PERCEPTIVE POWER

PROJECT ROOMS 1 & 2
24 APRIL - 16 MAY
Perceiving Power

Perception Power opens up challenging creative territory. It unpacks the complex exchanges between artists and designers and their industry partners. Some of the artists and designers featured in this exhibition have undertaken their projects without the consent of the organisations that are the subject of their critique. Others have been formally commissioned by industry to explore issues related to energy consumption in the form of artistic projects, the aims of which are ultimately to raise awareness of the potential for change. The exhibition’s title – Perceptive Power – highlights areas of tension in these relationships and raises questions about where authority and influence may lie in any creative act or formalised collaboration, particularly those with potentially conflicting agendas. The exhibition’s title also references electrical power and its equally complex position in the broader discussion around environmental sustainability. Finally, the idea of ‘perceiving power’ reveals the often hidden impact of environmental pollution and degradation, with many of the works attempting to materialize these sometimes unseen dynamics.

Perceive Power was initially proposed by Carbon Arts director, Jodi Newcombe, in the context of the concurrent ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2015 festival of arts and ideas, which aims to communicate the challenges and opportunities arising from climate change. An industry partner with RMIT’s Centre for Art, Society and Transformation, Carbon Arts is featured in the exhibition as a producer and researcher of environmentally-engaged public art.

As curators, we have commissioned designers Tin & Ed to work with us on producing an exhibition environment for Perceptive Power that reflects upon these ideas and distills the themes of the show. They have responded to our brief with the idea of using our store of existing exhibition materials – an archive of Design Hub’s past programs – that challenges Design Hub, and our visitors, to be aware of how we critically use resources within the context of temporal, and regularly wasteful, exhibition design.

As a result, a palette of materials comprising acrylic sheet, USB board, plywood, concrete, plastic and others has been used to form the surfaces of new exhibition labels. Tin & Ed’s ‘bumper sticker’ style treatment of the exhibition title plays into the environmental movement’s use of slogans and snappy catch phrases as a way to disseminate provocative messages and incite a critical mass of people behind the push for change.

Within the context of Design Hub – a place for the making, exhibition and critique of design – Perceptive Power reflects a sense of agency within the research community to place design within the social and political spectrum and to crack open the issues raised by the exhibition for debate. We encourage you to join us for a series of lunchtime conversations that address the works within the show and discuss ways in which we – individually and collectively – can act upon the urgent issues of climate change.

Kate Rhodes, Fleur Watson, Curators, RMIT Design Hub
Nella Themelios, Acting Curator, RMIT Design Hub
Perceptive Power: Cultural Perspectives on a Changing World

Perceptive Power examines the complex and sometimes uneasy relationship between the artist and industry within the context of what is described as the ‘third industrial revolution’. Coined by economist and social theorist, Jeremy Rifkin, in his 2011 book of the same name, this term describes a state of affairs driven by the convergence of new communication technologies with distributed and renewable energy production, paving the way for a sustainable, circular and collaborative economy. What role does the artist play in this societal transformation?

Melbourne-based artists Ash Keating and Keith Deverell examine new energy regimes in large-scale video installations. Distributed, local power generation at Melbourne Airport is the subject of Deverell’s TriGen, a work that seeks a nuanced appreciation of the merits of this low-carbon solution. In Keating’s Continuum (Parts One and Two) Victorian solar and wind farms take on a human dimension, at times playful and poetic, creating a song of timeless hope about humanity’s future.

Sydney-based artists Joyce Hinterding and David Haines, and Paris-based collective HeHe (Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen) seek to amplify and reveal the shortcomings of existing fossil-fuel based regimes, such as individualistic car cultures (Toy Emissions, HeHe), consumerism and excessive waste (Nuage Vert, HeHe) and the highly inefficient transportation of centralised energy production (Encounter with the Halo Field, Haines and Hinterding).

With a focus on video and sound art, Perceptive Power also articulates the unique ability of these mediums to combine data representation and narrative as new ways of seeing and questioning our relationship with the invisible forces that power our economy. In Building Run Deverell combines computer programming and documentary form to translate data into visual narrative, as energy consumption becomes human exertion; in TriGen carbon emissions are discarded as dangerous airport luggage. HeHe, Keating and Haines & Hinterding literally ‘perform’ our industrial infrastructure, revealing hidden realities and projecting possible futures. In these instances video art serves to interpret a performance, extending its life and reach.

Throughout the exhibition, we are reminded of how rapidly our perceptions of industrial infrastructure and iconography change, influenced by political manoeuvring or by a romantic nostalgia. Nuage Vert [Green Cloud] plays with the aesthetics of the smokestack, once the symbol of progress for an industrial revolution, now an icon for pollution. HeHe’s use of the colour green also offers a double meaning – a synthetic fluorescent toxicity or the hope of a grassroots political movement. Deverell’s Natural State ponders the beauty of a natural landscape altered. Here a hydroelectric dam with its attractive heritage architecture is presented as a tranquil face that defies the memory of its drowned ecology. Finally, Continuum (Part One) draws playfully on conflicting modern views about wind farms – blight on the landscape or symbol of hope in the fight against climate change?

Spanning industry-funded public art that lauds technological progress, to activist performances questioning the status quo, the work in Perceptive Power seeks to shift our perspective, enhance our powers of perception and catalyse action. But do these different relationships between artists and their commercial partners affect the ability of these works to bring about change? At what point does an artwork become a work of design shaped by a particular agenda and how much does this distinction actually matter?

Whether by design or through heightened observation, the artists in this exhibition focus our gaze on the industrial promises of both the past and the future, challenging our perceptions of what constitutes beauty, horror, despair and hope. From the celebratory to the critical, these voices offer the nuanced perspectives essential to both understanding and facing the current ecological crisis.

Jodi Newcombe, Perceptive Power Co-curator and Director, Carbon Arts Researcher at RMIT’s Centre for Art Society and Transformation (CAST)
Due to efficient usage of natural gas, this new system will reduce Melbourne Airport’s carbon emissions by over 60,000 tonnes or approximately 30 per cent reduction per annum.

—

2. Nuage Vert (Ivry-sur-Seine)

Hello (Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen)  
2011  
1 minute looped  

“A city scale light installation onto the ultimate icon of industrial pollution, alerts the public, generates discussion and can persuade people to change patterns of consumption.” Hello

Between 18:30 and 22:30 November 27, 2010 – in below freezing temperatures – a large green halo appeared onto the emissions from a huge chimney incinerator in Ivry-sur-Seine, outside Paris.

Gigantic smokestacks at the edge of Paris, endlessly puffing their clouds into the skies of Saint-Ouen and Ivry-sur-Seine, give the impression of a hub of industrial activity. But these particular sites do not produce anything new. As newly refurbished incinerators they exist only to burn the excesses of our luxurious waste.

Since we don’t know the precise nature of the technological processes inside the incinerator, only the cloud lets us imagine the inside of the furnaces. And so it is onto the cloud we project our worries and fears. The motivation behind Nuage Vert [Green Cloud], is to give form to these emissions cloud and its significations, to frame its amorphous shape by capturing and drawing its outline in real time.

Nuage Vert is based on the idea that the urban fabric can embody an ecological project, materialising environmental issues so that they become a subject within our collective daily lives. Its material, collective and aesthetic dimension distinguishes it from other approaches.

Nuage Vert is a social process as much as a material exploration. For the artists, the work exists in a dialogue with the different layers of perception of all those implicated in the smokestack, from politicians to environmental organisations and the general public. The intention is not for the outcome to be positive, negative, didactic or educational, but rather to be a reflection of the artists’ efforts in the eyes of everyone involved.

“Nuage Vert is a play on energy: the energy we invest, the energy we hope to save. Our ideal is that all of these activities, this energy, should lead to the impossible dream that the whole of Saint-Ouen, and the Paris region, will for a brief moment in time consider waste as a collective resource.” Hello

—

3. Continuum Part One

Ash Keating  
2013/14  
2 minutes, 25 seconds looped  

Ash Keating’s video works Continuum (Parts One and Two) bestow upon us a meditative experience, whereby the passage of time is gently brought to the fore through the presence of people in significant cultural, historic and scientific places of Australia. Across two videos, each playing independently of one another on a loop, Continuum questions humankind’s relish to collectively and wholeheartedly acknowledge its role in climate change by focusing on solar and wind farms – landscapes that are still so foreign an idea to many that they are the cause of ongoing dispute. Advancements in technology allow us to harvest renewable energy in ways that minimise the effects of global warming via greenhouse gasses most commonly associated with the burning of fossil fuels and the clearing of forests. Yet our reliance upon these resources as primary commodities means that we disregard the welfare of future generations.

Continuum (Part One) is a continuous motion performance of three human figures replicating the movement of three wind turbines in Waubra, north west of Ballarat.
5. EurEco
Ash Keating
2009–2015
Flag
“The death of the industrial revolution and the awakening of the green revolution.”
Ash Keating

In EurEco, Ash Keating redesigns the Eureka flag from blue to green. A simple gesture, it symbolises a nascent people’s revolution to rise up against the government and authorities for climate rights and action on climate change – much like the events of 1856 when migrant miners protested workers rights in the goldfields.

First presented in Ballarat in 2009, several hand-sewn flags were made which were flown above historic buildings in the town dating to the period of the Eureka stockade. Keating filmed the hoisting of these flags and projected them onto the buildings.

Throughout the exhibition Carbon Arts will be inviting practitioners and researchers across the fields of art, design, urbanism and sustainability to attend Salon ‘brown bag’ lunches focused on particular topics. These salons are open to the public to participate in and will inform the ongoing research of Carbon Arts’ Director, Jodi Newcombe.

For details on the Salon program visit: www.carbonarts.org

7. Carbon Arts case study
Building Run Examined

Installation of video, photography, media documentation

Building Run is a data-driven artwork by Keith Devereux, first commissioned by Carbon Arts with the City of Sydney in 2013 as part of a joint initiative called Sensing Sydney, which sought to engage artists with environmental data through public art. Displayed in the Deutsche Bank Place building foyer during the month-long Art and About Festival, the artwork offered a unique visualisation of building energy efficiency positioned as a race.

A different runner appears on each of the five screens, representing a different building in the race. Data collected from the buildings’ management system every 15 minutes provides information on each the building’s energy consumption, and is fed into the video programming. As a building consumes more energy the associated runner on the screen (or avatar) will increase her speed and show signs of exertion. Each race depicts a full day of building occupation from 6am to 6pm, but is sped up to a performance of 20 minutes; the clock ticking fast in the right of the installation indicates the time of day. Each runner’s performance is compared to a personal best, such that more than one runner may complete the daily (and the race) triumphant to have improved their energy efficiency. Personal best is estimated using the buildings’ historical energy performance data and an algorithm that takes account of the weather and other seasonal factors.

In 2015 the artwork was redesigned for a new audience with support from the City of Melbourne. Positioned this time as an event, Building Run Melbourne took place each lunchtime in City Square as part of the Sustainable Living Festival. An MC provided a theatrical engagement with the artwork and guest commentators were invited to embellish the material, in an attempt to untangle a complex set of messages.

Through various artefacts and media documentation, Building Run Examined offers portholes to the various agendas behind the commissioning of an artwork with an environmental and public agenda. Sometimes public, sometimes private interests compete with the voice of the artist, highlighting the challenges of a creative producer and raising questions about the compatibility of artistic integrity and ‘art with intent’.

“Building Run Melbourne inspired me to finally request a green audit of the facility that I manage. I was able to ask about whether we could average out our temperature requests across the building and how to stop the building from using unnecessary energy to cool and warm itself to a particular temperature across the day. I learnt a lot from our audit person too.”
— Anonymous audience member

“In terms of a vehicle for having conversations and bringing different people together to explore ideas from different perspectives, Building Run was really unique and exciting.”
— Esther Bayler, City of Sydney

8. Joyce Hinterding and David Haines
Encounter with the Halo Field
2009–2015
5 minutes

Encounter with the Halo Field is a video and sound work based on high voltage electromagnetic field experiments in the artists’ local environment.

Seeking to understand the strength of the electricity leaking from overhead power lines that weave through the Blue Mountains in NSW, the artists have been exploring ways of rendering this invisible terrain through sound and light. Two fluorescent light tubes scavenge electricity directly from the air and light up intermittently in an experiment that earths the high voltage field through the bearer’s body.

Two custom-built loop antennae that pick up very low frequency (VLF) radio waves capture the sound of the electromagnetic field created by the high voltage power lines. The sound pulses as the artist walks, reflecting the directionality of these waves and the antennae themselves. A ringing sound joins the symphony. It is the voice of a Route Surveillance Radar for Sydney Airport positioned at Mt Boyce; its song only detectable through the electromagnetic field it creates.

For such a volatile environment, the landscape that hags these power lines is surprisingly verdant, overgrown and full of wildlife. Its electromagnetic field experiments in the artists’ local environment.

The artists use this same equipment to ‘listen’ to electricity inside and outside of buildings, and in different countries, creating sound ecologies for our energy-intensive society. The artists also use the VLF antennae to give voice to solar flares and the background sound of the Milky Way phenomenon so seemingly distant, but clearly more closely connected to our existence than we realise.
9. Natural State
Keith Deverell
2013
7 Channel HD Video and sound

Natural State is a video work that traces a line through the Hydro Electric System in the heart of Tasmania. The work, presented as seven fixed camera position video images, explores the borders between the natural and developed world. Presented as a spatial installation it ponders the realities that lie behind the traditional landscape image, the type that adorns the postcard and the tourist brochure. Each location was filmed from a viewpoint that was signposted for tourists. With this in mind, Natural State contemplates the perceived reality of a landscape. Lake St Claire is man-made, but does this make it wholly un-natural? How do we consider the environment in relation to our needs as humans? Conversely, how do we consider our needs in relation to the needs of the environment that surrounds us?

“Wilderness ... is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history ... as we gaze into the mirror it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires.”
William Cronon, The Trouble with Wilderness, 1995

10. Toy Emissions (My friends all drive Porsches)
HeHe (Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen)
2007
3 minutes, 8 seconds

For this piece HeHe navigated a toy car, specifically a miniature radio controlled Porsche Cayenne, through the streets of New York. The toy car was manipulated to emit coloured smoke clouds. Toy Emissions was first performed in Brooklyn, because the artists were a little nervous about getting arrested. When it seemed to go well, they moved to Manhattan.

In Toy Emissions, HeHe respond to the continuous hum of traffic in New York and the everyday spectacle of the enormous 4x4 vehicles, of which the Porsche Cayenne appeared to be the most prominent (and emblematic) species. The cheeky and daring manoeuvres of the toy car defy its diminutive position and become symbolic of the extreme individuality of car ownership.

“Our question was how to represent something so visible, so big, so obvious, and so omnipresent in a different light? Strangely, by making it smaller, it became more visible.”
HeHe
Keith Deverell
keithdeverell.net

Jersey born, Melbourne based artist Keith Deverell has exhibited extensively in Australia and internationally. His practice focuses on the documentation and representation of place with an emphasis on the destabilisation of documentary forms within the field of video art. Using the metaphor of the horizon line, his practice considers the inherent problematic of truth, and the embedded politics of place. Deverell is currently undertaking a PhD through the School of Art at RMIT University.

David Haines and Joyce Hinterding
haineshinterding.net

Australian artists David Haines and Joyce Hinterding live and work in the Blue Mountains, NSW. Their collaborative practice incorporates experimental and traditional media to investigate Hinterding’s fascination with energetic forces and Haines’ attraction to the intersection of hallucination and the environment. Both artists are captivated by the unseen energies that surround us and seek to reveal them to audiences through work that draws upon aspects of science, the occult and philosophy. The artists work across a range of media and processes, including sound, installation, moving image, performance, sculpture, photography and drawing. David Haines and Joyce Hinterding are represented by Sarah Cottier Gallery and are employed part time at Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney University.

Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen
hehe.org.free.fr

Founded in Paris by Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen, both graduates of the Royal College of Art in computer related design, HeHe is an artist duo whose works aim to rethink the documentary forms within the field of video art, and collaborate with individuals from a diverse range of disciplines and interests. Their work has been exhibited widely throughout the globe. Nuage Vert, in particular, was awarded several international prizes. This is the first time they have exhibited in Australia.

Ash Keating

Melbourne-born artist Ash Keating has exhibited extensively in galleries and created numerous large-scale, site-responsive art projects in Australia and internationally since 2004. Working across a conceptual, site-responsive and often collaborative art practice that incorporates painting, sculpture, installation, video and performance, Ash Keating has raised a wide range of social and environmental issues within his many projects and artworks, such as systems of production and consumption, climate change, urban sprawl and gentrification, and waste and sustainability. Frequently working beyond the gallery, and often harnessing community narrative and energy, Keating’s work also draws upon myth, ritual and ceremony.

Building Run Examined, 2013–2015

Image: Josh Hill Photography
Video artwork: Keith Deverell
Special thanks to Nikki Walkerden and Sarah Last.

Originaly commissioned by Douglas Kahn and Sarah Last as a part of a publishing collaboration between Australian Network for Art and Technology’s (ANAT) Embracing Sound Program and Art Monthly Australia. It was released on a complementary DVD with the Art Monthly Australia ‘Sound’ issue 229 November 2009. Reshot and remixed in 2015. This project was assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. Special thanks to Nikki Walkerden and Sarah Last.
Acknowledgements

Perceptive Power at RMIT Design Hub
24 April – 16 May, 2015
Curated by Jodi Newcombe of Carbon Arts within CAST (RMIT University Centre for Art, Society and Transformation).
Co-curated for RMIT Design Hub by Kate Rhodes and Fleur Watson.

Graphic Design by Tin & Ed.
Creative Production: Nella Themelios.
Exhibition Technician: Erik North.
Exhibition Assistants: Kate Riggs, Audrey Thomas-Hayes.
Technical Assistants: Tim McLeod, Marcin Wojcik, Robert Jordan, Andrew Long, Gavin Bell, Sam Fagan.

Presented as part of ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2015.
ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2015 is a festival of climate change related arts and ideas featuring curated exhibitions alongside a series of keynote lectures and public forums featuring local and international guests.
ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2015 will inform, engage and inspire, communicating both the challenges and opportunities arising from climate change.
For more information: www.climarte.org www.artclimatechange.org.

Thank you

RMIT’s Centre for Art Society and Transformation, Queensland University of Technology for financial support to the exhibition through Jodi Newcombe’s PhD in the School of Design, Melbourne Airport for their support in bringing TriGen to Design Hub in advance of its official installation at the airport, BOOM Studios, Design Hub Volunteers and all the exhibitors.

RMIT Design Hub
Opening hours:
Tuesday–Friday, 11am–6pm
Saturday, 12pm–5pm
Closed Sunday, Monday and Public Holidays
Admission is free

RMIT Design Archives
By Appointment
The RMIT Design Archives is located on the western side of the forecourt.
Contact the Archives to make an appointment to view the collection: rmitdesignarchives@rmit.edu.au

Location
Corner Victoria and Swanston Streets,
Carlton, 3053
hello.designhub@rmit.edu.au
www.designhub.rmit.edu.au

Disclaimer

RMIT University has made every effort to trace copyright holders and provide correct crediting and acknowledgements in consultation with the providers of the exhibition.

1. TriGen
Keith Deverell
2015
10 minutes, 51 seconds

2. Nuage Vert (Ivry-sur-Seine)
Heike (Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen)
2011
1 minute looped

3. Continuum Part One
Ash Keating
2013/14
2 minutes, 25 seconds looped

4. Continuum Part Two
Ash Keating
2013/14
6 minutes, 45 seconds looped

5. EurEco
Ash Keating
2009–2015
Flag

6. Carbon Arts In-residence Studio and Meeting Space

7. Carbon Arts case study Building Run Examined
Installation of video, photography, media documentation

8. Joyce Hinterding and David Haines Encounter with the Halo Field
2009-2015
5 minutes

9. Natural State
Keith Deverell
2013
7 Channel HD Video and sound

10. Toy Emissions (My friends all drive Porsches)
Heike (Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen)
2007
3 minutes, 8 seconds

1. TriGen
Keith Deverell
2015
10 minutes, 51 seconds

2. Nuage Vert (Ivry-sur-Seine)
Heike (Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen)
2011
1 minute looped

3. Continuum Part One
Ash Keating
2013/14
2 minutes, 25 seconds looped

4. Continuum Part Two
Ash Keating
2013/14
6 minutes, 45 seconds looped

5. EurEco
Ash Keating
2009–2015
Flag