

28 June 2010

MCA PRESENTS IN THE BALANCE: ART FOR A CHANGING WORLD

21 AUGUST – 31 OCTOBER 2010



Catherine Rogers *Red road* 2007 photograph, pigment print on rag paper 59 x 180 cm Courtesy the artist Image courtesy and © the artist

Sydney, Australia: The Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) is delighted to unveil details of an exciting new environmentally-themed exhibition, *In the Balance: Art for a Changing World*. Running from Saturday 21 August until Sunday 31 October 2010, this ambitious exhibition comprises more than one hundred works by 30 artists and artist collectives which respond to contemporary ecological issues in Australia and beyond.

In the Balance presents a number of site-specific and newly commissioned works, as well as performance works created especially for the exhibition. Some artists work within the Museum's galleries, whilst others present their works through internet and blog projects, and across Sydney's parks and gardens. The exhibition encompasses photography, film and installation and draws upon the MCA's Collection as well as loans from within Australia and abroad. The diverse selection of artists and artworks featured reflects on the vast complexity of environmental debates today.

Key exhibition themes include a focus on Tasmania and the history of environmental activism from the 1970s in relation to logging and damming; Australian waterways including the Murray Darling, and Indigenous life on the Murray as reflected by artists working along the river from Queensland through to South Australia; the impact of mining (oil, gas, uranium) on the land and as a catalyst for environmental catastrophe; and issues of sustainability and recycling, and the role of plants in a changing ecosystem.

"This is the first major exhibition and publication devoted to the subject of Australia's contemporary environment debate in a major Australian art gallery," says MCA Senior Curator, Rachel Kent. "There have been a number of significant exhibitions within Australia and abroad that address environmental themes. However, none have tackled so many nationally-important issues at one time on this scale. We hope that by bringing together many different artists and practices for *In the Balance*, a new critical understanding of these national, state and local issues will be raised."

28 June 2010



Lauren Berkowitz *Manna* 2009 side view Indigenous and exotic food and medicinal plants
40cmH x 70Wcm x 460cm Photo: Courtesy La Trobe University Museum of Art

Exhibition highlights include Melbourne artist **Lauren Berkowitz's** installation *Sustenance* (2010), commissioned for the Museum and consisting of 250 living edible and medicinal plants, including Australian natives, succulents, European vegetables, and herbs. A visual banquet of colours and textures, it involves the broader community and local primary schools in the collection of recycled plastic bottles and the growing of plants and seedlings. These plants will be given back to schools and members of the community at the exhibition's conclusion.

Berkowitz pairs the work with a second site-specific installation *Bags* 1994 (re-made 2010). The work comprises a 12 metre-long suspended wall built out of 3,000 clean white plastic bags. It takes on the appearance of a Minimalist sculpture in monochrome, as the artist transforms an everyday disposable material into a poetic exploration of place and meaning.

Renowned photographer **Olegas Truchanas** was at the forefront of the movement to protect Lake Pedder from Tasmania's Hydro-Electric Commission (HEC) in the 1960s and 1970s. A decade later another Tasmanian photographer, **Peter Dombrovskis**, had an impact with his images of the wilderness. His photograph *Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend, Franklin River, Southwest Tasmania* became the pictorial icon of the campaign to stop the HEC damming the Franklin River, used on magazine covers, posters, how-to-vote cards and sheet music during 1982. At a time when most newspaper coverage was still black and white, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* ran the image as a full-page colour advertisement under the caption 'Could you vote for a party that will destroy this?' Federal Labor Senator, John Button, described it as the most powerful political advertisement he had ever seen. *In the Balance* presents a collection of photographs and slides by both artists as well as contemporary Tasmanian wilderness photographers, Catherine Rogers and David Stephenson.

In the last decade, artist **Dadang Christanto's** practice has focused primarily on Indonesia's social issues and political conflicts. As part of the exhibition, the artist will stage a performance on the front lawn of the MCA on Saturday 30 October. *Survivor* (2010) will see more than one hundred volunteers are joining Christanto in a two-hour silent protest performance over the catastrophic 2006 Indonesian mudslides. Covering themselves in mud, they will hold black and white archival photographs of victims from the tragic event.

Multi-disciplinary collective **theweathergroup_U** presents their latest film work exploring the controversial stand-off over the Koongara uranium deposit, adjacent to Kakadu National Park. The artists have documented the Aboriginal custodian Jeffrey Lee's struggle to assert his traditional ownership over the land. As the last member of the Djok clan, Lee has been approached with highly lucrative offers by multinational corporations who hope to extract 14,000 tonnes of uranium worth over

28 June 2010

.....

five billion dollars. Lee fears the mine would suffer the same fate as the nearby Ranger uranium mine, where allegedly more than 150 leaks, spills and license breaches have occurred since 1981.

For the exhibition, Victorian-based artist collective **The Artist as Family** is building a permaculture garden on the front lawn of St Michael's Church in Surry Hills, Sydney. *Food forest* (2010) aims to provide locally grown, readily available fruits, vegetables and nuts to the community. The collective is passionate about reducing greenhouse gas emissions created by Agribusiness and the transport of food products. The artwork also provides the opportunity for residents to learn about food production, conserving water, creating better soil using organic waste, and mapping sun and shade areas for maximum growth.

The exhibition also caters to virtual audiences. Sydney artist **Diego Bonetto** is creating a facebook campaign asking online audiences to 'Befriend a Weed'. Building on his past project The Weedy Project, the artist encourages viewers to socially engage with the city's most unloved plants.

On Saturday 9 October 2010, artist **Joni Taylor** presents *Urban Wildlife Safari* (2010) a four hour walking tour around Sydney's CBD examining how flora and fauna have been forced to adapt to the city landscape. Taylor is an Australian curator and writer with a focus on the urban environment, as well as a founding member of the international artist collective and blog (www.free-soil.org). The guided tour includes conversations with scientists, botanists and zoologists to provide a unique glimpse into the city's natural environment, how it has changed over time and how it will change further in the decade ahead. Taking on the role of urban explorers, participants can bird watch from a sky scraper, spot a weed in a crowd and meet endangered species.

Finally, Sydney-based artist collective **Makeshift** will present a mobile food cart housing a beehive of native stingless bees on the front lawn of the MCA. Viewers can watch the beehive through its transparent container and discuss food production processes with the artists. It is hoped the bees can be released to pollinate at various times. The site was chosen for its historical connection to food – it has long been an important food gathering area for Indigenous people and was the home of the city's first food store during early European settlement in Sydney.

As well as Australian artists, the exhibition also presents work by international artists whose practices reflect key exhibition thematics. American artist **Andrea Bowers** examines the impact of changing environmental conditions on First Nation people in the Arctic Circle. She presents film works documenting the lives of members of the the G'wichin tribe on the Porcupine River where rising sea levels caused by global warming are depleting the community's food sources and threatening their sustainable lifestyle. The artist and activist also showcases original protest banners from the 1989 Exxon oil spill off the Alaskan Coast under the title *Alaskans still fighting for the Earth* (2009), as well as her video performance *Nonviolence Civil Disobedience Training* (2009), in which Bowers is schooled in the art of tree sitting by renowned Californian activist John Quigley.



Andrea Bowers *Nonviolent Civil Disobedience Training - Tree Sitting Forest Defense* 2009 single-channel video with color and sound, Apple TV, climbing rope, carabiners, and Platform 33:50 minutes (looped) Courtesy the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York Image courtesy the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Suzanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles © the artist

San Francisco-based artist **Amy Franceschini** is the founder of the **Futurefarmers** art and

28 June 2010.....

design collective. The design studio operates under a strict ethos of seeking sustainable and ethical design solutions. The Collective are world-renowned in the graphic design field, having devised the iconic Twitter logo. The design arm of the collective serves as a platform to support its art projects, artists in residency program and research interests. For this exhibition, Futurefarmers presents *Sunshine Still* (2010), a new sculptural installation based on their design for a solar-power still that uses compost to create engine-ready biofuel. Inspired by backyard alcohol production in rural America during Prohibition known as 'Moonshining' and applying this Do-It-Yourself ethos to the current energy crisis, the artists aim to provide a viable energy solution and provoke discussions about renewable fuel.

In the Balance: Art for a Changing World is accompanied by a major **catalogue over approximately 240 pages** including more than 150 high quality reproduction images of exhibited and related art works. It features major text contributions by leading Australian academics, researchers, conservationists, scholars as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous historians have been commissioned.

Artists presenting work in the exhibition include: Badger Bates, Lauren Berkowitz, Diego Bonetto, Andrea Bowers, Dadang Christanto, Bob Connolly, Lorraine Connelly-Northey, Nici Cumpston, Peter Dombrowskis, Bonita Ely, Emily Floyd, Euraba Artists and Papermakers, Amy Franceschini and Futurefarmers, Jeanne Van Heeswijk and Paul Sixta, Lucas Ihlein, Lyndal Jones, Yvonne Koolmatrerie, Janet Laurence, Makeshift (Tessa Zettel and Karl Khoe), James Newitt, Mavis Ngallametta, Susan Norrie and David Mackenzie, Raquel Ormella, Cecilia Peter, Frank Petero, Catherine Rogers, David Stephenson, Joni Taylor, The Artist as Family (Patrick Jones, Meg Ulman and Zephyr Jones), theweathergroup_U, Angela Torenbeek and Olegas Truchanas.

To request a copy of the MCA 2009 exhibition program brochure contact Gabrielle Wilson on +61 (0) 429 572 869 or gabrielle.wilson@mca.com.au

Notes to editors: details of the MCA exhibition program were correct at time of issue, however the program is subject to later changes and additions.

ABOUT THE MCA

The MCA is the only institution in Australia devoted to exhibiting and collecting contemporary art. It is renowned for making art accessible and engaging for a broad spectrum of public audiences through stimulating exhibitions, educational programs and special events. The MCA was voted as Sydney's favourite museum in 2007 by an independent poll conducted by the Sydney Chamber of Commerce. In 2009, it was named winner of the Lord Mayor's Sustainability Award, as well as the winner of the Culture and Creative Services category for the second consecutive year at the City of Sydney Business Awards.

To request a copy of the MCA 2010 exhibition program brochure please contact MCA Public Relations Manager Gabrielle Wilson on +61 (0) 429 572 869 or gabrielle.wilson@mca.com.au