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## ***Lean means* at FESTA: the Festival of Transitional Architecture 2016**

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### **ABSTRACT**

FESTA was born in the aftermath of the devastating Christchurch earthquake of 2011. FESTA is Christchurch's Festival of Transitional Architecture, initiated in 2012 as a way to reimagine a city in flux, finding its feet and redefining its spaces. The festival is now biannual, and in 2016 the main event – a night-time exhibition of temporary installations – was entitled 'Lean Means', and was curated by Jos de Krieger of Superuse Studios in the Netherlands. In keeping with de Krieger's 'Superuse' practice, sustainability and reuse of waste materials were paramount. The installations were created by teams from Australasian design and architecture schools, allowing pedagogy and the real-world requirements of a large-scale event to meld impactfully.

### **ARTICLE HISTORY**

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### **KEYWORDS**

Urban renewal; sustainable design; transdisciplinary design; transitional architecture

The first FESTA was a night-time light show and street party; a moment of joy and wonder that helped reconnect people, through a shared moment, with the city centre; socializing and social bonding. It was so successful it became an annual event. Five years on from the quake, a great deal has changed for Christchurch, but much change is still embryonic. FESTA is as needed now as it ever was, though the emphasis has shifted from surviving, to thriving for the long-term.

The festival is curated by Te Pūtahi – Christchurch centre for architecture and city-making, a non-profit organization focused on the current rebuild and ongoing renewal of the city for the long-term. In 2016 FESTA shifted to from annual to biannual, and the headline event on 22 October was *Lean Means* – a night of installation and celebration framed around exploring sustainability through the reuse of waste materials in design and creative urban regeneration.

The creative director was Jos de Krieger of Superuse Studios (the Netherlands). De Krieger is renowned for architecture, urban installation and intervention informed by the availability of leftover and waste materials, utilizing these to push architecture and design into a closed-loop, cyclical process. Lean, practical, but with a playful exuberance, de Krieger's *oeuvre* is a great fit for FESTA (churlish thoughts on the carbon footprint implications of flying a Dutchman to Christchurch aside). De Krieger's impact is amplified when coupled with the pragmatic, dynamic force of nature that is Dr Jessica Halliday, art and architectural historian

and FESTA's director. There is part of the New Zealand's cultural lexicon that claims – because of our isolation and relative youth as a nation – Kiwis have a notable ingenuity: our famed 'number 8 wire' mentality. This fix-it-up, make-do-and mend, get creative attitude is named for a gauge of fencing wire that was ubiquitous here. Kiwis would have you believe we are uniquely inventive with what's at hand, and the 'Superuse' practice and ethos de Krieger imbued into the festival actually gives legitimacy and credence to this somewhat overused maxim; another form of regenerating and recycling! This emphasis on reuse in a city where – despite the efforts of groups such as Rekindle (a social enterprise seeking to divert reusable materials from waste) – much of the post-quake demolition material went into landfill is apt. Perhaps even a logical evolution as Christchurch becomes focused on long-term viability, thriving over surviving.

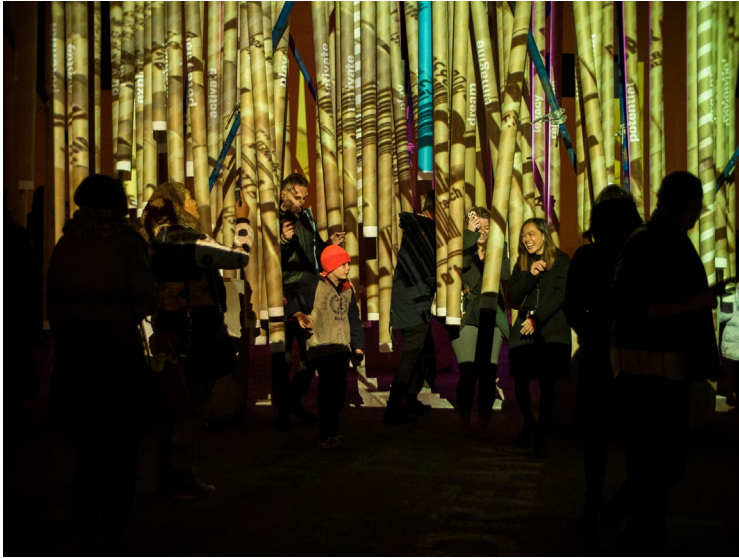
The city still knows how to revel in the *joie de vivre* of its very existence, and *Lean Means* was a joyful moment of celebrating collectively in a city centre still missing buildings, like a gappy smile. A vibrant street party of food, music, performance and 18 installations, all assembled by educational institutions from across Australasia from waste materials. A waterfall of bottles and plastic bags lit with LEDs (*Fallingwater*, Unitec, Department of Architecture); a fence tunnel woven by visitors with waste fabric to become an intriguing knitted obstacle course (*No Offence*, Auckland University of Technology, Spatial Design); an ethereal cloud of plastic bags (*Cumulonimbus*, University of Adelaide, School of Architecture and Built Environment); a temporary village of woven hazel structures (*Hence*, Ara, School of Architectural Studies in collaboration with craft artist Juliet Arnott [Rekindle]) and a landscape of suspended cardboard carpet tubes, lit with projected material explorations (*Pipe Dreaming*, Massey University School of Design in collaboration with artist Julia Morison) were a few of the diverse sculptural pavilions on display.

Working with tertiary institutions is a win-win situation for FESTA and the schools involved. FESTA was able to access managed manpower to deliver a diversity of forms, and the student teams got exposed to 'real' problems: strict site management requirements, engineers, council sign-off processes, and of course gained from the input of de Krieger and the FESTA team. For past events, design teams have been drawn from architecture or spatial design courses exclusively, but this year, FESTA extended the invitation to a team from Massey University that was open to all design disciplines (and was, in line with the makeup of the school, skewed towards visual communication). The Massey students were empowered to consider what they as individuals could contribute; not specifically the skills from 'their discipline'. Students commented that this helped them with new ways of thinking; a Spatial Design student summed this up: 'previous projects I've done in spatial design, because we are all thinking in the same way, approaching the issues from the same perspective, it was more difficult to get over a hurdle'. Another insight was that this approach broadened their perspective in a liberating way. This from a Visual Communication student: 'working in this interdisciplinary team has completely expanded our view of university; expanded our resources, rather than limiting them because of a discipline 'label'. In addition to the interdisciplinary design approach, artists acted as both 'clients' and mentors to two of the teams. This melding of art and design, and, in a broad sense, of design disciplines offered an interesting added dimension, and this exploration of interdisciplinarity could become a more deliberate, experimental part of the FESTA offering in future years.

FESTA's evolution from a format to revitalize the spirits and re-engage a community with their city to a longer-term catalyst for considered city-making and sustainable design

resonates with a realignment or blurring of design practice boundaries. If the festival can continue to push boundaries in both these arenas, its place as a go-to event on New Zealand's design calendar is assured.

### Photo credits



*Pipe Dreaming* by Massey University School of Design used suspended cardboard carpet tubes and projection to create an immersive sensory experience (photo: Peanut Productions).



Lean Means, FESTA's 2016 night-time festival activated key vacant lots in Christchurch city centre, bringing life to spaces still dormant as the city rebuilds post-earthquake (photo: Peanut Productions).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Note on contributors

*Nick Kapica* is Design Lead at Wellington City Council, and former Academic Experience Designer at Massey University College of Creative Arts. Before emigrating to the southern hemisphere, Nick was the founder and partner of SV Associates in Berlin, and a visiting lecturer at the University of Arts in Bremen where together with Peter Rea he initiated and co-directed the Profile Intermedia international conferences held annually in Bremen. He also taught Visual Communication at Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication.

Nick is a designer passionate about communication but interested in all fields of design – his favourite projects are those combining a multitude of fields. Nick generates bespoke communication solutions and is committed to delivering excellent design. He maintains a fine eye for detail throughout all projects that often draw on his rigorous approach to typography. He received a degree in Visual Communication from Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication and an MDes from Massey University College of Creative Arts.

*Jo Bailey* is a Lecturer in Visual Communication at the School of Design, College of Creative Arts, Massey University, New Zealand. As a designer her practice focuses on facilitating and democratizing access to information, and exploring visual systems across multiple media. She has a research interest in communicating science, environmental and social issues, particularly in the digital space, and also an interest and practice in editorial design. Jo has a background in research and information management, and spent many years in the NGO sector. She is interested in conservation and sustainability, the built environment, and the personal ethics of design practice. She has a BSc (Hons) in Geography from the University of Exeter (UK) and an MDes from Massey University College of Creative Arts.

Nick and Jo oversaw the Massey University School of Design team in the development of their FESTA installation as part of an experimental interdisciplinary studio within the curriculum.

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