

# The Politics of Perception

Debbie Symons and Jasmine Targett



## About the Artists

Melbourne based artists and researchers Symons and Targett have worked closely with one another, collaboratively producing four award-winning bodies of work. Their practices are sustained by significant research collaborations with scientists and environmental data organisations.

Debbie and Jasmine are currently completing a collaborative Artist in Residence at Creative Spaces: Carlton Connect Studio at LAB-14. Their work *The Catchments Project* will be exhibited as a part of the *Art + Climate = Change 2015 Festival*.

For further details please visit the project website:

[thecatchmentsproject.com](http://thecatchmentsproject.com)

<http://debbiesymons.com.au>

<http://jasminetargett.com>

Image details:

Front page: *Blind Spot* by Jasmine Targett

Back page: *Amazonia* by Debbie Symons

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Latrobe Regional Gallery  
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In *The Politics of Perception* artists Symons and Targett map critical issues surrounding our environment, poetically and potentially charting landmarks of anthropocentric disaster that cannot be found on any atlas or world map. This body of work raises critical issues surrounding the subtleties and complexities associated with humanity and its relationship to environmental change.

### The Urgency of Our Time

Dr David Sequeira

The works of Jasmine Targett and Debbie Symons presented in *The Politics of Perception* demonstrate more just environmental theory. The works in this exhibition are of 'our time', grounded in personal concerns about global warming and endangered species. Now more than ever, environmental concerns are an intimate aspect of mainstream consciousness. Whilst we may not always observe the rituals of recycle wheelee bins and green shopping bags, there is no doubt of their place (however cursory) in Australian culture.

This type of mainstreaming calls into question the role of art galleries and artists in 'dealing with' such concerns. Of particular importance is the active or passive voice that the gallery uses to express its connection to such concerns. As the Director of a regional Victorian gallery, I am more interested in art that raises questions than I am in art that chants a slogan. More specifically, I am interested in art that

encourages audiences to experience themselves as part of something much bigger. Mainstream consciousness has made new demands of artists and presenting information is not enough. The works in this exhibition are 'of our' time because of the depth of connectedness that they implore. The work of Jasmine Targett and Debbie Symons holds powerful insights into global resources and critical issues but that on its own is not why it is so significant. This work is important because its imagery is poetic and imaginative and it encourages audiences to consider themselves in relation to environmental concerns. Both artists are engaged in processes of art making where by the relationship of the audience to object (whether it be sculpture or projection) is central to the works' conceptual ambitions. For me, the potency and urgency of these works lie in their ability to reveal something previously hidden about me, about the world and about my place within it.



Jasmine Targett

**Blind Spot, 2014** Perspex with Steel Mirror. Perspex: L 1200 W 1700 H 2200 mm. Mirror: 1200mm diameter.

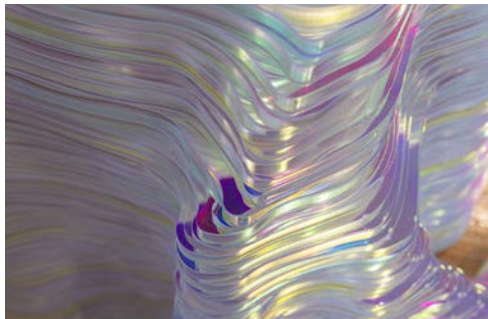
*'In every observation there is a blind spot, the spot on the retina where the optical nerve is connected making the eye blind on that very spot, all one can do is try to move these blind spots, in an effort to catch a glimpse of the invisible'*

– Krogh Jensen

*Blind Spot* maps the 20th century tipping point of awareness surrounding environmental concerns – the discovery of the Ozone Hole. Like an iceberg looming in space it is a dark wonder of the natural world that cannot be found on any atlas or world map. Its appearance in our atmosphere every spring is a haunting reminder of how close we come to pushing our environment beyond the point of regeneration. It provokes a continuing dialogue on the Montreal protocol: did we get it right, is this the first instance of changing our behavior on a global scale to correct the imbalance anthropocentrism has caused in nature?

The work maps the ozone hole filtered through the lens of a computer, giving a techno-romantic glimpse into an ecosystem of universal proportions from which no part is immune from the changes of its counterparts. Today there is a tenuous relationship between the fragility of our environment and its ability to regenerate. Its success or failure lies in learning how to navigate the landmarks of anthropocentric disaster so that further unforeseeable consequences never eventuate. The forecast for tomorrow's weather is reliant on our perception of today.

*This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.*



Debbie Symons and Jasmine Targett

**Antarctica: Dissolving Perception, 2009**  
Glass. L200 W200 H150mm (each dome).

*Present: Ice Shelf State of Cryosphere* (left)  
*Collective Past: Climatology Trajectory* (middle)  
*Forecast: Heat* (right) – changes colour from blue to red depending on the angle viewed.

*Antarctica: Dissolving Perception* consists of three hand blown glass domes that research the three central issues surrounding scientific documentation of decreased ozone over Antarctica during the last twenty years. Through shifting scale the domes act similarly to a microscope, magnifying the areas of impact on the ice over the landmass. This research discusses the potential implications the forecast for decreasing ice implies.

Data Sourced from: National Snow and Ice Data Centre

### The Politics of Perception: Latrobe Regional Gallery

Guy Abrahams

CEO and Co-founder CLIMATE: Arts for a Safe Climate

In *The Politics of Perception*, artists Debbie Symons and Jasmine Targett examine how different people at different times have perceived or failed to perceive the true impact of environmental degradation and its underlying causes. People often treat economics and ecology as structures of similar value and immutability, yet economics is governed by human behaviour, while the laws of nature govern ecology. We can negotiate with human behaviour, but we can't negotiate with physics and chemistry.

Symons' *Amazonia* explores what can happen when free market capitalism is pitted against a natural world that is viewed solely as a resource to be exploited. Targett's *Blind Spot* considers the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Both question whether we have the capacity to rectify the planetary environmental destruction for which we are responsible. The collaborative work *Antarctica: Dissolving Perception* takes this investigation further, by examining the impact the ozone hole has on the vast areas of ice over the Antarctic landmass.

Symons and Targett ask us to consider the widening fault line between human activity and the natural systems on which we depend, and to ask ourselves "where do we go from here?"

We are particularly pleased that Latrobe Regional Gallery is participating in *Art+Climate=Change 2015*. As a key region in our nation's agricultural, energy, and tourism sectors, it is vitally important that the communities of the Latrobe Valley have the opportunity to consider and participate in the very important questions that have fallen upon our generation to answer. We hope that this exhibition will play some part in informing and engaging individuals and communities, and allow them to consider how we could move towards a just and sustainable future. *ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2015*, is a festival of climate change related arts and ideas including exhibitions, lectures and public forums during April - May 2015 across Victoria. These exhibitions and events provide clear space for discussing the challenges and opportunities, impacts and solutions, arising from climate change.

Debbie Symons

**Amazonia, 2015.** HD Video – Runs 5min 10sec

*Amazonia* interrogates the inextricable links between environmental degradation and free market capitalism. During the 5 minute video threatened species and destroyed natural resources are juxtaposed with commodities, unequivocally and powerfully measuring the costs of recent economic development within the Amazon basin.

Utilising an animated map to track annual developments, *Amazonia* visualizes environmental research on deforestation and threatened animal and plant species through the integration of various databases: the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the National Institute for Space Research, and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation. The works narrative implores us to look upon the critical situation transpiring in the Amazon with renewed impetus by transposing one form of crisis upon another, reflecting not only the dire situation materializing within the region, but also the growing worldwide environmental conundrum.

