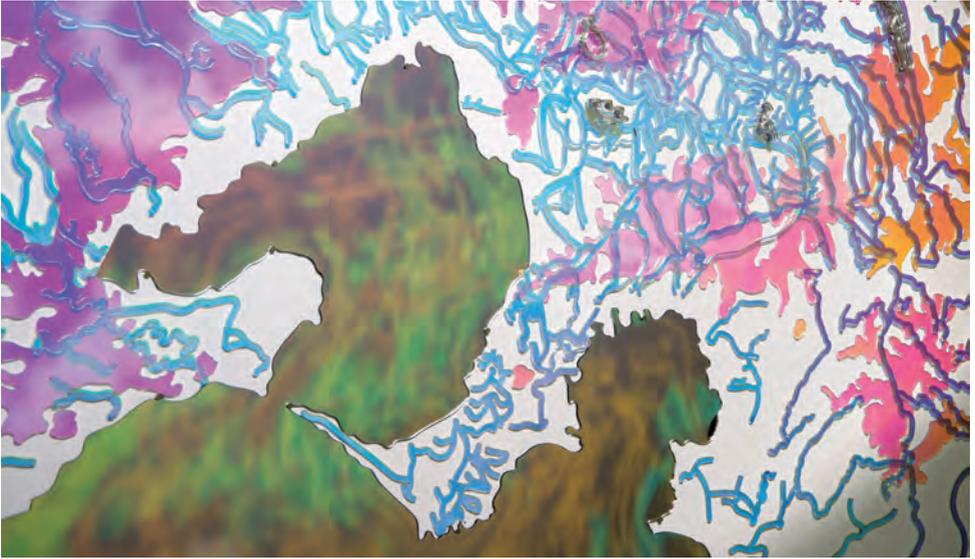


# **The Catchments Project**

**Debbie Symons and Jasmine Targett**



In *The Catchments Project* artists **Debbie Symons** and **Jasmine Targett** have researched how humanity manages or mismanages its nature-based assets surrounding water. Their understanding is that these actions will in part define our collective future in the 21st century. The works presented in the exhibition address the challenge and complexity of The City of Melbourne's climate change adaptation studies, surrounding reduced rainfall and drought. Their works *Making Water Visible* and *The Water Harvest* demonstrate how natural resources and man made catchments can work together to conserve our water within one "super-ecological" system.

*Making Water Visible*, maps Victoria's largest natural water systems, including the network of rivers, lakes, dams, springs and its unseen ground water. This innovative research based artwork creates a multifaceted visual representation of the entirety of Melbourne's water system for the very first time. Hand crafted from luminescent perspex and mirror, the map shimmers and comes to life giving a sense that our water is a living organism that supports life within Melbourne; similar to the nervous system of the human body.

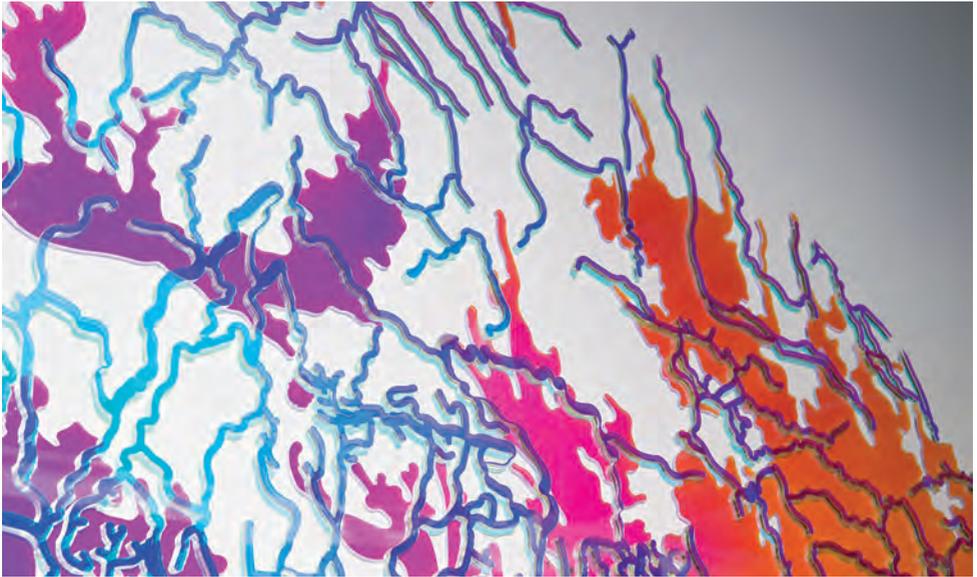
*The Water Harvest* is a socially engaged installation-based artwork that celebrates the seemingly small acts of Melbournians collecting rain/grey water in an effort to become more resilient to the impact of reduced rainfall and drought. The artists invited water conscious Victorians to contribute water saved around their workplace or home to be included within the installation; by collecting a sample, the contributors name and their address. The artists calculated the water's geographic origin and etched this into the bottle along with the water harvester's name.

Presented in an illuminated installation, the bottles act as markers on a map of a landmark shift in collective attitude and awareness towards preserving Melbourne's natural resources to create a resilient and sustainable city. *The Water Harvest* explores how Melburnians can create a man-made catchment to feed back into the system. This is reflected in the connection between the two works within the space as they overlap they create a visual representation of how the natural and man made can work in collaboration, creating a sustainable super ecology. At the end of the exhibition, the artists will gift the artwork to the community to thank every individual for consciously contributing to the sustainability of Melbourne's water. The antique handblown-glass bottles were generously donated by Monash University's science departments.

**Getting Busy**, is a research project completed during the residency. The project investigates the viability of creating a mini native oyster farm (Angasi species) in the waters around the docklands, an app that enables members of the public to pledge positive environment actions to help improve Melbourne's water ways. When a pledge is made, as a reward Barry White (the Love God) is played to the Oysters to stimulate them to 'get busy' cleaning the water. Conceptually the work is a creatively playful response to Melbourne's water contaminants in the Docklands.

The artist in residence program at the Creative Spaces Carlton Connect Studio has given Symons and Targett the opportunity to respond to the implications of climate change as perceived from scientific data. The artists used their residency to find innovative ways use this data to educate, engage, collaborate and empower their audience through their arts practice.





## The Catchments Project

*“From what fount is the sea replenished by its native springs and the streams that flow into it from afar?” - Lucretius, On the Nature of the Universe\**

Water is a substance that is, even now, all too often taken for granted in the developed world. Despite our increasing awareness of its preciousness and best intentions to be watchful of our consumption levels, it is still easy to convince ourselves that there is an invisible, mythical and seemingly endless ‘fount’ that supplies us with this essential element. Enough, it seems, to replenish the sea over and over, and satisfy an insatiable human thirst.

In our contemporary lives we have been forced to confront the reality of environmental degradation, pollution and depleting resources. Water conservation is one such pressing environmental issue that we as a community must be held accountable for – as consumers we are complicit in the use and misuse of this vital resource. Whilst the broader scientific community have continued to debate the manifold implications of climate change and human impact on the environment over many years, it is artists who are now taking the lead in promoting awareness of climate science and engendering the cultural shift that is required to initiate positive change.

In recent times there has been a strong movement towards interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly between the arts and sciences, within the context of climate and the environment. Whilst the natural world has occupied artists for millennia, from

the representational to the Sublime to the abstract, this new movement focuses more specifically on a mutual exchange of ideas, data, concepts, philosophies and factual records between artists and scientists to address important contemporary issues that affect all humanity.

In their latest body of work *The Catchments Project*, artists Debbie Symons and Jasmine Targett have been positioned amongst scientists, researchers, academics and entrepreneurs who are addressing the multifarious issues surrounding environmental sustainability in the context of reduced rainfall and drought. Awarded the first Artist in Residency at Creative Spaces: Carlton Connect Studio, an initiative of the City of Melbourne, Symons and Targett have devised three research-based works *Making Water Visible*, *The Water Harvest* and *Getting Busy* as a way of envisioning and augmenting the significance of Melbourne's waterways and catchments in the broader public mind. Their intention is to make water, and the engineered and natural mechanisms that supply us with water, clearly visible.

The luminescent sculptural complexity of *Making Water Visible* maps Melbourne's existing natural water catchments, incorporating multiple iridescent layers of Perspex to form a topographical representation of this usually unseen network or resources that supply us with water. The data for this map has been collated with contributions from the City of Melbourne, Melbourne Water and Geosciences Australia, demonstrating the benefit of mutual collaboration between the sciences, industry and the arts in calling attention to pressing global climate change issues. *The Water Harvest* represents Melbourne's engineered water catchments, and each water harvester who has contributed to the installation is gifted their bottle at the conclusion of the project as a reminder that a collective approach to natural resource conservation is crucial if we are to enact, activate and adapt. They are artefacts that stand as markers for united initiative and change on a significant scale. *Getting Busy* ingeniously and playfully draws the public's attention to water pollution issues in Melbourne's waterways and asks them to be an active contributor to the solution through pledging practical everyday actions to support their local environment.

As I collected a grey water sample from my own home to contribute to *The Water Harvest*, I reflected on the fact that despite my abiding and firm commitment to water conservation, I too often take this vital element for granted. With artists such as Symons and Targett working alongside scientists to create critical work such as *The Catchments Project*, we are as individuals and community members, at a local and global scale, called to task and encouraged to incorporate positive strategies that contribute to environmental sustainability within our daily lives.

Emma Mayall, Curator

\* Titus Lucretius Carus, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans R. E. Latham, London: Penguin Books, 1994, p.15.



## Adapting to change: Art meets Science at LAB14

The City of Melbourne's Creative Spaces program has established a studio at the Carlton Connect Initiative's (CCI), LAB-14, with the specific intention of positioning artists amongst researchers, academics and entrepreneurs addressing issues of sustainability and resilience.

An Artist-in-Residence program has been established to enable artists to develop work that addresses CCI themes such as water, food, energy, climate change and adaptation, risk and resilience, and social equity.

The City of Melbourne is aware of the way climate is changing and affecting cities around the world and is taking action to prepare for such change, "As one of the biggest water users in the municipality, City of Melbourne has a leadership role to play when it comes to water preservation. We've invested \$20 million in our storm-water harvesting network and we're working to conserve and re-use water across the city. We want residents, workers and businesses to think about water and its role in our future, and to help create a healthy city in a healthy catchment." – Chair of the Environment portfolio, Councillor Arron Wood.

The inaugural artist in residency was awarded to artists Jasmine Targett and Debbie Symons whose work addressed the challenge of climate change adaptation surrounding reduced rainfall and drought. *The Catchments Project* was conceived as three distinct artworks involving the mapping of Melbourne's existing natural water

system, an interactive installation and the setting up of an oyster farm to educate the public about the health of our waterways.

Targett and Symons' newest project is a great example of how art has the capacity to transform complex ideas and scientific data into a form that is more accessible and engaging to the general public. There is also a sense of play at work – the general public can either choose to go on a quest to collect water samples to contribute to the installation or make a pledge on-line to instigate Barry White's smooth tunes and disco lights designed to spur on the oysters to get busy and clean the waterways.

Chair of the Arts and Culture portfolio, Councillor Rohan Leppert, said the City of Melbourne places a high emphasis on sustainability and the arts.

*"The Catchments Project will get the community thinking about the way we use water. We are delighted to have Debbie and Jasmine in the studio as our first artists in residence,"* said Cr Leppert.

## **Adapting to Climate Change – The City of Melbourne**

Our climate is changing and it's affecting cities around the globe including Melbourne. Although the effects of climate change are serious, the City of Melbourne is taking action to prepare our city.

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## About the Artists

Melbourne based artists and researchers Debbie Symons and Jasmine Targett have worked closely with one another for some years, collaboratively producing four award-winning bodies of work. Their combined practices have developed a substantial thread that tethers between their arts practice and made it possible for them to represent their ideas and philosophies collectively at key moments in the creative process. During their exhibitions they present collaborative and solo new works.

Their practices are sustained by significant research collaborations with scientists and environmental data organisations. The conceptual underpinnings of their work complement one another. Symons' work is politically charged, discussing the moral and ethical consequences of ecological decisions. Targett's seemingly beautiful and intricately crafted works chart landmarks of anthropocentric disaster that cannot be found on any atlas or world map. These dark wonders of the natural world offer an insight into a 'super ecology' in which the natural and artificial have become inextricably linked within one natural system: An ecosystem of universal proportions from which no part is immune from the changes of its counterparts.

The Catchments Project was developed during the artists' residency at the Creative Spaces: Carlton Connect Studio LAB-14. Creative Spaces is a program of the City of Melbourne's Arts and Culture branch.

The Catchments Project is proudly supported by



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