



**James C. Sourris Artist Interview Series 2011-2014  
Peter Kennedy Digital Story**

**Interviewee:** Peter Kennedy  
**Interviewer:** Max Delany  
**Date:** 16 March 2015  
**Legend:** Max Delany (MD)  
Peter Kennedy (PK)

MD: Peter, Good morning

PK: Good morning Max.

MD: It might be helpful to understand how you came to be involved in art and sort of your upbringing in Brisbane.

PK: Right, well as you say I was born in Brisbane in April of 1945 and that my birthday I think was about 10 days before Hitler and Eva Braun put an end to themselves in a bunker in Berlin. I can recall a rainy holiday sitting down in the house that we lived in and copying a painting done by my uncle Reg, it was a painting of a gumtree and it was on a calendar that he'd given as a present, and I copied this with my Mickey Mouse, or Donald Duck set of watercolours and made a pretty good fist of it I have to say and people who saw this were absolutely amazed and there was mentions of talent and all sorts things and clearly this was something to be encouraged, and that was like the starting point, that's my memory of when I thought I had something special, which led to my taking job in my mid teens with an advertising agency in Brisbane in Fortitude Valley and I worked there for 3 years before I decided that commercial art really wasn't a thing that I wanted to do, it held out the possibility of a good income I suppose, but I was then discovering serious art and in my innocence or naivety at the age of about eighteen or nineteen I embarked upon what has now been a fairly continuous career ever since.

It took between 1965 and probably 1968, because in 1967 I got, I'd moved back to Sydney and was well established there at that point and in 1967 I got a job designing neon signs at Claude Neon.

MD: That then led in 1970 to your first significant exhibition at Gallery A, which is credited today as being the first exhibition in Australia to use neon light.

PK: Yes

As far as I can recall, it was the first public outing, that is the first expression, of the idea of installation that was bound up in the title Neon Light Installations that was presented to the public in Australia, so I think that's interesting because what we'd had previously was this idea of environmental art which as I'd mentioned earlier, which was art that occupied a 3 dimensional space rather than being like a work of sculpture on a plinth or a painting on the gallery wall.

When I look back at my work I can see a number of nodes of, or points of interest and they go right from the personal through to the universal and generally looking at it you see examples of the personal in my practice, you see examples of the local, I've worked with community groups. We have the national in that a number of the works like the "November Eleven" pieces or "On Sacred Land" which came shortly thereafter and then we have the global, which is to do with global politics. And then we go to the universal, and that work in some respects was partly an accident.

MD: Another area more recently you've become interested in alongside your abiding interest in history and the philosophy of history and politics, um, is that of science and the philosophy of science, and one of your most recent works is a work called "Light Rain and Everything We Know About the Universe-Except Gravity" from 2013, it's actually the largest neon work I think that has been produced in Australia, it's a work which is 80 metres long, it was presented at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2013, 2014 for the exhibition Melbourne Now.

PK: I've likened the succinct nature of the Einstein formula  $E=MC^2$  squared with a rowing boat, and if you park  $E=MC^2$  squared alongside everything we know about the universe a la the Lagrangian model it looks like parking a rowing boat alongside one of those gigantic US aircraft carriers, I mean, it's just a huge concept that seems to me to be simply extraordinary, I mean it's truly breathtaking. But the other interesting thing is that formula in all it's 84 metres, not only describes everything that's out there, but it's a description of us as well, it includes us. It's the materiality of us that can be quantified and converted into a formula by virtue of a bringing together of two particles and in that collision what emerges in the space of 3 trillionths of a second is this description of everything. I mean I'm not a particle physicist but that seems from a fairly prosaic mundane layman's point of view fairly extraordinary.

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