



The sea reclaims traditional owner and artist-in-residence Craig Tapp's sand ochre workshop painting, created by the artist and participants during the eco-ephemeral arts festival *Lines in the Sand* on North Stradbroke Island.

Photo: Charles Zuber.

FOUR TECHNOLOGIES

■ Carol Schwarzman

*Although human beings have been experimenting with new forms of life over the centuries, we now realise that we exist, irrespective of the ethnic, economic, and political situations that govern our lives, in 'symbolic immune systems and ritual shells'... Humans live in habitats, not in territories.*¹

Keith Ansell-Pearson

Four technologies – consider them as such for the sake of discussion – converge at North Stradbroke Island during *Lines in the Sand*, the annual environmental arts and cultural festival held there during the June school holidays. *Lines* has grown out of the longtime friendship between Jo Kaspari, Sharon Jewell and Pat Zuber – all visual artists with backgrounds in environmental activism and strong connections to the island – who began creating dialogue about NSI's pristine environment and

mining through workshops, forums, and ephemeral artworks along the Gorge Walk at Point Lookout. They wanted to show art that spoke of the earth and place, aligned with nature and to connect with NSI's First People. The name *Lines in the Sand* was first coined three years ago to call up resistance to mining and to reference nature's vulnerability.

Somehow, despite limitless grounds for contention, four modes of human creativity: the arts festival; the ancient laws of caring for Country; sand mining as big business; and Queensland state politics are all nudged into proximity and interaction during *Lines in the Sand*. And while mining company Sibelco has yet to be invited to participate, mining remains, as one *Lines* organiser put it, "the elephant in the room" during the festival.



Anaheke Metua and Lisa Boo lead a weaving workshop attended by *Lines* participants, traditional owners and Straddie residents, using locally gathered native fibres. Photo: Charles Zuber.

With due respect to all parties, this story is best seen as a grand experiment that brings together opposing issues and systems of belief, functioning without prior models for how to reach common ground and goals worthy of stakeholders' needs and self-respect:

The challenge that the Quandamooka community now faces is known as a 'wicked problem', a socio-technical puzzle where there are no right and wrong answers... On the face of it, there could be no greater difference in the situations facing Indigenous communities and corporate Australia.²

In a recent interview, Delvene Cockatoo-Collins, a Quandamooka woman and Project Officer for the Quandamooka Yoolooburabee Aboriginal Council (QYAC), manager of native title interests said:

My kids have this now, which I didn't have. They are growing up with an awareness of their land as sacred and theirs... What do we need to do to maintain our country so that in 500 years' time we managed well and we can be proud of our legacy? Researchers from the University of Adelaide have found that Blue Lake here on Stradbroke has been pristine for 7500 years because of the way our people managed it. Blue Lake is unique in Australia and the world because of how pure it is. There is no other lake like it in the world.³

I recently met with Debra Olive, Community Relations Advisor at Sibelco, to get a feel for how the company might respond to a request for comment within the context of this article. Truly, Sibelco's PR mojo functions on many levels. The company funds multiple community grants, sports, social and cultural programs, as well as environmental surveys related to land rehabilitation. According to Deb, forty percent of the island's economy is currently based on mining or mine-related businesses. She said, "Mining companies are ethically, legislatively bound to function with community interests at the forefront of how they do business. The mining industry as a whole has become more aware that in order to achieve and maintain social licence to operate, the community has to be supported and in favour of mining activities. As far as the company's compliance with replacement of flora

and fauna, University of Queensland Centre for Mined Land Rehabilitation monitors Sibelco to see that it complies." She also acknowledged that Sibelco can do more to address concerns related to island aquifers, and that traditional owners need better access to their land. She stressed that, "the perception of there being sides gets in the way of looking for and exploring common ground to find what it is the parties share, that we could move forward with."

Dan and Colin Battersby are well-known brothers who run *Fishes on Stradbroke*, the café at Point Lookout that's operated for eight years. As teenagers, they spent as much time as possible surfing on Straddie, and convinced their Dad to buy a house here in the 1970s. They grew up with their Mum's fellow-members of Queensland Conservation Foundation designing leaflets against mining on Fraser and Moreton Islands in the basement of their family home. Both men would be happy to see mining go, but are concerned that all too soon NSI's all-too-precarious small businesses would be undermined. Colin said, "There's no precedent for this idea of mining and tourism cohabitating so close to an urban area, and the Quandamooka's Native Title designation is across the water from three million people. This scenario is unlike any other in the country." They credit mining with building NSI roads and electrical services. Colin told me, "I feel as though I wear two hats: one as a businessman and one as a human being. A contract is a contract, and mining should continue until 2027, the date set up before Anna Bligh envisioned eco-tourism as the answer. Yet coming back from a trip to Europe recently, I flew over the island and saw the Enterprise mine is twice the size it was three years ago."

In the autumn issue of *Straddie Island News*, Darren Burns, a Quandamooka man and QYAC's Land and Sea Manager, said,

Sand mining is a very destructive industry. As well as destroying the ecology it is slowly pitting people on the Island against one another. There is a sophisticated campaign going on from the mining company to tell everyone that mining is OK. But it's not. North Stradbroke Island is one of only a handful of sand barrier islands that are unique. There's nothing like them anywhere in the world, and we're destroying what should be a sanctuary marked for preservation.⁴

When attending *Lines*, all become players, from the child attending a workshop who shapes a pot from local clay, to the Sibelco representative attending a forum on environmental activism. Exchanges of sociability and information occur on many unscripted levels. As Colin said to me, "Now we are having this conversation on Straddie: 'How do we want the island to be?'" ■

Carol Schwarzman is an artist and writer based in Brisbane and Brooklyn, NY. She contributes regularly to Australian and US arts publications and served as writer-in-residence for *Lines in the Sand* at www.linesstradbroke.wordpress.com.

1 Keith Ansell-Pearson, 'Philosophy of the Acrobat: On Peter Sloterdijk', *LA Review of Books*, 8 July 2013.

2 Tony Golsby-Smith, *Financial Review*, 26 February 2013.

3 Conversation with Delvene on 23 June 2013, <http://linesstradbroke.wordpress.com/2013/06/23/conversation-with-delvene-cockatoo-collins/>

4 'Stolen Footprints', *Straddie Island News*, Autumn 2013 p9.

OPPOSITE TOP: *Lines* participant Jesse Stewart helps to create the image of a green turtle (hunted by traditional owners) during Craig Tapp's sand ochre painting workshop. Photo: Mimi Zarsky. **BELOW:** *Lines* artists-in-residence Virginia Jones and Lisa Behan work to create Jones' installation, *Untitled*, using locally sourced sands donated by traditional owner Craig Tapp. Photo: Charles Zuber.

Tapp. Photo: Charles Zuber.

