



HELIA

Artwork proposal
Denmark High School – Upgrade – Percent for Art Project
Carol Mancke

Introduction

Even as it aims to open minds, the education process imprints a particular culture or way of thinking which shapes the world view of students. A school is a physical environment which, imprinted on a place, shapes both the land itself and how we understand it. It can be seen as both a container of knowledge and also an outpost of civilization that helps to hold unmediated nature at bay. Language is the medium through which most education is achieved; and, in the western tradition, shelter or architecture is the medium through which nature is mediated.

There are ways of living with nature other than those deriving from the European tradition. Many would argue for the need to change the way we live with nature in order to achieve a balance between human needs and available resources. The early history of Denmark illustrates how a failure to consider the future consequences of exploitative inhabitation of a place can damage both the environment and the struggling human settlement.

Life in Denmark today may seem to be in balance, but is it truly sustainable? Do we fully understand what the young people of

today will need to know in order to deal with the future?

The artwork is intended to provoke thought about the possibility of a more careful marriage of culture with land and place. It incorporates the entire courtyard and operates over time through three mechanisms – language, engagement and the mediation of nature.

The work is made up of three components: the setting; a sunlight-filtering sculpture and a collaborative/participatory development and maintenance process.



Bibbulmun track near Denmark
(<http://welcome2australia.com.au/locations/denmark/>)

The setting

The setting is a shady courtyard which gradually becomes an inviting learning space – a place where students can meet in small groups, read work on their laptops or just sit and think. Moveable chairs and tables designed and developed in art and technology classes might be brought out into the space.

A grove of 18 deciduous trees, selected and planted by students and staff, will shade a crisply delineated undulating path/area of local gravel. I hope that the use of local gravel might allow the spirit of place/ country into the school precinct. It also suggests a Japanese raked garden and in doing so will bring a contemplative quality to the space.

The gravel area is edged with corten steel edging strips, maintaining a precise separation and contrast of colour and texture with the surrounding area of lawn. Maintenance of the courtyard, ground, trees and sculpture would be part of the ongoing life of the artwork, hopefully becoming an ongoing yearly project of one of the school classes or year levels.



New York Public Library, Bryant Park (photo: internet)



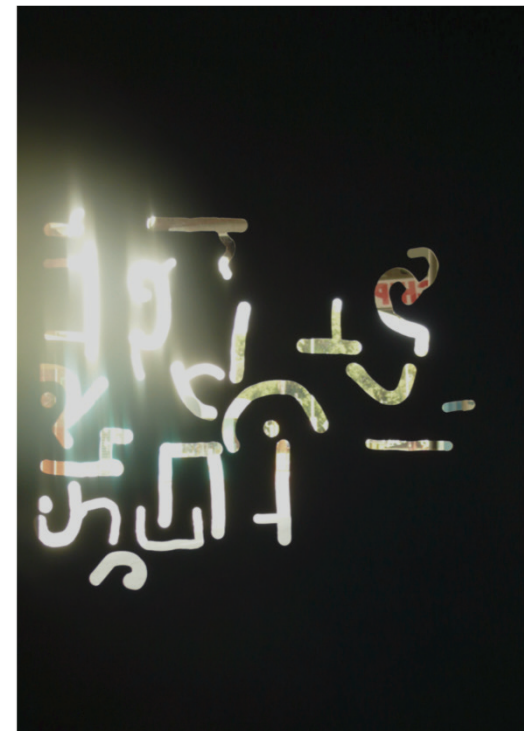
Place de Vosges, Paris

The sunlight-filtering sculpture

This sculpture works with nature in the form of sunlight to overlay language on the land. A curved screen of rusted (corten) steel supported on columns forms a nominal enclosure at eye level. The screen is perforated by marks or glyphs derived from a text which the school community and I will choose together.

The sculpture stands on a concrete slab in the shape of overlapping circles. Symbols similar to those cut through the screen will be cast into this concrete base. Sunlight passing through the screens will project language-like symbols across the ground, making patterns which change throughout the day and the year.

On certain dates and times, to be chosen in consultation with students and staff, the projected marks will combine with those on the ground plane to create words or meaningful patterns. These fleeting, yearly momentary events can then be anticipated and celebrated by the school community.



Helia

Collaboration and participation

The making of *Helia* will be an event that involves the school community in four ways. The first will be the selection of the text and/or images to be cut into the light filtering screen.

The second will involve choosing and planting the trees in the courtyard. The trees should be deciduous so that the courtyard captures sunlight in the winter. The school community will decide what kinds of trees they want and why with the collaborative support of a local nursery.

A third collaboration will be to choose the date(s) that *Helia* will celebrate – the moments when the moving symbols and the fixed marks will coalesce into a meaningful pattern.

Finally, there will be the development of an evolving long-term plan for the artwork which will change over the years according to the interests of the school community and will include the ongoing maintenance of the courtyard and trees as well as other activities such as gravel raking; the design and making of chairs, benches, tables and art installations as part of the school's art and technology classes; use of the courtyard as a setting for performance and exhibitions; etcetera.



Workshop for *Get Over It* 2010



Palimpsest public house performance 2009

Everywhere, fine dust gave these rods and trunks of light the importance of a dimension [...] individual grains turned over each other, or bounced all together like a mayfly in a breath of wind... further away they drifted cloudily, coiled, or hung in a moment of pause becoming [...] nothing but colour, honey colour slashed across the body of the cathedral... He shook his head in rueful wonder at the solid sunlight.

C. Raine quoting William Golding, *The Spire* (Guardian Review 17.09.11) used for *Disclosure*

