

History buff keen to connect

BY ALEX BAIRD

Storyteller Amy Tsilemanis has been quick to form a special bond with the Otways and hopes to build the same connections with its people when she embarks on a special project to give them a voice.

Locals will get a chance to work with the young, but very experienced history buff, who already has a wide range of experience in the audio world as both a producer and communicator.

Amy will be based out of Apollo Bay for parts of the year, collaborating with people and community groups to share their stories through Heart Maps.

The Hearts Maps project has received funding from the Australian Government's Regional Arts Fund, with Amy having an artistic licence to explore the rich layers of life in the Otways region both past and present, with a look to the future.

Amy will call on community members to start the project later this month during workshops at Apollo Bay, and she said the Heart Maps concept would grow from there.

"The maps created at the workshops will help me and the community start to imagine a communal map made up of our individual experiences," she said.

"The idea of Heart Maps may start with individual journeys and sites of meaning. But when these stories are collected and layered, they give a sense of our being in the world together, a kind of shared public map made up of diverse individuals and our many points of connection."

"All ages and backgrounds are welcome to participate and explore these ideas."

"People will have to stay tuned for how that evolves within the project, but one thing I will be working towards is creating a new audio work for the Winter Wild Festival this August where material I collect along the way will be interwoven with soundscapes and a walking experience around town."

"It's been over 10 years now since I did my first creative audio tour at the Ballarat railway station, so I am also investigating locative technology and fun stuff like that too."

It was in Ballarat where Amy developed her skills and was involved in inspiring projects to make a name for herself in radio and audio storytelling, and in "collaborations that creatively bring new perspectives and experiences to stories and

collections of the past".

She also completed a PhD at FedUni working across the Collaborative Research Centre in Australian history and the Arts Academy.

Amy has since brought her skills to the Otways after she and her husband Julian bought into a share house at Johanna two years ago.

She is working at Cape Otway, volunteered at events like the seafood festival and engaged with the wider Apollo Bay community before earning a Regional Arts Australia fellowship to tackle the Heart Maps project.

Amy said she was thriving connecting with the coast again and finding her feet in the local community, excited to share some of her encounters with the interesting people she has already met.

"I grew up tagging along with friends on holidays down the Great Ocean Road and have always loved the area," she said.

"I spent last year immersing myself in the Otways places and people, writing a monthly piece for the Otway Light and a small poetry collection."

"Through this I got to meet great locals like Gadubanud traditional owner Richard Collopy and learn about his rich creative and educational work, as well as all the hardworking volunteers at the local historical societies, and arts organisations."

"I've also been working casually at the Cape Otway Lighthouse so I knew that my next project would have to be based in this area and explore all the different layers that include Indigenous culture, the ecological, industrial, tourist, marine and more."

"I have gotten a tantalising taste with my writing so far and can't wait to hear people's stories and ideas."

Amy will also add digital content to the Apollo Bay Museum, using the historic site along the Great Ocean Road as a base during her Heart Maps journey which will no doubt inspire both her and others involved.

"One of the threads of the project is helping the museum collect some new oral histories for their collection and capture some of the memories of the area's elders," she said.

"I am also interested in chatting to people of all ages who are passionate about the area."

"I am so excited to be based at the museum for a series of days and invite people to come and visit me and my



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COMMUNITY MINDED: Amy Tsilemanis is pictured at Apollo Bay during the recent seafood festival where she volunteered.

portable recording studio and be part of the Heart Maps project, and also to help promote the work of the museum and maybe inspire future creative collaborations."

Amy has plenty of history ahead of her at the age of 39, but she understands the importance of embracing the past moving forward.

"I think people are often led to believe that history is dusty and boring, or in the case of the ongoing impacts of colonisation, that it 'should be left in the past'," she said.

"But the people and stories of the past are what have led us to the present, and what we do now will directly shape the future."

"I see past present and future as intersecting and that is what I like to explore in my creative heritage work."

"I also love to help connect people up who might not otherwise get the chance to meet or work together and see these relationships grow."



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IMMERSED: Amy says she can't wait to learn more about the Otways through its people after falling in love with the place. The storyteller will launch a special project at Apollo Bay called Heart Maps.