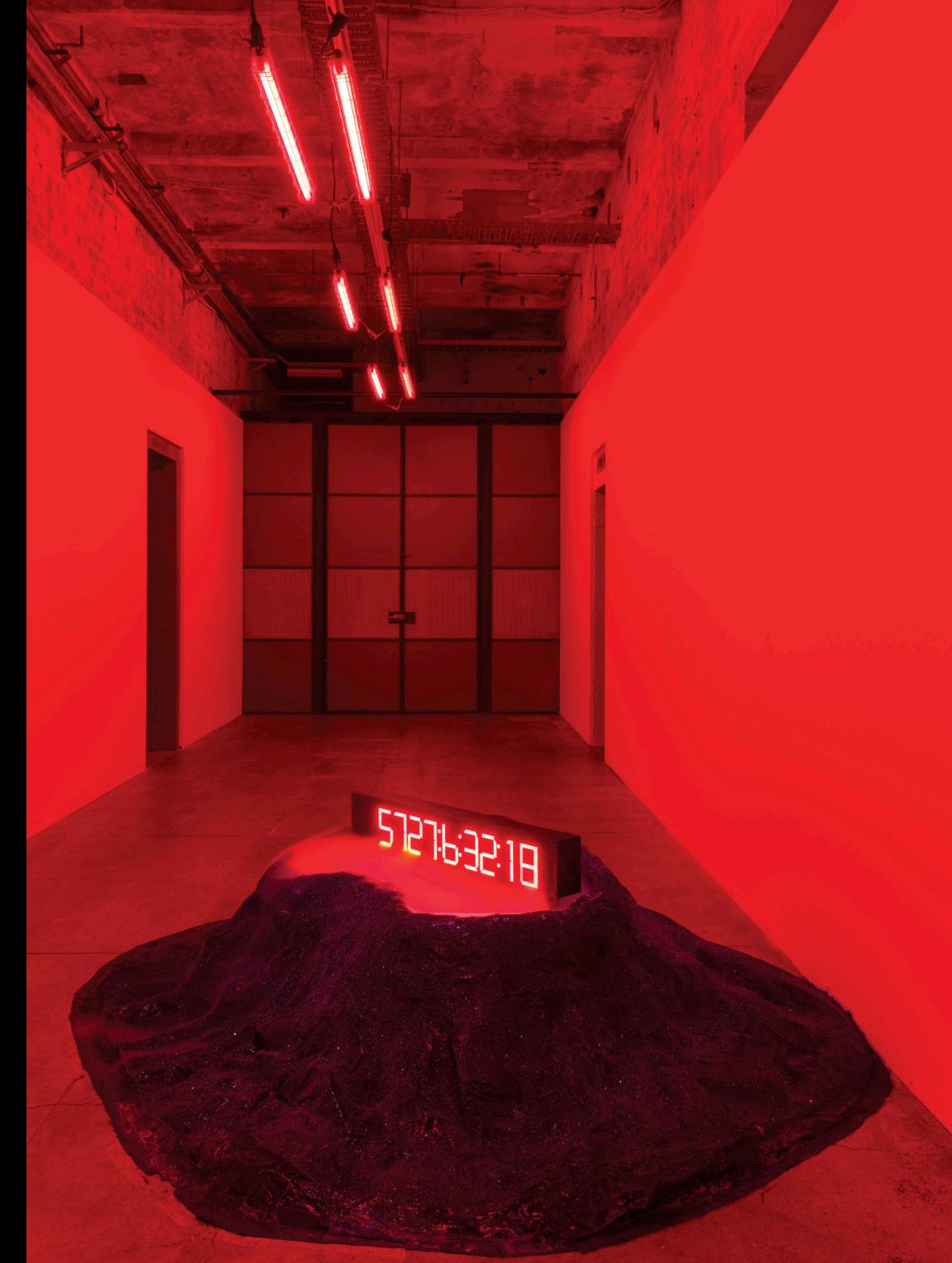


SHIFTING SURROUNDS

YANDELL WALTON



This publication has been sponsored by



SHIFTING SURROUNDS is commissioned by The SUBSTATION as part of the
ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2019 Festival.

FORWARD

Yandell Walton is a leading Melbourne based artist whose work deftly crosses the divide between public and private, indoor and outdoor spaces, featuring projection, installation and interactive digital media. Her distinct aesthetic and interest in innovative practice are underpinned by a deep concern with contemporary ideas which aim to shift audiences thinking and immerse them in a unique new world. Her art is expertly executed and profoundly engaging for audiences.

We are delighted to present her first solo exhibition, SHIFTING SURROUNDS in partnership with the ART + CLIMATE = CHANGE Festival. This exhibition is the culmination of more than 2 years' work by the artist carried out over a series of on-site residencies throughout the gallery spaces of The SUBSTATION. Located in the heart of the western suburbs of Melbourne, our building inspires grand ideas, and through our program, we aim to support artists to produce the most important work of their careers. As a major project of our annual program, SHIFTING SURROUNDS is the result of a long term collaboration between Yandell and The SUBSTATION.

SHIFTING SURROUNDS is one of four newly commissioned works as part of The SUBSTATION's inaugural commissioning program. Primarily funded through donations, this program aims to create an opportunity for independent artists to develop their practice and create a breakthrough body of work. Providing artists with the chance to imagine and stage new work while building new audiences are central to our vision as a facilitator and supporter of independent artists' careers. It is through exhibitions like SHIFTING SURROUNDS that we aim to engage our audiences in a critical dialogue about art and society and deepen their understanding of contemporary experimental art.

I would sincerely like to thank the Besen Family Foundation, Creative Partnerships Australia and the Gordon Darling Foundation along with the many individual donors to our commissioning program, who have directly supported this project from development to presentation and the Australia Council for the Arts, Creative Victoria and Hobsons Bay City Council for their ongoing support of The SUBSTATION. Without these partners, this significant new work would not be possible.

Brad Spolding
Director
The SUBSTATION

In its latest report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that we have 12 years to act to limit global warming to no more than 1.5C.¹ In Australia, bushfire, flood, cyclones and drought are ravaging our country like never before. Nine of Australia's ten warmest years on record have occurred since 2005.² Australia's emissions are tracking at the highest on record, according to new data from the emissions-tracking organisation Ndevr Environmental.³ Australia will not meet its 2015 Paris commitments.

The climate emergency has arrived and is happening now.

How do we make sense of the impact of global warming? How do we understand what is happening around us and act to limit the worst ravages of climate change? What is the role of the artist in these challenging times? CLIMARTE believes that contemporary art has the intellectual and creative capacity to be a powerful and persistent change agent. Critical thinking by artists provides unique and innovative ways to communicate, understand and feel the enormity of the climate challenge.

Yandell Walton's exhibition; SHIFTING SURROUNDS, at The SUBSTATION, is part of CLIMARTE's ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2019 - a biennial festival of socially engaged exhibitions, ideas and events that considers climate impacts and 21st century environmental issues. The festival engages leaders in art practice and curatorship, alongside climate and environmental sciences, with prominent thinkers on cultural, philosophical and psychological consequences of climate change.

Yandell Walton's exhibition, SHIFTING SURROUNDS, is an inspired and luminous representation of what is happening to our planet now. This survey of work shows us the challenges before us, as we shift to the new epoch of the Anthropocene.⁴

Yandell Walton's practice is driven by her desire to create immersive and interactive works that are technically and conceptually powerful. This exhibition has been two years in the making and continues Walton's practice of using emergent technologies.

SHIFTING SURROUNDS confronts us to examine our growing disconnection to the natural world, through the space flight of a tetra pak, pollution - including the ever present and growing waste in our waterways - and unpacking the interconnectedness of Earth's ecology that supports all life on the planet we call home.

SHIFTING SURROUNDS invites us to do no more harm to our planet and demand a just and sustainable future – for all life on Earth.

Bronwyn Johnson
Executive Director: CLIMARTE
Director: ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2019

1. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Summary for Policy Makers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5C, approved by governments, 2018.

2. Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BOM), 2018 Climate Statement.

3. Ndevr Environmental. Ndevr replicates the federal government's National Greenhouse Gas Inventory (NGGI) but releases them months ahead of the official data. Data it has produced for the year up to September 2018 shows Australia is still on track to miss its Paris target of a 26%-28% cut to emissions on 2005 levels by 2030. Guardian, 13 December, 2018.

4. The 'Anthropocene' relates to or denotes the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.

SHIFTING SURROUNDS, SPECULATIVE FUTURES

BY EMMA MCRAE

Our time is running out.

The ice caps are melting, the seas are rising, the rubbish is accumulating and the insects are dying. The realities of climate change are here, yet awareness of climate change is not new. We are now in the year that marks the 40th anniversary of the first World Climate Conference, and climate change has finally come to be recognised as the most urgent issue of our time.

In SHIFTING SURROUNDS, Yandell Walton presents a series of six new site-specific installations that examine the continual process of change and adaptation that is the nature of life — in the planet, its ecosystems, and us. The scenarios presented in SHIFTING SURROUNDS are speculative; they sit within a discourse of science fiction, and use metaphor to suggest the extent of the impact humans are having on Earth. Behind these speculative visions are the sobering, and increasingly alarming, facts and statistics of climate change. But facts and statistics alone are hard to digest; they often present catastrophic scenarios that leave us feeling helpless and hopeless. SHIFTING SURROUNDS invites us to perceive the impending realities of climate change viscerally and sensorially. The exhibition takes us out of the ‘real’ world and transports us into a possible future, allowing us to see and feel what our world could become. Walking through this world, out of time and out of place, we are travellers in a desecrated environment created through actions that have the potential to become our own undoing.

Walton’s practice is concerned with impermanence, addressing the fragile, fleeting nature of existence. Working with installation, interactive digital media and the ephemeral medium of projection, her works are always responsive to the architectures they inhabit, merging the solidity of architectural form with the elusive nature of projected light. Her site-specific installations, ranging from large-scale, projection-mapped buildings to intimate peepholes, have transformed urban laneways, industrial sites, modernist homes, waterways and galleries, presenting viewers with unexpected encounters. In each instance Walton’s works transform these spaces with an otherworldly presence that invites us to experience the mystery, chance, possibility and ephemerality that lies at the very heart of existence.

SHIFTING SURROUNDS continues Yandell’s investigation of our anthropogenic age. These new installations follow works including Landfill (2010), Human Effect (2012–2017) and 1500 per second (2016) in exploring the impact humans are having on the planet. In SHIFTING SURROUNDS Walton also introduces sculptural elements that bring a new physical presence to her futuristic visions as a means of engaging with the technological possibilities we now possess to adapt and/or construct the world we live in.

In the exhibition we travel from the sewers beneath our feet to Earth’s outer atmosphere, visit a digital forest and an industrial wasteland, and experience the alarming intensity of a tidal wave engulfing the building — all while observing the steady countdown towards a world that is 1.5°C warmer thanks to human activity. These works express the vulnerability of the planet we live with — the planet we are part of — and therefore underscore our own vulnerability. Yet they also reveal great power: the power within the environment, the Earth’s ecosystems and (hopefully) within ourselves, to resist. Such resistance, as Francois Lyotard said, is “up to each of us.” It is “to resist the already done, the already written, the already thought” as a means of bringing new realities into being.¹

This year, as the UN has noted, “There is still time to tackle climate change, but it will require an unprecedented effort from all sectors of society.”² Producing change — even attempting to create change — will require us to embrace the power and vulnerability that is within and all around us.

Through speculative scenarios that bring together the technological, environmental, industrial and human aspects of contemporary life, SHIFTING SURROUNDS offers an experiential bedrock to inspire determination and equip us with the strength to resist.

DEADLINE

A countdown tells us something is coming, arousing tension and nervous excitement. In DEADLINE the countdown is literally alarming: it shows us the seconds, minutes and hours remaining until the year 2030—the earliest date predicted by the IPCC when our planet could reach 1.5°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels. 2030 is not far away, eleven years, just over a decade.

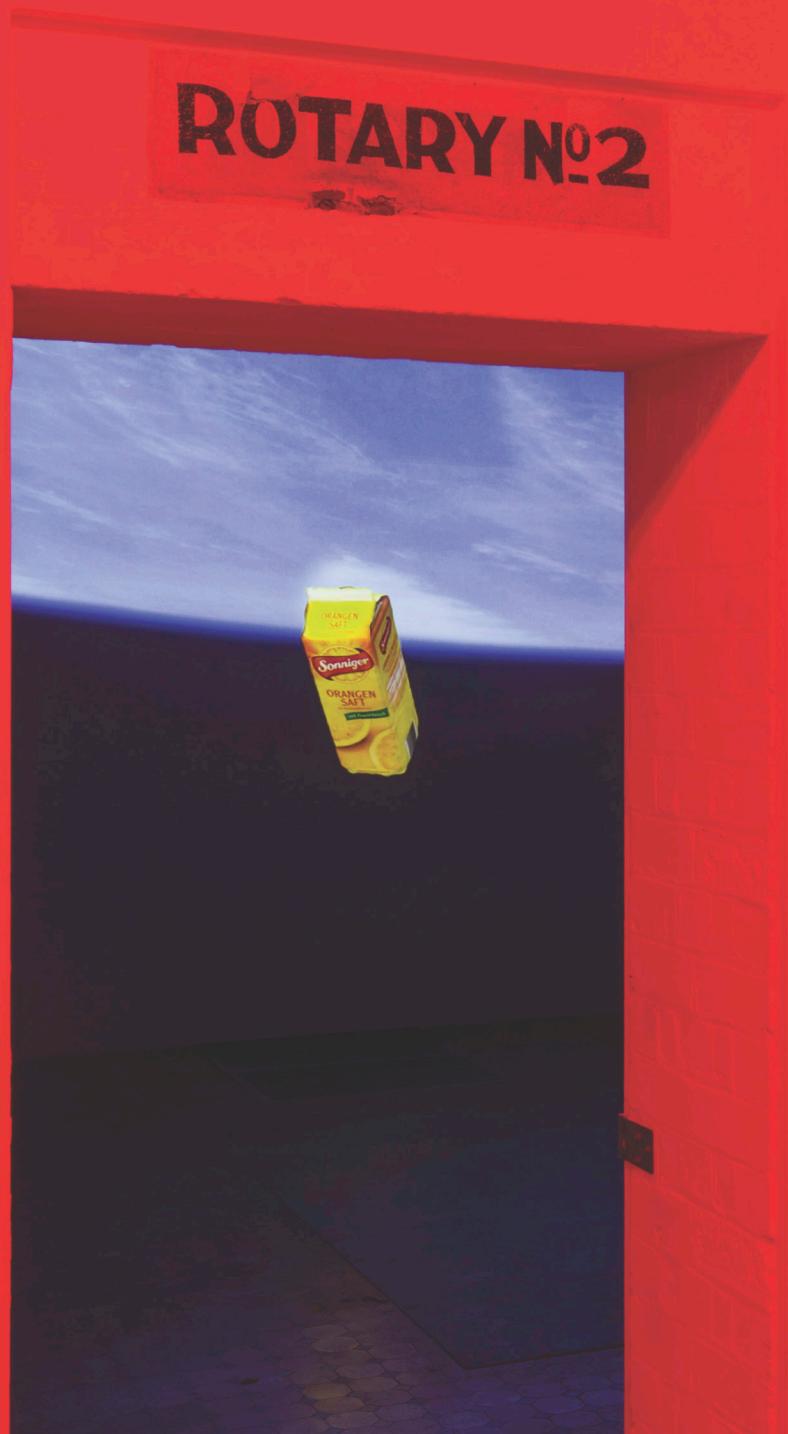
The clock sits on a pool of black water on top of a craterous rock, recalling the inhabitability of burnt volcanic landscapes, and of blackwater, which occurs in rivers as a result of drought and flood and in which fish are unable to breathe. These are images of a rupturing and devastated Earth; an Earth that is likely to become increasingly familiar if we continue emitting greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere at the current rate.

For Australia, scientific predictions for global warming include rising sea levels, hotter temperatures, decreased rainfall (in southern Australia), and greater frequency and severity for events including, floods, droughts, and bushfires. As a result, we will see increasing reduction in biodiversity across the land and in the oceans, changes to ecosystems including species loss and extinction, and our access to food, water and energy will be affected. The IPCC report also states that ‘there is no single 1.5°C warmer world,’ but rather multiple possible warmer worlds depending on how soon and for how long we live at 1.5°C of global warming.

DEADLINE’s measured countdown has a slightly hypnotic effect that makes us acutely aware of the passing of time. To experience eleven years as a short duration requires an expansive understanding of time that makes individual actions seem almost insignificant; yet in the present, time speeds up and we can easily forget to look further ahead. Confronted with this countdown, whether we focus on the big picture or on the second-by-second present, what becomes clear is that time is running out—both for us as individuals and for the planet. As a silent witness to global action (and inaction) on climate change, DEADLINE encourages us to be aware that we are looking towards an unknown future.







OBLIVION

In OBLIVION, the now-familiar yet always-wondrous sight of our planet floating in space is partially obscured by a piece of junk: a juice carton rotating serenely in Earth's atmosphere. The resulting image recalls collective visions of human vulnerability from films such as 2001: A Space Odyssey or Gravity but here humans are conspicuously absent and all that remains is the rubbish. Seen like this, the seeming insignificance of one Tetra Pak thrown in the bin — or the gutter — is transformed into a slightly comical yet profoundly disturbing spectre of a wasted future.

Most of us are committed to recycling. Yet we have to admit there are methodological and systemic problems when 79% of our plastic waste is still accumulating either in the world's landfills or as litter in the natural environment — including ocean garbage patches like the one in the Pacific Ocean, which is estimated to be 1.6 million square kilometres, or three times the size of France. Our efforts are also somewhat thwarted by the limitations of recycling processes that consume energy and repurpose materials for different uses. While Tetra Pak cartons can be recycled, the process turns them into different post-consumer products, which means a constant supply of virgin material (wood, oil and aluminium) is needed for their manufacture.

With it's outer-space vision of Earth, OBLIVION alludes to what some people propose as a possible solution: the colonisation of other planets. The hypothetical process of terraforming, which would purposely change the atmosphere of another planet to make it habitable for humans, seems not only absurd but also a cruel irony in the context of terrestrial climate change. Terraforming won't solve our recycling problem, and suggesting that we could have somewhere else to go when our own planet has been turned into a massive rubbish dump only serves to highlight our wilful blindness and the desperate extremes humans will go to in trying to avoid looking in the mirror. OBLIVION asks: is this really the best we can do? Would we really relinquish our responsibility, leave this "tiny pea, pretty and blue"³ and begin all over again just to avoid having to change our habits?



INTERNAL CURRENT

INTERNAL CURRENT reveals the out-of-sight, out-of-mind plastic waste that is contaminating our waterways and killing our wildlife. Embedded within the existing architecture of the building, the work depicts a steady flow of refuse washing away beneath our feet, and shows how easy it is to just walk on by.

Since the late 14th century ‘consumption’ has been a disease, a wasting of the body by what had previously been known as ‘the evil disease’. Otherwise known as pulmonary tuberculosis, consumption is highly contagious and was, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the most feared disease on Earth. More recently ‘consumption’ has simply been used to describe acts of eating, drinking, or purchasing goods. But consumption remains a contagious and destructive process: as you use a resource, it’s supply wastes away. In contemporary society we are all consumers yet the evidence of our wasteful

behaviour is hidden. We bury our waste like we bury the dead, but the plastic does not decompose as our bodies do.

Every year nearly three million tonnes of plastic is used to bottle water, and this is in addition to the plastic used to bottle other drinks, laundry liquid, dishwashing liquid and juice, to name just a few. Over-packaging and over-consumption are the by-products of our high-stress, progress-oriented 21st century lives. Created from digital scans of real plastic rubbish collected from gutters and creeks, INTERNAL CURRENT depicts the reality of rubbish entering our sewers and waterways despite our efforts to recycle. The constant stream is an uncomfortable reminder that if we want to clean up the mess we’ve made it’s going to take conscious effort from every one of us. As consumers, we have great power: what we buy signals to producers that we either support or oppose their choice of packaging. It’s so easy to think that one more bottle won’t make a difference, but it will — it does.

CONNECTING SYSTEMS

CONNECTING SYSTEMS confronts us with pre-emptive nostalgia, provoked by the possibility of a treeless future. This forest of digital trees — a high-definition yet diminished re-presentation of the natural environment — resonates with a deep sense of loss. As a mediated experience of nature, CONNECTING SYSTEMS suggests a logical conclusion, and the potentially devastating impact, of the current trajectory of our technologically networked lives.

In the mid-late 19th century, when the railways increased the speed at which humans could travel, people pined for nature.⁴ Nature was still there, just outside the window, but that technological advance distanced travellers from physical interaction with the natural world. Contemporary technologies can have the same effect, and increasing urbanisation and industrial farming further distance us from interaction with the land and the natural ecosystems that make life possible. We've now become so accustomed to mediated existence — to speed and to images as representation — that we notice this distance less and less. While we interact with the world through screens and live cocooned inside a mediated bubble, the destructive effects of deforestation and climate change can feel remote and not connected to our daily lives.

Created digitally by combining footage of real trees with animated effects and the sounds of human respiration, these breathing trees seem to accuse us of neglect. They appear on screen as living creatures, breathing as we breathe, yet they are mere shadows reduced to existing within the limited frame and light spectrum of the screen. Breathing is unconscious and we often take it for granted, but CONNECTING SYSTEMS draws our attention to breath as the basis of life. It reminds us that the complex ecosystems of the world are fragile and that our own existence is intimately entwined with this vulnerability. If the hectic pace of contemporary life creates such a distance that we forget nature for too long, will we look up to find it that the trees are no longer there?





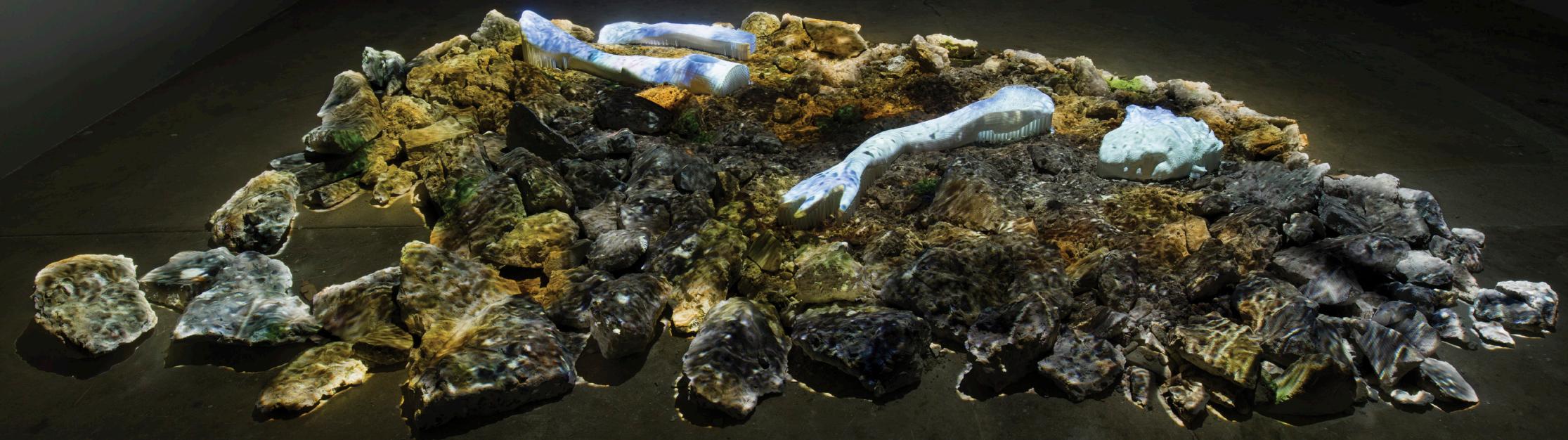


UPRISE

As the digital tidal wave of UPRISE engulfs the gallery, the terrifying power of water overwhelms and suffocates; it is an all-consuming, visceral reminder of the very real —unavoidable — threat of rising seas.

Water covers 71% of the Earth's surface, mostly in seas and oceans. With increasing temperatures, water expands and the ice sheets on the north and south poles melt.⁵ Even if we manage to slow the rate of global warming, the seas will continue to rise — and sea level rise is increasing.⁶ If it continues at the current rate we will see an average rise of 65cm by 2100, and it's predicted that sea level rise will be higher off the southeast coast of Australia than the global average. Current predictions are that an estimated 275 million people are now living in areas that will be flooded by 2100. Coastal communities and island nations are under threat, and when the water comes there are no safe places: it floods streets, houses, schools and subways.

In UPRISE we see every drop, every swell, and watch the peaks crashing and colliding with the walls of the gallery. The water subsumes everything with an intensity that is frightening and makes clear that our current way of life is unsustainable. While we cannot stop the oceans from going where they will, we can choose to plan and design our cities and our resource consumption to adapt to the rising seas. By immersing us in this speculative deluge, UPRISE makes palpable the urgent need for action and insists we pay heed before our window of opportunity is washed away.



TRACES

In TRACES we see a vision of the future that is entirely human-made: a landscape made of concrete rubble collected from construction sites; 3D printed figures — human-like yet not human; and footage captured by a drone flying over an otherwise inaccessible industrial wasteland.

This human-not-human topology represents our entrenched fascination with technology while also highlighting the potential failures of technology to continually provide positive solutions. The scanning technology used to create these life-sized human figures also recorded imperfections generated by the technology itself. When translated to the sculptural prints, these imperfections give the partial bodily segments a decomposing quality and exposes their digital structure. They become human-technology hybrids. Cyborgs. At the same time, the tracking motion of the drone footage draws attention to the multitude of surveillance technologies that monitor us, often autonomously, wherever we go.

Concrete has been called 'the most destructive material on Earth'⁷ because, taken as a single industry, the global production of concrete is the third highest emitter of CO₂, coming behind only China and the US. Supposedly providing us with seemingly stable habitats, concrete is simultaneously destroying the environment we need to survive. Is this the techno-centric future we are heading towards? Is this the future people mean when they talk about the machines taking over? And is this the future we are helping to create yet do not in fact want?

The post-industrial, post-human landscape in TRACES poses a question about how we choose to be human. It suggests an idea of the posthuman as posited by Rosie Braidotti as a "condition [that] urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming."⁸ This is not only a question of our relationship to technology but also of how we will choose to relate to each other, as individuals and as a society, and to the planet. Are we aiming to become these broken, incomplete figures occupying a wasted landscape? Or do we want our human being to encompass greater care for the other — other people, other species, other life forms — and for ourselves? The power of the futuristic vision in TRACES is in emphasising that we do have a choice in what being human means.





YANDELL WALTON

Yandell Walton's practice addresses human relationships with the physical systems of the planet by interrogating shifting environments caused by climate change. By using digital technology in the production and presentation of works, she aims to highlight the current technological climate and raise questions around its effect on our rapidly changing world. Through creating immersive works that connect to the viewer, her installations aim to engage and inspire action from individuals towards a collective consciousness within an ever-changing and increasingly damaged planet.

Yandell is an accomplished contemporary artist exhibiting regularly in non-traditional and public spaces both in Australia and Internationally. Recent public art commissions include; 'Digital Agora' Nillumbik Shire Council (2018-2019), 'Departed' in regional New South Wales (2016), 'Absent Presence' in Townsville (2014) 'Transition' in Melbourne (2014). Her work has been part of ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE Festival 2017 (Melbourne), Light City Baltimore (2016), Digital Graffiti Florida (2015), Experimenta Speak to Me (Melbourne & Brisbane 2012-14), PUBLIC Festival Perth (2014), Melbourne Festival (2012), VIVID Festival Sydney (2013), ISEA (International Symposium of Electronic Art 2013) and White Night Festival Melbourne (2013/15).

Awards include judges choice The Gertrude Street Projection Festival (2017), the National Gallery of Victoria Women's Association Award (2014), Best of Show Award Digital Graffiti (2015), The Windsor Prize (2014), Highly commended Sunshine Coast New Media Art Award (2015), Special Recognition Digital Graffiti (2016), Best Video Work, Centre for Contemporary Photography Salon (2014) and the recipient of an Australian Postgraduate Award. In 2018 she was awarded the Phasmid Studio Residency in Berlin through Victorian College of the Arts.



LIST OF WORKS

DEADLINE

LED programmed countdown clock,
recycled paper, Silicon Carbide,
paint, ultrasonic mist

OBLIVION

Looped single channel video

INTERNAL CURRENT

Looped single channel video, steel

CONNECTING SYSTEMS

10 channel video installation with
sound. Sound design **Michele Vescio**

ENDNOTES

1. Lyotard, Francois, quoted in Gary A. Olson, "Resisting a Discourse of Mastery: A Conversation with Jean-Francois Lyotard," *Journal of Advanced Composition* 15.3 (1995), pp.396-397
2. "CLIMATE ACTION SUMMIT, 23 SEPTEMBER 2019", <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/>. Accessed 9 April 2019
3. Neil Armstrong, quoted in NASA Earth Observatory, <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/91494/right-here-right-now>. Accessed 9 April 2019
4. Solnit, Rebecca, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*, Penguin Books, New York, London, Australia, 2004, p.22
5. "The three-degree world: the cities that will be drowned by global warming", *The Guardian*, 3 November, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2017/nov/03/three-degree-world-cities-drowned-global-warming>. Accessed 2 April 2019
6. "New Study Finds Sea Level Rise Accelerating", 2018, <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2018/new-study-finds-sea-level-rise-accelerating>. Accessed 19 February 2019
7. "Concrete: the most destructive material on Earth", *The Guardian*, 25 February 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/feb/25/concrete-the-most-destructive-material-on-earth>. Accessed 26 February 2019
8. Braidotti, Rosi, *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, Cambridge and Massachusetts, 2013, p.12

UPRISE

4 channel projection installation with
sound. Sound design **Michele Vescio**
with **William Elm**. Animation **Tobias
Edwards**

TRACES

3D printed sculpture (recycled PLA
filament), salvaged concrete debris,
single channel projection with sound.
Sound design by **Michele Vescio**
with **Jennifer Moore**

Artwork documentation by
Matthew Stanton

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