

**Lumens Festival  
Curating the Ancient City**

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# Lumens Festival

Curating the Ancient City

Edited by **Shane Hulbert & Tammy Wong Hulbert**

Texts by Geoff Hogg, Shane Hulbert, Tammy Wong Hulbert and  
Clare Leporati

Introduction by Susan van Wyk, Senior Curator, Photography,  
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The editors dedicate this book to their son Emmet.



An Art, Cities and Transformation research group and Photo Imaging Research Network project.

Front / back cover

***Lumens Festival***

Suzhou, China

*Lumens Festival* Project Archive

Photo: Shane Hulbert

Overleaf

***Ping Jiang Road Canal District***

Suzhou, China

*Lumens Festival* Project Archive

Photo: Shane Hulbert

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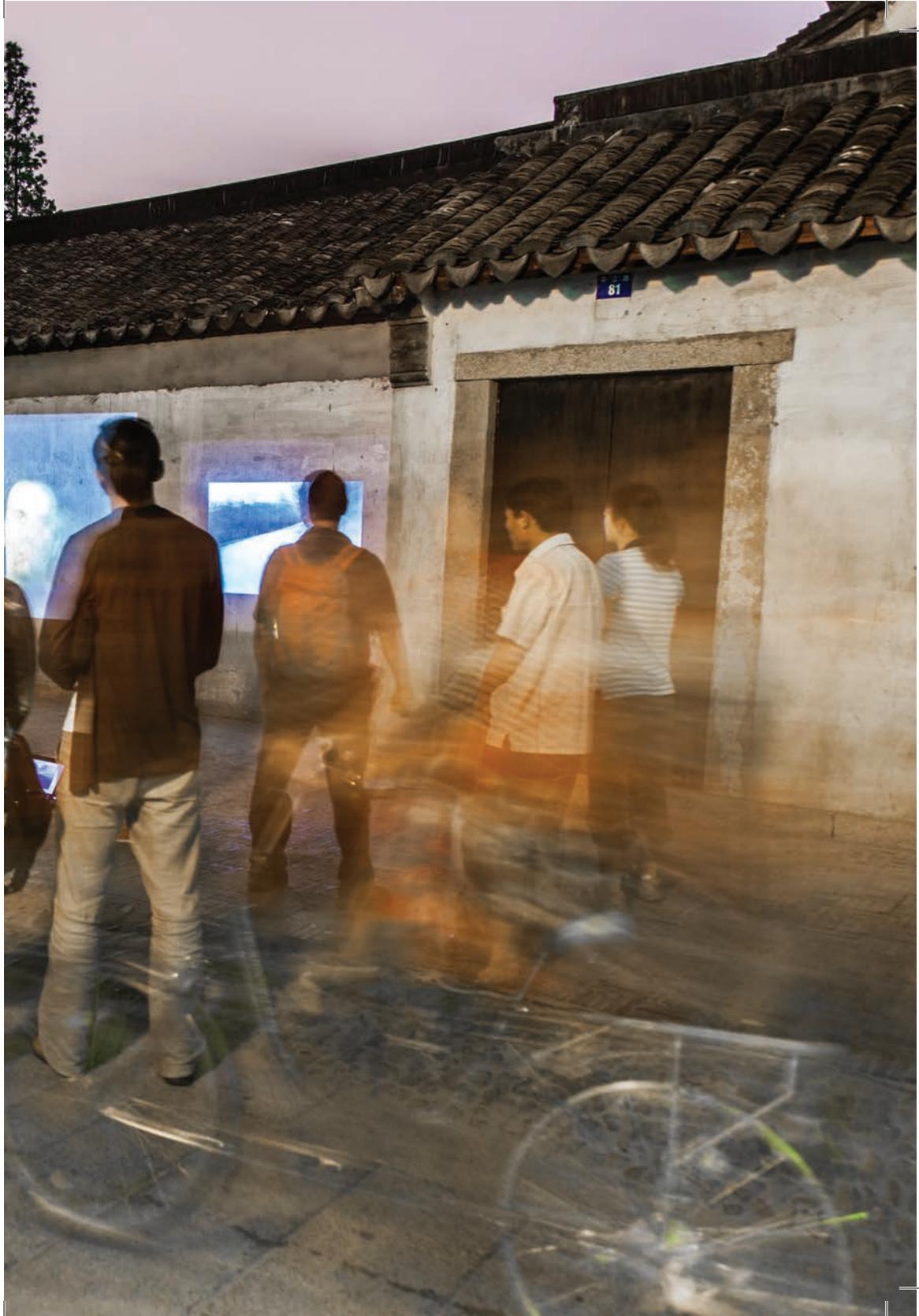
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# | Foreword

## **Typology, Heritage and the Lens:** Curating an ancient city through photography and video

It was the appeal of the ancient walls that did it – a projection festival of Australian and Chinese photography and video art in an ancient Chinese city with no gallery, no venue and no ‘screens’, just a bustling 900 year old canal district adorned with white washed stone walls. Known as the ‘Venice of the East’, the ancient city of Suzhou, 110km west of central Shanghai, in Jiangsu Province, China, has, throughout the centuries, been a popular site for lovers, poets and artists. There is an ancient proverb in China, *Up in the sky there is Heaven: here below on Earth we have Suzhou and Hangzhou.*

*Lumens Festival: Curating the ancient city (Lumens)* began as a project with a unique challenge – how to make use of a UNESCO world heritage listed site for a public art project that engages the community, integrates with the history and culture of the site, and leaves no permanent physical trace. Developed out of a series of research trips to China to work on public art projects connected to the 2011 Shanghai World Expo, *Lumens* was designed specifically as a cultural project supporting the Victorian State Government’s Sister State Agreement with Jiangsu Province’s government. Established in 1979, the agreement seeks to enhance co-operation between Victoria and Jiangsu, on projects of

mutual benefit to create a forum for knowledge sharing through collaboration. This sister connection was critical in not only providing the festival with the essential monetary funding, and facilitating a dialogue to secure the necessary permissions required to hold such an event, but it also positioned the project within the broad context of realising the shared cultural goals of the sister state relationship.

*Lumens* was held over three nights in May 2012, along the central canal precinct of Ping Jiang road, an amazing location containing all the elements of a city district that inspires, bewilders and impresses. The cobbled streets and arched bridges run alongside and over the canals, shop vendors work at the front of their stores crafting traditional Chinese goods, and well-dressed couples line the streets with photographers shooting glamorous wedding portraits.

The location was so tantalising, the idea so unique, that it presented one of those rare opportunities where the curatorial framework had the potential to integrate itself into the site in a way that could engage with the street community and promote cultural connections between Australia and China on a local level. It also meant that a 'normal' curatorial process seemed almost irrelevant. Rather than develop a singular or specific theme for the project, it became more about connecting cultures, and identifying global issues that concern artists from both Jiangsu Province and the State of Victoria. The resulting work presents an overview of what is essentially a shared experience, but one that is shared on a local level.

Following the Suzhou exhibition, the festival was then screened in Melbourne at Federation Square on the 'Big Screen', as part of the summer program. Featuring the same works as shown in Suzhou, the Melbourne screening linked the curatorial framework, consciously emphasising the potential for dialogue found in difference. In this way, *Lumens* pictured an ancient city and a new world city linked increasingly by media and travel – collapsing concepts of distance and time, as artists explored both their own place and that of the former 'other'.

The combination of artists chosen for the project and presented here outlines a collective experience of key aspects of life in Victoria, Australia and Jiangsu Province, China. The artists' eclectic responses to the project are evident in the

diversity of issues being considered: environment and sustainability, heritage, isolation, sexuality, politics, history and culture, all forming a collective attitude towards life in the contemporary world, a life that, while separated by oceans, cultures and history, resonates with the similarities that define our relationships with each other and our world.

The editors wish to thank the following people for their support and encouragement with this project and publication. Michael Nation, Arts Victoria; Zhu Ying Yue, Suzhou Art, Design & Technology Institute; the government of the Province of Jiangsu; the Ping Jiang district location management group; Elizabeth Grierson for her editorial advice; and finally the contributing artists for their support of the project – in artworks, thoughts and information for this publication.



*Lumens Festival archive #42*  
Suzhou, China  
*Lumens Festival* Project Archive  
Photo: Tammy Wong Hulbert



*Lumens archive #105*  
Federation Square, Melbourne  
*Lumens Festival* Project Archive  
Photo: Shane Hulbert

# Contributors

**Dr Shane Hulbert** is an artist, educator and academic. He has a PhD in Fine Art from RMIT University, where he is currently the Bachelor of Arts (Fine Arts) program director and senior lecturer in photography. His research interests investigate the artistic and cultural influence of contemporary photographic material, technology and processes on the imaging of the Australian landscape. Recognising that our relationship with land is influenced by the myths and legends that shape its history, his research focuses on the dominance of stories with the 'outback' as the central theme in the determination of our cultural perception of land and environment.

Hulbert is also the chair of the RMIT Photo Imaging Research Network, a collaborative network connecting different disciplines of photographic practice and discourse, with an aim of providing a central framework for activities and critical engagement between photography, culture and society.

**Dr Tammy Wong Hulbert** is an artist, curator and researcher. She has a PhD in curatorial studies, researching *The city as a curated space*, a study focusing on understanding the policy and planning around public art activity in urban centres. The research developed curatorial models for determining the impact of art in public spaces on the cultural and social life of urban centres. Originally trained as an artist at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, she was actively involved in the art community of Beijing from 2000 to 2002, working for Chinese-art.com, a web-based publisher of critical writing on contemporary Chinese art, one of the first journals of its kind.

Wong Hulbert has also worked in arts exhibition management, and as an Australian of Chinese descent she has continued an interest in developing artistic and curatorial arts publishing projects that explore the relationship between Australian and Chinese communities. She was recently a member of the City of Melbourne Public Art Panel.

**Dr Geoff Hogg** trained as a painter and was an early contributor to the revival of contemporary public art in Australia. He began his work with a strong interest in public forms, including street installation, projection, integrated architecture and craft, along with banner making, processional objects in practice, large scale wall painting and drawing. His work grew from a concern to re-connect with under-valued sources and traditions in contemporary cultural life. He has led over 60 large scale public art projects in Australia and overseas, bringing together diverse groups of artists, historians, craftspeople, community members, journalists, architects and related professionals.

Pursuing his interest in cross cultural practice, Hogg developed what are said to be the first joint public art projects between Chinese and international artists in China. His collaborative projects draw on grassroots support at a local level in Australia to create links and develop imaginative connections for cultural dialogue and exchange.

**Clare Leporati** is an arts manager and public art researcher. She has an MA in Art in Public Space from RMIT University, a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts and Entertainment Management from Deakin University, and a BA in Art History and History from University of Melbourne. Her research interests explore creative collaborative practices and the convergence of material and virtual public space.

Leporati's professional experience is across the cultural sector in Australia, the UK and Canada. In particular, as the Senior Arts Officer for Arts and Recreation Training Victoria and Associate Director of the Professional Writers Association of Canada, she undertook projects focused on developing strategic direction and policy to advance industry development. She is currently Research Contracts and Grants Coordinator for the College of Design and Social Context at RMIT University.

**Susan van Wyk** is the Senior Curator of Photography at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Since joining the gallery in 1989, she has curated numerous exhibitions of Australian and international photography. Recent exhibitions include *Thomas Demand*, *Confounding*, *Contemporary Photography*, *Deep Water*, *Photographs 1860-2000*; and *Luminous Cities: Photographs of the built*

*environment.* van Wyk is the author of *No Standing Only Dancing: Photographs by Rennie Ellis*; *The Paris End: Photography Fashion and Glamour*; and co-author of *Second Sight: Australian photography in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria*. She regularly contributes to exhibition catalogues, scholarly journals and magazines.