

Two Shows About Weather - and Dangerous Water

The Trouble With the Weather: a southern response

See: <http://www.weathertrouble.net/>

UTS Gallery

July 4 – August 3

Is it Getting Hotter in Here?

At the Vanishing Point, Newtown

June 21-July 15

Written by Ann Finegan

Images courtesy of the Artists: Elizabeth Day, *Imprint* & Thomas Hungerford, *At the Vanishing Point*.

Beware the water. It might be bottled but it's angry red and if you come too close within its earshot it will send out angry growls - your own voice remodulated at death metal frequency. A comment on the state of our interventions on the planet, part mad scientist's experiment, part environmentalist's *Rocky Horror Show*, Thomas Hungerford's installation wields the microphone of karaoke against the crowd. Conversation becomes bad vibrations, the water is poisoned, sickly, even monstrous, sending sparks through the liquid in that dangerous sense of sparking out. There's not a chance of cellular activity sparking into life - Frankenstein-like. Or the biochemistry of a planet's awakening. Instead, death hangs in the air like spasming out.

Welcome to two shows with innocuous titles about the weather. Hungerford's, at 'At the Vanishing Point', exudes the prickly feeling that it's *Getting Hotter in Here*. A few kilometers down the road at UTS is *The Trouble with the Weather: a southern response*. Next to Jonathon Jones and Jim Vivieaere's *NICE*, a row of melting monoliths - simply large vertical rectangles of ice in an Easter Island configuration - Liz Day's carpet square of living grass, not astroturf, is suffering from the popular past-time of playing burn out with four wheel drives, judging from the tire tracks. On a video screen her eighty-year-old Dad rigs up some wheels for a pallet to move a water tank from a paddock to more critical use closer to the house in *From A to B*. Through the tone of a quiet vernacular, this "something strange that is happening to the weather" is simply noticed or acknowledged in small practical ways.

Peter Bennett's photographs Pacific islands residents sleeping on the runway at Tuvalu at night. Ironically the cool flat road which puts jets and more greenhouse CO₂ in the air gets more breeze than a house.

Other responses were more deadpan. Back down the road at 'At the Vanishing Point' Daniel Kotja summed up the carbon chemistry of burning fossil fuels with a

simple arrow of rows of light bulbs - pointing up. 'Up there' is where the effect of these light bulbs is worked out, Looney Tunes style, like a giant arrow placed in space by Martin the Martian. It would be humorous, except we live here.

Jenny Brown, also at Vanishing Point, goes anti-art with *Tied, Mayday 2006*, documentation of an absurd and futile performance that doesn't pretend to be anything other than what it is - a group of climate refugees from the Mount Druitt Pacific Island Action Network aboard the indigenous boat *Tribal Warrior* throwing ice-blocks into the sea at Sydney Cove in protest against rising sea levels and loss of their islands from melting ice caps. Of course, with circular logic the ice-cubes are made through refrigeration, standing in as synecdoche for all technologies of electricity, which, like Daniel Kotja's light globes, are indirectly responsible for heating the globe.

Back at UTS, Dani Marti has made a giant pile of pool noodles (foam spaghetti), hanging round unused due to water restrictions, which has left suburban swimming pools dry (*Off My Noodle*). They're installed with the melting ice-monoliths to one side, and Liz Day's wrecked grass on the other, simultaneously participating in the big cars and swimming pool conversation of rampant consumerism. The big carbon costs, as the Saturday Herald front pages recently reminded, comes from overspending and the energy consumed in costs of production. Material remainders of disuse and misuse are therefore enough to trigger connections between global warming and changing patterns in the weather.

The Trouble With the Weather is subtle. Major electronics artists Hinterding and Haines turn their backs on a practice largely charged with electrostatic and ghost of the electronic underside. They go back to painting and drawing: Haines to a modernist reflection on the sun in its nimbus of solar flares, in *Hydrogen Alpha 002*; Hinterding becoming a scribe to Reich's energy theories, testing his ideas in a series of ink illustrations, *Plan for Cloudbuster*. The message here is go back to the arts of thinking and reflection; open a space for research. Zina Kaye constructs *The Fairyhood Calculator*, a counterintuitive prototype machine that appears to react positively to our shadows, turning us all into negative suns with the power to light up the universe. Curators Maria Miranda and Norie Neumark (Jacqueline Bosscher also co-curated) work with the magic of no-thing at all, capturing samples of human breath, absurdly through asking volunteers to breathe into a microphone, though one sample apparently fills a large glass box. Are we to interpret their research in *Talking About the Weather* as an oblique commentary on the fact that we are all part of the system of the weather in our each and every breath?

Curiously Hungerford had also connected breath, or the breath that goes bad when pushed through the electricity-facilitated amplifications of the microphone, with having an (adverse) effect on the weather.