

Architecture Makes Us: Cinematic Visions of Sonia Leber and David Chesworth

Education Resource



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ccp.



A Centre for Contemporary Photography touring exhibition. Curators: Naomi Cass, Pippa Milne and Madé Spencer-Castle. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body. The publication *Architecture Makes Us* has been supported by the Gordon Darling Foundation.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource has been created for use by teachers and students to engage with artworks and themes in the exhibition *Architecture Maeks Us: The Cinematic Visions of Sonia Leber and David Chesworth* at Griffith University Art Museum. The exhibition provides engaging cross curriculum connections for units of study relating to colonial histories, sustainable futures, political and social systems, place and identity in The Arts, Social Sciences and beyond. This resource can be utilised by school groups visiting the exhibition or to assist with learning experiences in the classroom.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Architecture Makes Us is a major mid-career survey of the cinematic video works of Australian artists Sonia Leber and David Chesworth.

Architecture Makes Us brings together six major video works by Sonia Leber and David Chesworth, exploring craggy geographies, territorialisation, surveillance, exhausted systems and future philosophies. In this mid-career survey commissioned by Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, Leber and Chesworth offer a rich exploration of the way society is impacted by the geographical, technological and architectural influences that surround us. Examining structures both physical and invisible, these works point towards the complex architecture of our world.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Sonia Leber and David Chesworth are known for their distinctive, highly-detailed video works that emerge from the real, but exist significantly in the realm of the imaginary. Developed through expansive research in places undergoing social change, their works are speculative and archaeological, responding to architectural, social, and technological settings.

Leber and Chesworth have been collaborating since 1996, and have been shown in key international exhibitions including the 56th Biennale of Venice (2015), the 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014); and a parallel exhibition as part of the 5th Moscow Biennale (2013).

KEY THEMES

Future philosophies	Time
Territory	Geography
Architectural sites	Politics
Utopia	Dystopia
Surveillance	Social change
Physical & invisible structures	Technology

KEY CONCEPTS

How societies are shaped by geographical, technological and architectural influences.

The physical and conceptual architecture of our world.

Human efforts to define territory.



Image: Sonia Leber & David Chesworth, *Universal Power House*, 2017.
Installation view of HD video and electric model. Model fabrication
Matty Fuller. Courtesy the artists.
Commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney.

FOCUS ARTWORK

Geography Becomes Territory Becomes, 2018
8-channel HD video installation, non-sync playback
14:00 minutes

Geography Becomes Territory Becomes was filmed around the 18th century island fortress of Suomenlinna in Finland. Built up of violently exploded rock, and emerging from the chaotic earth, this architecture of heavy fortifications demarcates the original ownership of territory: the stronghold.

RESPONDING

How can *Geography Becomes Territory Becomes* be interpreted in a contemporary Australian context? Consider current political debates in Australia regarding Asylum seekers and the government's border control policies. Do you think this artwork could be read differently within a different cultural context? Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.

The Suomenlinna fortress was constructed using rock mined from the land on which it stands. As you can see, after 300 years, nature is reclaiming the structure, blending it back into the landscape. Write a personal reflection about the significance of this slow transformation.

This video artwork anthropomorphizes the Suomenlinna fortress. Imagine you are the fortress and write a short story or poem about what you have witnessed in the years since your construction. You could focus on the long trail of time or on one particular occurrence.

MAKING

Design and construct a small fort structure using clay. Collect a variety of natural items from around your school and use them to decorate the built structure. Once you have completed your 'fort', place it in the natural environment and document using photography.



Image: Sonia Leber & David Chesworth, *Geography Becomes Territory Becomes*, 2018.
Multi-channel HD video installation (video still). Courtesy the artists.
This project has been supported by an Australia Council funded residency at

FOCUS ARTWORK

Universal Power House: In The Near Future, 2017, HD video, stereo audio 12:30 minutes. Filming, editing and sound design: Sonia Leber and David Chestworth, Music: Mino Peric with David Chestworth, Performers: Maria White, Kevin Ng, Alicia Dulnuan-Demou, Ebube Uba and Harriet Gillies

Universal Power House: Electric Model, 2017, Acrylic, wood, programmed lighting. Fabricator: Matty Fuler, Original Architect: David Liddy

Universal Power House: Research Cabinet, 2017, Objects from the Universal power House, Sydney

The Universal Power House project emerges from the worldwide ambitions of the Universal Power World Society, that in the 1970s planned to use its Australian house as a base to uplift future generations to a higher level of global consciousness and concern.

Perched atop Mt Universe in Campbelltown, Sydney, the planet-like design of the house embodies the proposition that, in the future, new Universal Power Men and Women would be guided by the fundamental Universal Power Laws that 'regulate all of nature, planets, galaxies, and the whole universe'.

RESPONDING

Identify the three elements that come together to make up the *Universal Power House* installation artwork. Write down the techniques and materials used to create each individual element in your visual diary. Discuss with a classmate how you think these three parts work together to communicate the artists' intended meaning.

Watch *Universal Power House: In The Near Future*, identify the visual references used by the artists and discuss their significance with the class. Consider the performers, locations, objects and structures featured in the video.

Analise how Leber and Chesworth have utilised humor in *Universal Power House: In The Near Future*? How does the use of humor by the artists enhance the viewers experience of the artwork? Write a short paragraph justifying your analysis.

MAKING

Leber and Chesworth were commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre to produce a work in response to the neighborhood surrounding the gallery. They came across the 'Universal Power House' while searching for inspiration on Google Maps. Use google maps to search for your school or your family home, print the satellite image and use it as the basis for a mixed media artwork. You could draw, paint or collage onto the image or cut and reconstruct it into a 3D structure.

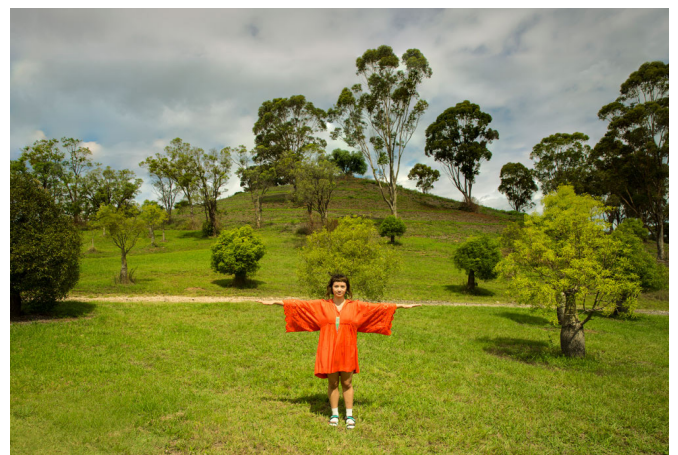


Image: Sonia Leber & David Chesworth, *Universal Power House: In the Near Future*, 2017, Single channel HD video, 12:30min. Video still. Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney.

FOCUS ARTWORK

Myriad Falls, 2017, Single Channel HD video, stereo audio 7:00 minutes

In *Myriad Falls*, our sense of time is disrupted via the mechanics of time-keeping, cinematic time, and natural forces. A circular machine, designed to activate an array of self-winding wristwatches, stands in for the complex arm movements of watch-wearers. Under a pressure test, we see an original scuba-diving watch, made to withstand huge underwater forces. Later, the spatial hands of a large floral clock are thwarted by the force of wind, as though winding time backwards.

RESPONDING

Watch *Myriad Falls*, how have the artists have used the medium of video to disrupt the viewers' concept of time? Discuss your thoughts with a small group of classmates.

Listen to the soundtrack of *Myriad Falls*. List the sounds you recognize in your art journal. Write a critical analysis identifying how the use of sound in the video works to generate an emotion response within the viewer.

MAKING

Taking inspiration from the circular watch winding machine featured in *Myriad Falls*, create a 'kaleidoscope' digital photo collage. Find a picture of a wristwatch online, using your chosen digital imaging app, copy the image and use repetition to create a kaleidoscope like circular pattern. Alternatively, if you do not have access to a computer, you can use traditional collage techniques, photocopying your wristwatch image and gluing your kaleidoscope pattern into your art journal.

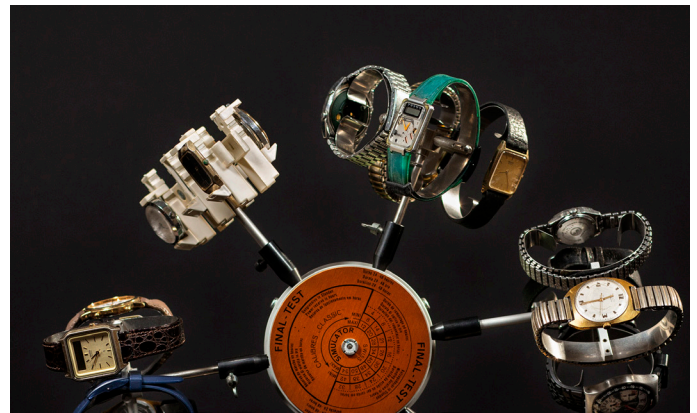


Image: Sonia Leber & David Chesworth, *Myriad Falls*, 2017. Single channel HD video, stereo audio, 7:00 minutes (video still). Courtesy the artists. This artwork has been supported by Australia Council for the Arts and Rory Macdonald, horologist.