The Moss is a wonderfully mysterious landscape where often one can be the only person. These sculptures, they make it more mysterious! A great place for communing with oneself and the Moss's inhabitants"
Art trail visitor

Project Team

Lead Artists:

Andrew Howe, Kim V. Goldsmith

Artist Partners:

Elizabeth Turner, Keith Ashford – sculptural work at Whixall Moss

Sue Challis, Kate Johnston – artists for work with Wem Youth Club

Gudrun Filipka – curatorial advice with Arts Territory Exchange

Jamie-Lea Trindall - curator, Outback Arts

Richard Hepenstal, Max Allmark, Sue Gainsborough, Mediaactive Projects CIC – video production and community engagement advice

Lydia Halcrow – independent evaluator

Dr Liz Charpleix - book editor

Partner organisations

Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Natural England

Wem Youth Club

Qube, Oswestry

Wem Town Hall

Arts Territory Exchange

Macquarie Wetlands Association

Dubbo Regional Council

M16 Artspace

Outback Arts & Orana Arts

RiverSmart

Milan Dhiyaan

The project received advisory support in the UK from Shropshire Council, Meadow Arts and Dave Pritchard of the Ramsar Culture Network. There were many invaluable contributions from individuals, organisations, artists, ecologists and other specialists from local communities around the Mosses and Marshes for which we are hugely grateful.



Activities and events

New artworks and exhibitions

Mosses and Marshes exhibition of work by Andrew Howe and Kim V. Goldsmith at Qube Oswestry with curatorial support from Gudrun Filipka (1st – 30th October)

Individual and collaborative work by the two lead artists included sound and video installation, prints and paintings using dyes and paper made with natural materials gathered from the landscape.



Mosses and Marshes exhibition at Qube Art Gallery

“Thoughtful and thought provoking, very well curated”
B Suackiland

“Good to see natural materials used in the artworks of these great spaces. Reminds us greatly of the Mosses.”
Roger and Beryl Cale, Audlem

“Beautiful artworks and research. I enjoyed the weaving of sound and video with visual art.”
Emily Wilkinson

“Excellent, best exhibition since you opened.”
B Helm

“Kim and I use similar processes to explore sites, really getting to know both human and ecological perspectives by spending time there, doing what could be described as deep-mapping; while I use walking to lead my research, Kim’s focus is the use of technology to dig deeper into the landscape”

Andrew Howe



Territory, handmade paper collage, Andrew Howe

“...The exhibition of works on display was both interesting and of an incredibly high standard, meeting our expectations perfectly.

We were particularly interested in the combination of digital and visual pieces. We felt the Mosses and Marshes exhibition approached this very well and successfully.

Most of our services are aimed at those who are disadvantaged which includes disability, health including mental health, unemployment and rural poverty and isolation. The Mosses and Marshes exhibition reflected this ethos successfully in many ways. The exhibition brought high quality art to a rural area, where many would ordinarily have to travel to see similar work.

Overall, we are very pleased with the outcomes and quality of the exhibition. The exhibition encouraged a greater interest in the local area and complemented similar projects Qube has coordinated around local heritage and landscape in the past.

Andrew Howe and Kim V. Goldsmith were a pleasure to work with and showed a keen understanding of their audience, presentation and promotion. ...”

Charlotte Jackson, Qube Arts Development Officer



An Ancient Land, video still, Kim V. Goldsmith



The Tone of Things, video still, Kim V. Goldsmith and Andrew Howe

Community Engagement

Partnering with Wem Youth Club and Marches Mosses BogLIFE project Series of site visits and evening workshops at Wem Youth Club involving over 20 young people and artists Kate Johnston, Sue Challis and Andrew Howe, plus Anna Martin and Phil Playford of Shropshire Wildlife Trust/ Marches Mosses BogLIFE.

“Excellent work Andrew. It has been a brilliant collaboration with yourself and Anna from Shropshire Wildlife Trust and NE and a fantastic opportunity for the children to get to know more about this beautiful and important landscape on our doorstep” Wem Youth Club volunteer

“The project breaks down gender roles, everyone has enjoyed poetry, arts and science. They are getting to know kids across age groups and outside friendship groups ...

...it creates a really interesting shared experience; a community” Sue Challis

“Enabled me to think big and to get the children to think big. To create a work that blended engagement and my own arts practice to produce a high quality piece of art that was fully inclusive throughout the process. It was great to collaborate with another artist.” Kate Johnston



“What was wonderful about this project was that it gave local young people a chance to really get to know this important place on their doorstep, to go deeper and explore the Mosses in lots of different ways – they worked with ecologists, used their senses to investigate, heard stories of the past, foraged for natural materials, explored other artists work about the site and drew on all this to create amazing artwork. In the local exhibitions their work will help bring the Mosses to life for others in their family and the wider community. The project has had real depth, and I believe will have created lasting memories and a sense of connection to the Mosses for the young people involved.

All round a smashing collaborative creative project!”

Anna Martin, Marches Mosses Events Officer,
Shropshire Wildlife Trust



Activities that Wem Youth Club took part in at Whixall Moss and in the Youth Club included:

- Splashing about in puddles, bouncy bog and finding sundews and handling raft spiders
- Learning about the importance of peat, sphagnum moss, wetland ecology, water and carbon through talks and games
- Listening, collecting descriptive words and writing poetry
- Foraging for plants for eco-printing and cyanotype printing
- Observational drawing and mono-printing
- Having a go at video/photography and sound recording

"I feel really small, because there is so much space around you"

"Its glorious! Its so beautiful"

"I loved learning all about it"

I was just amazed, I didn't realise it was so big!"

Wem Youth Club members



peat – surface – sky

An exhibition at Wem Town Hall by Wem Youth Club featuring three 7m long banners, photographs, and artworks made by the children, and other artworks, including prints by Andrew Howe and works by Sue Challis (15th Sept to 30th October)

Site interventions - Sculpture

The Art Trail at the Marches Mosses comprised a sound trail and a series of sculptural waymarkers by Keith Ashford and Elizabeth Turner. The sculptures encouraged visitors to look at the landscape and reflect on how the land is valued and measured (July – November 2021)

“Helped me to explore a different type of sculptural language for making art in the landscape that both reflects elements of place (industrial fragments, horizon line etc) and with the use of measuring tools also introduces a new way of viewing.

Great opportunity to learn about Whixall Moss landscape through multiple visits and meeting different people with huge knowledge about the place, its plants and wildlife.

The chance to take the sculptures to more locations across Shropshire is very exciting and extends the project for us into next year.”

Elizabeth Turner

“Liked how the sculptural waymarkers framed the landscape drawing upon the tools of the past; Learned more about the lived histories of local people.”
Sheila Birch Art trail visitor



Keith Ashford and Elizabeth Turner with their sculpture, Inclinometer



Centre Finder II, Elizabeth Turner and Keith Ashford

Site interventions - Soundscapes

The immersive sound trail created by Andrew Howe and Kim V. Goldsmith was accessible via the Echoes app or via QR scan linked to SoundCloud. It comprises soundscapes created using field recordings in both the Mosses and Marshes, to reveal the landscape not ordinarily experienced using night time sounds, trees, birdsong and underwater sounds, aural history recordings with local people and sounds telling the history of the Mosses

The Wem Sound Trail of the Mosses was created by Andrew Howe and partners and located in Wem town centre, also accessible via the Echoes app (October 2021)

“...really informative, beautiful recordings...”
Dr Colin Black, composer/sound artist who heard the individual sound recordings via an ABC Radio podcast

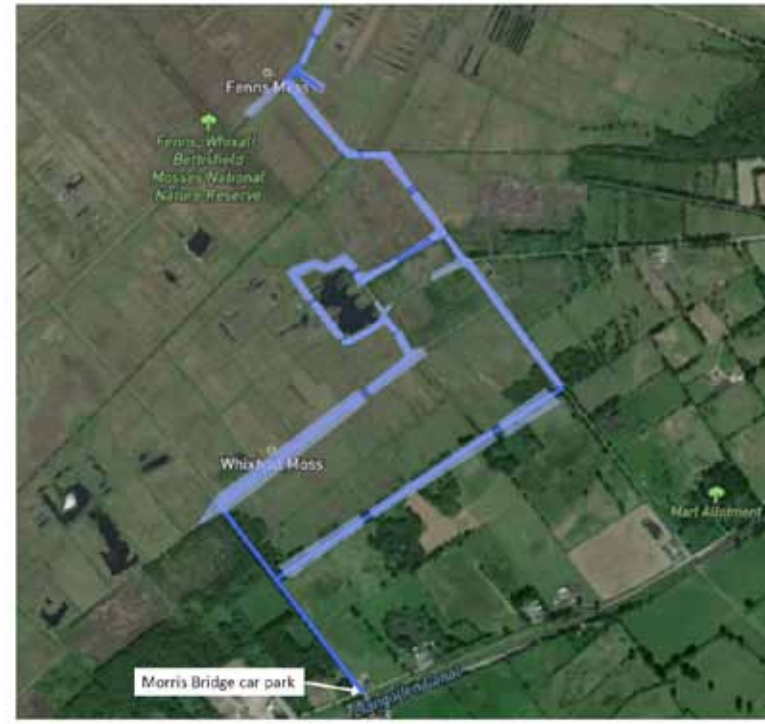
Scan QR code to listen to:



Sonic Stories of the Wetlands



Soundscapes from the Mosses and Marshes art trail



Map of soundscape zones at Whixall Moss on the Echoes app



I am Walking, soundscape by Andrew Howe and Kim V. Goldsmith

Other public engagement

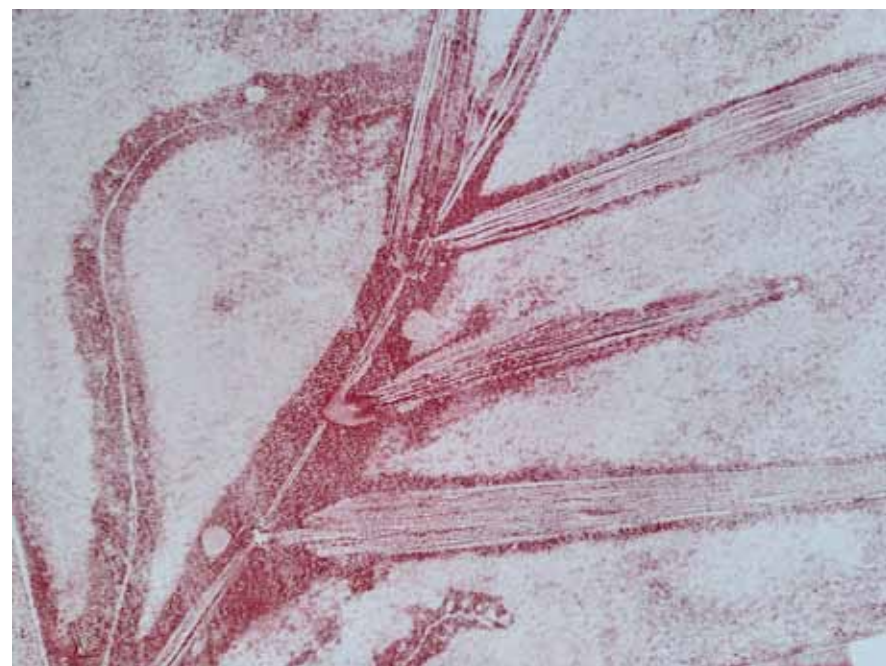
Two print workshops run by Andrew Howe with Shropshire Wildlife Trust at Whixall Marina as part of the **Shropshire Love Nature Festival**. Participants were able to experiment and learn new skills by trying out simple monoprinting techniques using acetate sheets for printing from, gelli plates and stamps and stencils. The theme of the workshop was inspired by nature and participants could forage for leaves or other natural materials to use as part of the printing process or as inspiration for creating stamps or stencils. (August 2021)

Meet the artists day, with Andrew Howe, Keith Ashford and Elizabeth Turner at Whixall Moss (1st July 2021)

Guided walk to the Art Trail at Whixall Moss by Andrew Howe, Keith Ashford and Elizabeth Turner

Artist talk – a conversation between Andrew Howe and Kim V. Goldsmith online (14th October)

The Future of Wetlands webinar, - An event hosted online by the **Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management** (CIWEM). Andrew Howe presented a talk about the Mosses and Marshes project and arts and science collaborations. Robert Duff, project manager for Natural England gave a talk about the BogLIFE peatbog regeneration project and there followed a Q&A discussion chaired by Dave Pritchard, chair of CIWEM's Art and Environment Network and chair of the Ramsar Culture Network (25th March 2021)



“Reading the book, walking the mosses, I’ve certainly learned more about these places, and about how artistic practices might approach them in the time we live in.”
Jean Atkin, writer, participant in guided walk



“As I walked, I began to realise that not only was I walking as if I was with the artists but I was the walker and I was noticing the little details around me. It was me, I am walking.”
in conversation with participant in guided walk after listening to the soundscape “I am Walking”

“I love wetlands, they are mysterious and wondrous places to me. We had a small wetland area at the bottom of the garden where we lived in Australia. The frogs calling madly, the water birds, the inlets of water into land, the meeting of the two, land and water, the merging, the mists that come down...all seem very evocative and poetic to me. I want to visit more wetlands in the UK. I love wetland birds and some of their calls. It is liminal world., A place between. Activities are walking, movement and dance, meditation, poetry, journal writing....sitting and being and letting it all in. Gazing. Listening. Watching movement of air on water, birds landing. Wetlands are meditative places, they call you. “,
Satyo, participant in guided walk at Whixall Moss

Community Stories

In the localities of both the Marches Mosses and Maquarie Marshes, Howe and Goldsmith gathered stories and conversations with people connected with the wetlands. These are available either through the sound trails, or via Storymaps and blog posts on the artists’ respective websites.

“There’s always been a feeling that voices were missing from the conversations around these special places, for a range of reasons. The environment itself being one of them – in a way that doesn’t anthropomorphise it. The opportunity to share deep listening experiences through the artworks, links in the book, in radio interviews, podcasts and the project blogs; listening to others speak in a facilitated event; and providing other ways of participating in the conversation offline and online, including within the artworks, has allowed quieter voices to take their place at the table. As artists, we have the opportunity to shuffle the seating and bring more perspectives to the discussion. We’ve started this process, but it’s not yet finished.”

Kim V. Goldsmith, artist



Barbara Clorley and Bill Allmark, Whixall Moss

Discussion

International online panel discussion on the topic of “Alternative ways of understanding and valuing special environments to help shape their future” bringing together a group of natural resource managers, scientists, academics, and cultural consultants from Australia and the UK with a wealth of experience in land and natural resource management issues. Issues were introduced to the discussion by six video provocateurs from Australia and UK (11th November 2021)

“Some very important and passionate perspectives shared here tonight - thanks to everyone”

Dr Tim Ralph, geomorphologist and Macquarie Marshes researcher, Macquarie University Australia

“I feel excited and grateful to hear these diverse [views] especially from Australia – thanks.”

Dr Sue Challis, artist

“Thanks Kim and colleagues for the continued meticulous planning – it’s very much appreciated.”

Dave Pritchard, panelist, Ramsar Culture Network



Panelists (clockwise from top left): Dave Pritchard (UK), Fleur and Laurance Magick Dennis, Milan Dhiyaan (AU), Kate Mildner (AU), Tim Hosking (AU), Jessica Moore, facilitator of Dubbo Regional Council (AU), Dr Tim Acott. The panel also included Robert Duff, Natural England (UK), not shown above

Documenting

Book

The **MOSSES AND MARSHES project book** was published October 2021. Edited by Dr Liz Charpleix, with a foreword by Dave Pritchard (Ramsar Culture Network), the book goes beyond the artworks and research and features an array of images and texts from curators Gudrun Filipiska (UK), Jamie Lea Trindall (AUS), ecological, environmental and cultural writings by Tim Hosking (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment), Fleur and Laurance Magick Denis of Milan Dhiyaan, Sooty Welsh (Wayilwan Elder/artist), Cathie Sleight (Shropshire Wildlife Trust), Robert Duff (Natural England), and many other project partners and people from the communities around the Mosses and Marshes.

Film

A short film documenting the **peat-surface-sky** project by MediaActive Projects CIC

Internet

Websites collating information about the project artworks, events and resources, with ongoing blog posts documenting activities and conversations/stories gathered from local community and people associated with the wetland sites:

www.ofthemosses.com and www.eco-pulse.art

“This book is beautifully written and presented, with the clever use of QR codes, that allows the reader to experience through sound and vision this beauty. It encouraged me to further explore the effects of colonisation on this diverse landscape, to the present-day challenges of climate change. Positively thought provoking and beautiful.”
Natalie Cutler, interested reader with historical family connections to the Marshes, Sydney Australia

“On reading Mosses and Marshes I was intrigued to learn of new places I had never encountered and to be introduced to these landscapes by two artists passionate about these environments. This book which documents and expands on elements of this project, provides insights into the extensive investigation of place as habitat, home, limited resource, human habitat and in some ways a political arena. The artists recognise and explore the fragility of the landscape and the history of human impact in these watery locations. I totally agree when Andrew Howe states “the anthropocentric illusion that humans are in control, and therefore capable of solving the problems our impact has set in motion.” We are not in control but could do so much better.”
A Glynn NSW



Impact

The project:

- Enabled the lead artists and artist partners to create high quality artworks in a range of formats for exhibiting in gallery exhibitions and in the landscape.
- Raised awareness and understanding of the two wetlands by engaging with local community, visitors and wider public.
- Raised questions and provoked discussion about the values of fragile ecosystems by bringing together scientists, land managers and cultural specialists.
- Engaged people in self-guided arts trails, guided walks, workshops and creative events to encourage stronger connections with the landscape and enable people to learn or develop arts techniques in printing workshops.
- Gave a voice to ordinary people, young and old, by recording memories and opinions in response to the landscape and its social and historical contexts.
- Developed research and arts skills/experience of artist partners.

What a magnificent undertaking by artists respecting our environment. Love the Australian input!!

“From the events I’ve been part of, and the book, I’ve learned how others value the wetlands, from different perspectives. It’s reinforced my belief these are very important places to look after into the future.”

Kate Mildner, discussion panelist.

The project:

- Established long-lasting outcomes for future use and reference, including artworks, website, film, photographs, book, sound trails, and research.
- Used creative activities and environmental learning with partner Shropshire Wildlife Trust to help build understanding, confidence and sense of ownership in the landscape for a group of young people from Wem Youth Club.
- Helped to broaden national and international recognition of these wetlands and their cultural and environmental importance.
- Provided a platform from which to develop further artist residencies and projects involving the arts linked to the wetlands.

“Whenever I go back there again, I get this sort of calm, freedom, peaceful feeling and its actually quite nice”
John, Wem Youth Club member



In Figures

Exhibition visitors:

700 Qube)
1000+ Wem Town Hall

Event participants:

700 est Visitors to Fenns, Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses NNR for Art Trail of sounds and sculpture
20+ Wem Youth Club members
20 Shropshire Love Nature workshop
21 Art Trail guided walk
300+ Environmental practitioners and other attendees at or engaging with the CIWEM webinar
20 Attendees for artist talk
25 Attendees for International Discussion Panel
50 Attendees at face-to-face talks about the project by Kim Goldsmith within the Macquarie catchment to field naturalists and the business community

Audience

100+ Artists and environmental practioners learning about the project via the Ramsar Culture Network, seminars and other networkig events, such as the Deep Peat anthology series of talks and events, and the Arts and Artists in Landscape and Environmental Research Today (AALERT) research forum
40,000Shropshire residents and Shropshire Wildlife Trust members learning about the project via BBC Radio Shropshire and SWT members magazine article
15,000 est. readership for The Environment, CIWEM magazine article
3,500+ followers on social media and website updates (excluding project parners

“I’m visiting the area so was unfamiliar with most of the lived history of the Moss. The sound trail encouraged me to listen more attentively & consciously to my surroundings as I walked around, especially to the curlews.”
Lorne Osborne, art trail visitor

“Good to see an installation that doesn’t hide from the industrial past. I think it rhymes with the landscape. So nice to be able to walk in a beautiful place and come across such interesting art.”
BK, art trail visitor

Legacy

Artworks, research and documentation

New artworks created by the lead artists and by Keith Ashford and Elizabeth Turner will be shown at additional exhibitions in Shropshire and in Australia.

The project has been documented in a book, in film and websites collating information about the project artworks, events and resources, with ongoing blog posts documenting activities and conversations/ stories gathered from local community and people associated with the wetland sites.

The engagement work with Wem Youth Club resulted in the peat-surface-sky artworks, which were exhibited in exhibitions in Wem and at Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury. Further exhibitions are planned for other venues in Shropshire in 2022. The young people involved learned new arts skills and knowledge about wetland ecology and climate change issues, and they developed confidence in exploring the natural landscape.

Public Engagement

The public engagement during the project was well received by partners Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Natural England and with local parish council and Shropshire Council. A platform has been established from which further opportunities can be extended to engage the local community.

The international discussion panel started an ongoing conversation that will continue in communities connected to the respective Mosses and Marshes wetlands and in relevant research communities. This conversation is building a level of trust, understanding and challenge into the relationships between artists, community and scientists.

“Listening tonight I heard about access and about the future. Children are our future. Schools are our vehicle. Education is our tool and the arts are the focus to bring this message to a wider audience. Some may not have access to actually walk on the marshes and the mosses but they can be introduced to it via film, drama, stories, books, language. Connections can be made by people from all walks visiting schools, communities and bringing it to the people.”
Therese Gabriel Wilkins, artist/educator

Next steps

Exhibitions

In 2022, attention will switch to events taking place in Australia with exhibitions featuring collaborative and individual work by Kim V. Goldsmith and Andrew Howe taking place at:

M16 Artspace, Canberra - 15th April - 1st May 2022

Outback Arts Creative Arts Space, Coonamble - May/June 2022

In the UK, the peat-surface-sky artworks by Wem Youth Club feature in an exhibition at Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury (Jan-Feb 2022) also with works by Howe/Goldsmith. Further exhibitions of the Wem Youth Club banners and artworks are planned for other venues in Shropshire.

Artworks created by Keith Ashford and Elizabeth Turner will be shown at other venues in Shropshire.

For further information and details of events visit:

ofthemosses.com | www.eco-pulse.art

Or contact the artists by email:

andrew@andrew-howe.com | kim@kvgoldsmith.com

Public Engagement

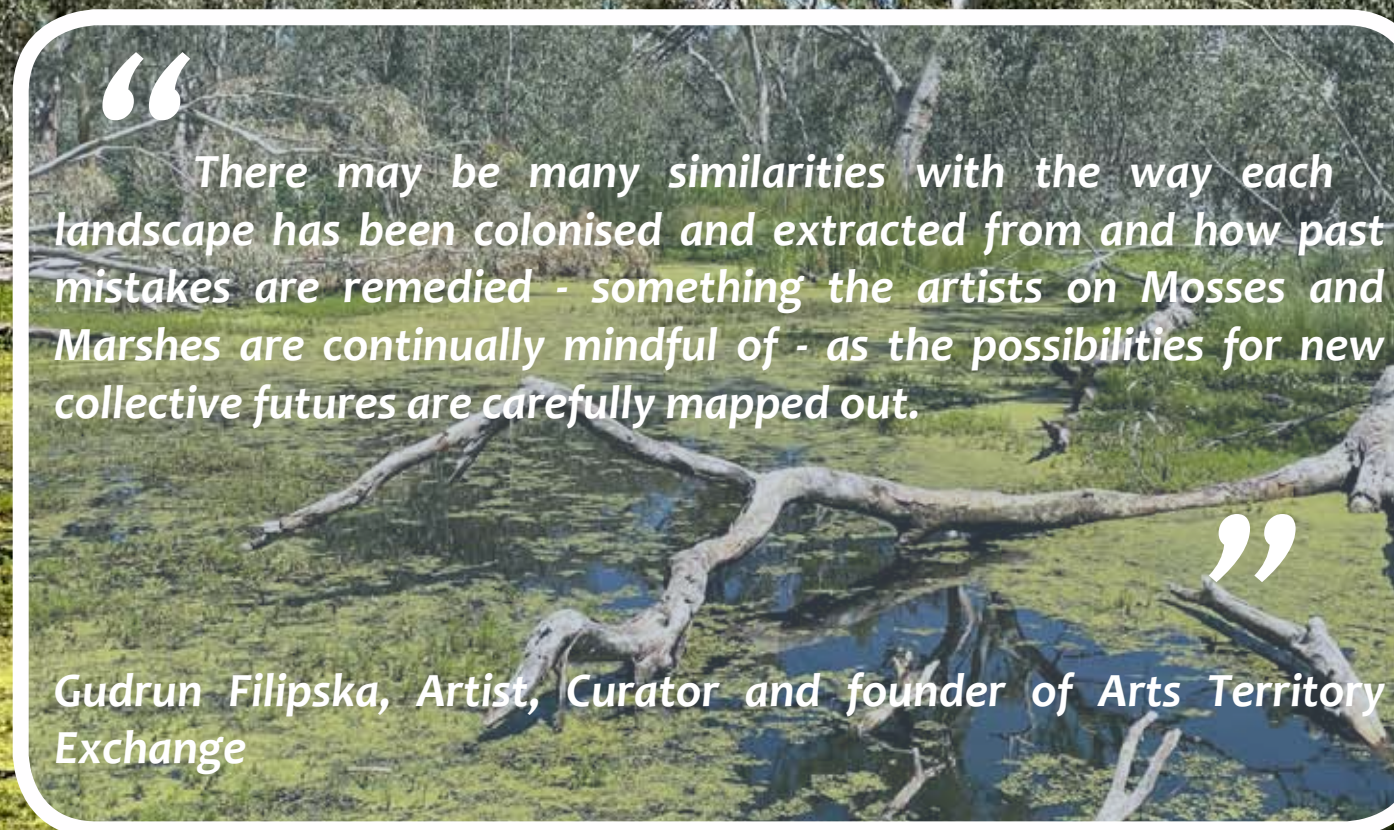
Kim V. Goldsmith will be leading the MACQUARIE MARSHES SOUND WALK on 20-21 May. This will be a field trip to the Marshes alongside the exhibition in Coonamble. This event is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW, Outback Arts, and the Macquarie Wetlands Association.

The artists and local partners in both the Mosses and Marshes are keen to build on public engagement established in 2021 and develop further opportunities to involve people at the wetlands and invite a more diverse range of views.

Values Voices Action

As part of the follow-up activities continuing from the International Discussion Panel event, the artists invite you to join the conversation around some of the issues raised. You can view a recording of the event and add your comments via the Values Voices Action form by visiting:

<https://eco-pulse.art/values-voices-action/>



“ There may be many similarities with the way each landscape has been colonised and extracted from and how past mistakes are remedied - something the artists on Mosses and Marshes are continually mindful of - as the possibilities for new collective futures are carefully mapped out. ”

Gudrun Filipka, Artist, Curator and founder of Arts Territory Exchange

MOSSSES AND MARSHES

Thank you to our funders and supporters:

