

## **Over Many Horizons**

Artists are deeply engaged in understanding the ecology of Earth and producing works that express both their understanding of environmental issues and their emotional responses to it. Artists hope to generate the same emotional response in people who view and consider their works, and thereby are powerful forces of change by stimulating conversation, action, shifts in perspective, and deepened connections between people and the environment.

Scientists seek to understand the ecology of Earth, and the causes and impacts of environmental stressors upon the Earth's ecology.

The scientist sees as an objective observer, adhering to a logical process of enquiry (the scientific method), and building upon a greater body of work. The results of scientific observation and experimentation are communicated to the community of peers where they are scrutinised and further tested prior to their acceptance or rejection. The work of a scientist continues with the communication of this new understanding to the wider, non-specialist community.

We hope the results of our research will develop not only the body of scientific understanding, but also enlarge your awareness and be used by governments and organisations to develop solutions.

The scientific and artistic endeavours are similar. They involve research and experimentation, the refinement of specialist skills over many years, and a passion to communicate. Art and science change perceptions, produce emotional responses, force us to question ourselves and our places in nature, and stimulate discussions and debate.

Many of Keith Armstrong's works represent a collaboration of art and science, especially ecology. He has created works that have involved seasonal changes, the migrations of flying foxes and their links to environmental changes in vegetation, water, and marine life. Importantly, Keith has also contributed, via his research and published written works, to different ways of thinking about the nature of understanding, ecology, humanity's links to Earth's ecology, and the roles of art and science. He is profoundly influenced by the human cultural crisis he sees as the root cause of today's environmental crisis.

I've spent time with Keith over the past 12 months discussing ideas about the places of art and science in responding to and interpreting the environmental

crisis, and the possible collaborations between artists and scientists, including ourselves. We snorkeled in Sydney Harbour, along with some other colleagues, and he kindly said that this experience helped inform his creation of the Deep Ecology work, which is premiering in this exhibition.

The works presented here in Over Many Horizons challenge us to question our connection to the environment and the possible future form of that connection. The work Seasonal Horizon 2 changes not only with seasonal changes in vision and sounds, it also changes with the presence of people in the space, reminding us of how the natural environment, while constantly changing, is influenced by us, and the greatest demonstration of that and a recurring theme in Keith's work is human-induced climate change.

Inter State invites us to look more closely and understand environmental relationships. This is a difficult work for me because it asks me to overcome my apprehension about the periodic table that was planted in me as a first-year undergraduate biologist by a very dull and intimidating experience of chemistry. On the other hand the incorporation of the microfiche reader softens the blow because it reminds me of many happy hours I spent in the university library searching through the microfiche catalogue for texts and other references, with the promise of a discovery. The entire work encourages us to consider the scientific taxonomy of elements structured in the familiar form of the periodic table (as a symbol for the structuring of scientific knowledge) against a classification system based upon relationships, and to move more slowly and purposefully in our exploration of them.

When so much of environmental imagery explodes at us via enriched and vivid images of landscapes, often to the point of artificiality and devoid of humans, Keith collects us in a cramped dark space, isolating us from the environment in spaces where natural materials are largely absent and enclosed by haunting soundscapes, where we end up considering what is not in there, or what we have lost or might lose, as much as we consider the work on display.

The name of the Deep Ecology Horizon 1 work, combined with the immersion in inky blackness and the view of a dark viscous ocean, reminds us of the devastating oil spill unleashed by the Deep Water Horizon tragedy, with the creature we view being the sole survivor or a mutant form that has evolved in the changed environment.

The creature is reminiscent of a species of deep water life form that we think we have seen but can't quite name. It's like a memory of something or some experience long forgotten.

The creature's movements, and the lighting emanating from it, are sensuous and the work leaves us wondering whether we would prefer to watch this constructed creature, and have this manufactured experience, rather than a natural experience.

Shifting Dust creates a scientist's eye-view of a specimen in a petri dish undergoing a time-lapsed accelerated life cycle through birth, development, and eventual dissolution.

The work is compelling because the objectivity and remoteness of the experience that Keith has created by the Petri-dish perspective and immersion in darkness conflicts with an emotional response to the human in the work, her beauty, struggling movements and eventual demise.

The works exhibited in Keith Armstrong's Over Many Horizons are stimulating, engaging, thoughtful, and under-pinned by a commitment to a different and more sustainable future. On behalf of everyone here tonight, and the people who will visit Over Many Horizons in the coming weeks, I'd like to congratulate Keith on assembling these works and express our gratitude for and admiration of these works and of his career as an artist who has been compelled to explore our ecological interactions with one another and with the Earth.

Professor William Gladstone

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