



The first Painted River Project was held at the Duck River as part of RiverFest 2017

Design & Art meets Science: Reimagining the Duck River

The Painted River Project

Design Thinking Framework: Design intentionally shapes our interactions and our relationships – Let's create a new future for our river systems.

The WSU Painted River Project is a multi-disciplinary academic research initiative designed to directly support a creative, practice-based community project that encourages a transition to a more sustainable future. The project seeks to move beyond the academic realm into the heart of the community as a way of integrating different perspectives and disciplines.

The key aim of The Painted River Project is to engage the community, through site-specific participatory art-making to explore our shared connection to place, through creative interaction and by nurturing transformative thinking. Another is to connect our vision of the future with science. As a major public painting event The Painted River seeks to re-imagine a new future for the Parramatta River and its tributaries within the Sydney catchment area through the creation of multiple artworks that express a new more sustainable future for the river – One that is clean and healthy for all of us.

The human-centered nature of art making provides the 'cultural window' through which to view scientific knowledge. By advancing different ways to view, often seemingly intractable complex problems and to help inform new and innovative approaches to support the transition to a more sustainable future.

The project is specifically designed to bring art and science together to create an ongoing dialogue and to highlight the potential of place – our shared common ground – offering ways to rethink existing cultural practices relating to planetary health. Planetary health is about safeguarding the health and wellbeing of current and future generations through good stewardship of Earth's natural systems, and by rethinking the way we feed, move, house, power and care for the world. As a framework for living, planetary health directly links the things we do and how we manage ourselves with the health of people and the health of the planet.

The key aim of the research is to identify better ways to engage community about their role in a sustainable future and means to communicate more effectively the need for a collective shift in perspective and consciousness that encourages a change in values, intentions and behaviours. The science research component will be run by Dr Ian Wright and will include freshwater ecology, water chemistry and water pollution (science and management). Ian has an outstanding track record and a longstanding interest in the impact of urban development and mining on streams and rivers. As a scientist he embraced innovative ways to engage and empower community.

The event and art research component will be run by Dr Leo Robba who is a highly regarded practicing artist, design educator and media professional. The Painted River Project seeks to build on the success it created as part of RiverFest, 2017 and on several previous art and science community engagement projects created by Robba. An event worth noting is Art and About's, Contested Landscape of Sydney funded (80K) by the City of Sydney that attracted the involvement of over 31,000 people across nine days.

Given Western Sydney is Australia's third biggest economy and one of the country's fastest expanding regions, our water needs to be central to the future planning of the region. Water and our river systems are the foundation of healthy cities, human health and wellbeing.

Our future depends on the health of the natural world.

[Watch Video](#)

In August 2017 the first Painted River Project was held at the Duck River as part of RiverFest and the *Make Parramatta River Swimmable Again*, which are initiatives of the Parramatta River Catchment Group. The PRCG is comprised of several councils, state government agencies and a variety of committed community groups working together to improve the long-term health of the river and its tributaries. The recently launched Parramatta River Master Plan (Ten Steps to a Living River) sets out a positive long-term strategy to make the river swimmable by 2025 and more accessible to the millions of people who live within 20 minutes of the river. Central to this plan is to improve the way we manage the river system and water quality by placing the community at the heart of the process supported by the concept – "Everyone has a role to play in keeping the river clean".



Two examples of the Duck River re-imagined