

## CLIMARTE Poster Project II

### POSTER PROJECT II ESSAY COLLATERAL | Essay commissioned by academic and Ecofeminist Fiction author, PHD Dr Hayley Singer.

26 April - 18 May 2019

Testing Grounds

CLIMARTE Poster Project II commissioned ten contemporary artists to each create a unique poster provoking public dialogue and accelerating a response to the unfolding climate crisis. The artists, based on land of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung people of the Kulin nation, and on Gadigal Country of the Eora nation, have created a diverse, critical and sometimes alarming collection of responses exploring decolonization, the transition to renewables, the tragedy of the commons and the impacts of climate damage.

### OUR FUTURE DEPENDS Dr. Hayley Singer, Convenor Ecofeminist Fridays

I was born on Wurundjeri country. I live on Boon Wurrung country. I work on Wurundjeri country. These territories are my home but they are someone else's sacred land, air and waters. I am from settler colonial heritage. I cannot read and I do not speak the human or ecological languages of these territories. I do not have the skills to see Country through concrete. I live this illiteracy, but I am not often asked to confront it. At least not in the way ***Our Future***, created by Amy Spiers in conjunction with Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung linguists and Elders, asks me to confront it.

On this poster there are two untranslated phrases. When I see them I am called to recognise a connection to land, waters and air that I have never had. And then, when I read the translation – 'Our future depends on respecting country and Indigenous ways of being' – I am gripped by two kinds of anxiety, race anxiety and ecological anxiety. The structural oppressions that support and maintain racism are deeply entwined with the structures that contribute to ecological destruction and climate change. This interconnection creates a situation called environmental racism. We need to engage in serious national discussion about environmental racism, and every person privileged enough not to know, or feel, or live this prejudice or injustice needs to find the way they can come to terms with the part they play in it and work to counteract it. How to begin? Listen. Learn. Find a way to see the ground you are standing on, the waters you cherish, the air you breathe as the sacred land and air and waters of the Wurundjeri, Boon Wurrung, Djab Wurrung, Dja Dja Wurrung, Watha Wurrung, Ngarigo ... and then ask yourself, what does it mean to trash sacred ground?

Study after study, story after story, are emerging to tell of the ways marginalised communities, including Indigenous people, immigrants, the homeless, the elderly, non-white people are disproportionately burdened by the effects of pollution, are geographically exposed to more particulate matter, pesticide contamination, waste dumps, coal dust pollution, sadly the list goes on. There is also the cultural sickness that comes from settler and extractive colonisation digging up, draining and razing sacred ground. This burden, this sickness is driven by the industries that are contributing to what many people now call the Anthropocene – an era defined by the catastrophic human alteration of the planet.

The term Anthropocene tells an impossibly big story. It is a story about colonisation, industrialisation, exploitation, alienation and dispossession. It is mind numbing and depressing and who knows how to do anything significant about it when you are just trying to live your life day-in, day-out? Sam Wallman's *A Just Transition* offers an anti-dote to this debilitating line of thought – everyday people do all the work, and so, every day people can take charge in the fight for change.

Within scientific and cultural spheres the term Anthropocene is heavily contested because it problematically homogenises all people as equal in their contribution to planetary destruction. The prefix, anthropos, meaning 'Man' or human being with the suffix cene, which means 'era' or 'epoch,' mark this as a time of 'Man-' or human-induced change. Again, study after study, story after story show that those who contribute the least to the worst are suffering first and most. And of course, it is not just humans that bare the burden of planetary destruction and climate change. Australia has the highest rate of mammalian extinction; a phenomenon directly linked to environmental racism as ten percent of Australia's mammalian species have been wiped out since European colonisation.

Deforestation is a major driver of species extinction in Australia. Deforestation is, in turn, deeply entangled with Australia's animal agricultural industries, which see around 700 million animals bred for food production per year, take up roughly half the landmass of this continent and are projected to drive the clearing of three million hectares of forest in eastern Australia over the next two decades. I talk about the effects of industrial animal agriculture now because it is directly connected to the colonial settlement of the territories on which we all stand. Early colonial settlers used sheep and cows (who were themselves dispossessed from their home territories) as key colonial tools. Hooved animals roamed across sacred territories finding (as well as eating, drinking and compacting) cultivated sweet grasses, fresh water and nourishing soil. In its ecological destruction, industrial animal agriculture shows the destructiveness of the kind of settler illiteracy of Indigenous ways of being that Our Future points out. In the same vein, Eugenia Lim's *The Coal Face (ScoMo)* offers a seriously parodic critique of the quintessential white settler colonial illiterate who celebrates the work of ecological destruction and ongoing colonisation; who parties while ancient land, beautiful Country, sacred trees are cut down, dug up, hollowed out, turned over and burnt. If settler Australia does not listen to and learn the human and ecological languages of these territories the 'no future' narrative Kelly Doley's punk poster points to will arrive, and fast. But, of course, it is already here in many respects.

The 'no future' narrative can mean many things. It can refer to a queer refusal of procreative futures. It can also refer to a vision of complete ecological, social and cultural collapse. For First Nations people, mass cultural and ecological destruction has already taken place (and continues to take place) through extractive and settler colonisation. But the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung resist this 'no future' narrative. The first word on the poster, 'Yirramboi,' is a shared Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung word. It means 'tomorrow,' it also means 'our future.' The Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung are telling a story of respect, listening and learning. Perhaps they are talking about closing what Palawa woman Sarah Lynn Rees calls 'the non-Indigenous gap.' Closing the non-Indigenous gap is about recognising knowledge of Indigenous land and culture and Country as markers of success.

What if all Australians sought to close the non-Indigenous gap? What kind of change would that bring to land, culture, humans, animals, water and air? Closing the non-Indigenous gap is a kind of education imagined by Rees as a reversal of the Australian Government initiative, 'Closing the Gap.' As Rees points out, the Government initiative was set up within Western cultural frames, according to Western standards, in order that Indigenous peoples could find success as defined by Western, colonial, values. Western colonial frames and standards and values ... What have they brought to these sacred territories? (I will let you elaborate on the radically truncated list I am about to offer.) First and most obvious, Western colonial frames and values brought the fiction of Terra Nullius and with it a 'progressive' paradigm that worked to excuse any number of violent actions against water, land, humans, animals. A singularly future-oriented perspective and mentality that focuses on working towards some imagined state of future achievement. This focus works to deflect from (or deny) harms perpetrated in the present, and attempts to ignore or erase the harms of the past.

Practices of denial and erasure pave the way for the colonial progressive paradigm, which enables regimes of ecological and colonial violence to continue their work through the proposed Adani mine, rail and port project, Gina Rinehart's expanding beef empire, the proposed clearing of sacred Djab Wurrung trees and land, including talk of 'clean coal.' Each of these projects is framed as progress and development. Each of these projects perpetrates, and excuses, mind-bending cultural and ecological destruction for the sake of some future achievement. ***The ripple*** by Peter Waples-Crowe speaks of histories and layers of such destruction. In his image, Indigenous knowledge and ways of being perforate the layers of erasure and the ripple acts as a site of resistance to this erasure.

We cannot stop talking about race and the environment and (going further) the concept of environmental racism urgently needs to become a greater part of mainstream knowledge. We need to talk about it because many of us settler colonials can't or won't or don't (yet) understand the stories environmental racism tells. And we need to. We need to start to feel the real discomfort of learning like we've never been asked to learn before. Learn about your ancestral heritage – find out the role they played in the colonisation of this continent. That will start to tell you what you are responsible for. Once you have that knowledge, act on it. And, of course, there's more. Call each other out and call each other in – recognise why you cannot read or speak or (bare to) hear some stories, but not others.

## **ARTISTS & POSTERS**

**Amy Spiers** Our future

**Clare McCracken** Get There in a Canter

**Dean Cross** SPECTRE

**Eugenia Lim** The Coal Face (ScoMo)

Artist: **Jen Rae**, Illustration: **Indie Ladan** 2030 SURVIVAL GUIDE (TIP #19): FIELD DRESSING

**Julia Ciccarone** Connected?

**Kelly Doley** No Future

**Peter Waples-Crowe** (Ngarigo) The ripple

**Salote Tawale** Get Floaties

**Sam Wallman** A Just Transition

Curator: Will Foster