



EARTH ARTS AND RONA16

CELEBRATING THE RIGHTS OF NATURE

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FEATURE

September and October 2016, artists around Australia will be sharing their work, hosting exhibitions and engaging the wider community in conversations about the rights of nature.

AELA, Earth Arts and RONA16

The Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) is a national not-for-profit organisation created in 2012 by a group of lawyers concerned about the deteriorating health of the natural world, and in particular, the role that law and governance plays in supporting the legal destruction of our precious natural environment. AELA's mission is to increase the

An exciting collaboration between artists, lawyers and community groups is known as 'RONA16', or 'Rights of Nature Australia 2016', and has been created by the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) in the lead up to Australia's first Rights of Nature Tribunal, which will be held in Brisbane on 22 October. RONA16 is a network of creative events that includes a major art exhibition at the Brisbane Powerhouse, called 'Plenty', storytelling in Perth, a regional art exhibition in Bundaberg, collaborative arts events in Melbourne and a cabaret night in Sydney. In this article we share an overview of RONA16 by providing an introduction to the work of AELA and its Earth Arts program, and highlighting some of the fantastic work that artists are sharing, to celebrate our relationship with the wider Earth community.

understanding and practical implementation of Earth centred law, governance and ethics ('Earth jurisprudence') in Australia. AELA's work is inspired by deep ecologist Thomas Berry, and as a 'response to the Great Work', is multi-disciplinary and

brings people together from different cultures, professional backgrounds and bio-regions of Australia. It combines academic research, advocacy and community based projects and is connected by five core themes: changing culture, reconnecting with

what matters, building community, building alternatives and transforming law and governance.

A core part of AELA's work is helping people to reflect upon and understand the fundamentally anthropocentric or 'human centred' nature of western style law and governance and the devastation that our human centred, 'pro-growth' culture causes to the natural world. We don't dwell on the destructive capacity of our culture, however – we work with communities, academics and others to explore positive cultural responses and practical projects that support systemic change that can nurture, rather than destroy, the natural world.

AELA has a deep respect for the power of human artistic expression, and its capacity to help us reflect and respond to our world, and to imagine and create a different future. This is why our organisation created the Earth Arts program, to support collaboration between lawyers, governance experts and artists from all traditions. Earth Arts is designed to be inclusive, experimental and positive.

When AELA created the Rights of Nature Tribunal Australia, which will hold its first public hearing in Brisbane on 22nd October, we were keen to ensure that the Tribunal was connected to our Earth Arts program. The Tribunal offers a unique space for Australians to speak on behalf of the ecosystems they love, and to make recommendations about how the law should be changed to better protect our natural world. RONA16 was created by AELA to blend the Tribunal's creative reinterpretation of environmental governance with cultural responses to the rights of the natural world to flourish.

RONA16 works as a loose network of interconnected activities that are hosted on a central portal (www.rona16.org.au). In addition to exhibitions, individual artists can register their work online and there's also an artist-in-residence program that enables a number of artists to attend the Rights of Nature Tribunal and respond with work that will be featured next year, in RONA17.

RONA 16 THEMES

All RONA16 events and responses respond and relate to the following inter-connected themes, in the full spectrum from meta to micro nuances. (See chart)

RONA16 Events and Artists

Our major national exhibition 'Plenty', is being hosted by the Brisbane Powerhouse from 26 September to 23 October. This exhibition has curated art works by established and emerging artists that explore and stimulate our thinking about human connectedness to the natural world. Drawing on a variety of media, that includes sound and video works, wall sculptures, drawings and photographs, the exhibition is designed for the audience to reflect not only on ways that we have connected to the natural world in the past but ways in which we may imagine that relationship in the future. The title 'Plenty' is intended to remind us that until relatively recently in developed western countries there was a popular notion that the natural world represents a cornucopia for human consumption. Since the eighteenth century, through paintings of landscapes and still life arrangements, artists have tended to represent that nature/human relationship as a natural hierarchy with 'man' on top. Genesis 1:26 clarifies the hierarchy: 'Let us make man in our image,

after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'

For most of human history, the natural world appeared to provide us with everything we need to thrive. But given the current ecological crisis – driven by humanity's insatiable consumption of the world's minerals, plants, animals, water and soils – is the Earth still plentiful?

'Plenty' is an exhibition that aims to engage audiences with questions about our interconnectedness and interdependence on the natural world. The exhibition will seek to reactivate a sense of wonder in the everyday, and to assist in the contemplation of our place on this small planet.

The industrial ruin that has become the Brisbane Powerhouse Performing art space, is an ideal site for thinking about regeneration and transformation, as it is a defunct coal fired electrical power station architecturally transformed into a healthy, historically aware and resource efficient site for creative activities.

Reveal, reflect and critique the current flawed paradigm of western law which:

Privileges humans over other forms of life

Has created governance systems that do not reflect how the natural world works

Is built on the idea that humans 'own' nature – nature is property, objectified, commodified (bought and sold), caged, fenced, destroyed

Gives 'rights' to humans and human created fictions – corporations, ships-while plants, animals, ecosystems have no rights, are invisible and 'dead' in the eyes of the law

Privileges western legal, scientific and evidentiary frameworks of knowledge

Legalises the destruction of vital ecosystems and life support systems

Imagine and create the paradigm we're proposing – Earth laws and rights of nature

Humans are one part of nature – interconnected, interdependent with the Earth Community

Human governance systems should be embedded in deep knowledge of local Earth communities

Non-human agency is vital, the non-human world belongs to no-one; vibrant biodiversity is critical to life on earth

Recognising that all life and life supporting systems on Earth have 'a right to exist, thrive and evolve'

Respects indigenous knowledge, human 'lived' experience, emotional and spiritual connections, as well as scientific and rational ways of knowing

Holds all life sacred and balances reasonable human needs with the rights of the natural world to exist and evolve; would never prize human wants over the destruction of ecosystems