REFUGE 2019: Displacement

Ms Sarah Rowbottam

Arts House

Presenting to the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference 2019.

Arts House is an advocate for the role artists play in imagining new futures for our city, and where civic responsibility and the arts collide. These questions permeate our program and are examined closely in REFUGE: a five-year project focused on community preparedness for climate change disasters.

REFUGE sees artists, elders, emergency services, academics and scientists participate in ongoing research and collaboration. The result is two weekends of new art, talks, workshops, dinners and parties that share the result of this research and offer a new perspective. Crucially, these experiences are co-designed by people who might not normally collaborate in a crisis. To this end, REFUGE's strength is found in a broad set of partnerships including Emergency Management Victoria, State Emergency Services, Red Cross, Resilient Melbourne, University of Melbourne, North Melbourne Language and Learning, and others.

The fourth year of REFUGE leaps into the foreseeable future to consider displacement of peoples from across our region prompted by climate change crisis, and to address our own histories of displacement. How do we care for the newly vulnerable arriving on our shores? How can we take the lead from Traditional Owners and First Nations people when imagining new approaches? What can civic spaces like the Arts House offer? When resources are limited, how do we share? REFUGE 2019 creates space for a multitude of voices and proposes new ways to embed equity, access, dignity and justice in our response to catastrophe through a creative approach.

2020 is the final year of REFUGE. It is the culmination of five years of research into community preparedness for climate change disasters. The REFUGE model - research, art, community and action – will be shared through an international conference, publication and a retrospective of the past four years of artist's works, alongside new commissions.