



JUNK THEORY is an award-winning inter-cultural project, from the Sutherland Shire, designed to create positive media from November 2006 to January 2007, so as to pre-empt negative media surrounding the one year anniversary of the "Cronulla riots". Working with diverse cultural groups in the Sutherland Shire, participants and artists created a highly visible project, to reinforce positive dialogue and social harmony and promote a positive image of the communities in the Sutherland Shire. The project was programmed as part of 2007 Sydney Festival.

Beginning

The events of December 2005 on Cronulla beach caused shock and heartache across Australia.

Big hART has had a long association with the Sutherland Shire, both through previous projects with Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Art Centre and through its team members. Big hART Producer Michelle Kotevski and National Creative Director Scott Rankin both had separate and long associations with the Sutherland Shire, having grown up on its beaches and having raised a family there. The project began after Michelle and Scott discussed the events, the impact of the media on the local community. This led to Big hART asking itself the question "*what are we going to do about it?*" This was the genesis of **JUNK THEORY**.

Community involvement

In January 2006 Big hART began consultations with individuals and organisations in the Sutherland Shire. Hazelhurst Regional Art Gallery and other partners welcomed the idea of a project that focused on the diversity within the Sutherland Shire and that would shine a new and positive light on people and places within the Cronulla community, particularly around the time of the one-year anniversary.

Throughout 2006, people from 22 cultural backgrounds came together regularly to create **JUNK THEORY**. They listened to each other's story, listened to others in the community, helping to create understanding, respect and empathy. They worked with photographers, filmmakers, composers, shipwrights, seafarers, and local business to create a strong picture of life and the values and cultures that make up the Sutherland Shire community.

Big hART formed 36 partnerships with local organisations and groups including social services, arts organisations, local Police, Sutherland Shire Council, the local businesses and numerous community groups. These partners and Big hART worked with 41 young people and 60 older people through workshops, meetings, activities and site visits to create **JUNK THEORY**.

THE FINAL PRODUCT

On December 5th in Cronulla, *Mr James Strong- Chairman of the Australia Council, in front of 300 local, s launched **JUNK THEORY** echoing the project' s key message "it's harder to hurt someone when you know their story".*

JUNK THEORY was a floating multi-media installation on a 37ft Chinese junk, travelling in its own pool of light. Films, portraits, messages, maps and animations were projected onto two of the sails. The sound world made up of ambient sounds, sound scapes and musical compositions wafted off the deck.

Over 174 portraits and 8 short films responding to the themes of sanctuary, chaos, 'God's own', conflagration, Chinese whispers and breathe with corresponding sound scapes and

musical scores were created. Maps and animations referenced changes in topography in the Sutherland Shire over 100 years and illustrated geographic links between project participants. Messages on the sails and in fortune cookies included those written by participants.

Media and audiences

JUNK THEORY was successful in 'jamming' the media around the one-year anniversary of the Cronulla riots. Between November 2006 and February 2007 there was a total of 81 media segments nationally and nationally about **JUNK THEORY**- profiling a new and positive image of the Sutherland Shire and the community.

At the height of summer in Sydney on the Port Hacking River and along Sydney Harbour, 30,000 people witnessed **JUNK THEORY** from their balconies and backyards, from bridges and restaurants, from speedboats and ferries, whilst quietly fishing in a small bay or walking the dog through water-side park lands.

What difference did it make?

In discussions and evaluation sessions with participants and partners a number of impacts and differences were noted as a result of the **JUNK THEORY** project. These included:

- Positive national and international profile for Cronulla and the Shire
- Return of visitors from outside of the Shire to its beaches, restaurants and shops
- Young people said that they had felt less isolated within their community and that this had changed as a result of their work on **JUNK THEORY** and that they felt a change in perception about them from older people within the community.
- Young people also showed and identified an increase in their self-confidence and skills - *"showed we're not drop kicks and we can do things and have talent"* (JT participant).
- Participants particularly felt that the positive media impact of the project and the work of other people locally had a large part to play in bringing NESB families (local and out of area) back to the Shire parks for picnics- *"we did it- we showed everyone its safe and that we don't hate each other"* (JT participant).
- Young people expressed joy about being able to form close relationships with each other in spite of the fact they all came from very different socio-economic, cultural and lifestyle backgrounds. During evaluation sessions one young person said *" Working together isn't always hard- listening to others is good even if it means your first idea changes"* And another offered *"we get on so well together now- like friends. Junk Theory made us."*
- Young people reported liking working with older people and hearing their stories and their opinions on young people. Participants expressed that they learned that *"different sorts of people can get along."*
- Older participants enjoyed the opportunity to work with and help younger people in the community. One participant has said, *" I think junk theory has been a very positive and constructive project because it has brought young people together, and they just see that they're all the same, and bring them together and everyone can work together if they see there's something positive to work for, and be positive. It's about being positive not destructive."*

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