



FIELD LINES

IT'S UNSURPRISING THAT CAMERON ROBBINS' WORK WOULD FIND A HOME AT MONA. ROBBINS' WORK SHOWCASES AND UTILIZES UNIQUE FORCES OF NATURE, CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT; MONA ITSELF STANDS PRECARIOUSLY AT THE MERCY OF THE TASMANIAN SEAS AND GROUNDS. ROBBINS CREATES STRUCTURAL PIECES, MACHINES, WIND DRAWINGS, OCEAN-POWERED MACHINATIONS AND SOUND ART THAT REACT AND CAPTURE THE CHANGING MOODS OF WEATHER, LAND AND SEA. HIS PIECE *THE SEA WAILING*, FOR INSTANCE, IS AN OCEAN TIDE-POWERED ORGAN IN THE CLIFFS OF ELLISTON, SOUTH AUSTRALIA; A PIECE THAT RESPONDS TO A BLOODY MASSACRE OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE THAT OCCURRED THERE IN THE 1840S. THE SOUND RECORDED IS HAUNTING.

Robbins' *Field Lines* exhibition is a multi-faceted, media-varied exhibition of illustration, video, photography, installation and sculpture that are direct responses and interpretations of Victorian and Tasmanian wind and weather; indeed, several of the pieces are specifically MONA-inspired. Robbins talks about how the project came to light (and wind, and rain...)

"*Tide Line* responds and draws to the tides in the Derwent. I wanted to look at actual sea levels, but for a four-month show, the tides are more exciting," he explains. "I started my weather-drawing works in 1990 in a tidal boatshed, and wanted to bring this dynamic into the museum. So this massive instrument starts with a fourteen-metre long balance arm and seven-metre hydraulic system transcribing the tidal movements from river level up into the Museum level. It draws on a huge 3.2 metre diameter drum which revolves once every Lunar month - about thirty days."

As well as his varied mediums, Robbins uses music and instrumentation (he plays clarinet and bass clarinet himself) to enhance and act in tandem to the works themselves. He talks about how something that can be easily planned and rehearsed - like music - comes into contact with his other works, that are often at the mercy of unpredictable forces.

"In [my piece] *Sonic Wind Section*, I amplified the sounds of the wind-drawing instrument as it

responded to the winds and brought the energy indoors. With two other musicians, Jon Tarry and Peter Knight, we improvised compositions and soundscapes to this rhythm. In January, the sea breeze in Hobart arrives each day around 1pm, so we played to this. It's difficult scheduling this for a festival as I didn't really know when the wind would come. But we created six separate performances, and it was a great success. You can hear one recording in the Tunnel at Mona now, and see the drawing created during that performance."

"For the *Field Lines* opening, I have a different plan - we have hired The Hoodangers - a high-energy New Orleans improv/traditional jazz group - and I will join them on clarinet for an old-school, ceremonial walk through of the exhibition, and we will interact with some of the works on the way."

It is inevitable that questions of "agenda" or "message" would come to pass in regards to climate change, and how very dangerous the effects of it are becoming in the world, but Robbins maintains that his only dedication is to the art, beauty and intrigue of the world around us.

"Nature is my own benchmark for concepts such as beauty and balance. Why is a cloud so beautiful? *Tide Line* is in part a response to David Walsh's concerns about the flooding of the B3 gallery, where *Field Lines* is on. I have been working with the weather and natural

energies since at least 1989, and it came from my experiences in ocean and weather. I guess it has become more topical. While I never try to be didactic, my main concern is that we look closely at nature and learn from our observations. This is my understanding of how science works. Through my own observations, I have a natural respect for scientists who observe nature closely."

Robbins' machines and setups are unusual in the sense of what we might normally see used as mediums and tools in 'traditional' art sphere. He discusses why he has chosen the method he has.

"Kinetic art machines are so attractive because they are moving. Maybe it's why dogs chase hubcaps. As Carl Andre said, kinetic art doesn't work if it's not moving - whereas his minimalist pieces only begin to work when they are not moving. Unless there are surprises, I find the machines disappointing. I think machines are invented to take the chaos out of life, but often artists want to bring it back in. It's quite difficult to make a machine come up with lovely surprises - which is why I use the wind as energy, because it is dynamic. Nought to infinity."

"In terms of art history, when you create something it seems you can always trace path back where others have explored before you," he explains. "For instance, I see a lineage of art machines from artists such as Eliasson, Mortensen, Sugget, Fischli Weiss, Signer, Calder, Haacke, Bueys, Tinguely, Duchamp, and scientists like Hargrave or Lord Kelvin."

LISA DIB

Cameron Robbins' *Field Lines* is currently showing at MONA. An official opening will be on Saturday June 11 as part of Dark Mofo at MONA. Head to www.mona.net.au for more information.