



MUSEUM OF OLD
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CAMERON ROBBINS – FIELD LINES

Exhibition dates: 18 May to 29 August 2016

Official opening: 12 June 2016

Museum of Old and New Art, 655 Main Rd Berriedale, Tasmania

Some artists can give us a glimmer of things that we usually can't see. Mona delights in such artists. Cameron Robbins gives nature a voice, but he's not telling it what to say.

—David Walsh



Wind Section Instrumental (2013)

Australian artist Cameron Robbins' work is based on interaction with natural forces and the elements. He creates structural instruments and devices, such as wind or ocean-powered mechanical systems, site-specific installations, wind drawings, photographs and sound compositions.

Field Lines is Cameron Robbins' first major museum solo exhibition, and will include works created over more than three decades of his practice. In addition, seven new installations will be developed specifically for Mona – many in direct response to the museum's location. A few of these installations will generate work for the duration of the exhibition, providing visitors with a live artistic response to the world outside the museum's walls.

Robbins has devised many ways of producing a kind of collaboration between artist and nature. This is evident in the series of wind-drawing instruments that he has developed since 1990. These mechanical instruments are set up in different locations to collect wind energy and transcribe this, by a connected pen, into the strangely readable format of drawings on paper. The drawings take on

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the forms of location and time; the marks vary widely depending on the conditions, which range from violent storms to calm stillness; clean laminar winds on a pier to turbulent city windscapes.

This drawing practice has led Robbins to focus on forms generated by natural energy, including the exploration of vortices, magnetic anomalies in the landscape, tidal movements and astronomical observations. His research into the elemental has also been combined with his musical career on clarinet and saxophone. In this way, Robbins is much like a conductor of our surrounding environment: his work gives form to the unseen.

Robbins was among the first artists to be commissioned by Mona for the inaugural Mona Foma (Mofo) in 2009, for which he installed *Southern Marine Music Test Rig* (2009) adjacent to the CSIRO pier on Hobart's waterfront. This piece was created in response to the Derwent River's estuary. The wave motions and tidal changes of the location would generate a cacophony of notes as the moving water pushed air through large industrial pipes into a set of handmade bass F-minor organ pipes and recorders. In 2013 Robbins created another site-specific work for Mona's exhibition *The Red Queen*. Harnessing the speed and direction of the wind at the museum's site, *Wind Section Instrumental* (2013) created dozens of large-scale drawings between June 2013 and April 2014.

Field Lines will feature drawing, installations, photography, sculpture and video. Several decades of Robbins' drawing practice will be shown, dating from 1991 through to 2016, including works being created on site through the exhibition run. The selection of drawings features site-specific responses from Norway, the high country of Victoria, city rooftops and the Mona site itself.

Of note will be the impressive collection of 16 drawings from *Wind Section Instrumental* (2013), which are up to five metres in length, and were created over a twelve-month period. Accompanying these drawings will be a sound recording of an improvisational performance by Robbins with Jon Tarry and Peter Knight, as they responded to the movement of *Wind Section Instrumental* in-situ during Mofo 2014.

The video work *Dissipative Structures* (2012) reveals how energy flows through a vortex. Robbins filmed a water vortex in a 120-litre chamber he created and, he explains, by introducing inks to render visible the intricate flow structures: ...'the fractal nature of the universe can be seen, reminiscent of other parts of the natural world – galaxies, exploding stars, cyclones, tornadoes, wood grain, insects ...'



Two distinct series of Robbins' recent work with long exposure photography will be included, many being seen for the first time. The first series is a response to a geomagnetic anomaly from a basalt outcrop in the high country in Victoria. Here *Mt Jim Anomaly, Loops* (2011) and *Mt Jim Anomaly, Star Maps* (2011) trace out the energy lines of this location.

The second photographic series, *Anemographs* (2014–15), includes six photographs created by a wind-powered light instrument that Robbins made and placed at various locations to capture the moving light. Examples of these *Anemograph* instruments will also be seen in the exhibition, along with other portable devices and instruments Robbins has created and used over the years.

Among Robbins' newly created works for **Field Lines** is *Mt Jim Field Outline* (2016), a direct representation of the geomagnetic anomaly as outlined by Robbins in the *Mt Jim Anomaly, Star Maps*. *Mt Jim Field Outline* is a room-sized installation that depicts the geophysical survey as the *Star Maps* do; however, here Robbins traces this with a 45-metre-long neon light on the gallery ceiling and a corresponding floor piece of basalt columns.

Further responses to the Mt Jim site are the series of works *Magnetometers* (2016). These are sculptural instruments which detect the earth's magnetic field lines, and are located in the same room as the photographic works that depict this site.

Robbins has long wanted to create a piece that responds to the tidal zone of the Mona site. The work *Tide Line* (2016) will do this. By transferring tidal motion from six metres below the museum's galleries, powerful hydraulics will push half a ton of water to drive a pigment ink-pen to chart the rise and fall of the tide on a 10-metre-long piece of paper. The paper will be mounted on a 3.18-metre-diameter drum that rotates once per month, in sync with the Lunar cycle. This references David Walsh's infamous prediction that the rising ocean levels will eventually flood Mona.

Two more new works are *Wind Funnel* (2016) and *Solar Loggerheads* (2016). *Wind Funnel* is a vast structure that invokes the forces of wind within the gallery space, and will be placed in the same gallery as the sixteen *Wind Section Instrumental* drawings and other instruments and devices. *Wind Funnel* will animate these instruments, evoking the windy landscapes that helped create many of the drawings in the exhibition.

Solar Loggerheads (2016) depicts opposing forces: creation and destruction, and drawing and erasing. Harnessing both solar and mains power, this instrument will function across the duration of the exhibition. The ease of the solar powered pencil creating a mark is far outweighed by the sheer



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brute force required to erase that mark. Robbins has referred to this process as being like an argument between two people.

Sternenachse Declinator (2016) references devices used to measure the latitude of a location, or the angle of variation of a plane from the horizontal. Here it is set to 42.88° – the latitude of Hobart, it gives the viewer a direct representation of the rotational axis of the earth. *Sternenachse* translates from the German as ‘Star Axis’; the *Sternenachse Declinator* sculpture can be adjusted to depict latitudinal points across the earth. Robbins has marked certain points through the drawing series that accompany this sculpture, which includes *Sternenachse, Darwin* (2016), *Sternenachse, Hobart* (2016) and *Sternenachse, Mawson Base* (2016).

Cameron Robbins’ **Field Lines** is curated by Nicole Durling and Olivier Varenne. The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue including interview with the artist and essay by Jarrod Rawlins.

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MEDIA:

Rebecca Fitzgibbon, rebecca@mona.net.au, +61 408 102 919

Megan Reeder Hope, megan@mona.net.au + 61 435 103 735