

# 'Lights across the Sea' - an India Australia Contemporary Art Project.



In late October 2012 Louise Rippert and William Eicholtz travelled from their Melbourne studio to Varanasi, India for an intensive 16 day project to explore new connections between their artwork and Indian culture.

Louise Rippert has had a long connection to Indian symbols in her own artwork, a deep interest in the culture and has travelled extensively through all parts of India. This project is the first time she has made artwork in India and her site specific works stretched her resourcefulness. She embarked on this project with her personal archive of mandala images and high expectations that connections could be made on a street level with locals and pilgrims visiting the holy city.

The intense colour and high decoration of figurative religious statues in india has much in common with the baroque flourish of the sculptural work of William Eicholtz. His project was to find a practical and meaningful connection between the two worlds.

Upon arrival in Varanasi, William and Louise immediately formed contacts on the street level with traders, postcard sellers and café owners- ie. locals who knew how relationships worked on a community level. These were people without constant electricity, let alone internet connections or websites, and could consequently only be contacted at this personal level. So began a highly successful art-making encounter.

On day one William discovered a small group of local artisans who work with straw, bamboo and mud to make the Kali/ Shiva puja statues that are ritually worshiped and eventually submerged in the Ganges River. This encounter quickly formed into a wonderful working relationship where these traditional artisans assisted William, helping him to create his own unique sculpture.

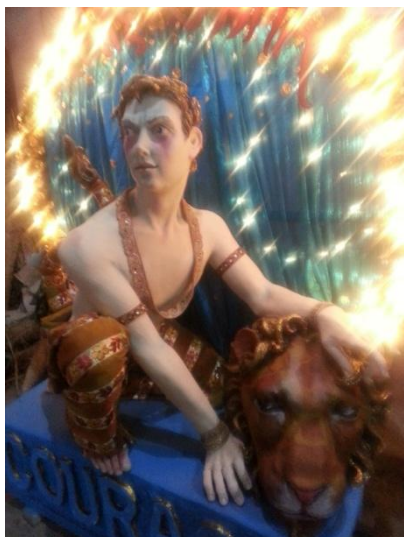


The statue makers work with their traditional family techniques that have not changed for centuries, working everything by hand to create an effigy that strictly adheres to tradition. During his time in the workshop William introduced a new concept of the artist as the 'imaginative individual', offering a new approach which challenged the strictures of the accepted traditions.



Working from an image of 'Courage', an image of a boy in a lion suit that he has been developing for some time, William embarked on a new incarnation of this concept. The 'Cowardly Lion' quickly entered the pantheon of Hindu Gods and became 'Narsingh Avatar' the half man, half lion incarnation of Vishnu, who is victorious over an evil king. This symbol of Courage was resonant with the Indian counterparts, visiting pilgrims and all who saw the sculpture.

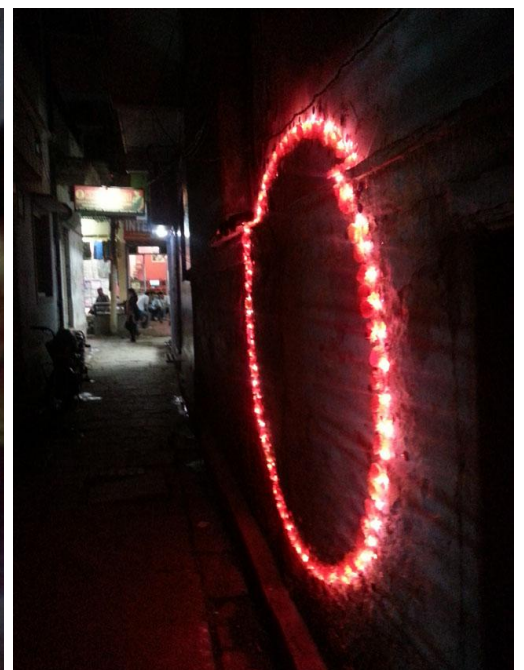
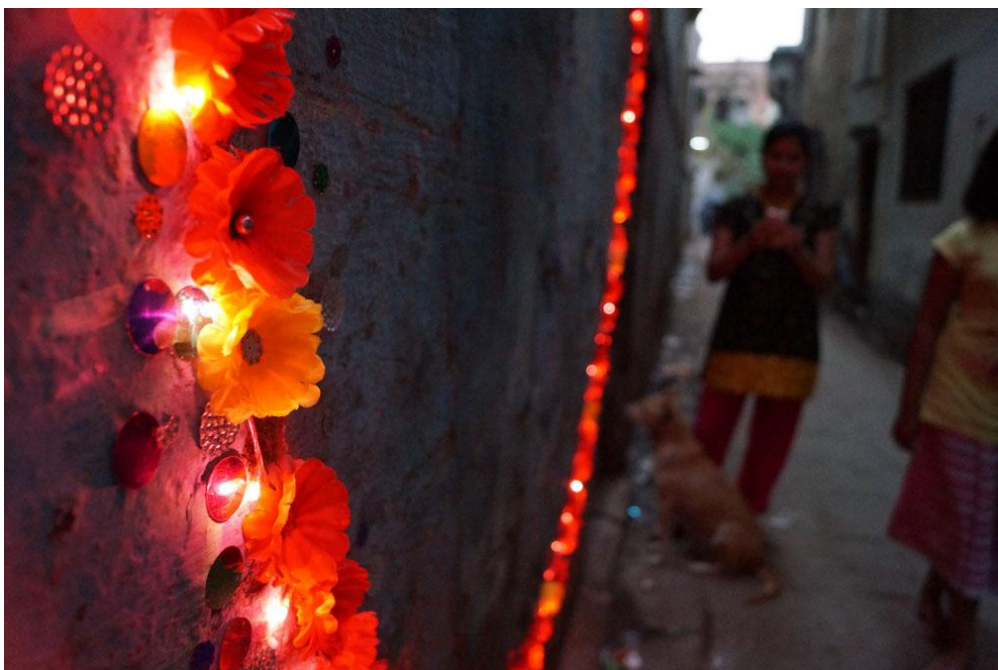
The sculpture was completed within 9 days according to traditional construction methods, costumed, painted and bejeweled. It was eventually displayed on the banks of the Ganges and left to return to its natural elements.



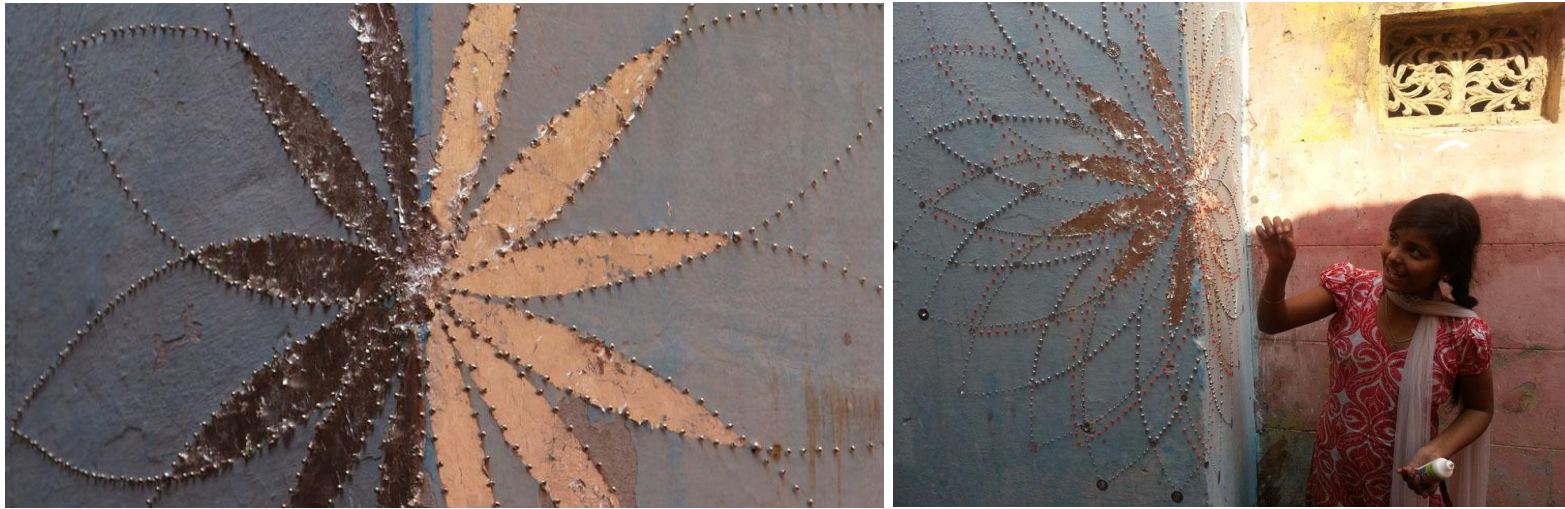
From the first day Louise also began the exploration of possibilities for her work. Noticing that the heritage walls of the Ghats were quickly being covered/ tagged by visiting international artists her reaction was to take her ideas and efforts to a more intimate street level, where local interaction and involvement from those who lived and worked beyond the walls would become part of the works “making”.



Varanasi is considered to be one of the holiest cities in India and attracts many sadhus (holymen) and pilgrims who seek enlightenment through the discipline of yoga and meditation. Louise’s previous use of the mandala motif in her contemporary practice made a living connection with these ancient practices. Despite the language and cultural differences, the circular symbol of the mandala was immediately accessible to city inhabitants and was an appropriate choice of imagery to transpose upon the inner city walls.



Sourcing material such as beads, flowers and beaten silver gilt from local markets, and working with the most basic construction tools, Louise began to map out her mandala forms . From the first traced circle, locals became involved, visiting pilgrims studied the meanings and the wall owners proudly shared with their neighbours the newly created artwork in their community.



The 3 chosen wall locations that Louise created her images upon each had their own unique and timeless beauty. Through the placement of the contemporary mandala this beauty was revealed anew to the passing viewers and on looking neighbors, all who had lived amongst these same walls for generations.

Some of the mandalas were completed in several hours, some took the entire 14 day duration, but all commanded the constant involvement of locals and a shared fascination in the art making process. The artworks completion and illumination by the eve of Diwali was celebrated by distribution of sweets to all the delighted locals and new found friends, for whose participation and enthusiasm Louise was very grateful.



As with the rangoli (sand artworks) that are traditionally created at Diwali, these wall mandalas were meant only to be temporary and would eventually fade into the weathered patina of the city.

The documentation of the entire collaboration, public interaction and art making process was captured in a commissioned film by Moonlight Pictures. Louise and William's fortunate meeting with this talented filmmaking team also facilitated the opportunity to work with one of India's most respected classical composers and singers, Dr. Revati Sakalkar .



On many occasions Dr. Sakalkar accompanied William and Louise on location. Using the new artworks as inspiration she composed and sang original music that reflected the spirit of their collaboration. This inspired meeting of artforms was captured on film by the fourth participant in this project, Moonlight Pictures.

The resulting documentation, 'Lights across the Sea' is the unique and spontaneous collaboration between 4 artists, William Eicholtz, Louise Rippert, Dr. Revati Salkakar and the director, Praveen Chaturvedi . The visual and musical exploration of this encounter between cultures and artforms will be completed in 2013.

It is the sincerest wish of all 4 participants that their involvement in this project and their unique creations are greeted with the joy and warmth that this cultural and artistic exchange enjoyed in India.

'Lights across the Sea' was made with the support of Arts Victoria and all participants gratefully acknowledge this visionary support.



William and Louise particularly thank Barkha Sahani, Shiva Biswas and their friends, the amazing team at



All images are the property of Lights across the Sea, William Eicholtz, Louise Rippert and Moonlight Pictures.



## Outcomes

1. Construction of new Sculpture by William Eicholtz in traditional methods.
2. Artistic exchange between traditional statue makers and William Eicholtz.
3. Production of 3 unique site specific wall pieces by Louise Rippert.
4. Engagement with local traders and residents who participated in construction of wall murals.
5. Cultural exchange between pilgrims in the holy city who witnessed the contemporary mandalas.
6. Commissioning of new music composition and vocal performance by Dr Revati Sakalkar.
7. Inspiration for new music composition from the visual creations.
8. Commissioning of digital film documentation by Moonlight Pictures, director P. Chaturvedi.
9. Engagement with local traditional artists and forming of genuine warm working relationship based on the unity of artistic endeavor.
10. Collaboration in production between the 4 partners, L Rippert, W. Eicholtz, Dr R. Sakalkar and director P. Chaturvedi.
11. Developed 'on the ground' networks with local knowledge and cultural sensitivities.
12. Promote cultural understanding of Indian culture for Australian audiences.
13. Highlighted artistic possibilities of cultural exchange between diverse cultures.
14. Showcase for Indian filmmaking and the rich heritage of Indian culture beyond Indian shores.
15. Deepened the friendship and mutual cultural appreciation between India and Australia.

Any correspondence or enquiries regarding this project or resulting documentation should be directed to:

William Eicholtz, [www.dishboydreaming.com](http://www.dishboydreaming.com) [sculpture@dishboydreaming.com](mailto:sculpture@dishboydreaming.com) +61 0404 488 343

Louise Rippert, [www.louiserippert.com.au](http://www.louiserippert.com.au) [louiserippert@bigpond.com](mailto:louiserippert@bigpond.com) +61 411 520 721

Moonlight Pictures [www.moonlightpictures.tv](http://www.moonlightpictures.tv) [praveen@moonlightpictures.tv](mailto:praveen@moonlightpictures.tv) +91 9235152022