

Christina Lorena Weisner + Matt Keene

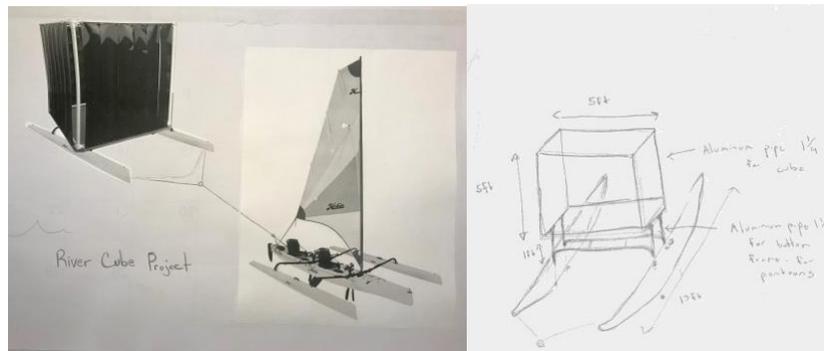
River Cube Project, Neuse River, North Carolina 2019-2020

Introduction

The nearly two-million-year-old Neuse River is one of the oldest in what is now known as the United States and stretches some 275 miles across the state of North Carolina. Its waters traverse ancient rift basins created during the break-up of the supercontinent Pangea and accumulate behind dams of the modern epoch before flowing onward to the global ocean. Rivers have the capacity to remember and tell stories; to connect the past, the present and the future.

The River Cube Project will explore the Neuse River as a unique environment created and influenced by relationships between nature, people, and technology. The Project is the catalyst for the collection and creation of context-specific materials that take the form of sculpture, drawings, data, audio visual materials and scientific studies that synthesize and reflect - present a sampling of - the Neuse River's diversity and complexity.

In April of 2019, the River Cube will be constructed and exhibited in the [Gregg Museum](#). In May, the the River Cube will be taken from the museum to its launch site: the headwaters of the Eno River, the source of the Neuse river. Over the course of approximately four weeks, the River Cube will drift or be paddled, peddled and sailed down river by artists, scientists and other guests gathering diverse social and environmental data and information that will become part of the Project's archive. The River Cube Project will stop in cities, small towns and wilderness along the "route" to collect such information and to join and create dialogue about the river and relationships it creates and hosts. Once the vessel crosses through the Ocracoke Inlet, the 275-mile journey will be complete and the River Cube will be returned to its exhibition at the Gregg Museum. The Project will culminate in a curated exhibition of the River Cube vessel and the Project's collection.



The River Cube as Art and Science. The River Cube Project brings together both Art and Science, not as competing or contrasting, but as interdependent and co-evolving perspectives that bring to the Project methods, tools, skills, thought and

actions that are both systematic (the rational, stepwise) and systemic (the whole, holistic).

As a sculptor, Christina Lorena Weisner is not only interested in the physical space of the river itself, i.e., as an excavated form carved by water over millennia, but also in all aspects and interactions within the space. This includes the geological and anthropological history of the river, both current and historical scientific research on the river and the instruments and tactics used to better understand this natural phenomenon and its formation and development, as well as any collective mythology on the river, and how all of these impact the region's rich social-ecological systems.

Matt Keene is interested in the Neuse River as it changes and is changed through the river's interdependencies with the histories and memories of its communities, their perspectives and values and the actions they take to realize intentions and visions. Bringing together social, natural and systems sciences into a deep praxis of iterative cycles of evaluative inquiry, action and learning, the River Cube Project will co-create innovative spaces for witnessing both the co-evolution of relationships along the river and our collective ability to navigate the Neuse toward a future we want.

The River Cube Project as a Complex System. Prehistoric Native Americans left artifacts of their settlements along the banks of the River. Later, the Neusiok People, after which white colonists named the river, might have found those artifacts and come to know something of their ancestors. The colonists, post-colonial settlers and immigrants who followed grew settlements into towns and cities nourished by agriculture and industry on the same river banks. The divergent evolution continues today, as new waves of immigrants come to the Neuse River and its watershed to retire, serve a nation's military, work factories and fields, and usher in a new world of synthetic biology and artificial intelligence. Peoples have been born, brought to, enslaved, freed, oppressed, emancipated, and died on the Neuse for thousands of years. With each generation, structures have been built that house and nurture both powerful and ignored assumptions, biases and notions of progress and development. The river flows through the wealthiest and the poorest counties in the state, the populations with the most and least formal education. A view worth millions in the spring is a mortal threat in fall. The river is the source of economic and bodily nourishment and the outlet for waste. All communities of the Neuse are, in some way, observing, challenging and redefining boundaries and relationships in pursuit of well-being.

What is the purpose of the Neuse River? Why is it important or valuable? Who is changing the River and how? What is or ought to be the future of the River? What should be done about it? The answers to these questions depend on who is asked, who is asking and why they believe they are being asked and why they believe they are asking. The answers may be diverse and divergent...and equally valid, depending on who is judging. These relationships and these questions describe the Neuse River as a complex system, one that is highly uncertain, unpredictable, dynamic and volatile, having many parts that interact with each other and are perceived by someone as interacting for a purpose. The relationships between the parts of complex systems - cities, the human brain, ecosystems, climate and society - result in distinctive properties like openness, non-linearity, emergence, and feedback loops.

And so, into an abyss of complexity, in an attempt to better understand the river's multivalent evolution, The River Cube Project is dropping in another tiny part that will start at the narrow and shallow origins of the Neuse River and float and drift with and through the whole as a way to better understand and engage with the relationships, patterns, and change of the Neuse River System.

The River Cube Project as Sculpture, Experimental Space and Museum. The River Cube Project simultaneously functions as a sculpture, studio, laboratory and museum – a space for exploration, experimentation, co-creation and innovation.

The River Cube Project Sculpture is made of metal pipe with a “skin” of old aerial film displaying an entire river system. Much like Robert Smithson's “non-sites,” the image of the river in the film represents the concept of a river -- as a holding space for interpreting the ideas, conversations, stories and scientific studies that will develop through this Project. The cube sits atop a custom-built floatation system and will be joined by another watercraft equipped with paddles, pedals and sail.

As, an experimental space, the Project collaborators will explore (as listed above) the river as an excavated form carved by water over millennia and all aspects and interactions of the region as a social-ecological system. This includes relationships within and between the:

- Geological and anthropological history of the river,
- Current and historical scientific research,
- Instruments and tactics used to better understand this natural phenomenon and its formation and development, and
- Collective mythology concerning the river.

From preparation to 4 weeks on the Neuse to post-travel reflection, analysis and synthesis we are exploring innovations at the gap between what is and what could be a museum. The Project is designed and positioned to be a center of gravity, a magnetic and organizing force, that pulls and attracts the information, artifacts, and people necessary to explore and experiment with the idea of “building” a museum that is fit for purpose, whatever purpose.

Phase I of the Project (Preparation) initiates the process of creating the museum collection. The content of the collection is wholly dependent upon and produced by the people who come into contact with the museum, helping to explore, navigate, and influence. The relationships between those people and the content they contribute to the collection will provide the information for making determinations about what is “in” and “out” of the “walls” of the museum. Hence, it is a museum designed and curated in part by the people for whom the museum was, and is to be, “built” – updating itself in the continual present moment. In this way, the museum, which historically, at times, has been remote and separate, will be accessible and relevant because it is adaptively generated by content it references and organized according to the values of those who created it.

The process of building a fit for purpose museum will draw upon the Project’s collection of artifacts, which will include:

- Systematic monitoring of water, soil and air quality; hydrology; noise; climate and weather; fish, invertebrate, mammal, and bird species
- Photography, film, drawings and sculpture
- Conversation, stories and memories shared along the Neuse
- Recordings of the audible space, e.g. sounds of life on the river
- Collections of physical objects, nature- and human-made, representing the diversity of the Neuse systems
- Assessments of system complexity and of personal ability to navigate complexity
- Interviews with residents, other community members (e.g. non-profits, corporations, academic institutions) and experts in the fields of limnology, geology, ecology, history, art and sociology.
- Existing research on the geological, anthropological, and natural history of the Neuse
- GIS maps offering visualizations of Neuse related information

To facilitate the curation of the large and diverse collection and design of a fit-for-purpose museum, we will develop and use a participatory, replicable and transparent methodology based on proven tools and methods from evaluation, complexity, systems thinking and other fields of research and practice. The methodology will aim to integrate objective, subjective and normative truths to establish museum boundaries and facilitate judgments as to what items from the collection are “in” or “out” and how the museum and its exhibits might be curated.

Project Leads

[Christina Lorena Weisner](#) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Fine Arts at the College of the Albemarle. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Sculpture + Extended Media and Bachelor of Arts (BA) in World Studies from Virginia Commonwealth University (2006) and a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Sculpture and Ceramics from University of Texas at Austin (2010). In 2013 – 2014, Weisner was awarded a Fulbright Research Grant for Sculpture and Installation Art to Germany, where she worked on a series of site-specific sculptures based on the Ries Meteorite Impact Crater. Her work often employs found objects, scientific instrumentation and elemental materials, and has been shown both nationally and internationally, most recently at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany and the Mint Museum in Charlotte, NC.

[Matt Keene](#) is the CEO and Founder of The Silwood Group LLC, a team that brings together expertise in evaluation, complexity and sustainability to assess and navigate wickedness in the Anthropocene. From 2006-2018, he served in the Administrator’s Office at the U.S. EPA as a social scientist and evaluator. He’s held positions as founder and coordinator of the Environmental Evaluators Network, Program Chair of the American Evaluation Association and as consultant to a variety of organizations. Matt has degrees from Virginia Tech and Duke, publishes on a variety of topics and will release

the book *Visionary Evaluatives in the Anthropocene* in mid-2019. Matt grew up on the Eastern Shore, floating West on the Nanticoke River and lives with his family in Arlington, VA, where gardening and woodworking are good and surf is small.

Collaborators and Sponsors

- NC Arts Council
- The Gregg Museum
- Christina Lorena Weisner – christinaweisner.com
- Matt Keene – [The Silwood Group LLC](#)
- Bobby Bailey – Filmmaker, [NowHere Films](#)
- Shad Keene – Meteorologist, National Weather Service
- Lisa M. LeMair and Christopher Proto – graphic design and website services
- [Matt Ogburn](#) - Marine Ecologist, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center
- HopeFloats.org
- Kitty Hawk Kites
- Michelle Edwards - Fish Finder Project, [Ocean Research Project](#) & Smithsonian Environmental Research Center
- Kenny Reed - Filmmaker

Funding

The North Carolina Arts Council has sponsored the Project with 10k awarded through the [North Carolina Artist Fellowship](#). We are looking for partners and additional sponsors to cover the total Project budget. The initial 10k has been allocated to creating The River Cube sculpture and acquiring the vessel to accompany the sculpture on the Neuse.

Unmet funding needs include:

- Artists and Scientists
- Travel
- Food and Accommodation
- Equipment
- Other

Logistics and Phases of the River Cube Project

Phase 1 (November 2018 - May 2019): Preparation, Partnerships, Construction, and Presentation

The River Cube will be constructed in the artist's studio in Kill Devil Hills, NC in early 2019 and then transported to the Gregg Museum in Raleigh, NC where it will be displayed as part of a larger solo exhibition of Christina Lorena Weisner's work entitled "Explorations". [The exhibition will run from February 6th– July 28th of 2019.](#)

To introduce the Project, the River Cube crew will:

- Design and develop a website. (Estimated launch - March 1st).
- Develop and launch a crowdfunding campaign
- Host a presentation and panel discussion at the Gregg museum, on NC State campus, and/or other locations in NC and/or virtual (e.g. video/webinar intro) in March or April.
- Promote the project via media, interviews, website and printed materials.

We are looking for project partners in the following areas:

- Scientists and historians whose research pertains to the Neuse River
- Photographers, videographers, filmmakers.
- Local organizations with an interest in the Neuse River
- Local organizations/individuals to host River Cube crew as they travel the Neuse
- Support crew - transporting the Cube, driving equipment from from site to site, communications

Phase 2 (May 2019): The Trip

On May 4th, 2019, The River Cube will be transported from the Gregg Museum to the headwaters of the Eno River, the source of the Neuse. While The Cube is in transit and traveling on the river, museum goers will receive daily updates from the the team on the vessel that include GPS coordinates, who is traveling that day, and planned activities. Museum goers and others can send questions, ideas, and reactions to the River Cube crew anytime via Twitter.

On May 6, 2019, the River Cube Project will begin its journey down the Neuse. Over the course of approximately four weeks the River Cube will drift and be paddled, peddled and sailed down river by The River Cube crew, who will be collecting and creating data and information that will become part of the Project's collection. Occasionally, the boat will need to be portaged. The River Cube Project will stop in cities, towns and wilderness along the "route" to collect information on the river and to create a dialogue about the river. The River Cube crew will camp, spend some nights in an RV and organize overnight stays provided by local organizations or families. Once the vessel crosses through the Ocracoke Inlet, the 275-mile journey will be complete. The Project will culminate in a curated exhibition of the River Cube vessel and the Project's collection.

Phase 3: (May - December 2019) Reflection, Learning, Development

- The sculpture returns to the Gregg Museum as part of a larger exhibition entitled, *Explorations*, which runs from February 6th- July 28th 2019
- During the trip and in the months that follow Matt and Christina will be engaged in an iterative process of inquiry, action and learning designed to realize the Project's process and vision. Matt and Christina will work, remotely and in person, to continue developing Museum Design/Build methodology and the The River Cube Museum as an exhibition.
- Christina and Matt will continue work at their respective home offices/studios and also meet for work in person in New York, North Carolina (Raleigh, Kill Devil Hills) and Arlington, VA. Contributing artists, scientists and other members of the Cube Crew will be invited join and contribute to those meetings as needed.
- Christina Lorena Weisner will be located at a Sculpture Space artist residency July-August. After July she will return to her home studio in Kill Devil Hills, NC. Matt will be at his home offices in Arlington, Virginia.

Phase 4: (May 2019 - ?) Sharing and Continuing the Conversations

- We will continue to join and contribute to communities along the Neuse and elsewhere in a variety of ways.
- We will continue and facilitate conversations about the project and what comes out of it with a variety of audiences in person and remotely via social and traditional media.
- We will submit an article to the journal "Curator: The Museum Journal" (requested by the journal's editor).
- The River Cube Sculpture and The River Cube Museum collection will be displayed in physical and virtual spaces for the public. We are currently looking for physical spaces for this exhibition, slated for 2020.