

Ecological artist Lloyd Godman is inspired by nature and draws creative energy from his experience as an organic gardener. We meet this innovative artist at his Harmers Haven retreat and talk about life and inspiration – and his current work, Airborne the world's first rotating garden, showing in the city of Melbourne.

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I was born in Dunedin, New Zealand, and moved to Victoria in 2005. Back in the mid-sixties I got interested in surfing and photography, and have continued my passion for both. It was cold surfing down south. While the long point breaks were seductive and consistent, the winter was spent with little more than a footy jersey to keep the wind – and sometimes snow – off the flesh. It was ridiculous! Good wetsuits opened up more possibilities and we discovered some super spots. I have surfed a few times a week for about 38 years now.

Calio Rossi Gallery

In 1973 I decided to surf Hawaii with Chris Brock who was a good friend of the legendary George Greenough (an icon in the surfing world best known for his surf photography and surfboard design). George's footage in the last 13 minutes of the movie *Crystal Voyager* is a knockout. After the Hawaiian experience, Chris sailed from California to Australia with George, so I was very informed about his work. George has always been a huge influence on me: he is so innovative and focused on his work. Like Greenough and Brock, I was an air-mat fanatic

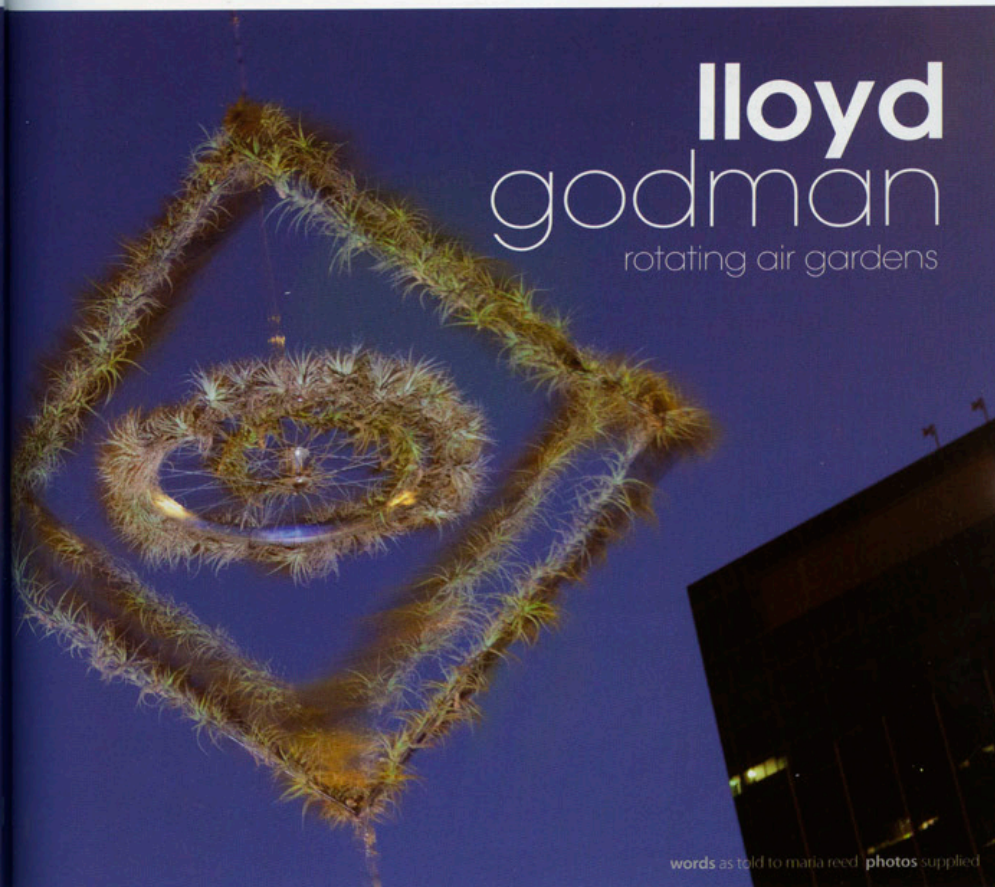
and rode large Hawaiian waves on a Hodgeman mat. I still get a few waves on either a mini-mat, or a new high-tech mat at Eagle's Nest and a few other spots around Harmers Haven.

Were you always a creative soul?

I've always had an interest in art, and in 1986 I got a job as a photo technician at the local Polytechnic. The institute had an art school and part of my job was to make slides from art books. Exposure to hundreds of amazing art books opened up doors and expanded my ideas about art. I then established the art school photographic department, which ran for 20 years. My art projects usually centred on environmental concerns and in '89 I instigated an expedition of 11 artists to the Sub-Antarctic Islands. On this trip I developed my interest in

lloyd godman

rotating air gardens



words as told to maria reed photos supplied

photograms – camera-less images where objects are laid on paper and exposed to light. My work became more centred on photosensitivity than using a camera. I eventually clicked onto the concept that plants are a form of photography... they use light like film. I began by placing opaque tape on the leaves of Bromeliads and over 4 months, I grew images into the leaves. As I began studying the science and amazing biology of these plants, I became totally intrigued. Many don't need soil, grow at night and take all their water and nutrients in through cells in their leaves. Unlike so many other plants, this made them perfect to suspend in a range of gallery installations. The largest photosensitive emulsion we know of is the planet earth. As vegetation grows, dies back, changes colour with the seasons, the 'photographic image' that is >

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our planet alters. Increasingly, human intervention plays a larger role in transforming the image of the globe we inhabit.

You obviously have a keen interest in sustainability. Where did this originate and how has it influenced your life and your art?

My interest in plants and the environment has always been there: it's just part of my DNA. When I was in Hawaii we lived in a 3-storey tree house. Here we were connected to the rhythms of the earth and nature. Breezes blew through the windows, the structure moved in the wind, you could hear every leaf hit the roof, and the surf in the distance.

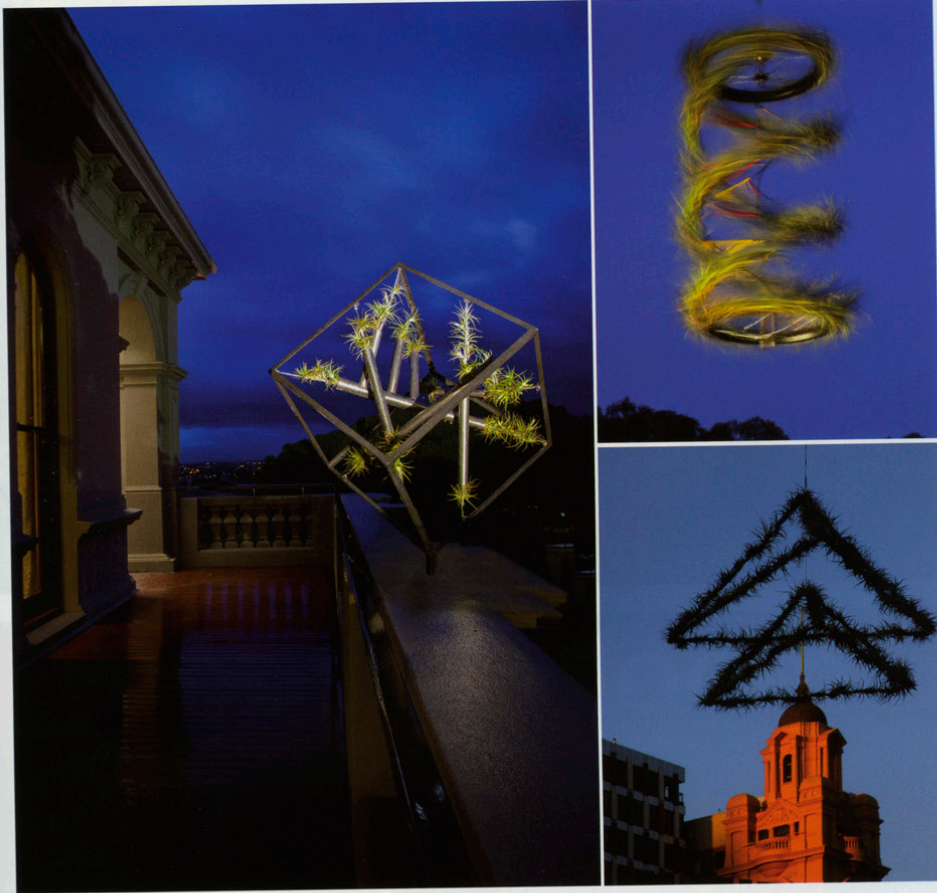
These days so much attention is paid to the financial deficit; it's monitored by the hour. Ultimately environmental deficit affects the financial deficit. If finance was plunging at the rate of the environment, people would be alarmed, and moved to act.

Since the 80s, I have witnessed a growing number of wonderful artists commenting about the environment in highly creative ways. But most often the work is just that, a comment or representation of nature. With living air gardens, there is a deliberate intention to step beyond comment, typified by artists like Joseph Beuys and his *7,000 Oaks Project* (he planted 7000 oak trees over several years). It not only comments, but also contributes to make works that are both cultural and natural – that are fully sustainable and grow to create a new resource to create from. Few art mediums can achieve this. With the suspended air plant work, I am interested in exploring how plants can occupy space but not surface. Suspension on wires extends the potential habitat of plants into what I term "Alpha space". While vertical and roof top gardens have become popular in major cities worldwide, these intriguing, ground-breaking air gardens step beyond earthly confines to rotate suspended in air or Alpha space. Unlike typical vertical gardens, there is no maintenance other than to harvest the plants biannually to retain the form, which in turn creates a resource from which to create further living works. Weighing very little, with multiple elements rotating independently on the slightest breeze, the air gardens throw intricate animated shadows on the ground or adjacent walls. These alter with the traverse of the sun and with the seasons. The concept behind the work is to create super-sustainable living artworks within the built environment.

How did the rotating air gardens begin?

When I began suspending Bromeliads from gallery ceilings they would often rotate. The first intentional rotating air gardens were simple affairs – plants on bicycle wheels that rotated on the breeze. It was a means of recycling and also made a reference to French artist Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*. > (cont. pg 79)

Art + Culture



Tell us a bit about your escape at Harmers Haven.

For decades my partner's family have had a house at Harmers. When I moved over I was quickly introduced to the place. We aim to get down to the ocean as often as we can. It's a real retreat where the other world ceases. At present I am establishing a Bromeliad garden around the house with many Tillandsia plants that suspend from and perch on trees. It's yet another testing ground.

What does being by the coast mean to you?

I have always been inspired by the ocean. We are all waves crossing an ocean: when we die we just fall back into the universal sea. In NZ I lived right at the ocean and I tuned into all its moods.

Tell us more about your upcoming exhibition.

The *Airborne* work is part of the Melbourne City Council 2013 Arts Grants, and a wonderful opportunity to test the work in an urban environment. This is the world's largest series of super-sustainable rotating air gardens, high in the sky, between existing poles at the Les Erdi Plaza, Northbank. The first installation coincided with the opening of the Sustainable Living Festival (9 Feb 2013) and further air gardens will be progressively installed every 4 weeks until the full complement of 8 adorns the sky of the space. They will remain till the end of 2013. [\[i\]](#)

Dates: Commencing 9 February until the end of 2013

Location: Les Erdi Plaza, Queensbridge Pedestrian Precinct Northbank (near Signal & Sandridge Bridge)