



Free / State
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Kate Scardifield: renewing and transforming

Kate Scardifield makes adaptable sculptures that intersect across the fields of art, design and science. Her interest in bringing an artistic appreciation to the material forms and cultural role of scientific devices is perhaps best demonstrated by her 2017 fellowship with the Powerhouse Museum and Sydney Observatory. As part of her research into systems of celestial navigation, Scardifield accessed the nineteenth-century astronomical artefacts once used by colonial astronomer Thomas Brisbane. This led, in a circuitous way, to an ongoing body of work whereby textiles become propositional instruments for atmospheric tracing and notation (see *The lighter a thought the more it rises*, 2019, and *Canis Major*, 2019–20). Scardifield places monumental material forms in the environment, drawing attention to changing weather patterns and atmospheric conditions by charting the shifting states of her responsive objects. As a method of visualising air, Scardifield proposes alternative apparatus for cartographic mapping, weather observation and information relay or semaphore.

Scardifield has continued her speculative material thinking through a current collaboration with the University of Technology Sydney's Climate Change Cluster (C3). C3's work is linked to algae biotechnology, and the development of algae and their derivatives into a green and clean alternative to fossil fuels. She is interested in building her knowledge of these special marine plants and how they capture and lock away carbon dioxide, with her central medium for the Biennial being biomass composed of harvested and pressed algae, a waste by-product collected from aquaculture farming and oyster shell waste. Biotechnologies hold great potential for tackling the global need for sustainability and, when we reconceptualise freedom in the context of the climate emergency, Scardifield's work signals how we might achieve ecological resilience.

If museums are containers for conservation, care and repair, then we also need to think through the role and responsibility of cultural institutions in relation to climate. Installed inside the depths of the gallery, Scardifield's biomaterials beg the question, 'what if the museum became a site for carbon storage?'¹⁴ They are forecasts for change, in terms of how we can power civil societies.

As part of her big-picture thinking on how our institutions might evolve, Scardifield has also constructed site-specific sails for AGSA's portico. Made in emergency orange from recycled synthetic material, which will outlive us, the soft sculptural form billows and flits at all who pass by the North Terrace boulevard. Responding to the air and wind, it becomes a beacon, alive to its conditions, as well as a public warning: we must pay attention to our environment and start to change our relationship with the material world.



Kate Scardifield

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lives and works in Sydney



photo: Robin Hearfield

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