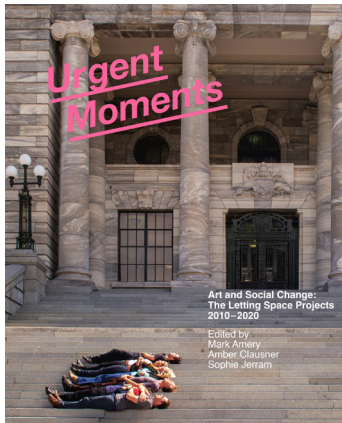




Urgent Moments

Art and Social Change: The Letting Space projects 2010–2020

EDITED BY MARK AMERY, AMBER CLAUSNER AND SOPHIE JERRAM



\$65

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THE STORY OF A REMARKABLE ART ACTIVATION

After first occupying vacant spaces in post-stock-market-crash Auckland in the mid-1990s, public art curators Letting Space re-emerged in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. Confronted by the thin net of social welfare, the waste of the capitalist system and the climate emergency, it brokered spaces for artists to think and act radically, outside gallery walls.

This book chronicles the projects those artists drove. From a grocery store where everything was free to an ATM for depositing moods and a citizens' water-testing lab, they added to the civic dialogue at a time when public space and media were increasingly commodified and under surveillance.

Written by leading New Zealand writers and thinkers, including Pip Adam and Chris Kraus, *Urgent Moments* demonstrates the vital role artists can play in the pressing discussions of our times.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

MARK AMERY is a writer, producer, curator and facilitator working across the public arts and media, with a focus on new forms of participation. Co-founder of Letting Space, Paekākāriki.nz and Paekākāriki 88.2FM, Amery works at Radio New Zealand and as a contributing arts editor for the Dominion-Post. He is a member of the Wellington City Council Public Art Panel and recently completed a public art project with Wellington social housing residents.

AMBER CLAUSNER is a British artist, writer and events co-ordinator who lives in Te Whanganui-a-tara Wellington, Aotearoa, where she is a facilitator at an artist-run space and a member of Shared Lines Collaborative. Her art practice investigates human connection to the non-human world.

SOPHIE JERRAM works with artists and communities between university, government and community roles. Her research focuses on how shared space and time are important actors in community landscapes.

SALES POINTS

- Insights into a ground-breaking and long-running arts intervention project
- Of deep interest to the general arts and community activist audience
- Introduction by well-known American arts writer Chris Kraus, with new writing from Pip Adam and designed by the multi-award-winning designer Anna Brown

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Photograph by J. J. Farnham
November, early 2010

Open Call // Chris Kraus

During the seven years chronicle in this book, Letting Spaces ranged widely and ambitiously between installation and gallery. The project was presented as a public domain. Letting Spaces producers Mark Arney and Sophie Arney's mission was to create an environment for artists to work in, to be able to express their ideas and their environments to enable social change. It's only now, by examining the extraordinary circumstances contained in this book, that it's possible to appreciate the social agencies that Arney and Arney created to create an organizationally viable but conceptually fluid artistic space of responding to changes in the social landscape as it evolved.

Space was a very odd site for an art-institution. The projects longed to be attributed to its ability to shape-shift between high-art conceptualism, institutional critique and bare artistic social realist... a shift that was determined by the artists and other practitioners who responded to Arney and Arney's open calls.

An early text set in the account of the project's beginnings (page 10). Letting Spaces opened in 2003 in the heart of the public domain, the CBD of Auckland. In the early years, Letting Spaces offered artists access to a ghost town of vacant commercial spaces that developers were reluctant to lease (page 11). In the early years, Letting Spaces offered artists access to a ghost town of vacant commercial spaces that developers were reluctant to lease (page 11). In the early years, Letting Spaces offered artists access to a ghost town of vacant commercial spaces that developers were reluctant to lease (page 11).

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As I stood on the other side of the street last week and watched the Campbell Live current affairs reporter repeatedly fail to do her live to camera walk-and-talk spiel, because she simply could not navigate the mass of people milling at the store's entrance, it was clear that this artwork had achieved that rare phenomenon of popular lift-off.

David Gross, *Artforum*, 7 June 2010

John Key is prime minister of New Zealand // The Deepwater Horizon oil drilling platform explodes in the Gulf of Mexico and the resulting spill spreads for several months // Julian Assange leaks footage of a 2007 airstrike in Iraq titled 'Collateral Murder' on the website WikiLeaks // The 2010 flash crash, a trillion-dollar stock market crash, occurs over 36 minutes // A 7.1 magnitude Canterbury earthquake causes widespread damage // A storm the size of Australia's widespread damage // GST is raised to 15 per cent // Breakfast broadcaster Paul Henry is suspended by TVNZ after questioning whether Governor-General Anand Satyanand is a proper New Zealander // Unions threaten to boycott the \$670 million project to film *The Hobbit* // A gas explosion in Pike River kills 29 workers // Tika Waititi's *Boy* is released // A 7.0 magnitude earthquake in Haiti kills over 100,000 // The attempted suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor in Tunisia, triggers a revolution in the country and the wider Arab Spring // The European Union and International Monetary Fund bail out Greece // Major cyber attacks are made in response to the banning of file-sharing websites such as LimeWire and The Pirate Bay // A litre of regular petrol is \$1.77 // A litre of milk is \$3.25

Beneficiary's Office

Tao Wells
15 October -
1 November 2010
Wellington

When I was interviewed on *Prime News*, I was asked if my work was a protest. I said that the work was not a protest, but it was a critique of the system. I was asked if my work was a protest. I said that the work was not a protest, but it was a critique of the system. I was asked if my work was a protest. I said that the work was not a protest, but it was a critique of the system.

New Zealand once ranked among the best in the world in terms of income equality. However, since the mid-1980s, according to the OECD, New Zealand has had one of the fastest-growing rates of income inequality among the world's richest countries.

In *Beneficiary's Office*, established after the Wells argued that before 1988 it was considered a basic human right that everyone in New Zealand had a job. Since then, he noted, a percentage of the population had been left unemployed to create a false climate of job competition and to keep wages down and control inflation. Many found these ideas and concepts provocative.

In the face of the recession triggered by the global financial crisis, the unemployment rate almost doubled between 2007 and 2010. This, Wells believed, created a greater social inequality by creating the welfare system. Wells sought to address the growing economic inequality. In his view, the welfare system was not a solution to the problem. The Wells Group, committed to social justice, wanted to see what the New Zealanders could do for themselves.

The Wells Group was a public initiative company run by a small collective of volunteers and funded by the state. It was a public initiative company run by a small collective of volunteers and funded by the state. It was a public initiative company run by a small collective of volunteers and funded by the state.



Facing the Same Barriers // Cathy Aronson

Strange happenings take hold when you face the last barrier to your desired destination. As you offer yourself to be bigger and proceed in the face of your natural guards, body and mind, you are asked to "breathe and cheer" to create the security guard, your own body, mind, to that reality, reality is what you are. The body is a barrier, the mind is a barrier, the body is a barrier, the mind is a barrier, the body is a barrier, the mind is a barrier.

By creating artworks that respond to infrastructure, the thing to encourage people to look more closely at what the social and cultural institutions are that are embedded in those things that we take for granted. It's not just the things that we take for granted, it's the things that we take for granted, it's the things that we take for granted, it's the things that we take for granted.



self-reflexive, interpersonal interactions in public contexts that was distinct from the work of conventional public art commissions.

Wells' work with organized community groups in Los Angeles aimed to address the social and economic inequalities that were being perpetuated by the welfare system. Wells' work with organized community groups in Los Angeles aimed to address the social and economic inequalities that were being perpetuated by the welfare system.