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COLLABORATIVE DUO CLAIRE M^CCAUGHAN AND LUCY HUMPHREY OF ARCHRIVAL REJECT THE NOTION OF INDIVIDUAL AUTHORSHIP AND ARE NOW ON THEIR WAY TO SHARE THEIR VISION AT THE VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE

WRITER *Susan Muldowney*

It's a fair question: How did a not-for-profit organisation formed less than a year ago with just a few projects under its belt make the cut to exhibit in the Australian pavilion at this year's Venice Architecture Biennale? Archrival, founded by Sydney-based architects Claire McCaughan and Lucy Humphrey, eschews the notion of individual authorship, creating unsolicited projects and inviting everyone in the industry – in fact the entire creative community – to participate. So in a way, Archrival is the poster child for this year's Australian pavilion, which aims to challenge long-held beliefs of architecture; to cast a light on changing formations by featuring a select group of architects working in non-traditional ways.

Archrival was born out of frustration felt by McCaughan and Humphrey about the hurdles preventing emerging architects from gaining work, especially through the protracted process of public procurement. While a strong tradition of mentorship exists within the European industry, allowing emerging talent to lean on larger companies to get smaller jobs, Archrival considers the local design environment to

provide more obstacles than opportunities. "It's kind of egotistical in a way, but it's also just convention that if you have an idea then it's yours and you take it on," says McCaughan. "But Lucy and I start with one idea and it changes so many times after we start talking to people that it becomes everyone's idea."

Humphrey and McCaughan met at university. Humphrey now has her own architectural practice and McCaughan has spent four years with Sam Crawford Architects, a practice that encourages extracurricular work. They have separately produced work outside their practices – Green Cathedral, Alchemy and Much Lead and, under the moniker of Archrival, their collaborations include Eleventh Hour for the Sydney Fringe Festival, Concrete Colony for the Sydney Festival and they will soon be shipping their creation for the Venice Biennale.

Gerard Reimuth, co-creative director of the Australian pavilion, along with Anthony Burke and TOKO Concept Design, says that of the 125 submissions received, Archrival understood this year's 'Formations' concept better than most. "They are not diminishing the role of their offices – their offices do great work. But

rather than seeing offices as competing entities they've said 'let's work as a team'. They use the momentum from this collaboration to do things they can't do in practice. Most of their projects are not often about the finished thing but about the process."

Reimuth adds that, as a creative director of the Venice Biennale, he felt an "ethical responsibility" to give an opportunity to a diverse range of people.

Along with Archrival, the innovative architectural formations selected are Health Habitat (Paul Pholeros, Stephan Rainow, Paul Torzillo), Supermanoeuvre (Dave Pigram, Iain Maxwell, Chris Duffield), Richard Goodwin Pty Ltd (Richard Goodwin), 2112 Ai (100YR City) (Tom Kovac, Fleur Watson) and The Architects Radio Show (Stuart Harrison, Simon Knott, Christine Phillips, Rory Hyde).

"Seeing as Archrival understood the concept so clearly, what we can do as curators is help them by giving them a venue to jump to the next level. That was the reason for choosing them," says Reimuth.

Humphrey and McCaughan's initial concept for the Biennale stems from their interest



in the way it has been curated since the 80s. "A curator is nominated and they curate work in the Arsenale and then the country pavilions in the Giardini kind of run their own agenda," says McCaughan. "They don't really respond to the curatorial brief, which is okay, but we don't really understand why this happens and why it's never really been questioned." Their concept also considers the scale of the event. "Lucy and I did a calculation – if you stay at the Biennale for two days, you only have five minutes to see each exhibition if you want to see all of them. It's madness. It's like going travelling – you can't look at all the galleries you want to look at in a day."

Collaboration is at the heart of Archrival and is a process that broadens possibilities. "It's a different way of working," says McCaughan. "Some people ask if it's a response to big companies who don't credit their project architects. It's not really that – it's more that projects evolve because of all the different input. We don't know how things are going to turn out, which is terrifying at times but also really rewarding because things happen that you don't expect and turn out better than you imagined – most of the time."

The following pages represent a body of work – individual and collaborative projects.

ABOVE: Archrival's Lucy Humphrey (left) and Claire McCaughan draw on a range of 'rivals' to collaborate on unsolicited experimental projects.

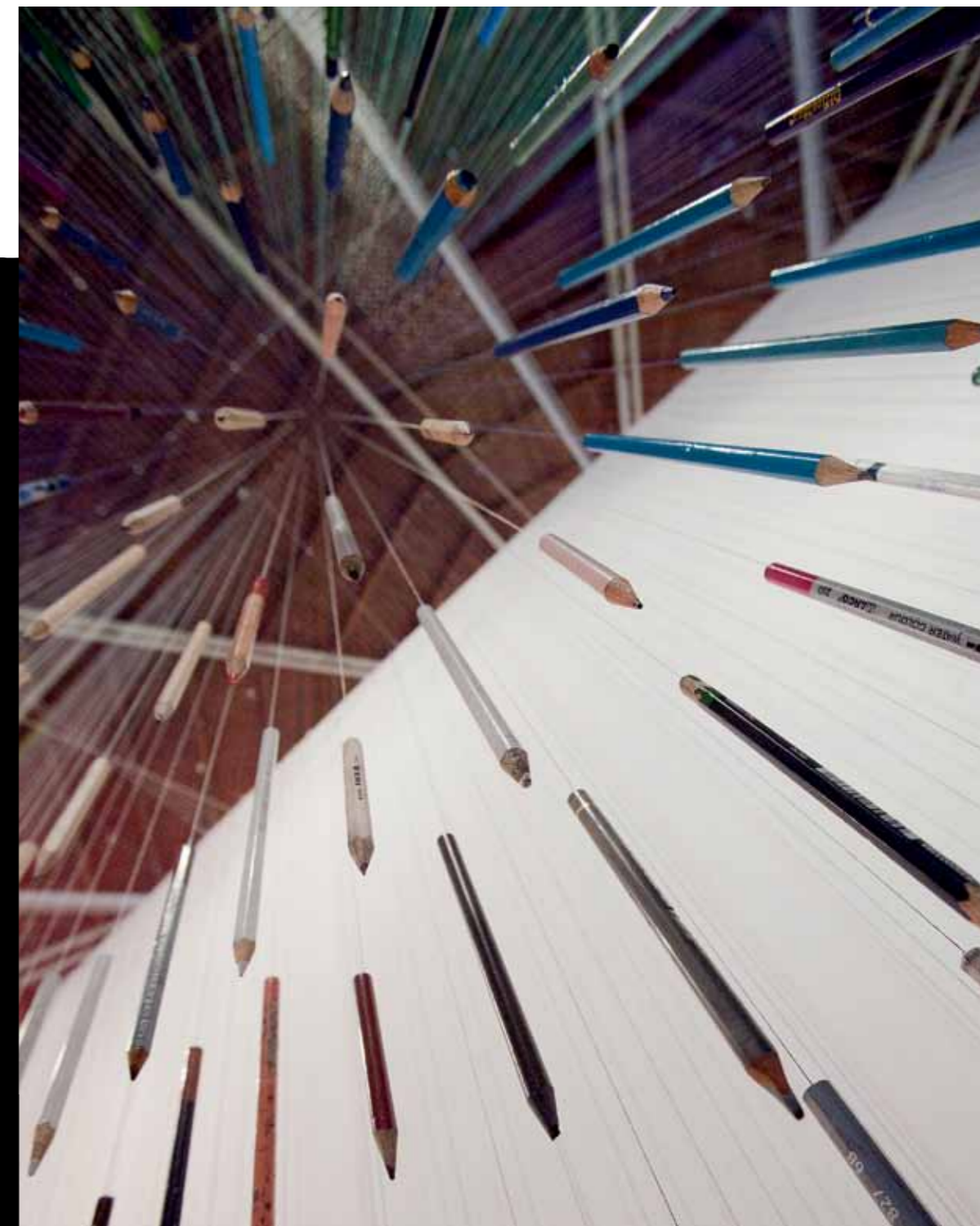
ALCHEMY

Lucy Humphrey's Alchemy was a feature of Sculpture by the Sea in 2009 and received the AGNSW Site Specific prize. Highly polished steel so closely mirrored the effect of rock pools filled with water after rain that many people were surprised to discover it was not a natural creation.



GREEN CATHEDRAL

A conceptual competition entry for the 2010 International Garden Festival - Jardin de Metis/ Redford Gardens in Quebec, Green Cathedral is an enclosed sanctuary with a hanging garden by Lucy Humphrey Studio with John Duffield. Bringing together the natural and the artificial worlds, the concept mimics the vaulted interior of a traditional cathedral. Beyond the curved entrance wall, the space unfolds to reveal a ceiling of suspended plants. Designed as a place for refuge, meditation and inspiration, the concept explores our changing relationship to nature, which Humphrey describes as a "disequilibrium between mankind and the natural world".



MUCH LEAD

Encouraged by Sam Crawford, Claire McCaughan collaborated with architect Felicity Gartelmann to create Much Lead in 2010, an exhibition at Sydney's Object Gallery that called for community involvement. McCaughan and Gartelmann collected pencils from designers, makers, artists, tradespeople, students and teachers. "People sent us their pencils and they all told stories about them," says McCaughan. "We collected about 3000 pencils and we hung them in colour coded groups with very fine threads and it was very delicate work. It was a very organic process of making it up as we went along and it's the kind of process that Lucy and I enjoy now."

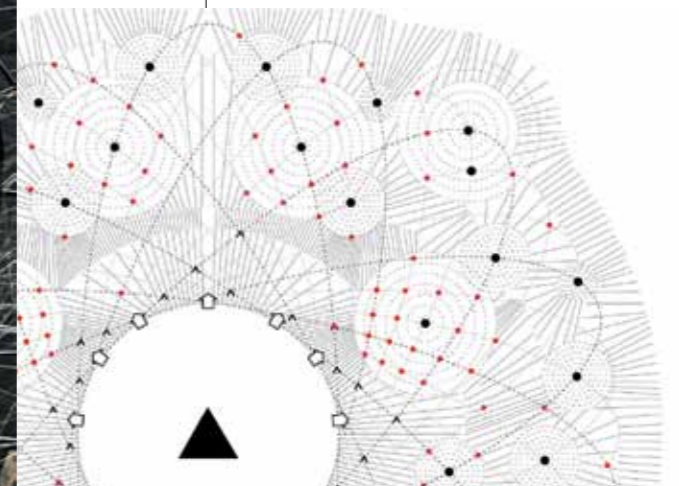
CONCRETE COLONY

The Concrete Colony installation, part of this year's Sydney Festival, is a series of graceful sculptural pieces that resulted from collaboration. Archrival used concrete canvas, a material of cement layers embedded within fabric that bonds with water, to cloak furniture that sat under a tree in the Hyde Park barracks.



VENICE BIENNALE 2012

Archrival has been selected as one of six teams to be part of the Australian pavilion for the 2012 Architecture Biennale. Their plan is to take visitors out of the traditional exhibition space. "We've been thinking, 'Why do you go to the Biennale?' You go to see the work or to see the Arsenale or the Giardini, but is there something else that you go there for? So can we make something that is not content but is an event or maybe it provides a piece of infrastructure or a rest space or not something that you need to think too hard about, you just enjoy it." M



ELEVENTH HOUR

An installation comprising black thread woven around steel arches like a giant spider web, Eleventh Hour was Archrival's first project and a truly collaborative artwork - the public was invited to add to it over a 10 day period. "The work became everyone's," says McCaughan. "On one Saturday morning there were 100 people in the room adding to it." The base terrain of black steel arches was inspired by the history and architecture of the Carriageworks, where the exhibition was held during the Sydney Fringe Festival last year. "The community involvement transformed the gallery into a 'making space', which was reminiscent of the manufacturing that previously existed in Carriageworks."