

# Chapter 15

## Curating Digital Public Art

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**Abstract** This chapter examines the practice of curating digital art in both museum and public art contexts. Extending from the *Beta\_space* model of a living laboratory for audience interaction and evaluation and through a series of selected case studies, it will consider the different methodologies that creative practitioners might follow for the presentation of new interactive digital art works. Three models that are useful in reviewing the current state of curating digital public art are discussed: first, the Museum Model: exhibiting in national public museums such as the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney; second, the Government Model: government funded commissions; and third, the Independent model, exhibiting through working with an independent curator. The different strengths of each model are discussed in the authors' reflections on current methodologies in place.

### 15.1 Introduction

This chapter reports and reflects on how digital public art is being commissioned. Here we review three models that examine case studies regarding the act of commissioning this emerging form of art. We utilise the Powerhouse Museum Sydney's traditional collection process as the basis for determining how an institution evaluates artefacts and selects them for display. We then discuss how experimental research

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platforms, such as Beta\_space that operated outside the traditional ‘object collection’ method for display, were important examples of platforms that diverged from the traditional approach in order to provide access to early ideas and prototypes, allowing for audience feedback and creating a more lived experience. From here we move outside the museum model and explore current examples of work funded by government commissions such as digital public sculpture, and discuss the variety of evaluative methods used to incorporate community feedback, set parameters for construction and the different ways that the life-span of an art-work can be determined through formal and informal feedback. The third model, where creative practitioners can work with independent curators, allows for more experimental approaches to assessment criteria. With a heavier reliance on expert contractors than those models already situated in the creative sphere, corporate funder, Ausgrid, provides their collaborators with a static site, a loose brief stating the type of work and quality of realisation they are looking for, and a requirement for specialist contractors and participants to fill in, and at times create, the criteria for assessment and realisation.

## 15.2 Digital Public Art and Evaluation

The history of public art is hotly contested, and involves political activism, social change, multiple mediums and a desire to engage the audience in art making. In 1995, Suzanne Lacy, feminist artist and writer, termed this evolving medium ‘new genre public art’ and defined it outside the bureaucracies that funded public sculpture. She defines it as specifically community-oriented work encapsulating mixed mediums including sound and film. The works, in her opinion, emerged as locative, in the sense of being tied to a community, an ethnicity or a practice. Lacy includes artists and the audience in her explanation, stating that perhaps even the relationship between the two may be measurable and might be representative as an artwork in its own right (Lacy 1995).

In his paper ‘The Known World’, Gibson discusses a rhythmic tension that artists experience when creating and then reflecting upon their own work. Artists who utilize their own practice in their research (as many do in this book) are caught between the distant, more methodological and scientific approach of evaluation and the more descriptive narrative that accompanies the lived experience of being involved with an interactive work. He calls this tension, this duality of encountering digital art, “the inside and the outside experience of things”. Gibson refers to a complex knowledge that emerges, a knowing that is usually “tacit, unspoken [and] unanalysed” (Gibson 2010, p. 7).

When Matthew Connell became involved with the Creativity and Cognition Studios in establishing Beta\_space, at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney a living laboratory model that he had been experimenting via previous research relationships with became a successful model for artists and researchers to work together to evaluate interactive and digital art (Muller et al. 2006). Turnbull was the second curator with Beta\_space, and in 2011, Turnbull and Connell together explored

this practice-based research approach of exhibition and reflection in regards to the museum space in their chapter *Prototyping places: the museum*. Here, they discuss the expectation that museum audiences were changing with the rise of digital technologies, and in particular, that they were becoming more active and wanting to connect with the objects on display in new ways, rather than looking at them passively in showcases (Turnbull and Connell 2011).

The Powerhouse Museum Sydney responded in many ways, one of which was to embrace the Beta\_space ethos for 6 years by providing floor space and staff resources to assist with the installation, launch and evaluation of these prototype exhibitions. At times, somewhat non-traditional methods were employed, in that materials were sourced and activities occurred against the accepted grain of the traditional museum ethos. In this way, Beta\_space was able to slowly influence the idea of what was acceptable in terms of exhibition objects (Turnbull and Connell 2011). This is similar to Sheridan's experience described in Chap. 16 ("Digital Arts Entrepreneurship: Evaluating Performative Interaction", Sheridan 2014) of the exploratory side of exhibiting digital art in her chapter on entrepreneurship. She often had to modify her methodologies or utilise platforms in ways her colleagues didn't immediately understand or accept. In time, however, and by example, she won them over and her curatorial approach was recognised. Perhaps most importantly, rigorous evaluation was included in each Beta\_space exhibition cycle. The Beta\_space evaluation criteria are situated in the *Where?* axis of Candy's Multi-dimensional Model of Creativity and Evaluation (MMCE) that is, the environment within which resources and expertise as well as physical spaces are included in the evaluative context (Candy 2012). A shorter account of this is included in the Evaluation and Interactive Experience Framework described in Chap. 3 ("Evaluation and Experience in Art", Candy 2014). In developing criteria for evaluation in terms of a pre-determined space, the final criteria were dependent on the constraints of the environment, the audience's active engagement with the prototype and their feedback to the artist-researcher.

In the Beta\_space study (Turnbull and Connell 2011), we concluded that the test, in a way, became the control. In attempting to showcase new media artwork and ideas in a traditionally static, or very slow moving, museum environment *Beta\_space* revealed the experimental and iterative practice behind the creation of digital public art and the crucial role that both the audience and evaluation plays in the iterative cycle. Standards were set whereby "the museum c[ould] begin to play a vital role as a laboratory for the creation of new work and new knowledge." (Turnbull and Connell 2011, pp. 79, 93)

### 15.3 Commissioning, Managing and Evaluating Digital Art

We identify three main models that are useful in describing the current state of curating digital public art in Australia:

1. The Museum Model
2. The Government Model
3. The Independent Model

We will detail these in turn below.

### 15.3.1 *The Museum Model*

‘Determining the significance of an object’ takes on a special meaning within collection-based institutions such as libraries, museums and archives. It is “a process that investigates and analyses the meanings and values of items and collections... [it] is a proven persuader [and] goes to the heart of why collections are important and why they should be supported.” (Russell and Winkworth 2009, p. 2). This collections-focussed method is quite powerful in terms of assessing the importance of a collection and in shaping the social history of an area by what is included in that collection. It can be utilised across several platforms within an institution, be it for new acquisitions, funding applications, or when lobbying for online or education resources.

In museums, the Powerhouse included, the standard way for an object to appear on display is through application for collection using significance as a negotiation tool to argue its value as part of a larger exhibition or collection. This is generally a more traditional approach whereby an object is assessed by a curator in the relevant field, put to a committee meeting of conservators, registrars and facilities staff for recommendations, and then submitted to the director for final approval. However, this can take time and is the recommended method for exhibitions with longer trends and persistent ideologies. Furthermore, it is not enough for a work to be well-known or controversial for it be accepted, it must also relate to the disciplines the museum focuses on, which, in the case of the Powerhouse Museum, are science, design and technology.

#### 15.3.1.1 **The Museum Model: Alternate Approaches to Significance**

With the rise of contemporary culture and the pervasiveness of the digital age, the Powerhouse Museum has responded to more immediate concerns in the cultural zeitgeist through our public programs departments. Objects representing these concerns are not always historical objects, sometimes they are designs, inventions, experiments or examples of live research. Many contemporary museums allow for these interventions and disruptions in the core collection practice through festivals, competitions and the partnering of key stakeholders in pre-packaged exhibitions.

There are many examples of this in the Powerhouse Museum’s 25-year history: popular examples are the Youngblood Design Markets,<sup>1</sup> the Ultimo Science Festival,<sup>2</sup> the Australian International Design Awards<sup>3</sup> and the Engineering Excellence Awards.<sup>4</sup> In 2013, the International Symposium of Electronic Art partnered with the

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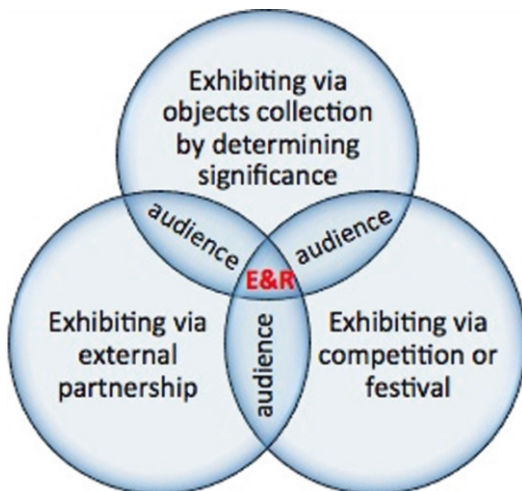
<sup>1</sup><http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/youngblood/>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/media/?p=150>

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/exhibitions/design\\_awards\\_2013.php](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/exhibitions/design_awards_2013.php)

<sup>4</sup><http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/engineeringexcellence/2012/>

**Fig. 15.1** Powerhouse Museum's collection and display experience model. NB: *E&R* experience and reflection



Powerhouse to display interactive and bio-art exhibitions.<sup>5</sup> Later in 2013, the Game Masters exhibition from the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne saw video game designers in the same light as their more traditional experience and object designers. Just prior to Game Masters, the Mini Maker Faire from MAKE made space for inventors across multiple disciplines to display their work, in either a finished or in progress state.<sup>6</sup>

In these ways, the Powerhouse Museum, and museums in general, have become powerful spaces for discussion and display of that nexus where art, science, design and technology incorporate research into aspects of their making and doing. An excellent and more closely related example of a similar project is the aforementioned Beta\_space laboratory. Figure 15.1 represents the different ways in which museums, the Powerhouse included, accept objects on the exhibition floor, both traditionally in fixed ways, and in more modern, perhaps more temporary ways. Audiences and researchers travel between all three modes of representation experiencing and reflecting on the content as they go.

#### *Case Studies #1 & 2: Beta\_space meets the Articulated Head*

As mentioned previously, Beta\_space operated from 2004 to 2010 in the Powerhouse Museum as an interactive public art laboratory. This model of prototype exhibition space for art systems with the museum audience as an evaluative medium strengthened the existing model for University/Museum alliances within the institution (Turnbull and Connell 2011). In collaboration with the Creativity and Cognition

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/exhibitions/isea2013/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/media/files/2013/11/MR-Maker-Faire-Sydney-FINAL.doc.pdf>

Studios at the University of Technology, Sydney, 3 curators produced some 30 experimental exhibitions over 6 years. In this time, researchers affiliated with Beta\_space established an evaluative framework that has been influential in the Powerhouse museum to this day. This is so much so, that it is difficult to evaluate a digital work without referencing the knowledge generated in that small space. Connell comments on its success below:

...The beautiful thing about Beta\_space, to me, is that it is a place of experimentation. We're a museum of design and this is a prototyping space; we're a museum of science and this is an experimental space, it's also a place where we invite our visitors to comment on what they see...not everybody gets to comment at great length, but some visitors get the opportunity to say what they think and maybe in new rounds of Beta\_space we'll extend that capacity for comment... (Turnbull and Connell 2010)

This desire to extend the design, exhibition and evaluation strategies learned in Beta\_space is made explicit in the second case study: the exhibition of Stelarc's *Articulated Head*. This exhibition developed out of both the external partnership and competition platforms of object display (see Fig. 15.1). Each year the museum mounts an engineering display in which a selection of the award winning entries are presented in collaboration with the Sydney Chapter of Engineers Australia. In 2010, the *Articulated Head Project* by the MARCS Auditory Laboratory from the University of Western Sydney, won the Bradfield Award for Engineering Excellence in the research category and was chosen to be part of the year long exhibition housed in the Success and Innovation Galleries at the Powerhouse Museum.<sup>7</sup>

When the Powerhouse exhibition team were developing the Engineering Excellence display for 2010, they were approached by Stelarc and his team about the possibility of continuing the research project onsite. Their aim was to have the interactions between museum visitors and the *Articulated Head* analysed and evaluated to guide further systems development. Museum staff were delighted with the approach as it was an unsolicited request to undertake a project in line with recently established strategies to re-develop some of our gallery spaces as living laboratories, the evaluative criteria of which was developed during the Beta\_space project (Muller et al. 2006). A simpler way to say this is that exhibition staff were comfortable with evaluation that incorporated the audience as a direct result of the Beta\_space precedent. One of the intriguing outcomes of both the Beta\_space and Thinking Head projects is that due to the inter-disciplinarity and cross-collaboration of practitioners, the lines that delineated predetermined roles such as software developer, engineer, artist, performer, curator and researcher began to blur. Complexity ensued and was experimented with and negotiated, and we think, new knowledge was gained.

There exist two examples of performances in league with the *Articulated Head* that happened within these auspices of the Beta\_space evaluation framework. Both Stelarc and the MARCS research group had their own evaluative processes in place in order to collate and improve the systems, most notably these interests crossed

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/engineeringexcellence/2012/exhibition.php>



**Fig. 15.2** Erin Gee and Stelarc, performing and evaluating with the Articulated Head and miscellaneous robots. *Orpheus Larynx*, 2011. Performance on Saturday 27 August 2011 in the Success and Innovation Galleries, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney (Image Courtesy of Amanda Reid, with permission from the artist Erin Gee)

over when it came to evaluating the audience's responses to both the system and the performances. In the simplest terms, the *Articulated Head* was an artificial agent attached to a robotic arm that audience members communicated with by keyboard. It was utilized in two collaborative performances where evaluation took place: one called *Orpheus Larynx* featuring roboticist and classical singer, Erin Gee, with Damith Herath and Zhengzhi Zhang (Fig. 15.2); and one that took place in both virtual and real worlds titled CLONE Second Life character Pyewacket Kazyanenko (controlled onsite by Daniel Mounsey) participated in a partly programmed and partly improvisational collaboration where avatars control automatons and artificial agents. It was during this latter performance, CLONE, that Creativity and Cognition Studio researchers evaluated audience's response to the performance by survey.

### 15.3.1.2 Reflections on the Museum Model

The Museum Model reveals that quite a few evaluative measures exist in terms of large scale, digital objects making their way to the museum floor for display. There is traditionally a critical, almost peer-reviewed assessment that occurs when determining the significance of an historical object for collection and exhibition. The results are collated and sent to the director for approval before moving ahead with collecting the object. Due to the amount of time it may take to make these cross-departmental assessments, this avenue is common for exhibitions with longer lead times and more static themes.



There exist simultaneous opportunities for displaying ideas with more fluid and experimental criteria. Good examples of these opportunities are the designs that come to the Powerhouse as prototypes or research queries, and as such are exhibited as part of competitions such as Engineering Excellence or festivals such as the Ultimo Science Festival. As with the *Articulated Head* from MARCS Auditory Lab, there may be another layer of evaluation that occurs, one that complies with the criteria of an external institution such as the University of Western Sydney, or as with *Beta\_Space*, the Creativity and Cognition Studios at the University of Technology, Sydney (Bilda and Turnbull 2008). This more focused evaluation might have more to do with examining anomalies in the art/engineering systems and how the audience responds to those anomalies during the experimental acts of performance or situated play, as with *Orpheus Larynx* and CLONE. In this way, the audience is almost a part of the artwork, and the artwork cannot evolve without the audience working with the researcher to improve the systems. The artworks themselves are designed this way, as prototypes to be improved on or as research queries to be investigated. These criteria differ from the more distanced approach of historically determining the significance of an object as part of a more permanent exhibition.

The Museum Model is an outstanding example of the rhythm that Gibson refers to- a rhythm that occurs when creative researchers examine both critically and experientially their objects and ideas on display.

### 15.3.2 *The Government Model*

In this section, we use the City of Sydney Council's public art programme as an example with which to discuss the Government model for curating digital public art. The City of Sydney (CoS) offers creative practitioners the opportunity to design, pitch, evaluate, refine and present art on a large scale through its public art platform City Art, including hiring the staff or collaborating with partners.

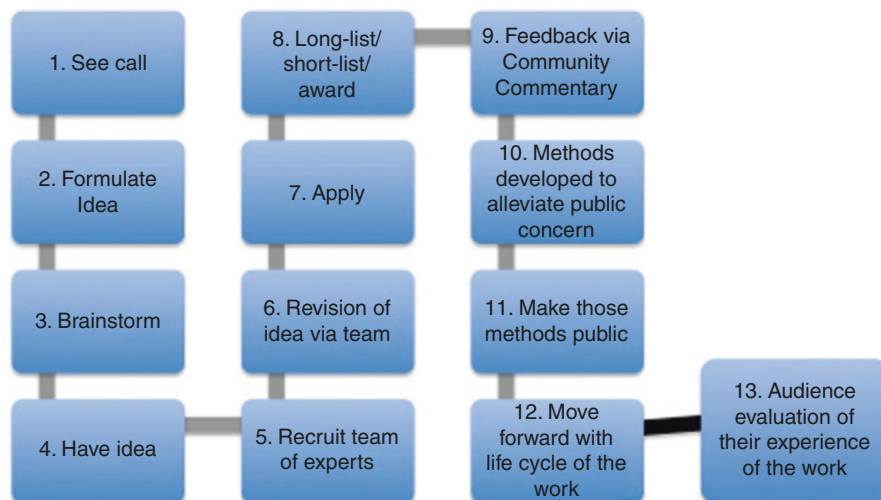
The six main ways that works are proposed or curated are by:

1. being nominated by a Public Art Advisory Panel
2. being nominated by a competitively appointed Curator
3. being nominated by a competitively appointed consultant for Capital works and major projects
4. responding to Open Calls for Expressions of Interest
5. becoming involved through a Partnership programme where the city speaks to a larger organization on behalf of the artist's practice
6. speaking to the Council Events Liaison Unit for information on your idea/project, including information about any other grant schemes that may be applicable.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>City of Sydney. <http://www.cityartsydney.com.au/cityart/about/CommissioningNewWorks.asp>





**Fig. 15.3** 12-step active process to the ‘Responding to Open Calls for Expressions of Interest’ City of Sydney Public Art application for independent creative practitioners

The first three options are predominantly influenced by who an artist knows, and whether they have produced enough successful work that a well-known curator or consultant would think to nominate them as a project takes shape. Most independent practitioners would become involved in this platform through option 4 – responding to Open Calls for Expressions of Interest. Again, a diagram (Fig. 15.3) may assist in visualising the 12-step process that applicants go through when applying to a public call through the city of Sydney.

It is interesting to note that there is space in this model for the lead creative practitioner to develop their idea with their team and make revisions prior to the lengthy application process. This first evaluation stage is self-reflective in the beginning but is then followed by a peer-review process. Second, each City Art commission for public art has a component within its development application process for public commentary called Community Comment. This usually happens during the monthly meeting at Sydney’s Town Hall where concerned citizens have the right to actively support or query aspects of the project that is under consideration. Any major issues are noted and managed by the Project Officer assigned to that application.<sup>9</sup> This process could be seen as a formative evaluation methodology that allows for community input into aspects of a publicly funded and executed artwork. Perhaps most importantly, there does not appear to be a capacity for summative evaluation in this process. As such, the funding body seems content to release the artwork into the public sphere after addressing the initial public commentary and implementing the approved recommendations by experts to alleviate these concerns.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/development/development-applications/comments-and-objections>

In the following section we discuss two case studies of projects that went through the City Art application process, which consisted collaborative art/technology partnerships, and were subject to both formal and informal evaluation with the public resulting in elements of the artwork being changed.

### *Case Study #1: Earth vs. Sky*

Mr Snow and Zina Kaye are creative digital practitioners who collaborated with artist Allan Giddy on *Earth V Sky* (Kaye and Snow). This work gathers weather information from a wind turbine, transforms it into a colour selection which is then used to light up two Moreton Bay fig trees in Rozelle Bay. In interviewing Zina Kaye, the application and assessment process, or evaluation of the project, happened at several stages, both leading up to and upon completion of the installation. Firstly, there was the response to a call for public works that the collaborators won with the artist Allan Giddy. Part of that process was obtaining a Development Application, in which there was a section for Community Comment for concerned citizens. One of the results of this preliminary evaluation was that the residents stated concern for the local wildlife. As a result, the Australian Museum's Business Services Unit was contracted to perform a survey regarding the habitats of local species in that area, particularly the effect of the light on the figs and the wind turbine on the birds and bats of the areas. Though the results of the study showed minimum impacts on both, there was a threat identified to both birds and bats, so the Australian Museum recommended that the turbine be monitored for at least 1 year, the results of which were collated online as part of a greater data set of aggregated information on wind turbines (Giddy and Snow).<sup>10</sup>

### *Case Study #2: Forgotten Songs*

Michael Thomas Hill's piece *Forgotten Songs* is a work that incorporates art and technology, natural history and memory. Originally part of an exhibition on Hidden Laneways in 2009–2010 curated by Dr. Steffan Lehmann, it is a series of bird-song recordings specific to the species that inhabited the Sydney CBD before European settlers forced them to relocate. These songs are visualized by birdcages and can be heard via digital recordings and speakers (Fig. 15.4).

Hill revealed that, apart from the usual Development Application allowance for Community Commentary, a kind of active evaluation took place as the project neared its end (Hill 2013). This happened by members of the public actively writing emails and making phone calls to the City of Sydney, evaluation which happened outside any prescribed avenues for formal evaluation, making this an interesting example of how unsolicited and unpredictable audience feedback can reshape the life span of a public artwork.

As articulated by Mayor Clover Moore in a letter to council in June 2012 and by council meeting sub-committee in November, *Forgotten Songs* was given the

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<sup>10</sup><https://xively.com/feeds/79693>



**Fig. 15.4** Michael Thomas Hill. *Forgotten Songs*. Digital sound and birdcages. View from the 2nd story. City Angel Recital Hall, 2009–2011 (Image produced courtesy of the City of Sydney)

opportunity to shift from being a temporary public work to remaining a permanent part of the Sydney cityscape. Unfortunately, further details of this active evaluative method, email and other records are no longer easy to locate. Nevertheless, there are still email communications that reveal these requests came from the public to both the digital agency that Michael Thomas Hill directs and the then City of Sydney project officer, Glenn Wallace.

### 15.3.2.1 Reflections on the Government Model

In this section, two City of Sydney Council commissioned works are presented as case studies of the Government Model, both following similar paths to exhibiting (Fig. 15.3). In responding to Open Calls for Expressions of Interest, applications were submitted that were assessed against council criteria and short-listed (steps 7 and 8). After a winning applicant was accepted, the projects were honed and refined at several further points (steps 9–12). Both *Earth Vs. Sky* and *Forgotten Songs* required Development Applications prior to construction, and part of this process allowed for the local community to have their say in a public forum (step 9). These committee-meeting minutes became important, especially when it came to addressing concerns the local community had over the wind turbine affecting local fauna in *Earth Vs. Sky*, or the end-date of *Forgotten Songs*. In both cases, active evaluation in the form

of community feedback, led to further contemplation by organisers, makers and managers of these works (steps 9–12).

In mapping the process as described above, we discovered that there is currently no summative evaluation undertaken after the work is installed (step 13), and nor are records kept during the lifecycles of the works, in order to determine their effect on audiences, or the satisfaction of the community where the works live. The findings from the data acquisition methods put in place after community comment (step 9) are published mainly on the websites for the work, perhaps only for 1–3 years. They obviously still exist in the tacit knowledge of the parties directly involved, but should key staff members change jobs, the records of this evaluation will be buried in deactivated email accounts or similar. What is required is a way to access the raw data of the projects after the project is installed.

Where the artists involved in these case studies (Mr Snow, Zina Kaye and Michael Thomas Hill) are interested in the life of the artwork after it has been installed, for the majority of administrators involved, and seemingly the community members, the big gain seems to be in formative evaluation leading up to a successful installation. The audience in this model appear to be the community that are local to where the work is to be installed. As long as their concerns are addressed during the development application process, the audience was then no longer an important issue. There appear to be no measures in place that summatively evaluate public artworks after installation, whether to gauge satisfaction or to find out what it makes the audience think or feel.

### ***15.3.3 The Independent Model***

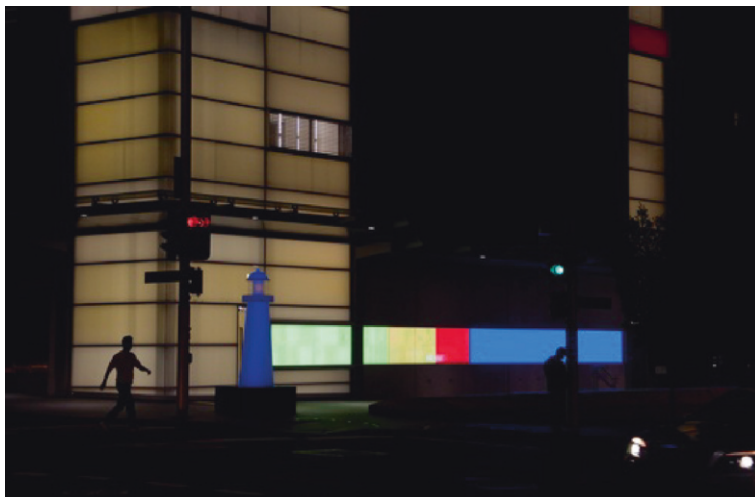
Amongst a handful of independent curators operating in Sydney that specialised in digital media from 2007 to 2012, New Media Curation was an initiative that emerged from the Beta\_space platform. Two case studies of independent curation of public art undertaken by New Media Curation are reported and reflected on below.

#### *Case Study #1: The Grid Gallery (Fig. 15.5)*

The public art projects procured by author Turnbull often involved collaboration with commercial entities, one of which was Ausgrid (a power infrastructure company) in Sydney.<sup>11</sup> Initially Ausgrid approached New Media Curation on a recommendation from a University of Sydney academic, to plan and execute a programme of digital artworks that tied in with the interests of some of their key corporate stakeholders. New Media Curation was responsible for advising on processes for sourcing and liaising with artists (providing them with technical assistance where necessary), and writing themes relating to the interests of key stakeholders and citywide activities. Ausgrid was responsible for providing onsite technical support for a

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<sup>11</sup><http://www.ausgrid.com.au/>



**Fig. 15.5** Ernest Edmonds. *Colour Energy*, Grid Gallery. Sydney CBD, Australia: June 2010 (Image courtesy of New Media Curation and printed with the permission of Ausgrid)

16 m × 1 m display screen and for maintaining the technology that operated it. They also outsourced production of a website to advertising firm, Leo Burnett, who devised a site that served as an online gallery and submission service for artists interested in participating in the project.

In terms of the evaluative framework for installing a work at the Grid Gallery, the methodology was mostly formative in nature. Table 15.1 below indicates the roles that the key actors played in determining the creation, submission and exhibition of a digital work. When the Ausgrid Project Manager was asked if there was any formative assessment criteria involved in set up the site of the Grid Gallery, author Turnbull learned that the original architectural plan included a digital screen for advertising, and permission was granted to exhibit artworks as a part of the City of Sydney Development Application. The audience that this ‘enlivening’ was aimed at was mainly city workers commuting to and from work. With themes developed around Sydney city calendar events and key stakeholder interests the interest of the audience was considered, but not retrospectively evaluated by those who commissioned the works.

### *Case Study #2: Silverwater Learning Centre*

The second project between Ausgrid and New Media Curation concerned two artistic commissions for the Silverwater Learning Centre, a training site for apprentice electricians as well as all other Ausgrid staff. The Centre contained several onsite ‘scenario’ models for trainee electricians to situate themselves within and learn from, but it also housed an exhibition entitled ‘Energy Efficiency and Sustainability’.

**Table 15.1** Assessment criteria for the grid gallery platform

Actors	How was criteria for the GG call determined?	How was criteria for the award assessed?	How was the build of each work assessed and how did they move forward?
<u>Ausgrid</u> (funders)	Contracted NMC to develop by:  Researched curators specialising in media art Rang Turnbull on recommendation from	Board Members accepted or rejected applicants based on: Look & content Ability for Ausgrid technicians to support the technology	N/A
<u>NMC</u> (specialist contractor)	Researched other calls for exhibiting digital public work and created an outline around two key criteria: Submission must work in low-res digital film environment Must submit content along criteria of the theme	One of the Ausgrid Board Members; assessed on: Reputation of artist Quality of submission in response to call Required technological support (could the artwork be produced in time)	Provided technical support to the artists and Ausgrid technicians as required
<u>Leo Burnett's</u> (specialist contractor)	Augmented this outline based on what was available via the web-platform: Submission accepted only the file types that were required Generated an email to Ausgrid Board Members at the closing date/time Provided storage and display of works that did not make the shortlist (online gallery)	N/A	Maintained the web platform as an online submission platform and web gallery
<u>Artists</u> (specialist participants)	Saw and responded to call based on:  Ability to work in lo-res digital environment  Had a (near) completed work that could be adapted Required minimal digital support/supervision Would work for exposure only	Assess the criteria for application and display – submit application Request assistance where necessary	Build a low-res artwork to the spec of the screen Uploaded the artwork to the LB web platform and waited on reply Requested assistance as needed from NMC.

Within the auspices of these education and training spaces, New Media Curation was responsible for commissioning two artworks: (1) a digital animation suited to Stealth Screen (a low-resolution vertical screen) for the exhibition; and (2) a physical sculpture meant for the courtyard. As the building was 5-star Green Energy rated, the sculpture was to be constructed from recycled materials found at two of the Ausgrid storage facilities that were closing down. New Media Curation issued a nation-wide call and criteria for submission deadlines, along with an invitation to tour the storage facilities and review the materials for any interested artists.

From 21 applications, six projects were shortlisted and presented to a panel comprised of an Ausgrid executive and two experts in design, art, and technology. While there was no particular criteria to be met, the panel understood the aims of the project and the type of works they were looking for. The candidates needed to demonstrate a history of creating public art, the ability to lead a project, and a passion for the mediums being worked in. Table 15.2 suggests an evaluative framework that the actors in this public commission participated in. It reflects the criteria outlined by New Media Curation and the experience and knowledge required of the acting participants (funders, pitch panel, and artists).

From this process, there were two successful artworks selected:

1. Dillon MacEwan and Chris Fox's *Mother of Invention* for the physical sculpture, and
2. Sohan Ariel Hayes' triage of low-res animations *Lightning* won the digital component and is still housed on the Stealth Screen in the exhibition inside the centre (Fig. 15.6).

When information was requested from the Ausgrid Project Manager on assessment, permissions or community comment taking place around these artworks, author Turnbull learned that as the artworks were housed inside the commercial property of Ausgrid, none of this was sought. In a sense, there was more freedom regarding content at the enclosed Silverwater site than at the city-facing Grid Gallery site. The reason being, that with a publicly owned commercial entity, stakeholder views were always a concern and the audiences at each site were divergent.

An overview of how the Independent Contractor Model works for the actors in these case studies involves five stages:

1. Ausgrid pitches creative ideal to the City – receives funding
2. Ausgrid consults and contracts experts
3. Experts run call and create infrastructure
4. Artists qualify and construct work
5. Artwork is launched to its audience – becomes a maintenance issue

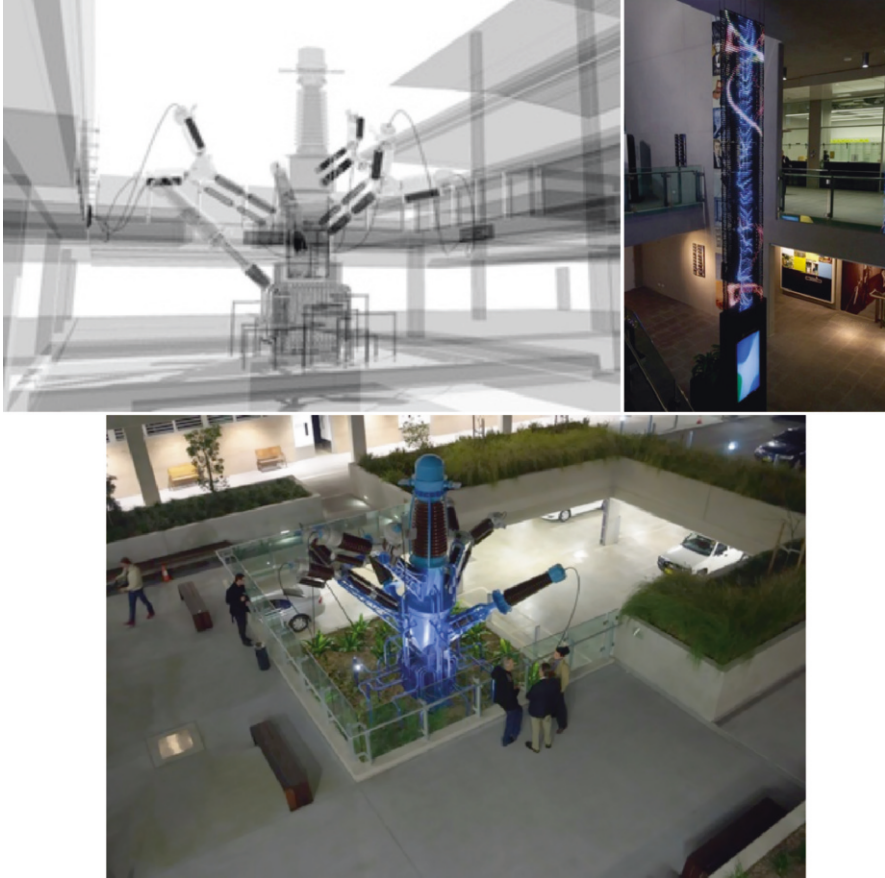
Note, however, that the audience, though considered indirectly, is secondary to the act of realising the work.



**Table 15.2** Assessment criteria for the Silverwater Learning Centre platform

Actors	How was criteria for the SLC call determined?	How was criteria for the award assessed?	How was the build of each work assessed and how did they move forward?
<u>Ausgrid</u> (funders)	<p>Contracted NMC to develop by:</p> <p>Working with her on GG and valuing her specialisation and artist network</p>	<p>Ausgrid set the scope of the project and put together an interview panel who understood the scope of the call. Pitches were assessed on:</p> <p>Proposed content vs./ audience of the works</p> <p>Ability for the artist(s) to bring the work to completion as per the call</p> <p>Consideration of materials and budget constraints in their pitch</p>	<p>Sculpture: Ausgrid Project Manager worked closely with the award artists to:</p> <p>Provide materials</p> <p>Assess progress</p> <p>Amend budgets</p> <p>Ensure tickets for construction were in place</p>
<u>NMC</u> (specialist contractor)	<p>Researched other calls for exhibiting digital public work and created an outline around two key criteria:</p> <p>Submission must work in low-res and vertical digital film environment</p> <p>Artists must be experienced in the construction side of public sculpture and be willing to use recycled materials</p>	<p>One of the Ausgrid Panel Members; assessed pitches based on:</p> <p>Reputation of artist(s)</p> <p>Quality of submission in response to call criteria</p> <p>Proposed content vs./audience of the works</p> <p>Ability for the artist(s) to bring the work to completion as per the call</p> <p>Consideration of materials and budget constraints in their pitch</p>	<p>Digital work: Ausgrid technicians and NMC worked with award artist to test the build of the digital work to the spec of the screen</p> <p>Tours of the materials warehouses</p> <p>Provided technical and content feedback for the digital work prior to submission</p>

<p>Artists (specialist participants)</p>	<p>Saw and responded to call based on:          Architectural and design experience          Construction experience          Ability to work in lo-res digital environment          Must be a new work          Required minimal support/supervision          Would work for a small fee</p>	<p>Assess the criteria for application and display – submit application          Request assistance and communicate feedback where necessary</p>	<p>Construct the physical sculpture as pitched          Build a low-res artwork to the spec of the screen          Requested assistance as needed from NMC &amp; Ausgrid.</p>
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**Fig. 15.6** Chris Fox, Dillon MacEwan and Sohan Ariel Hayes. *Mother of Invention* and *Lightning Series*. Finalists in the Silverwater Learning Centre commissions for sculpture and animation. Silverwater NSW: August 2011 (Images courtesy of Chris Fox, Dillon McEwan and New Media Curation. Printed with the permission of Ausgrid)

### 15.3.3.1 Reflections on the Independent Model: Curator as Contractor

The Independent Model encapsulates both formal and reflective evaluation criteria. As shown in the case studies of the Grid Gallery and the Silverwater Learning Centre commissions, the client, Ausgrid, was somewhat beholden to different criteria depending on the site-specific location of the work. If a work was public and meant to “enliven the street frontage” of a power grid, as Grid Gallery was, a Development Application was lodged with the City of Sydney and consent conditions were adhered to. The commissions for the exhibition and courtyard sculptures at the Silverwater Learning centre were meant for the edification and inspiration of Ausgrid staff and were housed inside their commercial property, and therefore no consent from

external parties was required. The Project Manager would simply need to make the design decisions based upon consultation of experts and with the interests of the stakeholders in mind.

## 15.4 Conclusions

This chapter set out to describe some models of how digital public art is commissioned and managed with the aim of revealing the role that audiences and evaluation play in its development and exhibition. The specific cases were mainly located in Sydney, Australia, but the models and approaches to evaluation could equally apply to similar contexts elsewhere. Frameworks for this work are represented as three different models, each of which has its own requirements and evaluation criteria. In presenting our curatorial perspective spanning all three models, we are articulating both the rhythm and the reason that characterises digital public art in contemporary environments. Each model has its strengths: within the Museum Model, there is more space for experimentation. Living laboratories such as *Beta\_space* allow for alternate platforms to develop ideas and permanent exhibitions. Through festivals, competitions, and external partnerships, ideas, prototypes and live research provide a rich environment with many iterative cycles and available participants for audience evaluation. As such, the frameworks for evaluating museum audiences are now well established, as represented by the *Beta\_space* and *Articulated Head* case studies.

The Government Model addressed the commissioning of public art through a city council based program. Here the two case studies (*Earth Vs. Sky* and *Forgotten Songs*) examined how artists and technologists collaborated to apply for and create artwork with the community in mind. In this model, the audience is considered in the preliminary or formative elements of the work, with the opportunity to affect and instigate an iteration of the work prior to installation. With *Forgotten Songs*, it is interesting to note that informal audience evaluation worked to extend the life of the artwork, but also that there was no formal or summative evaluation avenue set up to identify works that should be retained from temporary exhibitions on a more permanent basis. This ad-hoc evaluation consisted of members of the community hearing that the work was due to be removed and acting to recommend to the council that it remain in place.

The Independent Model is mainly reliant on external expert opinion. The two case studies (*Grid Gallery* and *Silverwater Learning Centre*) explored how commercial entity Ausgrid contracted experts to create gallery infrastructure and bring artworks through the application and assessment process, and finally to display. Where the audience for each site was considered initially in terms of content or execution of the work, once the works were up, there was no process or interest in evaluating the work as they were meant to remain permanently installed. As such, a summative evaluation was not deemed necessary.

In comparing the three models, the better opportunity for a creative practitioner would be dependent on what their intention was for display: the reason for their contribution to the rhythm, if you will. Where there is perhaps little dispute that the Museum Model is the safest, least expensive, and provides the most controlled environment after the artists' own studio, there are benefits to each model. If an interactive artist wants to iterate an early or complex idea based on scientific systems or test a prototype for public reaction, they might utilise the Museum Model. If they want to create a work that would remain a part of the cityscape, in a temporary or more permanent capacity, they might utilise the Government Model. If they have an idea in response to a call for works from a colleague acting on behalf of a larger corporation, understanding they might be more heavily involved in setting the criteria, even bringing their expertise to the table as part of setting the criteria, they might risk working with the Independent Model. In reviewing and revealing the current practices in commissioning, managing, and at some stages, evaluating digital public art, we are able to create a better, more meaningful infrastructure for the audience of today and the future encountering challenging and engaging digital art experiences.

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