

# THE ALTITUDE PROJECT

Eleven artists, pioneering aviation, astronomy and three historic sites with a shared history of exploration of the skies



*Rachel Peachey and Paul Mosig's work The Amy Johnson Flight School - photographer Ona Janzen*

**THE ALTITUDE PROJECT** was celebrated as a contemporary art event held on historically linked sites across the sandstone ridges of the Blue Mountains: Linden Observatory, Kingsford Smith Park and Melrose Park.

The project was curated by Miriam Williamson and Mahalya Middlemist, their artistic vision encompassing the themes of aviation and astronomy and drawing on the histories of individual endeavour and the use of technology to reach the sky that are signified by the two parks, named after celebrity aviators, and the observatory which displays the innovative technical skills of Ken Beames, the only amateur telescope maker in Australia during the 1940s.

Eleven artists exhibited technologically innovative works at the three sites utilising a range of media including sound art, interactive sculptural and digital works and works involving laser and GPS mapping. Artists were invited to engage with the histories, technologies and the science of early aviation and night-sky watching that are evoked by the sites.

The project launched with *Observatory Latitude 33° 42' South Longitude 150° 29" East* at Linden Observatory on the evening of 4 November 2017 and featured contemporary artists whose works intersect art, science and technology: artist Michaela Gleave, composer Amanda Cole and software designer Warren Armstrong presented

A *Galaxy of Suns* (percussion of the stars) where the stars were 'played' as they rose and set over 360° of the horizon. Tracking the Earth's motions through space, the work documented in real time the audience's precise position in relation to the stars, sonifying stellar data to create a sound and composition unique to their location in space and time. On the night the Pleiades cluster of stars was overhead together with the full moon.

Other participants were local artists Brad Allen-Waters with Jon Drummond, Graham Davis-King and Michael Petchkovsky each of whom developed works in response to the different cultural layers of the site. Works based on Beame's skill in lens making and optics were installed in the half-built planetarium, as well as works referencing Aboriginal astronomy and the use of GPS mapping and LED lights.

The second and third stages of the project, *Altitude -The Aviators*, were held over the weekend of 17 and 18 February this year and were free, all ages, art events.

With the current division in the local community over aircraft noise from the proposed second Sydney airport at Badgerys Creek, curator Miriam Williamson felt it was timely to draw from this cultural legacy to engage the audience in both history and contemporary art, in particular the relationship between the Blue Mountains, a World Heritage Listed area, and the pioneering aviators.

Celebrities of their time in the 1920s and 30s, their exploration of the skies through flight aligned with the 'Roaring 20s' era and the popularity of the Blue Mountains as a holiday destination. World famous aviators Bert Hinkler and Amy Johnson both visited the mountains and drew large crowds.

In Kingsford Smith Park over 200 people enjoyed the warm evening and the often overlooked beauty of the park as it was brought to life with interactive art installations and sound.

Audience members joined a séance performed by artist Jacqueline Drinkall calling on the spirit of Amy Johnson and were enrolled as students at *Amy Johnson's Flight School* in a work by Rachel Peachey and Paul Mosig using sensors and real time processing to explore the park through manipulated reality.

An interactive 4-channel sound installation celebrating Johnson's life by artists Solange Kershaw and Damian Castaldi was installed throughout the park. After dark the park was illuminated by a laser work by Brad Allen-Waters, a networked LED light installation by Michael Petchkovsky. Throughout the event sound artists Gail Priest and Chris Caines performed commissioned works with guest artist Broken Chip in the historic sound shell.

The following day over 150 people enjoyed a family day at Melrose Park held in partnership with the Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre and Friends of Melrose Park. Renowned parkour group Dauntless Movement Crew ran a workshop and entertained with their aerobic performance - at one stage leaping across a line of 10 children - and Aboriginal artist Graham Davis-King told stories over his sand work. 'We wanted to engage youth and build new audiences for contemporary art in the Mountains', explained co-curator Mahalya Middlemist.

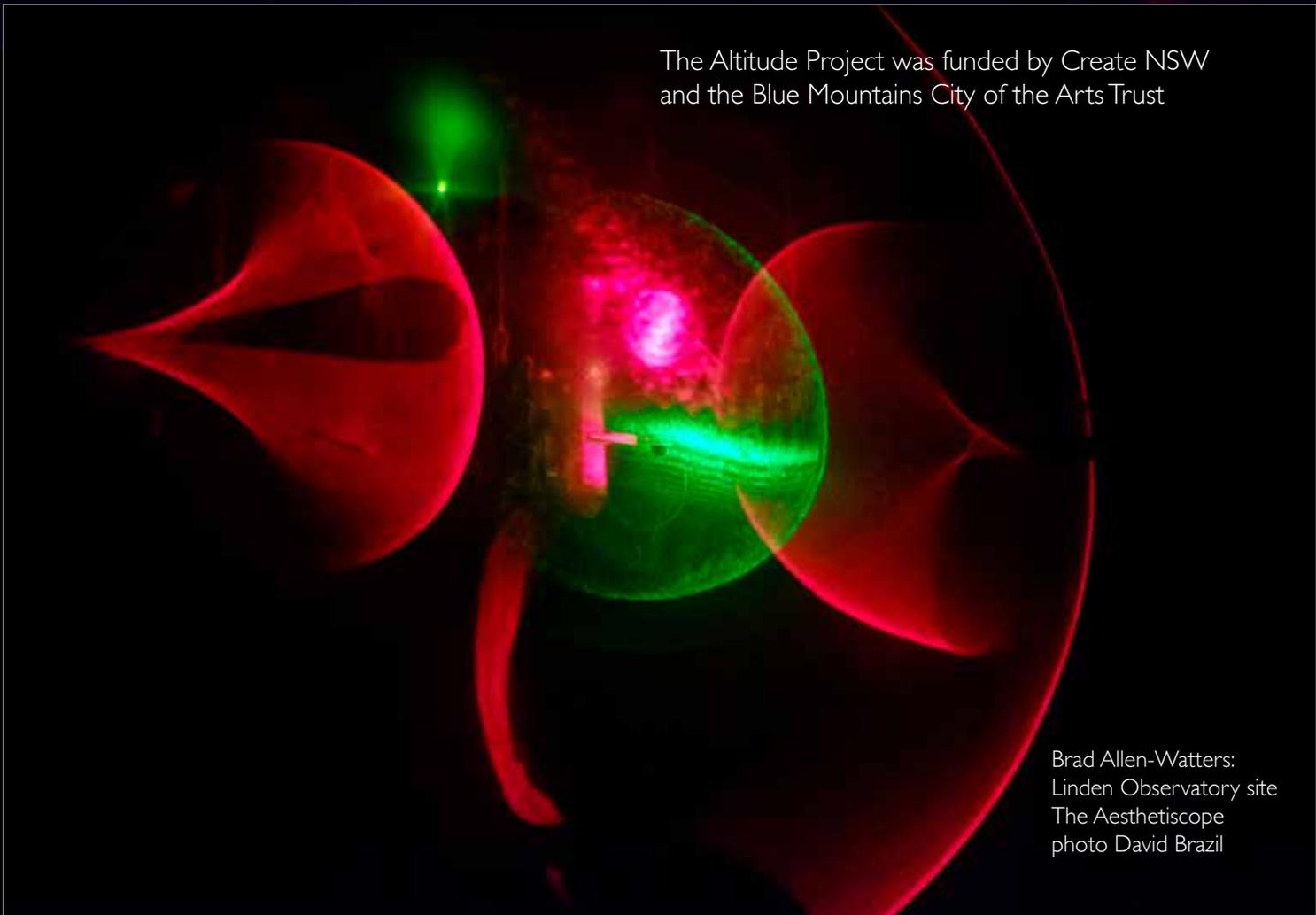
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Jacqueline Drinkall  
Left: Amy Johnson Séance  
Photo Alex Wisser



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Brad Allen-Watters:  
Linden Observatory site  
The Aesthetoscope  
photo David Brazil