Media Release

Heat - Art and climate change
12 September – October 18, 2008
RMIT Gallery 344 Swanston Street, Melbourne.

Heat - Art and climate change brings together the work of 22 Australian and International artists, and collaborators, for a sensory experience of climate change through paintings, photography, soundscapes, installations and interactive media.

Curated by Senior Lecturer in Cultural History & Theory at RMIT, Dr Linda Williams, it is the first international exhibition on this subject in Australia and will explore issues of degradation, global warming, over consumption, extinction and man’s impact on nature.

Dr Williams said “We are used to scientists providing the information we receive on climate change, this exhibition is unique because it starts to picture what these changes might look like.”

Australian artists Bonita Ely and Jill Orr have been commenting on environmental degradation for 30 years. In 1979 Ely mixed her first Murray River Punch a stinking cocktail of chemicals, phosphates and animal waste, 30 years later her 2008 recipe will include high levels of sulphuric acid. Jill Orr’s vibrant performances call for an awareness about how man impacts the environment from desecrated trees to salty planes.

Sam Leach’s painting of the Granrojo, a mutating jellyfish turned predator in a heated ocean, and Australian representative at the 2009 Venice Biennale, Ken Yonetani’s intricate ceramic works depicting the bleaching of our coral reefs, are both a powerful statement about Australia’s changing marine habitat.

Gregory Pryor’s work Black Solander creates a mausoleum to disappearing West Australian plant life, while Simon Perry explores the impact of technology through images of diving boards from the Chernobyl Pripyat pool, and Janet Laurence creates a metaphorical micro-climate in her glass work Carbon Futures.
Cameron Robbins explores the impact of wild weather in his kinetic installations. In Heat, he will create a whirling vortex of carbon dioxide in a room, activated by people walking into the gallery: an eerie companion is the soundscape of the energy required to illuminate a light bulb from coal mine to generator to switch created by sound artists, Australian Phillip Samartzis and German Michael Vorfeld, who will also display his photo-graphic images of light bulbs.

The exhibition also includes artists whose work focuses on the two poles, the Arctic and Antarctic, as flashpoints of global environmental crisis.

British artist David Buckland initiated the Cape Farewell project, which takes artists, writers and film makers to the Arctic to record their impressions of change. His own work Arctic, a film of an icebreaker pushing through black ice, coloured by drifting oil slicks will be accompanied in this exhibition by a soundscape created by British sound artist Max Eastley, who used a hydrophone to record the ice cracking and moving, and the walruses and seals calling to each other.

British artist Mark Wilson and Icelandic artist Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir use taxidermy polar bears to explore how humans covet the exotic, but are somehow divorced from the culture, history and impact they have on the animal’s environment. This was reinforced in Melbourne when RMIT Gallery staff found there were many people waiting for polar bear skins to be stuffed for use as an interior design feature.

Australian artist Georgina Read’s painting For the Baby reveals one of the massive cracks in an ice shelf in Antarctica, while New Zealand photographer Anne Noble’s Southern Lights Antarctic Collectibles I presents several images of the Antarctic as tourist postcards on a rack.

Tony Lloyd’s large-scale painting We have all the time in the world presents a much less fragile image of nature in this majestic snow capped landscape remains the jet stream of a plane, an ominous sign.

Other artists include

Ash Keating — 2020? project – Art and recycling by a group of Melbourne artists.
Dr Roslyn Taplin — Prints of petrol bowsers, remind us of reliance on fossil fuel.
Klaus Rinke — Water Proof – evaporation in an air conditioned environment.
Rew Hanks — The new Noah’s Ark.
Martin Rieser — Interactive piece, how the city impacts climate change.

Media enquiries, information and images

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