

The Dee and Don Catchment Areas – Creating resilience to Climate Change

What are we trying to achieve?

The Barn's work with the Harrison Studio aims to change our perspective of the relationship between humans and the environment.

We are accustomed to seeing ourselves as a human species at the centre of a set of interests that the environment serves. This has brought about an undermining of the ecosystems upon which we depend. Instead we need to imagine ourselves as one species among many, working with values and forms of action based on understanding Life as a whole.

Why here?

We have invited the Harrison Studio, Santa Cruz, California (<http://theharrisonstudio.net/>) to develop a programme of work over 2-3 years to help us address this aim in relation to the place in which we live. This is founded on the premise that if we start here, from our own deep knowledge and understanding of this place, we will learn more and be better able to transfer our learning to other contexts.

Why the Harrison Studio?

Invited by governments, organisations and individuals, Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison, ecology artists and systems thinkers, have over the past fifty years examined the eco culture of specific places under threat. In response, they create work that traces the interconnectedness of living systems, of which the human is but a part, reimagining a place within a much larger 'field' of relations and interdependencies. They frame this work through two important questions: **How big is here? How long is now?**

To quote the Harrisons' recent work

We envision a more ecologically grounded human population
Supported by global education in eco-literacy,
As well as the government representing both humanity and
Multispecies ecosystems co-equally

from *The Force Majeure*, A very incomplete conclusion in *The Time of the Force Majeure*,
Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison 2016, p 501

The Harrisons develop a shared conversation and increased awareness by drawing together expertise in the arts, sciences and local practices and ways of knowing, by observing and listening closely to what the human and natural environment is revealing in an on-going process of adaption to change.

An example

The Lagoon Cycle, their first shared work begun in 1976 and continuously refined, is an account of their exploration of the indigenous habitat of a crab in Sri Lanka and the implications of attempting to breed the crab in a different environment. Through their research, the natural lagoon in which the crab is found in Sri Lanka becomes a series of artificial tanks in California. These tanks present significant economic potential but with problematic ecological implications, a set of choices and

tensions of the kind that we confront on a day-to day basis.

In this work, The Harrisons reconstructed step-by-step points of interdependence between the crab and its habitat, responding to each new question as it arose. They documented their journey. Each development is represented as a 'lagoon', a discrete experience. Poetry, drawing, large-scale maps and photographs configure crucial links to form a complex narrative, raising questions, seeking practical solutions and exploring the implications of the success and failure of experimentation. The subject – the crab – becomes a metaphor of interdependence between living forms. In this way the Harrisons emphasize the often unacknowledged ways of coping with the world.

What this is this project *not* about?

We are anxious not to duplicate or undermine current effort that is already ongoing in the region in particular in relation to the floods of 2015/16. In this programme of work the floods are a moment in time and experience that focuses our minds on the broader issues. The programme is also *not* concerned with creating practical solutions in the immediate present but rather creating a vision in the long term that will support the development of new thinking and ways of being.

Why is the Barn hosting this programme?

The Barn has a long history of involvement in the environment. Starting life as a rehearsal space for a community play in disused farm buildings in the early 1990s, the Barn helped launch Aberdeenshire's Slow Food Convivium with a number of local people including Val and Calum Buchanan in 2002. This led to the building of Buchanan's café focused on locally grown and crafted food and drink in 2010, including the installation of a biomass boiler. Secondly two fields of allotment gardens and a wild garden were established behind the Barn during 2007-10. We have recently taken over the disused Woodend farmhouse walled garden with the intention of developing it into a Physic Garden. Over its 23-year existence as an arts centre, the Barn has evolved within an ethos of sustainable development and a low carbon footprint.

The Barn plays a key role in supporting artists to make work inspired by our location and context. Increasingly, the organisation has sought to work with associate artists over a number of years as a means of delivering more significant outcomes for both artists and communities.

Who will help facilitate the project?

Lorraine Grant, the Barn's Director, began her career as a visual arts curator in a range of public and private galleries, and spent over 15 years managing Cultural Services departments within several Scottish Local Authorities prior to joining the Barn. Mark Hope was a director in the oil industry in the 1990/2000s and is co-founder of Woodend Arts and **sound** festival. He was a member of the Scottish Government's Cabinet Sub Committee on Sustainability (2000-2). Anne Douglas co-founded *On the Edge Research* with Chris Fremantle, investigating the role of the artist in public life, including art and ecology. Chris Fremantle is founder and director of ecoartscotland and project managed the Harrisons' Greenhouse Britain (2000-2007) with associate artist, David Haley.

We close with The Harrisons "very incomplete conclusion" from *The Time of the Force Majeure*, Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison 2016 p 501

We see no alternative, whether forced or voluntary
For civil societies but to recreate themselves

And most of their social organisations
To compensate for the stresses
That they have forced on natural systems

We see no alternative than yield to nature's agency
Accepting a new form of global governance that reflects
Surrendering the idea that humankind is a special case
Understanding that we are simply
Even humbly, a species among species

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