



Eye of the beholder: when the public can't separate art from science, are you doing both?

Rolf Hut (1) and Thom Bogaard (2)

(1) Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Geoscience, chair of Water Resources Engineering, Delft, The Netherlands, (2) Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Geoscience, chair of Hydrology, Delft, The Netherlands

“So what statement are you trying to make?”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, you're doing this to raise awareness for something important, right?”

“No”

“So it's art for art's sake?”

I just explained my brother that I am going to Mandalay, Myanmar to throw a few hundred biodegradable balloons, fitted with LED-lights (Dutch bike lights actually...) into the Irrawaddy River.

No, we are not doing it for art's sake, we are doing it for science. Local student teams will record at what times the balloons pass major bridges along the river. That data will allow us to calibrate the hydrodynamics of the river, to better predict its behavior in the future: during both normal flow conditions and floods. So that is what I explain to him.

“But you are going to take pictures are you? Because it sounds like it will look great!”

“Sure we are, video even!”

Maybe we are making art. I don't know. We started out doing this for science. But if the public can't separate science from art, maybe we are doing both. Are we?