

KALDOR PUBLIC  
ART PROJECTS

2010  
PROJECT 20  
STEPHEN VITIELLO



# 2010 PROJECT 20 STEPHEN VITIELLO

## PROJECT 20 / 2010

---

### **The Sound of Red Earth**

Sydney Park Brickworks

13 August – 12 September 2010

### **The Birds**

Art Gallery of New South Wales

11 August – 12 September 2010

### **Performance:**

**Stephen Vitiello and Lawrence English**

7:30pm, 11 August 2010

Art Gallery of New South Wales

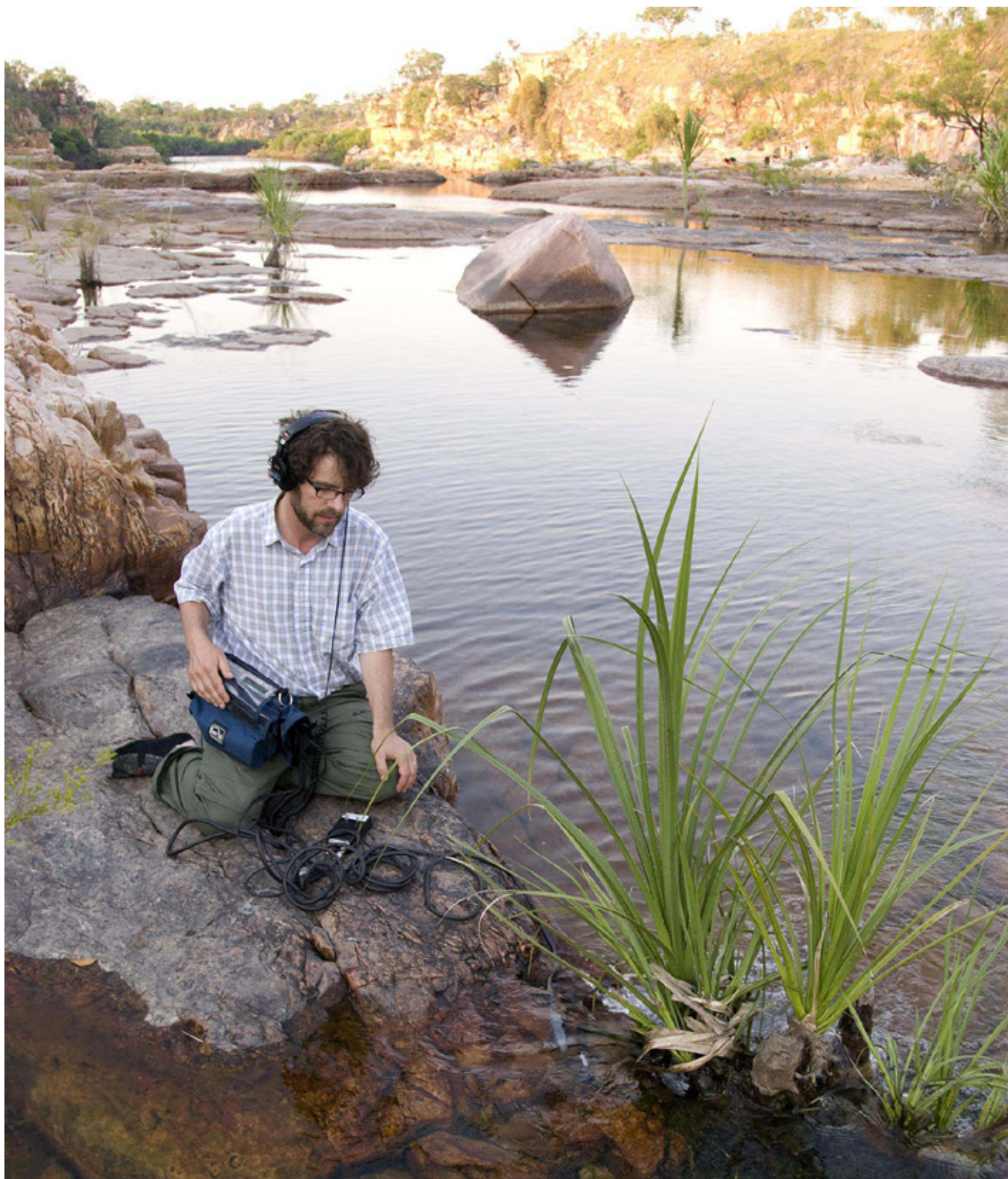
Electronic musician and sound artist Stephen Vitiello transforms incidental atmospheric noises into mesmerizing soundscapes that alter our perception of the surrounding environment... As an installation artist, he is particularly interested in the physical aspect of sound and its potential to define the form and atmosphere of a spatial environment.

Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain catalogue for the exhibition *Ce qui arrive/Unknown Quantity* 2002 quoted from [www.stephenvitiello.com](http://www.stephenvitiello.com)



Stephen Vitiello records outback  
sounds for his Kaldor project  
*The Sound of Red Earth* 2010

Photo Matt Flowers  
Courtesy Kaldor Public Art Projects



# 2010 PROJECT 20 STEPHEN VITIELLO

The grandeur of the Australian landscape has been painted in ochres and oils, now Stephen Vitiello will immerse us for the first time in the soundscapes of this unique environment.

John Kaldor

The experience of recording in the Kimberley was remarkable, visually beautiful, sonically rich and fraught with challenges. The winds were surprisingly strong, particularly on the second trip. On the first trip, we traveled by land and slept under the most amazing stars I've ever seen. For the second trip, we were on the sea. Our boat tossed in all directions as we tried to get to potential sound sources. A great deal remained just beyond the reach of the microphones. Overall, bird sounds dominate the recordings. In some cases, the wind was captured with force and presence, in others, it was just a rumble against the microphone.

Stephen Vitiello

Stephen Vitiello was invited to Australia by Kaldor Public Art Projects to create the 20th Kaldor Public Art Project. *The Sound of Red Earth* is made possible with support from Ray Wilson, Geoff and Vicki Ainsworth, and Mark and Louise Nelson.

Internationally celebrated US sound and media artist Stephen Vitiello has created two extraordinary new art projects in Sydney at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the historic former brickworks in Sydney Park.

Born in the United States in 1964, Vitiello started his career as a punk guitarist. Influenced by contemporary artists of the time, such as Nam June Paik with whom he worked in the early 1990s, Vitiello has since become a celebrated sound and media artist with work shown extensively across Europe and America. He was a resident artist at the World Trade Centre in 1999 where he recorded sounds from the 91st floor using home-built contact microphones. Other projects include the Cartier Foundation in Paris in 2003, the Biennale of Sydney in 2006, as well as a performance in the Tate's turbine hall in 2006. In recent years, Vitiello has been renowned for atmospheric installations such as his project at the Broadgate Arena, London, in 2007, and most recently his project for New York's High Line. In addition to his Kaldor project in Sydney, he is also working on a new commission for Mass MoCA in the US.

Vitiello's work *The Birds*, installed outside the Art Gallery of New South Wales, is a sound piece based on Daphne du Maurier's story of the same name. Inspired by the cacophony of Australian native bird life, Vitiello will 'catch a listener by surprise as if there is suddenly a spoken voice or singing bird whispering in one's unsuspecting ear'.

Vitiello's major work, installed in the Brickworks, is entitled *The Sound of Red Earth*, and is the result of extensive sound recordings captured by the artist throughout the Kimberley region in Western Australia. Over the past year, the artist has made two week-long field trips to the Kimberley to record bird and animal calls in freshwater billabongs, the sounds of tidal flows and marine life. He has even captured the frequency of the starlight and translated it into sound.

Vitiello's many recordings detail the natural life and environment of the region. Resonating with sound and light, the kilns at the Brickworks are transformed into immersive environments, evoking the remote Australian landscape. Each composition reflects a different focus: wind, water and native wildlife.

The historic Sydney Park area was first cleared for agricultural use by a marine sergeant of the First Fleet and has since played a significant role in the development of the city. In the 1840s, clay was extracted and brick-making began on the site, casting the bricks used to build early Sydney suburbs and its industry. The site has recently been re-developed to create vast and vibrant community parkland and the old brick-making kilns are officially open to the public for the first time with this new installation.

## COLLECTION CONNECTIONS

---

### Relevant works in the Art Gallery of NSW collection

[www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection)

- **Hany Armanious** (Egypt/Australia b1962)

*Turns in Arabba* 2005

clay, wax, wick, pewter, plaster, polyurethane, wood, formley, silicone, peppercorns, ceramic, drums, speaker  
approx 240 x 200 x 60 cm  
Contemporary Collection Benefactors 2006  
8.2.2006

- **Mat Collishaw** (England b1966)

*Waterfall* 2001

full-length mirror, picture frame, sandblasted glass, water and digital video  
dimensions variable  
Gift of Geoff and Vicki Ainsworth 2003  
34.2003

- **Ian Hamilton Finlay** (Scotland b1925)

from the series *Stonypath* 1984

20 type C photographs  
30.5 x 40.5 cm each  
Mervyn Horton Bequest Fund 1984  
190.1995.1–20

- **Antony Gormley** (England b1950)

*A field for the Art Gallery of New South Wales* 1989

1100 unfired clay figures  
approx 1200 x 1100 cm  
Mervyn Horton Bequest Fund 1993  
314.1993

- **Callum Morton** (Canada; Australia, b1965)

*Motormouth* 2002

polystyrene, wood, synthetic polymer paint, impact-resistant polyurethane, acrylic, sound  
dimensions variable  
Contemporary Collection Benefactors 2002  
305.2002

- **Susan Norrie** (Australia b1953)

*Undertow* 2002

6-channel video installation with sound, projection boxes  
Purchased with funds provided by Clayton Utz 2003  
266.2003

- **Patricia Piccinini** (Sierra Leone/Australia b1965)

*Swell* 2002–02

3-channel digital video projection with sound  
Contemporary Collection Benefactors 2005 with the assistance of Natalia Bradshaw, Andrew Cameron, Mark filtercroft, Richard Frolich, Leslie amd Ginny Green, Amanda Love, Roslyn and Tony Oxley, Stuart Quin, Reg Richardson, Penelope Seidler, Vivienne Sharpe, Ray Shorrocks, Stephen Solomons, Corinne and John Young  
266.2005

## SELECTED REFERENCES

---

### On Stephen Vitiello

- *2002 Whitney Biennial*, exhibition catalogue, Whitney Museum of Art, New York
- *2006 Biennale of Sydney*, exhibition catalogue
- Kelly, Caleb. *Cracked media: the sound of malfunction*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 2009

### On sound art

- Kahn, Douglas. *Noise, water, meat: a history of sound in the arts*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 2001
- LaBelle, Brandon. *Background noise: perspectives on sound art*, Continuum, London & New York 2006
- Licht, Alan. *Sound art: beyond music, between categories*, Rizzoli, New York 2007

Art Gallery of NSW, Kaldor Public Art Projects Explorer

[www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/kaldor\\_projects](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/kaldor_projects)

Kaldor Public Art Projects

[www.kaldorartprojects.org.au](http://www.kaldorartprojects.org.au)

Stephen Vitiello

[www.stephenvitiello.com](http://www.stephenvitiello.com)



# ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

Stephen Vitiello is a sound and media artist. Define this form of art-making. What considerations must Vitiello take into account to create his work? Compare these to the considerations of artists working in other media. How important is the audience and the venue for Vitiello? Describe the roles these elements play in creating a successful artwork.

Why do you think Vitiello and John Kaldor chose to present two works simultaneously in Sydney? How does this advantage or perhaps disadvantage the artist, Kaldor Public Art Projects and the audience? What opportunities or limitations do these venues present for sound art and for these particular works? Suggest other venues that may also be successful for this form of art.

Vitiello names Nam June Paik as one of his inspirations. Research Paik's works, specifically those in the Gallery's collection and on the Kaldor Public Art Projects Explorer. Discuss the similarities and differences between Vitiello and Paik in terms of the material they use and their conceptual practice. Describe how Vitiello has included elements of Paik's art practice yet made them his own.

[www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection)

[www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/kaldor\\_projects](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/kaldor_projects)

The environment is a key influence on Vitiello, and the senses play a significant role in the overall effect of the work. Consider the experience you have being immersed in a Vitiello sound work and compare it to standing in front of a traditional landscape painting. How does your response differ? What does each form of art-making offer the viewer? Discuss your opinion with the class.

*The Sound of Red Earth* was made possible by the art patrons Ray Wilson, Geoff and Vicki Ainsworth, and Mark and Louise Nelson. Discuss the significance of the patron in contemporary art practice. Research these particular patrons and discover the type of artworks they support. Debate in class 'The acceptance of art begins with individual taste'. Use these art patrons within your argument.

---

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Coordinated and written by Leeanne Carr, Public Programs Department, Art Gallery of NSW and Sophie Forbat, Kaldor Public Art Projects  
Editor Kirsten Tilgals

Cover: photo by Stephen Vitiello of his recording equipment for *The Sound of Red Earth* 2010  
Courtesy Kaldor Public Art Projects

All works © the artist  
unless otherwise indicated

Produced by the  
Public Programs Department  
Art Gallery of NSW  
Art Gallery Road, The Domain  
Sydney 2000 Australia  
pp@nsw.gov.au

© 2010 Art Gallery of NSW  
[www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au)

---