

COOL CHANGE CONTEMPORARY

23 NOVEMBER - 15 DECEMBER, 2018

REBECCA MCCAULEY & AARON CLARINGBOLD

MEI SWAN LIM & MATT AITKEN

TESSA REX

JAMES DOOHAN & BIANCA SHARKEY



**REBECCA MCCAULEY & AARON
CLARINGBOLD: SPEAKING TO THE
SURFACE OF A LAKE**

GALLERY 1

Saline Re/vision

In their photographs of salt lakes across the continent, Rebecca McCauley and Aaron Claringbold challenge the prevailing modes and subjects of traditional landscape imagery. In doing so, they shake off an enduring imperial lens that has presented Australia either as pristine or as a land ripe for exploit. In combination, such representations have ushered in and sustained possessive and destructive forms of land use. It is a deep concern for the land and its inhabitants that has spurred this perceptive reimagining of the Australian interior.

The artists offer a cultural reading of landscape: one which takes into account the histories and ideologies ingrained in the land. As the cultural theorist W.J.T. Mitchell has remarked, landscape “is an instrument of cultural power” and is capable of naturalising a cultural and social construction, “representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable”. In precisely this manner, early European depictions of Australia represented colonisation as ineluctable. Australian landscapes were reshaped not only physically, but imaginatively, by artists employing familiar, romanticised styling. Unfamiliar territory was soon enveloped into something recognisable, and the settler became naturalised in his new environment.

In tandem with the heroic representation of settlers, there was an attempt to marginalise and excise

Indigenous habitation from the picture. This sense of purity in the Australian landscape has endured to this day, as it offers a far more palatable picture than the increasing degradation of landscapes around the country. The highly marketable imagery of tourism adverts and calendars likely do a disservice to Australians' knowledge and attitude to the land. If all we see are pristine wetlands and radiant desert dunes, then what motivation is there to collectively modify our use of land?

Critiquing landscape photography through the very process of landscape photography poses an existential challenge for the artists. It takes a certain reflexivity to avoid contributing to the visual culture that they seek to critique. This is where Rebecca and Aaron demonstrate their nuanced understanding of the genre and their extensive experimentation in the medium. Perhaps the most immediate feature across the series is a shared disregard for one of the sustaining mechanisms of landscape photography: the horizon line. Art historian Hans Belting reminds us that the horizon is "the standard for verifying perspective in the western visual tradition...[and] is tied to the presence of a human observer". The removal of the horizon line in turn poses a challenge to both the comprehension of an image and the offer of possession granted by most examples of landscape art. Take, for instance, Rebecca's Lake Camm (Nyaki-Nyaki), with its bewildering combination of salt lake and rising earth formation. With no horizon to verify perspective, the frustrated viewer finds ascertaining scale an activity in self doubt. With both artists employing techniques ranging from aerial photography to microscopy, the mound of earth here could range from miniscule to mountainous. Whilst a glance up at the horizon would calibrate the otherwise ambiguous scale, without that



Rebecca McCauley, Lake King (Nyaki-Nyaki), 2018, photograph.



Aaron Claringbold, Lake King (Nyaki-Nyaki), 2018, photograph.

option, we cannot confidently insert ourselves into the landscape before us and thus it remains insurmountable.

The importance of perspective, or indeed its absence, has further consequences for the landscape image. In the classical tradition, perspective was not merely a technique, but considered an objective property of space - a form of truth itself. Dennis Cosgrove describes how in this tradition, "the spectator owns the view, because all of its components are structured and directed towards his eyes only". In Aaron Claringbold's *Munglinup (Wudjari)*, all traces of familiar terrain are abandoned to the point of abstraction and perspective is obliterated. Void of the elegant perspectival composition of traditional landscapes and, unsure even of the 'correct' orientation of the image, the work resists the singular, possessive gaze.

Beyond Rebecca and Aaron's subversion of the genre by formal means, they counter traditional imaging of the Australian landscape by reexamining traditional subjects. Rural fences, for instance, are often celebrated as testament to the hard work of pioneers. Embedded with such conviction and unlikely geometry across newly created grazing land, fences symbolise the first major change in land use in Australia for tens of thousands of years. By referring the fence, Rebecca's *Newdegate (Nyaki-Nyaki)* questions the wisdom of agriculture and the wider human impact on the land. In one of Rebecca's most powerful images, fencing wire enters the reddest of salt lakes before being subsumed by the heaving mass of salt. The presence of the wire here speaks of futility and ignorance in the selection of such a site for agriculture. Beyond this, such grotesque crimson lends a suggestion of toxicity and provokes anxiety for the environment.

Rebecca and Aaron's photographs speak of a perilous disassociation from the land, one which hides degradation whilst emphasising 'beauty'. Freed from pictorial convention, salt lakes offer an antidote to that tradition. With scale and perspective in flux, the photographs force viewers to interrogate the act of viewing landscapes and reflect on their own relationship with the land.

James Dear

James Dear is an Australian art historian living in London. His interests include landscape, iconography and the interaction of images and society.

Speaking to the surface of a lake ruminates on the Australian landscape as a narrative of human impact on the environment, looking particularly at impact post-colonisation. Shot across Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia since 2015 the works record transient and seasonal formations of salt in ancient river systems and lakes, and various direct and indirect interventions of human activity.

Rebecca McCauley and Aaron Claringbold are Naarm-Melbourne based artists who work across image-based practice to interrogate ideas around Australian national identity, land use, and the 'natural' environment. Recent work has been shown collaboratively at Kings ARI, and independently at CCP (Claringbold) and published in Un Magazine (McCauley). This exhibition was developed with support provided through the Fremantle Arts Centre, Artist In Residence program.

MATT AITKEN & MEI SWAN LIM: LAND SALE

GALLERY 2

10,000 ACRES A YEAR

In the words of Michael Foucault, in his eponymous work *The History of Sexuality*,^[1] "all art is arrangement of sand; therefore, all sand is arrangement." So it is in *Land Sale* by Mei Swan Lim and Matt Aitken.

Lim grew up in the Outer Northern Suburbs of Perth - the suburbs Connolly and Ocean Reef feature prominently in her childhood, whilst the suburbs Eglinton and Jindalee are in the same general area. Meanwhile, Aitken's grandfather was high up in the Department of Roads and Gravel. Their award-winning show *Land Sale* is a mixed-media comment on the sandiness of Perth boodja (country), on attitudes towards sand dunes, on social isolation in the rural urban fringe, on high-visibility, attitudes towards sand, population density, urban sprawl, wetlands, sand boondies, sandy clams.

Using the recurring trope of the inverted-reverted yellow sand white sand medium Lim and Aitken plan outer suburban property developments. Pitching lifestyle packages, featuring dunes, parklands, flat sealed roads, cul-de-sacs, banksias, sand formations high and low, Lancelin and Shark Bay, Eternity and Wisdom.

Like Shaun Tan and Christoph Buchel before her, Lim makes a pact with her muse to look 'where' rather than elsewhere, 'where' in his case Aitken is located holding a video camera in one hand, pinning pins to a Tamala

cork board mind map of the Perth Metro Area while commemorating achievements of the original 'boondie' himself, Alan Bond.

From Yanchep to Gnangara, Alkimos to Ocean Reef, Ocean Reef back to Yanchep, *Land Sale* bursts through reconstituted retaining walls like incinerated banksia heads throwing seed upon the bush tracks and beach lots of the Outer North. Exploding upon the walls, footpaths and roads, leaving a temporary yellow stain before retreating back to its place behind a pile of brickies sand. Lim and Aitken's collaboration delves deep into Currambine and Two Rocks, asking 'if not a history of moss, then?' and answering in the language of the long-necked tortoise and the spike-leaved plant, singing "cor... cor... cor..."

It is as if the dystopic presuppositions of Randolph Stow's *To the Islands*,^[2] have worn themselves into the aeolian grooves, and a said spectacle of disintegration sees a Stowian tradesman commandeering a bobcat whilst under the effects of hallucinogenic magic mushrooms found far away in the loam. "Clear away any trees" indeed, "while bees pollinate pigface."

Lim and Aitken's previous collaboration in the vaults of Old Customs House, in Fremantle titled *Aqua Familia* dealt with the psycho-geography of canoeing through the prism of an 'emotional bunker'. For that, Lim and Aitken amassed family photographs of water related memories and buried them deep in the vault. In *Land Sale* family photographs are present once again, as is water, only this time its presence is defined by absence. Even the newly created 'Blue Hole' wetlands do not yet appear on Google Maps. As a consequence, one is left wondering, can the wind itself become more visible without requiring the incidental movement of things



Mei Swan Lim & Matt Aitken. *Land Sale*, video still, dimensions variable.



Mei Swan Lim & Matt Aitken. *Land Sale*, video still, dimensions variable.

that do move to prove it's nature?

Likewise, elements of home 'reno' craft, Bunnings craft, Maccas craft, banksia craft, banksia leaves, calming ethereal synth music of dune systems, art from the period of humanity, the anthropocene era, all serve to expose what Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva and others have referred to as "Coastal Living", or as Aitken himself puts it: "Alan Bond invented the green sand."

E. M. Johnson

^[1] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. New York, USA: Vintage, 1990.

^[2] Randolph Stow, *To The Islands*. Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1958.



Land Sale has been commissioned as a part of International Art Space's *Know Thy Neighbour* program of context-responsive projects, asking artists to create new works in response to their own neighbourhoods.

Land Sale looks to the altered landscapes, sweeping sub-divisions, freeway extensions and early-phase industrial sites of Perth's northern suburbs. Taking their collective experience and memories of these sandy, barren and changed landscapes, artists Matt Aitken and Mei Swan Lim will investigate these familiar and yet largely invisible spaces. Through video and folk craft, *Land Sale* looks below the surface of the shiny brochure to try and understand the relationship between development and geology, urban sprawl deserts and dune systems, land and sales.

Mei Swan Lim is a practicing performance, sound and visual artist whose work centres on the environmental, emotional and spiritual importance of place, interdisciplinary investigation and cultural storytelling. Her works have appeared at Proximity Festival, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), and Perth Festival.

Matt Aitken is an interdisciplinary artist and educator. Drawing from his background in Cultural Anthropology and DIY music, Matt's practice centres around collaboration and empowerment. In past creative works he has partnered with PICA, Perth Festival, Museum of Water & City Arts Space. Matt is currently investigating youth radio and experimental film with CaLD youth.

Both based in Western Australia, Swan Lim & Aitken have collaborated on social practice projects such as Swamp Clubb (TRANSART), Walyalup Water Walk with Sharyn Egan, Freeway Meditation with Katie West.

TESSA REX: SEQUESTERED

GALLERY 3

Q&A with TESSA REX & COOL CHANGE

This exhibition has grown from a residency you undertook earlier in the year - tell us about your experience in Dawson City, Canada.

Cold! Blue. When I arrived we were in a constant state of twilight. I remember the first day the sun broke the horizon, and a few weeks after the first time I felt warmth from the sun on my cheek. It literally felt like I was at the top of the world.

It was a very self-directed residency, most of the recording I did there was on foot lugging everything around on my shoulders in -20C to -40C. I'd pull off a glove to press record then huddle into my huge jackets til the next shot. It became a lot about timing. How long can I withstand the cold, how long will it take me to get to shelter, how long will my toe warmers last. I broke my foot while I was there too which made for some extra hectic filming events - I ended up in a moon boot that I put inside a giant snowmobile boot with inch-thick soles and crutches with ice-picks for backup.

This exhibition coincides with the COP24 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, explain the relationship between this event and your live experimental documentary.

I was an activist at the time of COP19 in Poznan, Poland, 2008. I was already disillusioned but remember still desperately thinking it could be a last hope.

Green capitalism was emerging as a problem then and we're seeing the effects of it now. Russ George, the scientist behind ocean fertilisation, is a businessman

and entrepreneur. In 2012 he dumped 100 tonnes of iron sulphate into the Pacific Ocean hoping to generate algae growth and carbon sequestration, violating international moratoriums on geoengineering. Algae growth in *SEQUESTERED* is representative of this.

SEQUESTERED coincides with an online exhibition at Sister Gallery,^[1] *EVERYTHING'S SHIT IT'S REALLY BAD*, which is a video feedback loop of the same arctic image in this exhibition triggered by coal exports leaving Australia during COP24.

You utilise alternative/non-traditional forms of documentary making in this show and your practice more broadly, what strategies are you making use of in response to the contemporary issue of climate change?

Non-classical documentary media is already everywhere, we can attach a documentary lens to snapchat footage, internet torrents, the algae growing on a bathroom wall. We think we need a look-back perspective to evade subjectivity to see truth in reality, but really any medium can be used temporally to make sense of the world.

In providing 'solutions' to global warming, what role to you see in hypothesising or formulating potential futures within documentary making as opposed to cataloguing?

In *Duty Free Art*^[2] Hito Steryerl postulates the "future documentarians" - security cameras and recording devices that outlive us and continue to document the future. I think it's interesting to think about climate change in this context too, but in the sense of how can we be the future documentarians. Cataloguing is important, it can be very emotive and impactful but



Tessa Rex, *SEQUESTERED* (still), 2018, HDV, 9:00 loop.



Tessa Rex, *SEQUESTERED Chlorella experiment x*, 2018, chlorella, filtered water, nutrients, conical flask.

we don't necessarily get a sense of time and scale and future. What the future could feel like now.

What is the relationship (or balance?) between aesthetics and activism in your work?

I couldn't call myself an activist at the moment but I'm definitely influenced by being an activist in the past and excellent people around me. All art is political and situational.

^[1] <https://www.sistergallery.com.au/>

^[2] Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*. Brooklyn, USA: VERSO, 2017.

Tessa Rex is an emerging documentary artist and former climate change activist working with digital and analogue film and installation. In 2018 she was a resident fellow of The Weight of Mountains in sub-arctic Dawson City, Canada. She has made short documentaries about the Arab spring in Bahrain, the Night Bus in Brooklyn and The Williamsburg Houses. In 2015 Rex was a collaborative fellow at Union Docs Center for Documentary Art in Brooklyn, New York. She has exhibited in Sydney, Istanbul, Berlin, Mexico City, Taiwan, Dawson and New York. By day she's the Head of Video, Digital, at Bauer Media Australia. Rex is a board member of RUNWAY Australian Experimental Art Journal and a member of new Sydney-based celluloid collective The Highlighter Brigade.

Dr James Hitchcock is an aquatic ecologist and Research Fellow at the University of Technology, Sydney, where he completed his PhD in 2015. His current research addresses how microplastics, eutrophication, and altered flow regimes influences zooplankton and trophic dynamics.

Sydney-based artist Tessa Rex presents *SEQUESTERED*, a live experimental documentary unfolding over COP24, the UN's ongoing climate change conference. Inspired by a residency in sub-arctic Canada - with advice from ecologist Dr James Hitchcock - she creates three representations of 'solutions' to global warming.

These absurd real-life scenarios could have been sci-fi films: fertilising the Indian Ocean with iron filings; cooling coral on the Great Barrier Reef with fans; spraying sulphur dioxide into the stratosphere. In *SEQUESTERED*, Rex shows these three scenarios in micro-scale as representative experiments.

COP24 in Katowice, Poland, like the preceding 23 elsewhere, is more an avenue for absurd green capitalism than climate justice.

Adjacent to these experiments is a projection from sub-arctic Dawson City, Canada. In January 2018 the local government tried to construct an 'ice bridge' with a water cannon to connect West Dawson and Dawson City. Usually in winter with temperatures plunging to -40C the Yukon River freezes enough for cars to drive between the territories. For the last two years the once reliable thoroughfare has only partially frozen.

SEQUESTERED will exhibit concurrently with an online exhibition at SISTER Gallery. *EVERYTHING'S SHIT IT'S REALLY BAD* is a feedback loop catalysed by Australian coal export data with Beethoven's 7th symphony and an image of the unfrozen Yukon River.

JAMES DOOHAN & BIANCA SHARKEY: ASTRO MORPHS ASCENSION

PROJECT SPACE

IN CONVERSATION WITH NOLAN O SEARCAIGH

The Astromorphs live again in order that they may come to an end.

What happens when two fleeing cosmic cats get infected with parasitic microbes while being sucked into a black hole? This is something I had the pleasure to discuss with the Astromorphs in Kings Park under a watchful raven's eye. It is a black hole? I seek to clarify. Yes says Sox. Well no says Yow, it is actually a planet that is sucking them in. A planet? Yes a planet but it is a living thing.

If this leaves you, like me, a little confused but a lot intrigued, you will need to view the brilliant new cosmic installation that Astromorphs have given us as the finale in their story. This is to be the end of the cosmic cats that have amused us in their live shows over the past two years.

Why must it end I ponder. The Astromorphs explain that it is time to move on. But you cannot move on without coming to a conclusion. An end... "this is the end my beautiful friend". Do they really have to die? Yes, they do I am told. They must die to move through to the next stage. So death is not the end then, it's a transition to the new. Sox and Yow explain that the microbes live on having taken the essence of the Astromorphs as the essence of microbe sustenance. Again the microbes leave me as confused as the black hole did. Yet it is a nuanced confusion. A cryptic and, dare I say it, beautiful

confusion. If there is an answer, it is it be found in the installation itself.

This installation is not of course a live show. This time we have a video installation. However all the usual elements of music, graphics and costumes will still be there. Just that it is a portable recorded work this time. This is rather good as even though the Astromorphs will reach their long skirted doom in this work, it will be a doom preserved neatly on video. Preserved as a warning to future generations who may squander their oxygen and be forced to take flight in the cosmos. A cosmos filled with dangerous microbes, black holes and hungry living planets. A really important work then. Make sure you have a look at it in November. You can let the beautiful confusion wash over you as your ears process the squelchy beats and your eyes trace the graphics. A work that is hard to pigeonhole as all good art should be.

Nolan O Searcaigh

ASTRO MORPHS – SOME THOUGHTS FROM BIANCA AND JAMES

We are both weary of being passive consumers; Astro Morphs enables us to talk back. We make. We hope. We write. We dance. We sing. We tell stories. We collaborate. We use the degrees we have acquired! We stop waiting for what we haven't got. We live.

The happiest humans we meet are capable of being bewildered, at any age, they are interested in the world and this leaves them wanting less.



Astro Morphs, *Ascension*, 2018, digital video still, dimensions variable, image courtesy of the artists.

Astro Morphs are creations made to serve not to wonder. What makes them run? Being usurped? Survival? Neither knows another life, but interest finds a way of procuring and changing the uneducated. Even when dying they are experiencing, changing, learning.

ASTRO MORPHS 2016 – 2018

Yow and Sox have always found themselves on the periphery of culture, unable to exchange anything of value that would endear them to any individual other than one another. They ceased to exist post their fruition due to a shift in the economy that saw them usurped by a higher functioning cat person. When they miraculously survive a crash landing on New Gaia, they are truly isolated as they are the only relics left of the human species on a planet now colonised by microbes. As they witness a new evolution they are confronted by the many misconceptions that haunted the human species and brought about their demise. As Yow and Sox become part of a biofilm they find themselves grasping at straws as they must use a molecular language and not words to communicate if they are to survive.



Astro Morphs, *Ascension*, 2018, digital video still, dimensions variable, image courtesy of the artists.

James Doohan graduated with Honors in Visual Arts from ECU in 2006. Since this time he has participated in several group exhibitions including Hatched 07 at PICA and Coming Unstuck at the now defunct Free Range Gallery. In 2010 James collaborated with Perth music label Badminton Bandit to release the book Mystery Meats a collection of his drawings and poster designs. In 2016 he co-founded the multi-media project Astro Morphs which had its debut performance at the Fringe World Festival 2017.

Bianca Sharkey's primary exposure to the arts was through dance. Bianca completed her training in classical ballet (Vaganova method) but wanted to experiment with other art forms. Bianca graduated from Edith Cowan University with a Bachelor of Communications (Major in Scriptwriting and Minor in Creative Writing - 2011), she has also functioned as a songwriter and is currently studying Biomedical Science. Bianca makes up half of Astro Morphs, (nominated for best musical at its debut Fringe 2017).

THANK YOU

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Cool Change Contemporary acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional and rightful custodians of the land on which we operate. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

www.coolchange.net.au
hello@coolchange.net.au | 0484 500 838
1F Bon Marche Arcade Building
74-84 Barrack Street, Perth, WA, 6000
  @coolchangecontemporary