

“Each breath is a sacrament, an affirmation of our connection with all other living things, a renewal of our link with our ancestors and a contribution to generations yet to come.”

— DAVID SUZUKI

It was more than twenty years ago that I attended a lecture by the highly acclaimed Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki at Newcastle's Civic Theatre. There are two things that I remember quite clearly from that night. The first was the thought that we all share the same air and that through the motion of the atmosphere my next breath would inexorably spread around the globe to be shared by all living creatures, just as it had done to reach me. The second thing I recall was his angere response to a young woman's innocent question about the connection between the economy and the global environment. Back then it was clear — at least in Suzuki's mind — that the health of the economy had little in common with the health of the globe.

Today that incompatibility is becoming starkly clear to us all. The troubled global economy has supplanted the promised golden future of the global community. Globalisation and free trade rule for the benefit of corporations and at the expense of middle class jobs, local culture and the environment. Social and environmental value is sidelined by economic value as the measure of our success while 'jobs and growth' seems to be the only political slogan. Yet the response from the populace, as seen in the Brexit and Trump victories, is increasingly to place blame on 'the others' and retreat into nationalistic isolation. In these times of environmental and social crisis there is a clear need for new approaches to promoting a reconnection — a coexistence — with nature and each other.

blunt force of a gale. Stokes sees evidence for this connection both in our ancient spiritual concept of nature and our contemporary scientific view of the world. For many ancient cultures the air was a spiritual element closely tied with life. The Greeks believed that the world was composed of the four elements of earth, air, water and fire. From the Greek *psukhē*, meaning "breath, life, soul", we have *psychology*, literally "to give an account of our life-breath"; and from the Latin *spiritus* — meaning "to breathe" — we have *spirit*. In the roots of Christianity, the original Hebrew word for "the Spirit of God" means great wind and amongst the Navajo, like many indigenous cultures today, the concept of a "Holy Wind" embodies the association between life, breath and air. We seem to have lost this ancient and innate sense that we are part of the air and nature.

Science has given us the tools to understand how the components of the air permeate every system of the natural world. We know of the grand cycles of water, carbon, nitrogen and oxygen that govern these systems and how they involve an intricate exchange between the atmosphere, the oceans, rivers and lakes, the soil and the biosphere. We can validate Suzuki's claim with numbers. It takes just 12 months for the first breath of a newborn child in Britain or Syria to reach Australia and every breath we take includes 400,000 of the atoms of argon that Mother Teresa breathed in her life, or the prophet Mohammed, or Hitler

**Further reading**

Per Espen Stokes, "What We Think About Global Warming", 2015  
Curt Stager, "Your Atomic Self: The Invisible Elements that Connect You to Everything Else in the Universe", 2014

— Andrew Styan, curator and artist

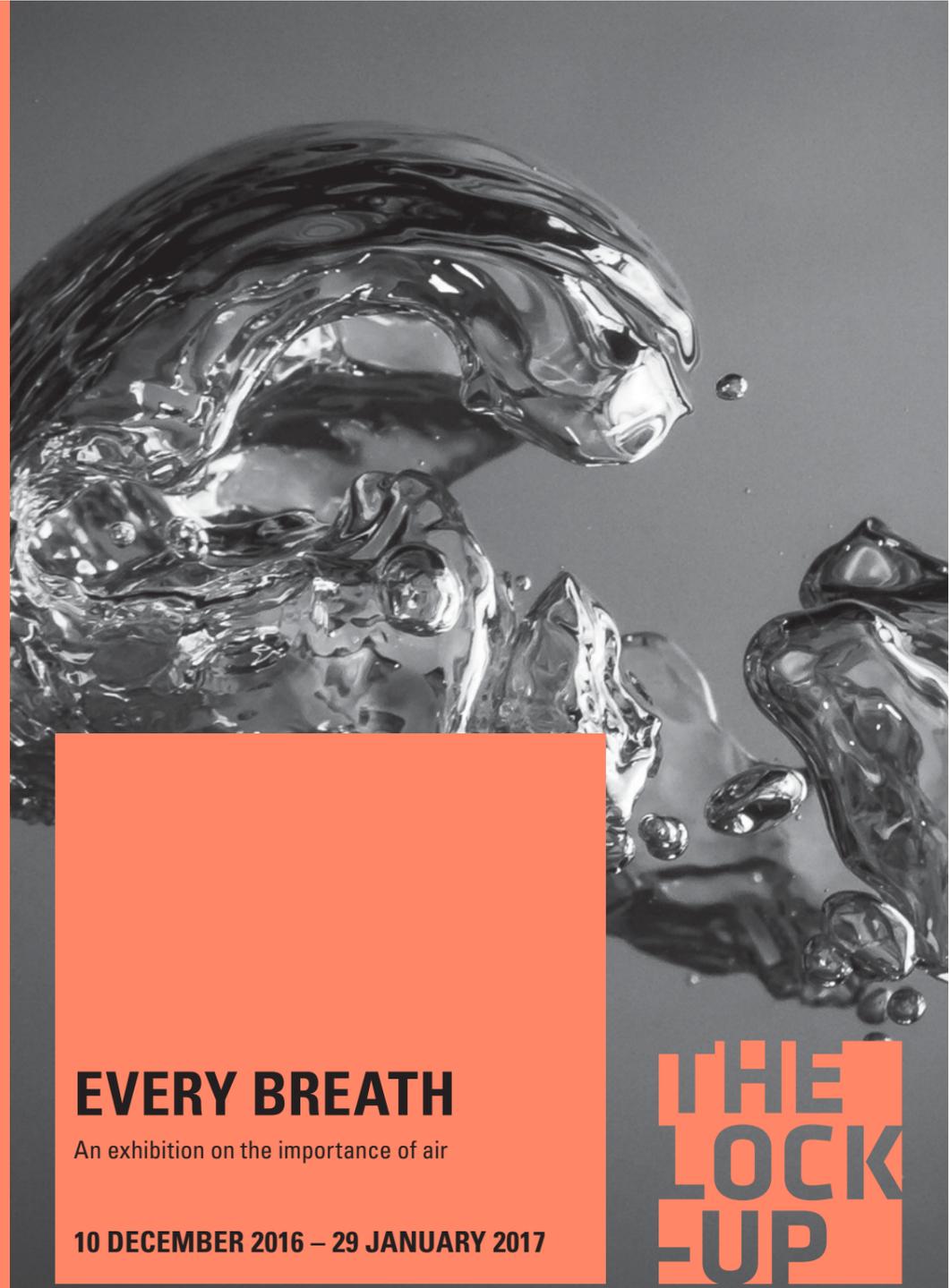
with us. empathy for those that share it and, by extension, an increased respect for how we treat the atmosphere and the earth. Knowledge can only help to foster a greater respect for how we treat with nature and each other, the or simply promotes a reconnection towards a pantheistic worldview, Whether this realisation guides us thing — past, present and future. cycles of nature and every living air we breathe connects us to the from our first breath to our last the We cannot ignore the fact that the grand cycle of nature.

or a polar bear. We model climate processes and how they are disrupted by the release of ancient buried carbon into the atmosphere by our industry. The same carbon is taken into our bodies through the carbon cycle and photosynthesis in plants. All of the carbon in our bodies was once part of another living organism and now, 150 years into the fossil fuel age, one eighth of that carbon was once coal, oil or gas. The air observes no social or political borders and we are part of the grand cycle of nature.



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COVER Andrew Styan, *Catch Your Breath #1* (detail) 2016

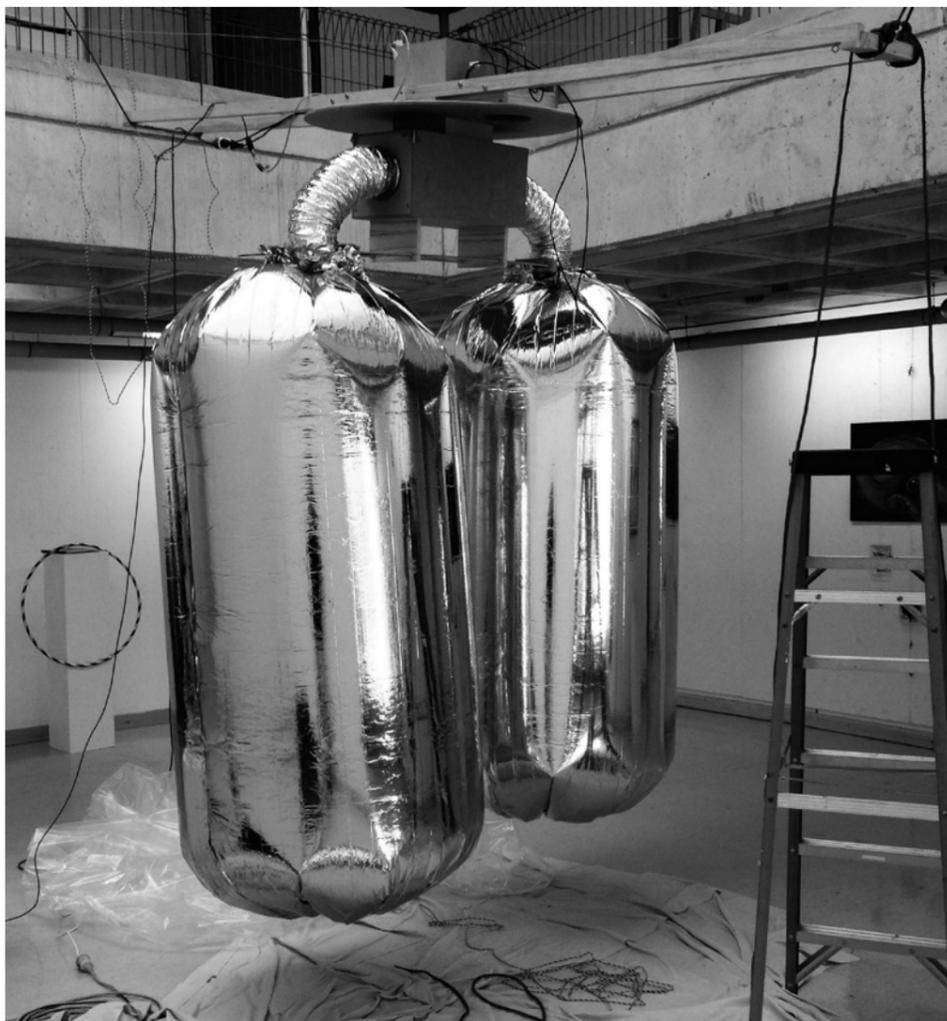


# EVERY BREATH

An exhibition on the importance of air

10 DECEMBER 2016 – 29 JANUARY 2017

# THE LOCKUP



Testing of Andrew Styan's artwork  
*Life Support System* 2016

## ARTIST STATEMENTS

**EVERY BREATH** features artists Kevin Anderson, Ian Burns, Dale Collier, Ineke Dane, Sophia Emmett, Greg Fuller, Jason Hicklin, Tracy Hill, James Maher, Andrew Styan, Katie Styan and Lucy Weaver, curated by Andrew Styan with curatorial mentorship by Meryl Ryan.

### KEVIN ANDERSON (Manchester, UK)

*A moment etched deep*

Kevin Anderson is a passionate rock climber and is regularly found climbing the back wall of Hobson Moor Quarry near Manchester. He is also Professor of Energy and Climate Change at the University of Manchester, a vocal critic of the inadequate international efforts to

address climate change and an advocate for the equitable treatment of those nations that have not caused climate change but will suffer the most.

### IAN BURNS (New York)

*The Effect*

*The Effect*, 2016 looks to our consumptive behaviours and the selective blindness we apply to the further reaching impacts of our choices. The heating radiator provides constant upward air movement jostling party balloons into movement that in inverted view appears jolly and playful, belying the crass cost involved in its generation. Party on dude.

### DALE COLLIER (Newcastle)

*White Man Say's (White Man Can't) Jump*

This installation is the result of an ongoing entanglement of engagements between the artist and contemporary institutions within Australia. Or, a step-by-step guide to sustainable existence beyond the white wall.

### INEKE DANE (Sydney)

*breath for... (when you take a breath, you touch a part of the planet with the inside of your body)*

Through aid we donate food, water, blood, shelter, basic health and education services to populations in need. Will air be next?

Today anecdotes from China tell of children who've never experienced seeing a blue sky. Yet the Chinese proverb 'when you take a breath, you touch a part of the planet with the inside of your body' speaks of a cultural environmentalism predating international instruments such as the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement. A land once so sensitive to nature is now symbolic of the catastrophic human effects of rapid industrialisation felt across the world.

Capitalising on pollution, new markets have risen from pristine parts of Australia, where air is captured, bottled and sent to the affluent of the very countries who receive our supply of coal and fossil fuels.

The work *breath for...* invites visitors to catch their breath in balloons, symbolically gifting it to a city classified unfit by the World Health Organisation. The city will change daily.

### SOPHIA EMMETT (Newcastle)

*Twenty Five Breaths*

For the glassblower, the breath – blown into molten glass – is the material and the process of art making, but whatever our calling, we take for granted our right to breathe clean air. Humans breathe on average twenty-five breaths a minute, 8.5 million breaths a year, or six hundred seventy-two million, seven hundred and sixty-eight thousand over an eighty year lifetime.

Our breath – the air we breathe – links us to the ancestral past and the generations of the future. It is our most precious tenure, though we have no possession of it: breath is only a means to an end, and the end of breath is the end of us.

*Twenty Five Breaths* draws awareness to the ephemeral and invisible signature of a single breath. The cloud-

like array of glass bubbles were blown in the hot-shop by twenty-five people aged between four and ninety-two. The height at which the transparent 'lung prints' are suspended registers the standing height of each subject, creating a transparent portrait of the individual and a ghost of the group.

### SOPHIA EMMETT (Newcastle)

*Gasping*

The lifetime rhythm of inhaling and exhaling enters us into an unspoken contract, the cost of exchange mostly ignored. *Gasping* represents our instinctive greed for resources: air, water, fuel, material. There is a fine line between drawing breath and sucking the life out of our shared inheritance. We may sigh in despair, or we may take a deep breath and take a bit less.

### GREG FULLER (Liverpool UK)

*Lung Tree*

My work stems from a study of the landscape and I start with drawing.

The work is a celebration of the quiet realities of life, realities whose beauty and subtlety are often hidden behind our familiarity with the ordinary.

I live an ordinary life in an ordinary place; it is only when I try to make work about them that I realise how extraordinary they are.

### JASON HICKLIN

(Wolverhampton UK)

*Meadow II (Diptych)*

This body of water forms part of the Goway Water Meadows, an area of wetlands surrounded by motorways and industry. The low lying meadows are situated to the East of the River Goway, near its confluence with the River Mersey. Before the building of the Manchester Ship Canal the Goway would have been tidal in this area, consisting of salt marsh and brackish creeks.

Sitting near to this water is a chance to draw breath before continuing the walk across the ditches which divides this meadow.

### TRACY HILL (Birmingham UK)

*Permeable Interface I & II*

This work invites the consideration that we are becoming increasingly detached from our understanding of place and that in order to reconnect we must focus on the point at which the experience of encounter determines and affects the physical shape of place. As we walk we move within the 'permeable interface', the point at which surface and weather combines to immerse us through multiple senses, informing knowledge and instilling memory. I use digital mapping technology to inform my artworks linking our modern obsession for locating and ordering journeys through our landscape with the reality that experience and memory of encounters cannot be mapped.

### JAMES MAHER (Newcastle)

*How we share our hollows*

The air we breathe is considered a shared resource that supports life, however when air quality is compromised it can have vast affects for the world around us. *How we share our hollows*, 2016 juxtaposes the communal nature of the air we breathe and the potential of air scarcity due to ecological collapse and pollution in late stage capitalism's increasingly urbanised and industrialised environment. This installation is comprised of three trachea-like pipes that contain 'field recordings' of various people's breath and lung functions raising questions on the relationship between breath, society and our collective futures.

### ANDREW STYAN (Newcastle)

*Life Support System*

The world is controlled by the three great forces of Nature, Humanity and Economics. Using an interactive inflated kinetic sculpture and live stock exchange data, *Life Support System* presents a model for exploring the relationship between these three forces.

### ANDREW STYAN (Newcastle)

*Catch Your Breath*

The breath is essentially formless and invisible and lost to us once exhaled — until we envelop it with a balloon, a soap film or water.

### WEAVER & STYAN

(Melbourne)

*Air Out*

The last decade has seen a worldwide surge in nationalist thinking and a 'fear of the other' that is promoting isolationism, a rejection of immigrants and refugees, and the fear-driven blame and suppression of those different to ourselves. *Air Out* is a device to give comfort to those who feel suffocated by these ever-present others who walk amongst us.