



# WINDWELLS

CHANNELLING + DIVINING

PAT HOFFIE AND STEFAN PURCELL

SLQ GALLERY  
STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND  
26 JUNE TO 17 OCTOBER 2010



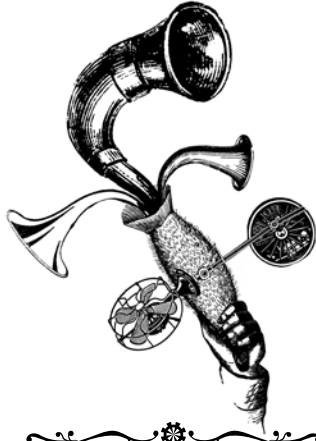
***WindWells – Channelling + Divining***

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**WINDWELLS**  
CHANNELLING + DIVINING

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**This exhibition would not have been possible without the commitment and enthusiasm of a group of people who together willed it into being. Most of their names are included below, but there are others, too.**

As the catalogue writers so eloquently describe, the show is in part about tall tales and true from a legendary Queensland past; in part about the often unruly relationships between science and art and technology; and in part about that much maligned area of practice often referred to as magic.

French sociologist Marcel Mauss reminded us that

*“The world of magic is full of the expectations of successive generations, their tenacious illusions, their hope in the form of magical formulas. Basically it is nothing more than this, but it is this which gives it an objectivity far superior to that which it would have it were nothing more than a tissue of false individual ideas, an aberrant and primitive science.”<sup>1</sup>*

Perhaps art is a little bit the same; even in the most apparently sophisticated and sceptical of times, when a vision for artistic expression is willed into being by the tenacity of a community of people rather than from the tissue of individual ideas, it may still be possible to travel through and into some of those bewitching channels that are neither occult nor spiritual, but which concern themselves with the inexhaustible wonder of this material world.

Video; Projections; Pepper's Ghost Simulacrum:	Tony Hamilton Donna Hamilton Arash Mohebbi
Performance:	Eric Rossi
Workshop Assistance:	Dave Sawtell Brian Sanstrom
Catalogue Design:	Luke Hollamby (Designer) David Sargent (Creative Director) Jacqui Higgins (Client Manager) at <i>Liveworm Studio</i>
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Large Windmill:	Darren and Melissa Fitzgerald at <i>Comet Windmills</i>
Catalogue Essays:	Ross Woodrow Louise Denoon Trudy Bennett

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<sup>1</sup> Mauss, Marcel in collaboration with Henri Hubert, (first published in 1950), *A General Theory of Magic*, 1972, Routledge



All welcome!

Established in 1934, the John Oxley Library is the custodian of Queensland documentary heritage, collecting, preserving and making accessible Queensland memory. Much of the collection can be modest at first appearances — pamphlets, illuminated addresses, leaflets, newspapers, books, letters, diaries and photographs, but in the hands of researchers — historians, writers, poets, filmmakers, artists — these simple items transform into wondrous parts of a complex puzzle.

Libraries are perhaps best known for their collections, but just as important are the staff — the librarians who collect, catalogue, store, and serve. Librarians are there to support clients, to find resources, to tease out the research questions, to reframe certainties; to take people from the known to the unknown and back again.

The initial stages of the research and development of *WindWells* has been a remarkable and unlikely partnership between artist Pat HOFFIE and librarian Trudy Bennett, when they worked together to weave a story that began with windmills and water, a perennial theme in Queensland history, and ended with magic, spiritualism and showmanship.

***Louise Denoon***

*Executive Manager, Heritage Collections  
State Library of Queensland*

## WATERY TREASURES FROM THE JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY

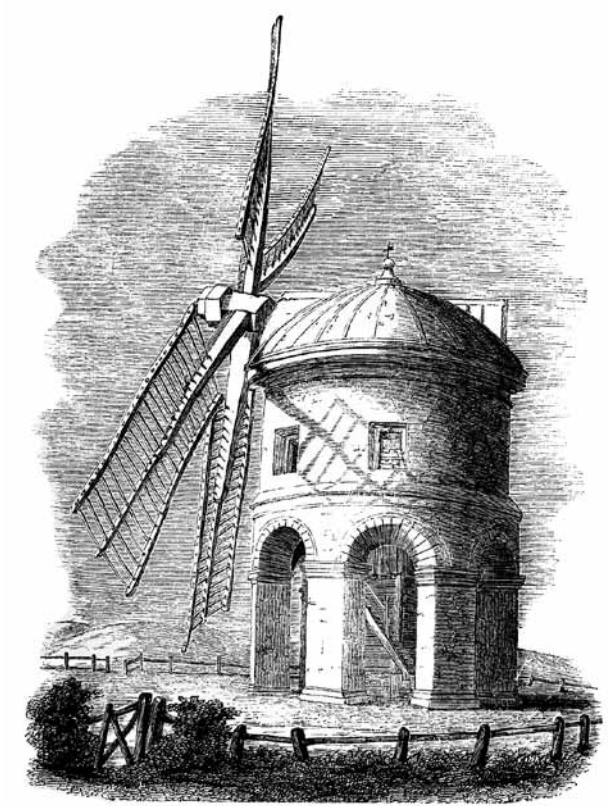
**Water is the most basic necessity of life, apart from oxygen. And in terms of water resources, Australia is a land of extremes; we go from flood to drought.**

In times of drought, Australians have resorted to desperate measures, as indicated by the careers of two notable men, Joseph Gordon Palethorpe and John Henry Pepper. J G Palethorpe exemplifies the sober side of finding the precious water, and J H Pepper the spectacular. Knowing there is water under the ground is one thing, but how do you find it? Enter J G Palethorpe, a Toowoomba resident, businessman, alderman, supporter of agricultural enterprises — and a highly successful water diviner. Witness his success, as described in his little book, *Water finding by means of magnetism and the divining rod*, published in 1903. The people of Toowoomba are all too familiar with the effects of drought, and the residents of Toowoomba in 1903 had good reason to be grateful to him.

As for the spectacular aspect, Professor J H Pepper, science educator, and showman, was the man to watch. He lived in Brisbane from 1881 to 1889, and his day job was as a chemistry analyst. However, at heart he was as much a showman as a scientist, as witness the portrait of him as centrepiece, surrounded by his theatrical creations. A notable creation of his was Pepper's Ghost. But he was also an unsuccessful rainmaker; in 1882, when drought conditions prevailed in southeast Queensland, he staged a truly spectacular attempt to tap the clouds, and thereby release much needed rain, by means of kites, cannons and explosions. What could go wrong? Well, everything...and it did. A great time was had by all (except for Professor Pepper and his assistants), but not a drop of rain materialized. The story of this fascinating man is told in the *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, 1974–1975; the article is *John H Pepper — analyst and rainmaker*, by R F Cane.

When water was discovered — what then? Enter artesian bores, irrigation, wells, and windmills. Especially windmills, which pumped water. By coincidence, a famous manufacturer of windmills was to be found in Toowoomba: the Toowoomba Foundry made Southern Cross windmills, used Australia-wide. Toowoomba Foundry was owned by the Griffiths brothers, who had been making windmills since 1876. Their Southern Cross windmills became an Australian icon, and their story is told in Rob Laurent's book, *Southern Cross engines*. For the benefit of





**Figure 1: The Chesterton Windmill**

The Chesterton windmill remained operational until 1910 and was restored by the Warwickshire County Council in the late 1960s.

# ART AS KNOWLEDGE

## WINDMILLS OF A CERTAIN AGE

Living on a farm, you take windmills for granted until they reach a certain age. The age, that is, when seals in the pump start to fail, the bearings and gears need more than a little grease to keep them from screeching and various nuts and bolts will no longer tighten, even with the addition of some hessian packing in the threads. This is the stage when a farmer starts thinking that a single-cylinder diesel engine or better still, an electric motor that can be switched on and off from the farmhouse, might be a better method of pumping water from a dam, well or bore. The classic Australian windmill has not evolved much for over a century and this is made evident by a comparison between the new windmill positioned outside the State Library for this exhibition and the much older nineteenth-century model installed inside the Library Gallery. Both share that skeletal aesthetic that results when functionality is the only consideration in construction and, like other Australian windmills; they distinguish themselves from their European namesake by not actually being windmills at all but windpumps. To be more accurate I should say that these examples have the potential to be windpumps since here they serve the purpose of art.

Windmills in Europe were used to mill corn and other grains, to make flour for bread. Consequently, they were substantial structures, as demanded by the need to house the milling stones and apparatus for flour production. The variation in scale and form of the windmills across European countries meant that they often became picturesque additions to landscape painting or decorative motifs on pottery with Dutch blue-ware being the most familiar examples. In the early nineteenth century, an English commentator suggested that it was possible to turn the commonplace windmill into a work of art or architecture given the right talent, specifically that of Inigo Jones who designed the windmill, built in 1632 at Chesterton, Warwickshire. It was said that he conferred a "structure and character of fitness and propriety, resembling in effect, though not in kind, the greater works which are regarded among the triumphs of the art."<sup>1</sup> [figure 1] Building an artful windmill was only possible in a preindustrial age. And because the Australian windmill is a result of mass production it is a generic type despite the fact that farmers do get to know the idiosyncrasies of their particular windmill or windmills.

It is this ubiquitous sameness of the windmill that has contributed to its particular appeal as an aesthetic or symbolic object in Australian culture, potent enough in miniature form to displace the European garden gnome from many suburban front yards.

### **ARTISTS' AIM**

Pat HOFFIE is well known as an agent provocateur and caution is always needed in taking her work at face value. Particularly so, considering she has consistently forced audiences to grapple with their expectations of what art should be, as she has manipulated the defining limits of the artist's role. For more than two decades, Pat HOFFIE has been investigating the connection between value and labour through a series of exhibitions titled *Fully Exploited Labour*. A central theme has been the contemporary and historical exploitation of skilled and manual labour in Asia and the Pacific by dominant, developed economies such as Australia. These projects have always involved collaborations of various sorts from initial conception to community production. This exhibition is also a joint collaboration between HOFFIE and Stefan Purcell although it marks a distinct shift in register for HOFFIE since *WindWells* explores the more complex, but no less political, relationship between value and knowledge. The potency of much of HOFFIE's *Exploited Labour* work was a result of contesting the hierarchies of idea over form, theory over practice, concepts over skills and individual over community. This earlier work was however inevitably forged around the linchpin of the commodity, with the art object representing its most rarefied form. To examine what knowledge is contained in a work of art you must first forget about its exchange value.

### **THE LIBRARY**

The modern library is distinguished from its medieval relatives by its founding principle as a repository of disinterested knowledge at the service of humanity. The modern library was once defined by the image of Karl Marx in the 1850s sitting at his regular desk in the British Library Reading Room in London surrounded by its stratified layers of books — books that were products of the world's first imperial power built on industrial capital and containing all the required political and economic theory, facts and statistics for Marx to plot its demise. It was not the powerful rhetorical style of volume one of *Das Kapital* that gave the argument against capitalism its unassailable

impact. It was the range and depth of evidence that Marx had collected in volume two. The fact that many readers, including William Morris, admitted that they didn't plough through the second volume mattered little since its density elevated the analysis of politics and economics to a level of science.

The domed British Library Reading Room still exists at the centre of the radically remodelled British Museum. Its central placement is symbolic, not functional since the millions of visitors to the British Museum each year come to see art and artifacts, not books, and the few who come to visit the Reading Room are mostly hoping to see that famous desk.

The real library action in London occurs out at St Pancras where the massive new British Library is located, although this is a very different place to the library that Marx understood as a monolithic knowledge pool that could be tapped using a card index.

In less than two decades we have seen the idea of a library transformed from a storehouse of knowledge to a place of knowledge transfer or a portal for knowledge exchange. This momentous shift in the image of the library from a deep repository to a functional knowledge exchange centre is only partly driven by the arrival of the Internet. Most significant in this transformation has been the dramatic change in the sort of knowledge we value, regardless of whether it is found in books, on the Internet or gained from investment seminars, scrapbooking workshops or genealogy classes, and this is far from disinterested knowledge. We seek knowledge that has immediate value and relevance — knowledge that can quickly convert to use or exchange value, in other words. Such performative knowledge has always been valued, and especially so since the invention of capitalism, but the distinguishing characteristics of performative knowledge today is its lack of hierarchies and above all the rapidity of its redundancy. We have seen the implications of the collapse of the boundaries between amusement and education, facts and fads, disciplines and enthusiasms or high and popular culture in the way the television quiz show has become an impossible game of chance rather than a test of knowledge. No single individual can keep up with all the latest trends in sports, music, film and the other arts while at the same time remaining abreast with the latest information in their chosen profession or topic of interest, to use the quiz show language. Thirty years ago the knowledge base in many disciplines such

as engineering was stable enough to be taught from texts that might remain relevant for the length of a career, whereas today texts on electrical engineering or computer science are redundant by the time a course is completed. Add to this the problem that knowledge is increasingly published digitally or in formats other than the book. The contemporary library has to be nimble to cope with the pace of this rapidly changing demand with its inbuilt redundancy cycle while at the same time hoping to identify and maintain important historical and cultural assets.

Identifying intelligent content in the barrage of incoming data is a problem not restricted to librarians. Contemporary artists also need to understand which images will become generic, prototypical, generative or shareable. To help in this process, as Barbara Stafford has pointed out, artists need a comprehension of particular and general visual universals that remain expressive in the present. Stafford describes these expressive universals:

Constituting an ancient semiotic system, such diagrammatic and chromatic configurations were taken to demonstrate that different cultures generated similar intuitions. They were portals opening out to past physical, mental and social conditions still accessible and alive in the modern world.<sup>2</sup>

Stafford's study of the nature of images focused specifically on graphic and other art images, including those generated by video and new media, showing that they represent "condensed objectlike forces for brain-mind convergence and cognitive-organic integration." In other words, contemporary art explains or makes sense of the world by linking the unknown to the known in the brain by a process that can reshape its capacity for cognition or understanding. It is therefore not surprising that almost every major library in the world includes an art gallery and many regularly show contemporary art.

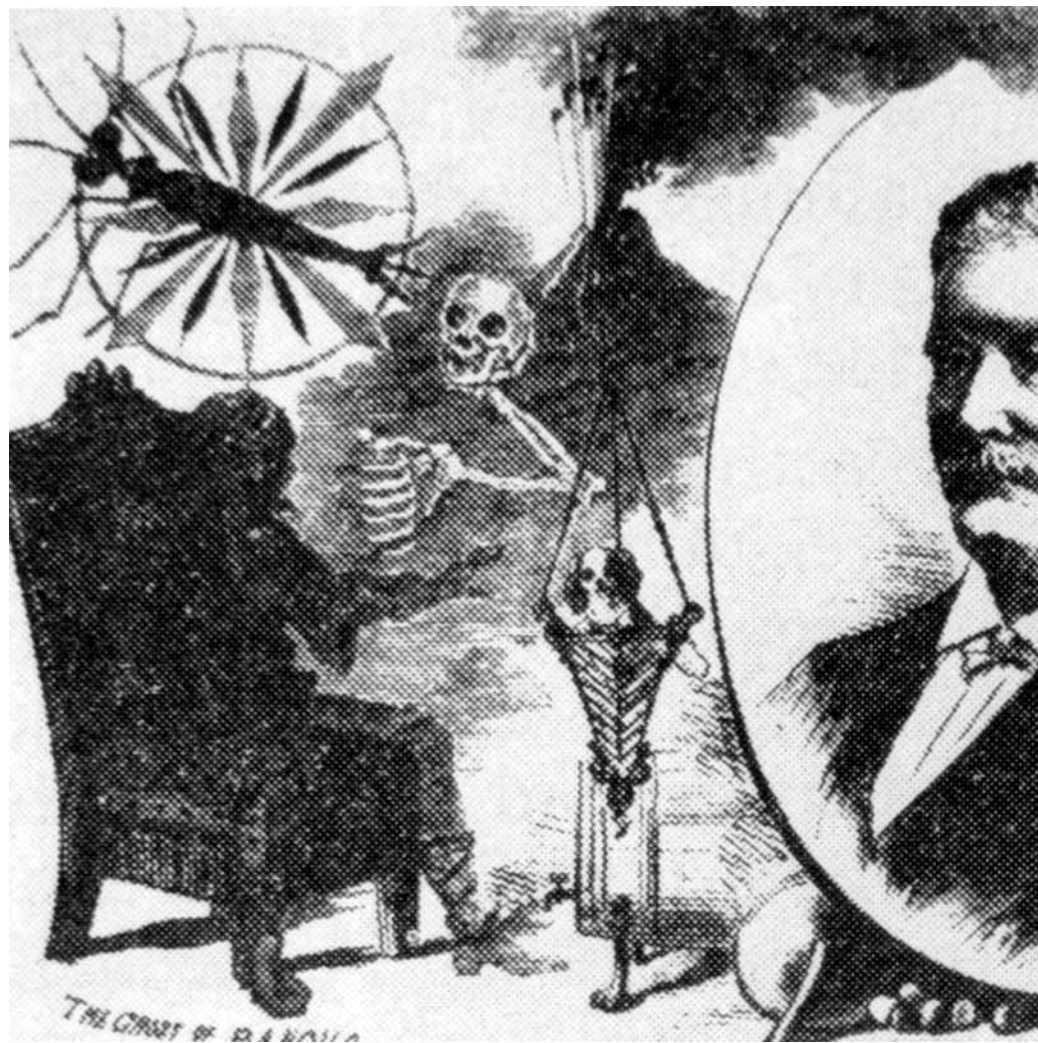
## **WATER KNOWLEDGE**

Books and wells represent two extremes of knowledge. The book and the library are interchangeable iconic symbols for the highest form of knowledge as represented in the abstract and arbitrary symbol systems of writing, "book learning". The well, in Europe, and the windmill in Australia, both signify water as an elemental life force, symbolizing human control of nature through technology or practical knowledge.



**Figure 2: The never-ending search for water**

*Mr Tilney and son water divining, 1919.*  
John Oxley Library. Image no.: 38204



THE GHOST OF BANAVA



**Professor Pepper the showman**

*Illustration featuring Professor J. H. Pepper in the centre.*  
John Oxley Library. Image number: 110744

In the earliest history of Indigenous and Anglo-Australians the most valuable knowledge, above all others, was knowing where or how to locate fresh water.

When Captain James Cook sailed up the coast of Queensland in 1770, for example, he used his navigating experience of reading topography and taking depth soundings to locate and name Keppel Bay as a safe anchorage and he used his observational powers to record that there was abundant fresh water in the vicinity because of the number of Aboriginal camps revealed by fires at night and smoke during the day.

Generally, early European explorers in Australia ignored or dismissed the Aborigines' relationship with the land but as the nineteenth-century progressed and exploration pushed away from the coast, the ability of Indigenous Australians to locate water was recognized as a most valuable asset. An Aboriginal guide became an indispensable addition to prudent exploration parties, Burke and Wills excluded. If we can believe the accounts of H.G.B. Mason writing in the early part of the twentieth century, Aboriginal Australians were willing to share this knowledge, depending on the circumstances. In his advice for bushman in Western Australia he has a section titled "Chaining Natives: Searching for Water" in which he recommends against the practice, "unless under extreme circumstances" although not on humanitarian grounds, but because of it being ineffective. Experience taught him that when under compulsion, Aborigines will conduct white people to an inferior soak or rock hole often in a direction away from abundant water.<sup>3</sup>

When experienced Aborigines made decisions about whether it was worth digging in a riverbed for water they drew on a high form of conjectural knowledge by reading indexical signs, such as the texture of the sand, its temperature and so on. This knowledge was as mysterious to white Australians as it was unerringly accurate. Little of the vast Indigenous knowledge of the land was tapped by Europeans except the selectively appropriated bush knowledge that gave them punitive control over anyone who resisted the imposition of written law. As reported in the *Sydney Gazette* in 1825 Aborigines were "most useful in tracking down the hiding places of bushrangers" as well as discovering where stolen items had been stashed in the bush.<sup>4</sup> In 1880 Ned Kelly was influenced to come out of hiding and make a final stand because of his fear of the Aboriginal trackers from Queensland who were enticed down

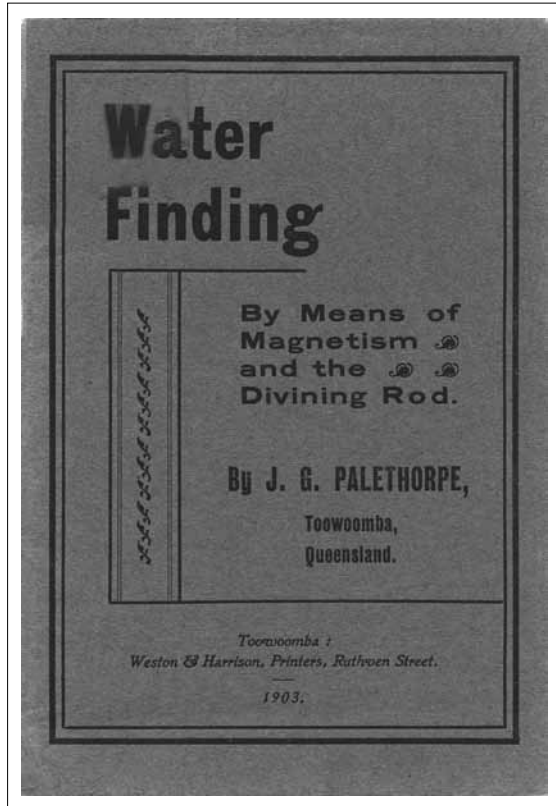
to Victoria to find him with the promise of a share of the staggering amount of reward money on offer. Presumably, in the 1880s it was only in the “wild” territories of the north and west such as Queensland and Western Australia where Aborigines could be found with the privileged knowledge to penetrate the landscape, using it as a system of signs to point the way to outlaws or water.

In parts of Australia where ground water disappeared in the dry season, Aboriginal groups also dug and maintained wells. To this day, the Gidjingali people, who live on the coastal plains of northern Arnhem Land, base their mythology and descriptions of country on a series of named wells which are depicted in paintings as hatched circles often connected by lines representing tracks of totemic ancestors. “Keeping such wells cleanly dug and free from rotting vegetation and silt is considered by the Gidjingali to be an important part of their curation of the countryside.”<sup>5</sup>

### **APPLIED SCIENCE OR WIZARDRY**

As a child I would regularly spend holidays with my family in our aunt’s weekender at Grass Tree Beach north of Sarina in Queensland. Like many other beach shacks in the area it was not connected to any services with water being supplied from a tank and a hand-pump over a bore outside the kitchen door. Lighting was with kerosene lamps and for entertainment at night or when it rained we had a hand-wound gramophone with a collection of records. We didn’t consider the old spring-driven gramophone as anything other than a functional device, acceptable in these primitive conditions but something we would have not bothered with at home where we had mantle radios and the stereogram to amuse us. I can’t remember when we threw it out, probably around 1960. That would be exactly seventy-eight years after the first gramophone arrived in Queensland; then an object of such wonder that Professor Pepper could charge admission to the Albert Hall in Brisbane to demonstrate its use.

As Hoffie and Purcell discovered in their research for this exhibition, John Henry Pepper was more than a gramophone cranking showman. He was a showman to be sure, exciting audiences around Australia in the 1880s with his novel integration of optical illusions, chemical magic and new technology with stage craft, literally using smoke and mirrors to conjure up apparitions, the most famous of which became



**Water diviner supreme**

Palethorpe, JG, 1903, *Water finding by means of magnetism and the divining rod*, The Author, Toowoomba.

John Oxley Library. Call no. JSM 133.3232 pal

known as Pepper's Ghost. However, he was also a Professor of Chemistry of a British Polytechnic and the first Government appointment to teach chemistry in Brisbane. It might be said that at the beginning and end of his career Pepper was forced to make his living from chemistry teaching but for most of his life he was a scientist who knew how to make science pay. His technique was simple. Crank up the magic in science and technology and play to the crowd. Prior to coming to Australia in 1879, Pepper had published prodigiously and successfully on popular science and dazzled audiences around the world in places such as London, New York and Paris with his stage performance of Pepper's Ghost. <sup>6</sup>

Stage magicians, such as Wizard Jacobs or Professor Anderson, the Wizard of the North, were a common feature of colonial life in Australia, although these magicians applied mesmeric or clairvoyant techniques or plied the established tricks of the conjurer's trade using combinations of special apparatus, distraction, drama and sleight of hand to delightfully deceive their audience. Pepper did not have access to this full repertoire and inevitably his audiences tired of his magic, limited as it was by the scope of science. Unsurprisingly, Pepper began to push the limits of science to draw audiences to his performances. Most notable for its audacity and grandiose failure, was his rainmaking and cloud-seeding event at the Eagle Farm race course. A giant kite attached to three miles of steel wire was to be sent into the clouds with a massive land-mine attached. Electricity would travel from earth up the wire to explode the mine while several powerful rockets would be fired up as well. Just in case that wasn't enough, a large bonfire was also built to produce more smoke to enhance the prospects of seeding with dynamite charges to be exploded and cannons to be fired as an added extra. Little wonder that after front page advertisements in the *Brisbane Courier* 700 people paid their entrance fee at Eagle Farm to see this spectacle on August 4, 1882. They were all lucky to leave uninjured at the end of the day. The kite never left the ground although dynamite was exploded, two of the rockets fired off horizontally, one exploding outside the fence, the other just missing part of the crowd and during rapid firing of the ten swivel guns one exploded blowing metal fragments in all directions. After this, Pepper briefly held out hope that he would build a lighter kite and successfully demonstrate the cloud seeding but he soon abandoned the idea and in 1888 he returned to England to give Pepper's Ghost a last try on the London stage. It wasn't successful.

## SEEING IS BELIEVING

Distinguishing between wizardry and science in the nineteenth century wasn't all that easy and without access to Indigenous knowledge, white farmers at the beginning of the twentieth century had to fall back on much older mystic traditions to find water. Prime among these was the craft of water divining usually with a forked twig as depicted here in the photograph of *Mr Tilney and son water divining, 1919*. [figure 2] Mr Tilney and his son are not divining but demonstrating the method in what would be an odd place to look for water, in the middle of a bush track, if it were not obviously a painted studio backdrop. Water divining is sometimes referred to as dowsing, reflecting that other European tradition of using the forked branch of usually willow or hazel to find a hidden metallic lode. The use of a rod or branch as a predictive tool in the west dates at least to Roman times, when the *virgula divina* in the hands of an official augur, could point to a chosen object or sign to indicate a correct course of action. Given the history of the practice, it comes as no surprise that water divining has no rational scientific explanation and does not approach the conjectural forms of knowledge in art and science where lightening recapitulation of rational processes are often intertwined with instincts and insights that cannot be articulated.<sup>2</sup> The coupling of father and son in this photograph is significant in attempting to imply the generational passing on of privileged knowledge presumably as a mystical inheritance since the ability to track, hunt and find water in Aboriginal society was passed from father to son by teaching a semiotic system that depended on the accumulation of seemingly unrelated or insignificant clues to come to a final intuition. Because both Mr Tilney and an Aboriginal guide could not explain the operation of their divining it might appear they are using related forms of knowledge but this is not so. In Mr Tilney's case there is no explanation possible beyond the suprasensible irrationalism of religion or mysticism. In the case of the Aboriginal guide the conjectural paradigm he follows to move from the known to the unknown is based on "essentially mute forms of knowledge in the sense that their precepts do not lend themselves to being either formalized or spoken."<sup>3</sup> This is very much the case in any sphere that operates outside the domain of symbolic systems using text or number where objects are the only evidence available and nowhere is this more so than in the field of contemporary art.

For several years, the Australian Sceptics organization have had a open challenge to those claiming psychic or paranormal powers, including divining for water or metals, to prove the validity of their craft with a prize of \$100,000.<sup>3</sup> No one has yet succeeded and I distinctly recall a television documentary where a controlled experiment with hidden water supplies and a large group of diviners showed no evidence that the diviners could find water above the normal percentage predicted by chance. I must say I was devastated on watching the program because of my long standing belief that water divining does work and it is simply a case that science has not yet found the explanation. My reason for this conviction was based in personal experience. I was in late primary school when I went with my parents to visit some family friends, the Hazels. Mrs Hazel was often talked about because of her special ability to divine for water and naturally my brother and I insisted she take us to their back yard and demonstrate the craft. This she did by pulling a branch from the nearest tree, a guava or "plugga" tree as I recall. It would have been amazing enough simply seeing the end of the forked twig twist emphatically down towards the ground but Mrs Hazel insisted we each have a turn of holding one handle of the fork while she held the other so we could feel the pull of the underground water. I still vividly recall the sensation, since I decided to hold the branch in a vice-like grip to ensure that it was not some trick manipulation by Mrs Hazel, who I might say was beyond reproach. So great was the force of the downward pull from the leading pointer of the forked stick that although the soft bark stayed rigid in my hand the wood inside rotated, splitting the bark and oozing sap into my hand. I could be conflating two vivid memories here since Mrs Hazel later repeated the process on a visit to our own backyard using a mango tree branch. What I also accept is that if Mrs Hazel were still alive she would not be interested in the Sceptics' challenge since she had a confirmed belief that she should not commercialize her ability and she resisted at every attempt the encouragement of her punter husband to test her divination powers on the racing form guide.

## HOW ART WORKS

Until very recent times when an artist prepared for an exhibition around a chosen theme their primary activity was making preliminary sketches or taking photographic records and preparing the final paintings, sculptures or lense-based images for exhibition. In preparing for this exhibition Pat HOFFIE and Stefan Purcell made photographic and video records of objects and sites of interest but this was a small part of a larger process involving library searches, interviews and discussions with librarians, farmers, windmill makers, historians and scientists. There was also no separation or demarcation between preliminary research and the process of production with the shape and form of the exhibition seamlessly morphing from preliminary sketches, computer generated models and constructed elements to the final installation all in response to demands such as material availability, technical capability and multiple inputs from the various fabricators and collaborators along the way. In short this exhibition is realized by a process of accumulation of knowledge and experience well beyond the reach of the individual artists who authored it.

Carlo Ginsberg noted that judging art was like judging horses, using knowledge that can be acquired over time. The value of this insight is limited by the fact he was assuming that the art object was an expression of a solo author, contemplative, self-contained and mimetic and therefore available for dissection by a connoisseur. Not all art operates in this way today where the expanded field of perception demands much more mobile, contingent and often confrontational forms of art.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of the *WindWells* exhibition the work will be dismantled. Some of the items will be stored for later use or recycling. Most of the books will no doubt meet their delayed fate in the paper pulp bin after their brief transformation into art. Only the photographic record and the experience of the work will remain in the memory of those who visited the exhibition. The knowledge gained will be an amalgam of existing experiences with this new encounter, stimulating the mind or brain in ways that cross the boundaries of cognition and intuition. For above all art helps you think, as I have attempted to show here.

**Associate Professor Ross Woodrow**  
*Deputy Director (Post Graduate & Research)*  
*Queensland College of Art, Griffith University*

- <sup>1</sup> Anon., *The Pictorial Gallery of the Arts: Useful Arts*, London: George Cox, c 1840 (quoting the *Gentleman's Magazine* from early 1800s). The Chesterton windmill remained operational until 1910 and was restored by the Warwickshire County Council in the late 1960s.
- <sup>2</sup> Barbara Stafford, *Echo Objects; the cognitive work of images*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 209.
- <sup>3</sup> H. G. B. Mason, *Darkest Western Australia*, Kalgoorlie: Hocking & Co. 1909 (facsimile ed. Hesperian Press, 1980) p. 32.
- <sup>4</sup> Marc Serge Rivière (trans & ed.) *The Governor's Noble Guest: Hyacinthe de Bouganville's account of Port Jackson, 1825*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 1999, p. 45.
- <sup>5</sup> Rhys Jones, "Ordering the Landscape" (pp. 181 to 209) in Ian Donaldson & Tamsin Donaldson eds. *Seeing the First Australians* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985, p. 200.
- <sup>6</sup> All the information on Pepper is taken from the comprehensive account by R. F. Cane "John H. Pepper – Analyst and Rainmaker" (pp. 116 – 133) in, *History of Queensland*, Royal Historical Society of Queensland Vol. 9 No.6 1974-75.
- <sup>7</sup> Carlo Ginsberg. "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm" in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989 p. 125.
- <sup>8</sup> Ginsberg, p.124.
- <sup>9</sup> See: <http://www.skeptics.com.au/features/prize/>
- <sup>10</sup> This is not a new idea, since James Hall in *The World as Sculpture*, London: Plimlico, 2000 made such a claim in his argument for an installation of independent objects as the primary contemporary art form.

## INTERVIEW WITH ARTISTS PAT HOFFIE AND STEFAN PURCELL

### *What was your inspiration for WindWells?*

When the opportunity of having an exhibition at the State Library of Queensland came up we were interested in the location — of how the idea of the exhibition space in the library sandwiched between GOMA and QAG might affect the reception of any work that gets installed there. That raises questions about what *kind* of exhibition space that might be — how it might differ from those either side of it. The obvious response comes from the fact that the SLQ is, alongside other things, important as a repository for knowledge about Queensland.

We'd worked with material from the library on previous exhibitions, especially with regard to *Madame Illuminata Crack's Phantasmagorical Armchair for Ecologically Sustainable Recreation* that was installed in the UAM at the University of Queensland. That exhibition had drawn from imagery of indentured labourers from the Pacific working on farms in Queensland at the turn of the century and coincided with the federal government's move to reintroduce Pacific labour to work on farms — under different circumstances. The library is a rich repository filled with all kinds of Queensland stories and imagery that have not been given the attention they deserve — the images that were uncovered at that time were so beautiful, so haunting, and so capable of opening up new insights and questions about how we got to how we are today. So it was important that the SLQ site was considered as an integral *material* component of the exhibition

The windmill idea came about through conversations about how they're such an iconic aspect of Australian life, and how the history of its development is rich with tall tales and true. Also, the aesthetic of the windmills is in keeping with several of the installations we've worked on over the past couple of years, many of which have drawn from a kind of nineteenth century steampunk aesthetic.

### ***What are the themes/curatorial thrust of WindWells?***

No matter how much information and data and archival resource you have to hand, it's important that the process of artmaking unfolds in unpredictable ways. Otherwise you end up with a history lesson. The windmill's function is to draw up water, and we wanted to use them as a metaphor for drawing information from the archives of the library. But the artmaking process is also one of sifting and gleaning and working on hunches, so other things keep coming to the surface as well, as it were.

We will be using projections as part of the work, and in discussions with Tony Hamilton and Danni Zuvella we started talking about the nineteenth century 'invention' Pepper's Ghost, which was developed in 1862 by Henry Dircks and refined by 'Professor' John Henry Pepper as a device to make ghosts appear on stage. There started to be a lot of interesting cross-overs: Pepper travelled to Australia as part of a kind of 'celebrity spruiker' international tour featuring the wonders of Victorian science during the 1870's, round about the time that the Griffith Brothers were working on the production of the first Australian made windmills in Toowoomba in 1876. Pepper was quite a character, and opinions at the time were divided about the extent to which his methods were useful for proselytising about the benefits of a scientific approach to life, or whether his showmanship lapsed too much on the side of fairground touting. In 1872 he had a bitter fall-out with the Royal Polytechnic in London where he'd been employed for many years, and eventually, after many long tours where he tried to make ends meet, he ended up accepting a job as a consulting chemist in the badlands of Brisbane. At the time the Victorian vogue for spiritualism and magic was all the rage, but Pepper would use his talk-show-demonstrations to argue that they were all fakes, and would try to convert the public's fascination for spirits and alchemy to the service of science.

So the latter part of the title: *channelling and divining* — alludes to those process of magic that were a strong aspect of that era, and that may or may not weave in and out and through daily life. Of course both terms also relate to methods of tapping into water-courses — to hidden channels of rich resources, and to some of the more arcane ways that are used to locate them beneath the surface. And the words also relate to Professor Pepper's magical re-creation, through

science, of the kinds of ghosts and spirits and alchemical illusions that the Victorian public were so fascinated with. But the words also relate to the art-making process — the way you have to tread slowly and listen intently and sometimes trust a sixth sense in order to tap into what it might be that wants to ‘come into being’ with your assistance.

***What resources within SLQ assisted you in the conceptualisation of WindWells?***

Well the human resources are one of the richest channels within SLQ. It's important that an idea starts to take on its own life in the minds and imagination of others, so when we first started fumbling around in search of something that might be relevant, we had a weather eye on the uptake of the idea in those within the institution. So when Lea Giles-Peters, Naomi Takeifanga and Ingrid Hoffmann first caught hold of the tail of the idea, and started to run with it in terms of their own in-put, it became clear that the lower heart-beat of the work had started. And I've worked with Louise Denoon on a number of things before in the past, and value her insight and perspective enormously, so we've just been trialling ideas and thinking obliquely about the installation and associated information and letting it all unfold. The potential cross-overs between the Griffith Brothers and Professor Pepper and the water diviner Mr. Palethorpe working in the name of science and progress and invention and ingenuity all within cooee of each other at the end of the nineteenth century right here in South-East Queensland made things seem too good to pass up on ... a tall tale and true just waiting to be told.

***How did material in SLQ's Heritage Collections help the realisation of WindWells?***

Trudy Bennett, one of the research librarians, got together some wonderful images and catalogues about the construction of the early windmills, and also uncovered some gorgeous black and white footage of the workers in the factory in Toowoomba... then there were the images of the water diviners, and the stories of Pepper's larger-than-life exploits in Brisbane as well as across Australia and internationally.

***Where else did you source material for WindWells?***

We're grateful for the support and enthusiasm of Darren and Melissa Fitzgerald of *Comet Windmills*, a family owned company that has kept the historical tradition of windmill construction going right up into the present. And a good friend Julie Johnson gave us her grandmother's little windmill that she had been keeping in a dismantled form on her farm.

We've been doing some research on Pepper's Ghost and the history of that particular aspect of the history of early cinematography. Previous installations provided some of the research on the nineteenth century machines, technology and progress ethic, and the kind of aesthetics that went with it. One of the most interesting things lies in the fact that developments in British science had been associated with the London theatre scene since the eighteenth century, and Pepper's lectures — he was well known as a wonderful lecturer and toured the world giving them — were a culmination of his showmanship where he used public display and 'edification' as a way of advocating the benefits of experimental physics and chemistry. His ultimate downfall was that he was perhaps too successful as a popular advocate, and that history has had trouble deciding whether he should be remembered as a mass entertainer or a scientific educator. The allusions to contemporary art are too rich to be avoided — the role of the artist now lies somewhere in that same primal ooze between playing the part of a kind of performer/entertainer and a 'serious' researcher. All that could be said is that, in spite of all his best efforts, Pepper's probably lucky that he didn't manage to kill off the magic after all.

***Would you describe WindWells as a collaborative project with SLQ during the genesis of the project? Or is the collaborative nature of the project limited to yourself and co-artworkers in its execution?***

Collaborative all the way. Tony and Donna Hamilton have been pivotal to the development of the screened aspects of the installation, and Eric Rossi has proved to be an indispensable channeller for the spirit of Professor Pepper. The usual suspects have cast their bit into the brew, like the indefatigable Dave Sawtell and also Brian Sanstrom.

But if the site is also to be considered as specific to the work — and so many of the recent installations and project and events have centred around this premise — then the people who are the custodians of that site have also ended up as being part of the work one way or another. There is a growing community of people involved up to the gills .... And there will be many more as it unfolds.

***How does WindWells compare to previous installation work such as Madame Illuminata Crack's Phantasmagorical Armchair for Ecologically Sustainable Recreation (exhibited at UAM in 2008), or does it mark a new development?***

Well as we mentioned earlier in this interview, *WindWells* inherits Madame's aesthetic of steampunk, and her tangential, skeptical interest in the arcane. Prior to the UAM show Madame had an earlier incarnation through her participation in a work titled *Madame Illuminata Crack's Pictorial Guide to the Universe*, that was created during a four month residency in Hanoi, and which addressed ten stages of colonialism from the point of view of a random tarot reading.

From time to time she kind of emerges as a channelling spirit to resurrect tacky aspects of arcana, and insists that they be part of some even tackier aspects of contemporary art. So we're not entirely sure about the extent to which she may or may not emerge in this one. There's a sneaking suspicion — nothing more than a hunch really — that she may have been closer to Professor Pepper than anyone was prepared to admit at the time. Madame is completely disinterested in history and abhors anything remotely political, so it seems as though she may have little to do with this project in terms of her input in any channelling kind of way. But it's been something of a surprise when she's reappeared before. We'll have to wait and see.

***What do you hope to convey to audiences with WindWells?***

We'll leave that up to the art. There's a big chance that there may be quite a bit of channelling, and more than a little divining going on.

*Interview by Gavin Sawford*





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