



Lyndal Jones: Climate Change, Performance and the Avoca Project

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Abstract

The Avoca Project (2005–15) by Lyndal Jones is a broad communal artwork based on a German prefabricated house which was transported in 1850 to the small Australian town of Avoca in Victoria. The artist purchased the house in 2004. The site, however, is more than a house; it is a place where Jones and visiting artists-in-residence (Australian and international), academics and members of the local community can gather to consider the impact of climate change and environmental sustainability. Jones's 2010 performance, *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca*, illustrates her belief in *The Avoca Project* as a hub for environmental discussion. This performative video work exemplifies Jones's reasons for utilising art as a powerful expression of climate change.

Under Jones's management, The Avoca Project signposts the creative challenge of a changing natural environment. It is this use of the house as live-in artwork combined with Jones's innovation with projects such as Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca that makes The Avoca Project significant within the consideration of climate change and contemporary visual art.

Keywords: Climate change, performance, The Avoca Project

Lyndal Jones: Climate Change, Performance and the Avoca Project

The Avoca Project (2005–15) by Lyndal Jones is a broad communal artwork based on a German prefabricated house, transported in 1850 to the small Australian town of Avoca in rural Victoria. *The Avoca Project* is a place where Jones and visiting artists, academics and members of the local community can gather to deliberate the effect of climate change and regional identity within a changing Australian socio-economic rural environment. *The Avoca Project* bridges the divide between contemporary art practice and local community. Jones's 2010 performance, *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca*, illustrates her belief in *The Avoca Project* as a keystone for environmental discussion and survival of the local community. This performative video work exemplifies Jones's reasons for utilising art as a powerful expression of climate change and the notion of local. Under her management, *The Avoca Project* signposts the creative challenge of a changing natural environment and its effect upon a small regional township.

Australia has many iconic sites and public buildings, the Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Uluru are among the most familiar; however, few private houses in Australia are iconic. Those that do exist are recognised for the importance of the person associated with the building, such as Captain Cook's Cottage in Melbourne. Although there is a long history of artworks as active community participation, such as discussed by Claire Bishop and also Grant Kester, the significant difference with Jones's *The Avoca Project* is that it is based in the Australian rural environment. As Kester remarked on the change in fine art to a community sensibility:

What I am pointing to, then, in the art of the 1960s and 1970s is a relatively subtle movement away from the artwork as self-contained entity and towards a more dialogical relationship to the viewer (60). Bishop's and Kester's texts give an international overview of the history and impact of community arts and its variables across the arts sector. However, Jones's *The Avoca Project* is situated in an Australian context, and therefore its relevance to the needs of this 'sunburnt country' aids the understanding of global climate change. *The Avoca Project* is not only a house as art centre, it is an interdisciplinary communal artwork based within an international concern for environmental and regional issues, built on a physical site of timber, grass, mud, rocks, water and galvanised iron. A site where Jones and other artists and interested people can gather to consider, reflect and work upon the impact of climate change and environmental sustainability within a changing rural Australian environment.

As Jones elaborated on her aspirations for *The Avoca Project*: "I'm actually interested in what I call a model of possibility. So if you take one very old, very derelict house, how can it become a kind of model of possibility for the future? A symbol of optimism?" (2010a).



Figure 1

Like Ballarat and many of the surrounding towns, Avoca was established in the 1850s with the discovery of gold. The average Avoca house price in 2011 was \$150,000. A three-bedroom home can be rented for \$150 to \$200 per week. The Avoca region is a mixture of traditional farming and support services, and a growing tourist trade with its associated attractions. There are twenty established vineyards that form the Pyrenees Region Winery Tour, all within an hour's drive of Avoca.

Although Jones was born in Sydney, her early childhood years were spent in the Riverina district of New South Wales. She admits that her latter-day "country thing" has a "lovely familiarity to it" (2008a). She went to primary schools in small towns such as Hay, Deniliquin and Narrandera, and attended Echuca High School in Victoria. After university and some time spent teaching theatre, she moved to London in 1974, returning to Australia in 1977. In the late 1970s Jones performed the *At Home Series* (1977–80) at La Mama in Carlton, of which Jeanette Hoorn wrote: "Employing sound, slide projection and live bodies, she was already questioning spectatorship" (546). With *The Avoca Project*, Jones embraces the local rural community not only as audience but also as performer. Many of the guests dressed as animals in the *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca* performance were from the local community. The *Ark* performance resounds with Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque where predictable social hierarchies are overturned and, for a brief moment, new ones introduced; fact and fantasy merge and become one intermingled action. As Hynes commented in relation to Bakhtin, the visual arts and performance:

Bakhtin's phenomenology of self-other relationships also included attention to the perception of action and space, as experienced both by the performer and the viewer. Where, he wanted to know, is aesthetic value (86)?



Figure 2

The Avoca Project is known to local residents as the Swiss House, or, more accurately, Watford House. The house uses Baltic timbers in its construction, and this gives rise to the theory that it was fabricated in or near Hamburg, Germany. The building was shipped as a numbered weatherboard house and was erected by C. K. Pearson as the accommodation wing of the Avoca Hotel in 1856. Twenty years after it was attached to the rear of the Avoca Hotel, either in late 1871 or 1872, the house was moved to its present site. The building, as local residents recount, was “dragged on red-gum rollers by bullocks, down the hill to the river’s flood plain” (2008b).

Jones is the fourth owner of the house and the second artist to live there. She purchased the property from painter Noel Tunks, who had not resided in the house for some time. He put the house to auction and then learned that Jones was interested in buying it. In what Jones views as a generous action, Tunks withdrew the house from auction and offered it to her, from one artist to another. By 2004, the year Jones acquired the property, it was nearly uninhabitable. The house’s oil-based exterior walls, once white, are now weatherworn, peeled and stripped back; the consequence of several decades of neglect and the harsh Avoca climate. On deciding to purchase the house, Jones called in a builder for an assessment: “He just laughed and said ‘pull it down’. Most people thought it was too late” (2008c). Since then she has had the house re-plumbed, re-wired, re-glazed, re-stumped, and has repaired all the internal walls, plus added a new roof, drainpipes and guttering, underground water storage and galvanized tank. Nevertheless, Watford House is definitely not five-star holiday accommodation or a weekend artist’s retreat.

When referring to the work completed on the house, Jones prefers the term ‘rejuvenated’, not ‘repaired’ and certainly not ‘renovated’ (2010a). All work has been carried out using sustainable building practices. For example, roof water is now directed into the galvanized tank and underground storage system. One *Avoca Project* is titled *Mending the House* and includes the photographic series *Everything that Has to Be Done*, an ongoing photographic record of all work carried out on the house. The series documents the massive amount of work and care invested by Jones and volunteers in the house, including almost totally rebuilding the front balcony section. Watford House is situated on 4350 square metres of land, equal in size to four or even five normal Australian house blocks. The grounds are enclosed on three sides by a corrugated iron fence, as in many Australian country towns. The house is exposed and neighbours or those walking or driving on Dundas Street can easily see into the grounds, which are sectioned by raised, layered slate walls, giving a stepped appearance. The garden has been designed to highlight the seasons; for example, in autumn the grounds are abundant with bright red foliage. Jones elaborated on the house exterior:

It’s like a giant pop-up book. If you stand out the front, you will see the layers of the house are created by the rock walls. That will be increased as the tree plantings continue. There’s a circle around the house of established European trees, outside the circle we are planting indigenous trees. By planting more indigenous trees, I am heightening the difference (2010a).



Figure 3

The Avoca Project kitchen has a small refrigerator with enough space for a carton of milk, a container of butter, perhaps some meat – the absolute basics. There is an old-fashioned, aerated, green-metal food safe for fruit and vegetables, plus another wooden cupboard with mesh sides. This is to oblige the visiting artist-in-residence to be self-sufficient and to shop for fresh produce at the local stores. The laundry has no washing machine or dryer. To save water, the visiting artist-in-residence must use the local laundromat on High Street, in the process having to consider their energy usage. As Jones commented:

“People when they come here start to deal with water behaviours and that’s the most transforming thing” (2008c). There is a strong social-activity agenda to Jones’s small refrigerator and laundromat usage. The visiting artist-in-residence has to engage with the community, speak with the locals and connect beyond the boundaries of the house.

Throughout the house, heating is supplied by a water-radiator system piped from the kitchen wood-combustion stove. Visiting artists must cut their own firewood from what is collected on site. All six fireplaces work, including the Wamsler slow-combustion stove in the kitchen manufactured by a German company that specialises in wood-burning environmentally-friendly stoves. For Jones everything environmental must be considered within *The Avoca Project* as artwork, therefore her preference for the Wamsler stove. Jones is continually draft-proofing the house, filling holes through which heat may escape. In 2009 Watford House received heritage classification by the Victorian Government.

The house includes five bedrooms and a small lean-to behind the kitchen. Jones rebuilt the lean-to, insulated the walls and replaced everything as it had been originally. The effect is a small, comfortable bedroom-cum-study where an artist-in-residence could work without needing to heat the entire house. A narrow wooden spiral staircase leads to the upstairs rooms and balcony, and is a noticeable architectural feature. Jones has left a section of the interior wall in the stairwell exposed, showing the hand-written numerals used to reassemble the prefabricated building on its arrival in Australia.

Jones has installed a modern bathroom, but here, as with everything at *The Avoca Project*, there is an environmental basis. The bathroom is designed with a narrow but deep sink to save water. All renovations, whether period or modern, take into account the need for the house and outbuildings to be independent of town water. In 2006 Jones received a Federal Government Community Water Grant to improve water usage by reducing pollutants reaching waterways and recycling. Jones’s underground water tank holds 17,000 litres of water per year. She installed aural sensors within the storage system, the plan being to pipe the sound of water through the house interior as an artistic reminder of usage. Jones has termed these indicators “smart meters that are done as wonderful artworks” (2008b). Simon Torok has commented on the concept of combining science and art:

Climate change is an abstract concept. It is gradually creeping up on us, almost unnoticeable. And that is where art and science can say more together than apart. Art can create objects and images of future climates and highlight the fragility of what we have: science can impress on us the transience of the landscape and the future impacts climate change may have on it. Together art and science can inspire an emotional response, inspiring changes in our attitudes and behaviour that ensure our landscapes survive in more than photographs, paintings and memories (17).



Figure 4

The Avoca House vegetable garden is another key component of Jones's sustainable rural ethos. The garden has been laid out in accordance with Peter Andrews's principles of Natural Sequence Farming (NSF). Andrews has developed an environmental scientific farming method based on establishing the natural water flows that enable land to prosper. The vegetable garden is located at the top of the house block at high-water mark; in this way the garden has maximum drainage. Rain flows down through the site into the wetland located at the Dundas Street frontage. Jones noted that any non-indigenous trees planted are fruit bearing: "Most of the trees that I'm putting in that aren't indigenous have a duty, they do duty (2008c)" by offering shade in summer or growing fruit to eat.

Jane Prophet was the inaugural *Avoca Project* international artist-in-residence. Prophet is a British artist who has worked with new media for two decades. She is internationally recognised for her photographic pieces, temporary installations, objects and video. During her residency in 2007, she created *Counterbalance*, exhibited from 8 November 2007 to 14 January 2008. *Counterbalance* was a luminous, stepped grid of linear colour, measuring 12 metres by 8 metres. The three layers of the grid were positioned to represent the peak water levels of Avoca floods in the last century. The first *Avoca Project Field Day* held on Saturday 21 April 2007 was marketed on the premise of the Swiss House as a poetic image of adaptability. The day began at 9.30 am with a series of lectures and seminars including "Adapting to Climate Change: Renovating for a More Sustainable Future" and "Creating Change: Social and Community Action." The carbon footprint of each visitor's journey to Avoca was neutralised by the purchase, to the maximum cost of \$20, and planting of seedling trees. For the field day *The Avoca Project* was used as a research site, a practical example and stimulus for discussion on water sustainability, storage, use of grey water and wetland developments. The speakers, as varied as the topics, included Peter Andrews and Pyrenees Shire councillor Lisette Ashford from nearby Snake Valley. For Jones the day was a success, bringing a diverse crowd to Watford House. Many travelled from Melbourne, with about 120 people in attendance. Jones was impressed by the passion that the house gave rise to in the local community. As she remarked when discussing plans for the house:

I was talking about the house and ... about all these sorts of plans. And a woman put her hand up and she said, 'Lyndal, I would just like to point out to you that this house is very important to the town' (2010a).

In October 2009 Avoca held the inaugural Eco Living Festival, specifically with Jones's involvement (or leadership). The festival's main theme concerned creating a sustainable environment, or as Pyrenees Shire councillor John Quinn remarked in an email to the author, "drought-proofing the town." The festival began on the Friday night with a special showing of a video by Gayle Maddigan and Megan Evans titled *A Place of Dwelling* projected at the RSL hall. The video was a large-scale, floor-to-ceiling production depicting portraits of local residents. Three new eco gardens were designed and constructed by RMIT landscape design students who were billeted with local residents in the town. Over twenty environmental exhibits by artists were on display at *The Avoca Project*, with self-guided historic tours available by visitors' mobile phones. The day included a series of lectures and seminars on sustainability, covering such topics as water saving, household energy efficiency and community gardens in Cuba, plus displays by Parks Victoria, the Wilderness Society, as well as the Eco Living advisory centre.

So what do local residents make of all this 'art stuff' occurring in their small township? As with most contemporary art projects, the reaction from the Avoca residents is a mixture of open hostility, genuine support and much that lies between.

Country towns to succeed have to have a 'hook', Dunkeld with the Royal Mail, Daylesford/Hepburn Springs with their gay-friendly and alternative lifestyles, Talbot with its monthly market and so on. *The Avoca Project* and Lyndal is the 'hook' for here as far as I am concerned, if we are to attract the high spending urban groups who may not want to live here but who are prepared to come up this way for an 'experience' (Quinn).

By deciding to base *The Avoca Project* in the confines of the regional town of Avoca, Jones has contributed towards reinvigorating the hamlet. Many small towns are in decline, if not slowly dying. Young people leave to gain employment. Industry, such as manufacturing and mining, has long ago stopped. On average the Pyrenees Shire ranked 76th out of the 79 councils and shires reviewed in a Municipal Association of Victoria study of population density, council assets, working capital and economic surplus (8, 16 & 22.). Although it acknowledged the Pyrenees Shire as small, its relative financial operational level and therefore ability to cater to the local community needs was ranked as very low. However, in contrast, the

Pyrenees Shire's own Economic Development Strategy, February 2006, describes Avoca as "experiencing some growth from a range of different sources". It goes on to report on Jones's *The Avoca Project* as one of the opportunities for growth in the arts: "This is an excellent opportunity for council to engage in an artist's project that will place Avoca in the forefront of an arts program that will have international connections and recognition" (Noelker 64). As Quinn commented on the local economy: "The main thing is that Avoca is within the magical two hours from Melbourne." For Quinn and the many local supporters of *The Avoca Project*, Jones and what she is offering at the house are all part of the economic and cultural reinvigoration of their town as a tourist destination. In a discussion with the author in January 2010, he explained that *The Avoca Project* may not be the full answer for the rejuvenation of his community, but it is "one of the mix to change the profile of the town."

Jones's next big Avoca event was the 2010 performance *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca*, inspired by Edward Hicks's painting *Noah's Ark*, 1846 (Philadelphia Museum of Art). Jones used the house as a combined stage and theatre prop to recreate Noah's Ark, with flashes of lightning and the sound of crashing waves. For Jones, *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1* is her first on-site project where the house has become the artwork. This is an important revelation as it shows Jones turning to the house as representative of her aspirations for *The Avoca Project* to symbolise a resilient opportunity for climate change (2010a).

In *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1* Jones is dressed in a black suit and top hat as master of ceremonies. She is chief designer, scriptwriter, performer and coordinator of all activities, including sound, lighting and editing the final video. Jones may have volunteers, collaborators and paid assistants, but *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca* is her performance. On my arrival at *The Avoca Project* at 3pm Saturday 4 December 2010, lawns were being mowed, a trestle table set with a white cloth, numerous power leads stretched across the grounds and people seated at the sound-and-light mixing desk. I was ushered into Tunks's old studio to be greeted by a smiling Jones. Susan Cramer, referring to Jones and her working method, observed:

As artist, Jones bears the primary creative responsibility for these works, combining the roles of artist, scriptwriter, and director. She is central to all of the performances, fulfilling the multiple roles of author/performer/storyteller/commentator, sometimes moving from one to the other several times within the work (9).

Draped over the studio chairs were twenty or more costumes of various sizes and genre, most were full animal suits, such as a bright multicoloured duck costume. Facemasks were also on offer or constructed for those less daring or theatrical. I selected a grey koala outfit. Many of the costumes and facemasks had been made by locals and primary school students who participated in workshops held prior to the *Ark* event at Watford House.



Figure 5

At around 7 pm guests started to gather at the house, some coming from the nearby Avoca Hotel, others arriving by car from Melbourne, and a good number of local residents. There were 13 *Ark* flyers in the Avoca main street shops, cafes and on the community notice board. According to Jones, approximately 160 people attended. Some, like me, dressed from Jones's supply of animal costumes; others were formally dressed in suits, ties and facemasks. One person wore a kilt; two people had large deer antlers positioned on their heads by an elaborate harness; several were elegantly dressed and wearing facemasks, as if attending a Venetian ball. Jones commented on the performance and the use of animal costumes:

It came from various incidents in my own life and understanding that people don't respond well to catastrophe. I thought it would be great to play at; you take away the fear by dressing up in animal suits but you're still able to broach big ideas (2010b).

In *The Avoca Project* grounds were three fenced enclosures containing two llamas, two lambs, three goats and two hens. The *Ark* performance video opening scenes feature the llama. Local supporters for the night performance loaned the livestock. The animals lent a pre-performance interest for the evening, and seemed as equally popular among the 20 or so children and the adults. From 7 pm onwards until approximately 8.30 pm, people gathered in groups, drank wine or cold beer, discussed their costumes. This was a night of celebration, attended by locals and visitors interested in Jones's project, wanting to show support and genuinely concerned about their township and community.



Figure 6

All 'animal' participants were encouraged to line up for a photo against a green screen backdrop. The film method involves layering one image over the top of another and is commonly used in television interviews to enhance the subject background. These portraits play a significant component of the *Ark* video outcome. Several guests or animals are shown in close-up, either standing or walking in front of the Ark and gathered crowd.



Figure 7

At 8.30 pm Jones called everyone to attention and announced that the performance was to begin. For Jones, the *Ark* performance delivered on her promise of a high-quality art performance at a professional level of operation. Jones strongly believes that rural Australia should receive a range of cultural activities and this was the first time she was able to use the house as a total artwork to present that viewpoint. The side windows of the house that looked down upon the majority of those in attendance became illuminated by internally projected animal imagery. The rest of the house was blackened, giving greater effect to the projection. The audience was enthralled and many gasps of wonder and delight were heard, not just from the children but also the adults. The animals – a cow, horse or sheep – passed by the windows, walking, grazing and looking down upon us, the viewers. There was a noisy menagerie of sounds emanating from the house, galahs screeching and animals baying.

Soon Jones, as master of ceremonies, encouraged us to walk slowly in groups back along the house driveway. Here we were filmed wearing our costumes. Some people played up to the camera, others walked by, savouring the moment. At the front of the house we were halted by one of Jones's volunteers. Before us, projected in all its biblical glory, was the Ark. Cecil B. DeMille would have been impressed.



Figure 8



Figure 9

We realised that a large screen had been placed across the front of Watford House, but Jones's use of the building's peaked roofline gave the impression that we were viewing a mythical ark. Intermittently, projected lighting flashed across the hull, illuminating the house exterior, and the sound of waves crashing could be heard. For approximately 20 minutes Jones let us revel in the mystery of how the biblical ark could be relocated to Avoca. Lights suddenly flashed, illuminating a figure wearing a yellow raincoat with peaked hat and holding what appeared to be several sheets of paper on which were listed the menagerie waiting to board. Glistening from the lights, this figure called for people to gather, for now we were to enter the ark. We were to leave all possessions behind and queue for our particular animal to be called, starting with those that had special needs, such as the Tasmanian devil. After the animals with defined requirements, the yellow-coated figure called the listing by alphabetical order; for example, A for anaconda, G for galahs and grasshoppers, J for jumping spiders, and so on until at last koalas were requested and I, too, could board. As we entered we were directed to our respective level – koalas on level two, and so forth. We walked along the interior of the projection screen (the house front porch) and then turned to the left past the underground water storage tank, now covered by broken rock. We entered Tunks's studio where guests removed their costumes, mingled or headed immediately for the cold refreshments at the bar. The night's festivities continued with a band playing in the former Avoca stock market building, the same structure where, an hour before, all the 'animals' had been individually photographed. Jones excels when she is taking control of a crowd, a united experience where all are involved, subtly coerced and tense with excitement at what is about to occur. For a single night Jones transformed Watford House into a mesmerising spectacle based on the image of Noah's Ark. In Jones's hands the ark was not merely a vessel for transporting the last of each species, two by two, but a potent symbol of climate change, with the associated drama of lightning and flood.

To discover what this performance contributes towards a greater understanding of climate change within the rural environment, we must go to the foundation of Jones's argument with *The Avoca Project*. For her, this house as artwork (or large-scale community performance as home) represents a program of exchange between varied people: artists (visual artists, musicians, performers, writers and designers), academics (not necessarily art-orientated but also including environmentalists, architects and historians, to list a few), specialist groups and local residents engaged with ideas on global environmentalism, sustainability and community. It could be argued that *The Avoca Project* crosses the great Australian divide of professional and community arts. For example, Jones plans to invite groups such as the State Emergency Service (SES) to visit the house, stay and make a short video as an outcome. Engagement with all sectors of the climate change debate is central to Jones's views.

The Avoca Project for Jones is the keystone for her beliefs concerning rural sustainability, global environmental effect and climate change. Specifically locating the project in rural Avoca utilises the site as a vehicle to investigate place, community and the local. The core concept being to "heighten an image of the house as immigrant, weathered but resilient, and the place, the land, the landscape as a site of climate change and response". The house is obviously not built to a contemporary sustainable design, but it has survived for some considerable time in the harsh extremes of Australian drought and flood. Resilience is a word that is often mentioned in Jones's media for the project. By using the history of the house, its story of immigration and survival, Jones is opening up debate on humanity's ability to adapt to climate change. This house has seen many floods and droughts, yet it still stands, albeit faded, reminiscent of the ghost gums standing near the Avoca River.

The project is multifaceted and includes the history of the house, the site, flood plain, township, sustainability, recycling and Jones's experiences. There is a strong ecological basis: our ability to co-exist with animals underlies the *Ark* video. All this is deeply rooted in the local, for Jones accepted very early in the project that she needed to work with the Avoca rural community. The local is a strong part of the character of *The Avoca Project*. The house is an immigrant symbol that has gained citizenship in many ways through hardship, whether it is flood or drought. For Jones the house is a rural model for opportunity, with a positive adaption to climate change as the key idea.

On the 19 January 2011 I visited *The Avoca Project*, discovering that the Avoca River had flooded, reaching the stone-wall boundary of Watford House. Eventually that day the river would peak at approximately the middle of the front lawn. This was only a signal for what was to come. Overnight the river returned to its normal position some 500 metres distant from Watford House, it was still at a much greater flow than during the drought, but all seemed normal.

By 6pm on Thursday 20 January, the Avoca River was again in flood, reaching into Jones's front lawn. After dinner at the Avoca Hotel I visited Jones to ask if she needed some assistance. By this time all roads in and out of Avoca were closed to traffic. Jones was preparing for a flood in the downstairs rooms of *The Avoca Project*. I assisted her by moving the carpets, mattresses, two single beds, a storage chest, several steel chairs and two armchairs upstairs or into Tunks's old studio. For Jones, the night was a restless one. This was occurring while ABC-24 was broadcasting live-to-air from the disastrous Queensland floods. Victorians sand-bagged homes and businesses and waited nervously across the state to see what the rising waters in Avoca, Glenelg, Hopkins, Loddon, Campaspe, Richardson and Wimmera rivers and Mount Emu Creek would deliver.



Figure 10

In the early morning of Friday 21 January, people gathered on the nearby Avoca Bridge talking, taking photographs and videos. Jones was also present, checking on her neighbours, making certain there were no serious incidents during the night. Water flooded into *The Avoca Project*, rising approximately 20 centimetres above the skirting board. With video camera in hand, Jones recorded the flood and its impact on Watford House. She may use this video footage later as an artwork.

Avoca was isolated as severe flooding blocked the town's main highway entry and exit routes. The tension was palpable; SES and ambulance vehicles were waiting in readiness for the call to action. The fire-brigade siren wailed, signalling a serious life-threatening accident; ambulances and SES trucks headed out of town. A police car with its high-pitched siren at full blast sped along High Street, toward St Arnaud. The threatening effect of climate change and its impact by the flood was now being seen as a real-life situation and no longer simply a house as an artwork for discussion and debate. In Victoria virtually a third of the state was eventually flooded. More than 20 towns and 1773 properties were damaged and some 4300 people adversely affected.

Conclusion

This paper outlines the history of Watford House, describing the building's origins, construction, design, the local residents' reactions and Jones's reasoning for locating the project in a small rural community. I have discussed Jones's 'rejuvenation' of the building, the artist-in-residence program, her use of the traditional rural field day and events such as the inaugural Eco Living festival to promote *The Avoca Project* as a site for environmental discussion. I have canvassed Jones's green base for *The Avoca Project* by elaborating on her first significant use of house as artwork, the performance *Rehearsing Catastrophe: The Ark in Avoca*, 2010. With this performance Jones is showcasing her aspirations for *The Avoca Project* to become an insignia of the resilient pursuit of combating changing global weather patterns. The *Ark* video, which included local residents and guests, was an attempt by Jones to incorporate the rural history of the house, the flood plain site, her viewpoints on recycling, shifting meteorological conditions and sustainability within an immersive public artwork. The potency in Jones's *Avoca Project* is its communicability across a quantity of ostensibly inflexible divisions – urban and rural and individual versus collective action. In Jones's hands or, more specifically, under her management, the house has become a site for the challenge of a changing rural natural environment.

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List of works

Fig. 1 Lyndal Jones, Watford House, 16 Dundas Street, Avoca.

Fig. 2 Watford House. *The Avoca Project* main entrance. Studio to rear of block at left.

Fig. 3 Renovated kitchen showing Wamsler stove.

Fig. 4 Vegetable garden designed on principles of NSF.

Fig. 5 *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca*, 2010. Guests gathering at Watford House. Jones pictured wearing top hat.

Fig. 6 *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca*, 2010.

Fig. 7 *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca*, 2010.

Fig. 8 *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca*, 2010.

Fig. 9 *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca*, 2010.

Fig.10 Avoca River in flood, January 2011.

Photography: The author gratefully acknowledges the permission of Lyndal Jones to publish the still images from *Rehearsing Catastrophe #1: The Ark in Avoca*, 2010. All other photography courtesy of the author.