

A SINISTER BEAUTY

JULY 24 – AUGUST 15



SARAH FIELD
JENNIFER KING
NADIA MERCURI
JASMINE TARGETT
BETHANY WHEELER

STRANGE NEIGHBOUR

A Sinister Beauty

“The state of emergency in which we all live is not the exception but the rule.”

– Walter Benjamin in Malcolm Miles, *Aesthetics in a time of emergency*.

Transfixed by the immanent threat of natural and anthropocentric disasters, *A Sinister Beauty* examines the sphere of inter-human relations that camouflage ‘states of emergency’, impacting the individual intimately and society collectively.

Artists **Field, Mercuri, King, Targett** and **Wheeler** have worked side by side over the past decade, creating an ever-evolving sphere of shared ideas. Realising that their practices were becoming increasingly linked by the desire to address ‘states of emergency’, *A Sinister Beauty* is the first instance in which they came together early in the creative process. This temporary collective between the artists formed a micro-community that has allowed the group to critically explore, interrogate and innovate. Their artistic voice is channelled collectively so the whole stands as great as the sum of its parts. The result of this strong cross-pollination of ideas is a significant new body of work that will continue to be developed over the next year. *A Sinister Beauty* is the first note in this opus.

Working with images, materials and techniques that access a shared history, the artworks interrogate the micro-politics that exist between art and other spheres. In *Three Minutes to Midnight*, Jennifer King presents the current ‘Doomsday Clock’ that was conceived in 1947 by the Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

King uses historic and contemporary images to open a dialogue on the realities of the dangers posed by all aspects of nuclear industries. In January 2015 the setting was increased to - three minutes to midnight - due to climate change, the modernisation of nuclear weapons in the U.S. and Russia, and the problem of nuclear waste.

Continuing on this narrative thread within the exhibition, Jasmine Targett’s work *Smoke Signal* charts the cause and effect of global climate shifts in the hottest year recorded in global history, 2014. Using images from the year’s disaster based weather reports; Targett creates a visual allegory that draws attention to the interconnection between these global weather events. The title of the work highlights that there are now clear environmental signals illustrating the consequences of global warming. Beneath the surface of vision, in molecules of water and air, it becomes apparent when viewing this work that the forecast for tomorrow’s weather is reliant on humanity’s ability to access a collective will and respond.

There is a sense of guilty pleasure in viewing King and Targett's works that in essence highlights global shortfalls. They are visually engaging and yet the message they deliver is sinister and uneasy.

"Beauty is something that we invite into the mind. We push away horrors that are beyond conceivability viewing them at a distance through a tiny telescopic lens. Beauty works its way in taking root, in the same way that humour has a sharpened wit that lingers in the mind." – Jasmine Targett

There is a poetic potency to these thoughts that reflect the polarising relationship between awe and terror. These two forces simultaneously engage and repel. The key within the work of all of the presented artists is that the subject is addressed in an unexpected and intriguing way so that we want to keep going back to the work to explore further, contemplate and interrogate. This is how art becomes a catalyst for change in the world.

When change becomes a real possibility as individual human beings, we feel fragile being made of flesh and bone, often becoming paralysed with anxiety from trying to visualise the future. Science fiction is a cultural form of art practice that allows us to critically engage with our present world and social issues here on earth playing out the narratives within a safe and hyper-real reality.

Nadia Mercuri's *The Truth is Out There! If you want it*, plays on how surveillance is used to control and monitor utopian and dystopian futures. Gerald Alva Miller says that "We are increasingly a society on the brink: whether it is the brink of destruction or transformation remains to be seen." Mercuri's vitrine of objects that reference ideas of alien life on other planets access the UFO as a symbolically loaded form that projects the human desire for wholeness and unity in times of social and spiritual rupture. The double meaning emerges that it is also a symbol of heightened paranoia, surveillance and conspiracy theories. Within this vitrine, the juxtaposition of these objects suspends these associations and allows us to engage on a deeper level with the relationship between the microcosmic, the macrocosmic and ourselves.

Picking up on the thread of interconnection, Bethany Wheeler's work *The Dew of Compassion* examines how we make sense of the world around us. There is a sinister zen-like beauty to her work that observes the relationship we have with common bodies of water. Our sense of ownership over the environment and concepts of societal compassion fatigue are made light of in her work that uses socio-political irony as a metaphor to highlight the 'for me-now' materialism impacting self-identity as a considerate and empathetic species.

Further examining the socio political landscape of the individual, Sarah Field's work uses a dark blend of violence and beauty to create a part self-portrait, part social commentary that examines the longstanding current of violence against women within Australian society. Within this visually potent body of work Field uses themes of seduction and disgust to highlight the relationship between fragility and control.

Collectively, *A Sinister Beauty* explores how 'states of emergency' elicit an intimate and communal response. There is a sense that 'emergency' hits such a raw nerve that the only way to manage its sinister beauty is to look closer at what it reveals about ourselves.

Jasmine Targett, 2015

<http://jasminetargett.com/text/>

Image credit: Jasmine Targett, *Smoke Signal* 2015, silk, 100 x 155cm

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