

*Leber & Chesworth:
Cinematic Visions of
Sonia Leber and
David Chesworth*

7 March - 27 April 2019

Exhibition
Labels

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

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Architecture Makes Us brings together several key works across a ten year period by Melbourne-based Australian artists Sonia Leber (b.1959) and David Chesworth (b.1958), exploring craggy geographies, territorialisation, surveillance, exhausted systems and future philosophies.

Known for their distinctive, highly-detailed video works that emerge from real sites and spaces but exist significantly in the realm of the imaginary, Leber and Chesworth develop works through expansive research in places undergoing social change.

In this mid-career survey commissioned by the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, Leber and Chesworth offer a rich exploration of the way society is impacted by the geographical and technological influences that surround us. Examining structures both physical and invisible, these works point towards the complex architecture of our world.

These works are speculative and archaeological, responding to architectural, social, and technological settings. Sound is always a central component in their video works, reinforcing the dimensionality and architecture of site through orienting the role of the viewer.

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).

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.



Geography Becomes Territory Becomes 2018

8-channel HD video installation, non-sync playback

14:00 minutes

Courtesy of the artists

Geography Becomes Territory Becomes explores how the architecture of early fortresses radically transformed the natural world, through the territorialisation of land. In this multichannel video installation, the artists mobilize the immovable in a sensual choreography of forms that quiver, twist and flip, unleashing invisible forces and sensations.

The project 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.

Commissioned by Centre for Contemporary Photography for *Architecture Makes Us*, the project was supported by an Australia Council residency at Helsinki International Artist Program, and a NAVA Visual Arts Fellowship supported by Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund.

Zaum Tractor: Battle for the Future 2013

Archival inkjet print

Zaum Tractor: Eternal Pools 2013

Archival inkjet print

Courtesy the artists

These two photographs are taken from Sonia Leber and David Chesworth's *Zaum Tractor* project, a major 2-screen video work shot in Southern Russia and exhibited as part of the 56th Venice Biennale. *Zaum Tractor* addresses notions of freedom and collectivity—contradictory forces within contemporary Russia.

Zaum Tractor: Battle for the Future shows a once grand foyer of a theatre from the time of the Tsars. More recently it has been home to a vagrant, who secretly lived and died here. Plastic rubbish is everywhere, despite the lofty ceiling and slender Corinthian columns.

Zaum Tractor: Eternal Pools reveals a makeshift swimming pool that has been created in a ruined warehouse, refreshed by a local underground spring. The setting presents a rare social space with an underlying set of rules, self-generated by its citizens.

The project has been supported by Australia Council for the Arts; Creative Victoria; Gridchinhall Art Centre, Moscow; Art-Amnesty Project by Olga Kalashnikova; and 16thLINE Gallery, Rostov-on-Don, Russia.

Myriad Falls 2017

Single channel HD video, stereo audio

7:00 minutes

Courtesy the artists

In *Myriad Falls*, our sense of time is disrupted via the mechanics of time-keeping, cinematic time, and natural forces. Here, cinematic time is wielded with a reflexive acuity, as time is both the medium and subject of the work.

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.

Myriad Falls' soundtrack is also awash with temporal motifs. Birds sing their morning chorus. Bells toll the hours. Wind rushes as seasons pass. An alarm sounds.

The project has been supported by Australia Council for the Arts and Rory Macdonald, horologist.

Universal Power House: In the Near Future 2017

HD video, stereo audio

12:30 minutes

Filming, editing and sound design: Sonia Leber and David Chesworth Music: Mino Peric with David Chesworth Performers: Maria White, Kevin Ng, Alicia Dulnuan-Demou, Ebube Uba and Harriet Gillies

Courtesy the artists

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. In 1979, Stefan Dzwonnik, a Polish immigrant, self-published *The Universal Life Challenge*: a book that outlines his ideology for revolutionising the way that people live. Dzwonnik theorised that a vital Universal Power underpins the harmonious structure of the cosmos, from the interaction of planets and solar systems down to atomic structures.

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'.

In the film, actors recite lines from *The Universal Life Challenge* against the backdrop of local playgrounds, as well as the white domes of the Campbelltown observatory, like the "people of the future" referred to in Dzwonnik's text.

One of the lines recited from the text is *All other cities in the world should look upon Sydney as an example of true and permanent peace, a city that has never been tainted by war*, which does not reflect the reality of the violence of colonisation experienced by the Dharawal people of the Campbelltown area and the many nations of the wider Sydney region.

Universal Power House, 2017 was commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney. The artists are grateful to have received support from Anna Dzwonnik, Stefan Dzwonnik and family.

Universal Power House: Electric Model 2017

Acrylic, wood, programmed lighting

Fabricator: Matty Fuller

Original Architect: David Liddy

Courtesy the artists

Universal Power House: Research Cabinet 2017

Objects from the Universal Power House, Sydney

Courtesy the artists

Earthwork 2016

Single channel HD video, stereo audio, 5:00 minutes

Timber, acrylic

Courtesy the artists

Earthwork's camera is in constant movement, disconnected from the eye, scanning a familiar, but dystopian, suburban topography of buildings, roads, fences and gardens.

Leber and Chesworth's video recalls the viewpoint of unmanned aerial drones, driven by remote, secretive and hidden systems of data collection and control. Yet, this destroyed landscape is in fact a discarded and damaged architectural model that the artists found at a rubbish tip.

When surrounded by continuous, low-level sounds that mimic the noises of Sensitive Compartmented Information Facilities (SCIFs), or self-contained military drone sites, and forced to assume the viewpoint of a drone itself, viewers might consider our level of complicity in contemporary conflicts that are waged from afar.