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‘Proticipation’: The Australia Council and Social Media Arts in Virtual Worlds

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In 2007 the Australia Council for the Arts became the first national arts funding body in the world to fund an artist residency in the virtual domain of Second Life. The successful recipients, writer Justin Clemens, visual artist Christopher Dodds and sound artist Adam Nash, proposed a mixed reality, networked project linking people in real life with avatars in a virtual world. Their residency project titled *Babelswarm* was a realtime, 3D sound sculpture grown from the conversion of words spoken and letters typed by people both in a physical gallery and as avatars in Second Life.

This residency generated one of the most successful media responses for any initiative the Australia Council has run to date. The project included several other highlights for the Australia Council, including the first in-world media campaign, the first in-world client meetings, the first in-world artists match-makers RSS feed, the first in-world international artist talk and the first in-world grants assessment meeting.

Babelswarm was a huge critical success, with a nationally profiled launch in regional Australia and Second Life. In part as a result of this success, several subsequent virtual world and social media arts initiatives were developed by the Australia Council to engage with a broader range of audiences, platforms, interfaces and curatorial practices, including the Massive Multi-user Virtual Environment initiative (MMUVE IT!); the *Frontline Media* initiative (involving Muslim and Indigenous Youth in Darwin); *Virtual Macbeth*; *Thursday’s Fictions* and the Australian Centre of Virtual Art Laboratory (ACVA Lab), an interdisciplinary arts space for virtual collaboration.



Fig. 1: Artists from *Babelswarm*, the Australia Council's first initiative in Second Life. L to R: Adam Nash (avatar Adam Ramona), Christopher Dodds (avatar Mashup Islander), and Justin Clemens (avatar S1 Gausman). Courtesy the Australian Centre of Virtual Art (ACVA).

Built into the core of these initiatives' funding criteria were requirements for artists and curators to experiment with new curatorial practices, mixed reality participation and transnational audience development.

Much of the social media art that has emerged as a result, requires what I have termed *proticipation*. Proticipation describes the production of a social media artwork through the participation of users, either as avatars and/or in physical form. I use the term proticipation, as opposed to produsage (another term often deployed for this type of work) as proticipation implies a more active, performative engagement with the act of creation [2].

Although still at the beginning of these new virtual world practices, Australian funding recipients, and more recently major Australian arts institutions such as the National Portrait Gallery of Australia are continuing to develop critically acclaimed, globally engaged, mixed reality projects, where user proticipation is central to the co-creation of art.

Of particular interest is the emergence of a very strong Indigenous presence in these domains, highlighted by the selection of artist Aroha Groves' Second Life work for the inaugural new media arts category of the 2010 Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award, the most significant Indigenous art award in Australia.

References

- [1] Social media arts describes new types of media art that has emerged in social networking sites such as Second Life, Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms. The term social media arts combines the concept of *Social Media* [or social networking] 'an umbrella term that defines the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio' with the concept of *Media Arts*, which 'at its simplest level is the application of existing and new technologies within the arts'. Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media Accessed. 16 July 2008; *New Media Arts Scoping Study*, Australia Council for the Arts, 2006, p11; Peach, Ricardo *The Second Life funding Landscape: Keith Gallash Interviews Ricardo Peach, the Inter-Arts Office*, REALTIME, October-November 2008 www.realtimearts.net/article/87/9181 Accessed 19 July 2010.
- [2] Bruns, Axel, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, February 2008 <http://produsage.org/book> Accessed 7 July 2010