



Isle of Plenty

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project manager



It was one of those times when you can actually feel how the arts can have an impact on a community, an ordinary rural community. In this case, it came down to how the community sees itself. I saw such beautiful outcomes.

Cygnnet was one of the sites for *Isle of Plenty* in the 2007 *Ten Days on the Island* festival. It's a lovely small town about 45 minutes south of Hobart. It's actually on the water but it's rural and historically it's got a strong apple picking culture. In the 1960s a lot of people moved into the area and there was a division or split. It was the old timers versus the newcomers. Over the last few years, many more people have moved to Tasmania and now this town which used to be thought of as isolated, is seen as commuting distance from the city. As the identity of the town is changing, we thought that this would be a great time to acknowledge the old traditions of the area and incorporate a celebration of the newcomers.

The brief for *Isle of Plenty* was to produce three site-specific landscape installations across Tasmania that would reflect and celebrate the regional areas. It was a huge new initiative and I was the project manager. My job was to try and keep all the partners and the players communicating, working

together, so we had a common theme. And to make sure that everyone felt supported at a local community level.

Nicolas Goodwolf was the artist chosen for the Cygnnet site. He lives in the area and had driven around over the years seeing the little old apple pickers' huts falling down around the hillsides. The huts were where the seasonal workers stayed and they were often clustered together like little villages around the orchards. They were such an integral part of the culture of the town and so it was like this moment in time, this tradition was coming to an end. Nicolas wanted to comment on that and celebrate it, so he built a contemporary version of the apple pickers' huts. He played with the perspective of them so that when you were viewing them, you couldn't actually tell until you got up close whether they were small or large. And he clad them in white lycra and scattered them around the local park. Some were actually in a little creek that ran through the park. It's a tidal creek so you could see the water rising and falling. At night they were lit up and gave a beautiful glow.

It's a big leap having this incredible contemporary artwork plonked in a little rural town and there was some fear for a while that people might think we were actually making fun of the apple picking culture. The community coordinator worked hard in the lead up with a lot of beautiful media work to explain straight up that this was a contemporary interpretation.

It was decided to have an apple festival at the same time and build in elements of the old apple picking traditions. Cygnnet had a long tradition of apple queen festivals to draw from. There's this old hall next door to the art installation and that's where they did a display of old apple-picking boxes and paraphernalia and they had an apple pie bake-off. There were oral histories and old film footage. The Apple Queen Festival was always a huge community get together. All the young girls used to dress up in their finery and parade around the sports ground and the school children would do little routines. That was until the apple picking industry went into decline and the festival died off and people were still working hard but not having that lovely celebration at the end of the harvest.

In some small way, our apple festival revisited those times. There was a parade with the iconic apple queen float and a concert and an apple queen crowning. Local performers were given great exposure and there was so much enthusiasm for making it an annual event and bringing the festival back. The newcomers loved it. They were taken back to that community's past and had the chance to feel the history of that place, too.

I loved seeing all the old apple queens from the past festivals who were invited to be a part of this one. When those old apple queens got together, they had tears in their eyes and it was really moving. They were remembering what it used to be.





LEFT:
Hut culture installation – night
PHOTO: NICOLAS GOODWOLF (ARTIST)

ABOVE:
Hut culture installation – day
PHOTO: NICOLAS GOODWOLF

RIGHT:
Apple Queen
PHOTO: ANGELA BARRINGTON

