

CONICAL

Marie Sierra

stomata

November 21 – December 12, 2009

Gallery

In the nineteenth century, Alfred Russel Wallace thought to describe the atmosphere as 'The Great Aerial Ocean'. Tim Flannery notes this in his book *The Weather Makers*, and in his view, 'it's a far better name, because it conjures in the mind's eye the currents, eddies, and layers that create the weather far above our heads, and that are all that stand between us and the vastness of space'.¹

Another nineteenth century concern was the relationship between atmosphere and health, and air bricks for buildings date from this time. Cast iron versions were more common in Australia than the terracotta variety, which became prominent only in the twentieth century, as noted by Miles Lewis, who has written many impressive and detailed histories of Australian buildings.¹

Both the iron and terracotta versions of air bricks sometimes have a face that is modelled with an ornamental foliate or a floral motif, known as *rinseau*.¹ But the type of air bricks in the building that houses Conical Gallery are not foliate; they are bulk standard terracotta with quite large, coarse holes. They are there to ensure the building can breathe.

Their small size compared to the vastness of the room, and that there are several of them, is reminiscent of stomata, the small breathing apertures on a plant. Air moves through the vent bricks depending on the pressure difference between inside and outside. The real regulator of air movement in this large room, however, is the chimney, which opens directly to the sky. Between this one large opening and the seven smaller ones, the room takes in air, or gives it back to the external atmosphere.

Both the chimney and the vents are now redundant architecturally, and indeed would prevent this building from being considered 'green' or 'sustainable' by current standards. They let too much air pass through, with no control over the transpiration. In other words, they engage too freely with the 'Aerial Ocean'.

Such a high level of engagement can make us uncomfortable, as we are no longer used to having to experience climate closely. Julien Knebusch argues that 'the perception of climate is the perception of an arrangement, a configuration of the real by the subject; this perception is a certain presentation (and presentification) of an ensemble of natural atmospheric facts embraced and expressed by a sensitive being. Climate is thus a multidimensional phenomenon in which are combined the contributions of nature, culture, history and geography, but also the imaginary and the symbolic'.¹

In 1994, I was in a show called 'Ipso Photo' at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, then a few doors down.¹ The work, *Horizon*, was a consideration of the function of the eye and the presence/positioning of the self in relation to the horizon, both literally and metaphorically. In preparing the Conical exhibition, it strikes me that fifteen years later, my interest is still our perception of the social construction we think of as 'nature'.

Only the atmosphere has changed.

¹ Tim Flannery, *The Weather Makers: the history and future impact of climate change*, Text, Melbourne, 2005, p. 12

¹ <http://mileslewis.net/australian-building/pdfs/services/services-ventilation.pdf>, accessed 17 Oct 2009.

¹ For example, the Police Stables in Southbank, along Grant Street, have these foliate vents at head height.

¹ Julien Knebusch, 'Art and Climate (Change) Perception: outline of a phenomenology of climate', in Sacha Kagan and Volker Kirchber, eds., *Sustainability: a new frontier for the arts and cultures*, Frankfurt am Main, Germany: VAS, 2008, p 244

¹ Curated by Susan Fereday and Stuart Koop

Marie Sierra has held numerous solo and group exhibitions within Australia and overseas, published articles on contemporary art, and won several grants and awards, including four Australia Council Grants. Originally from Philadelphia, she has lived in Melbourne since 1986, where her current practice focuses on nature as a social construct. She is currently Graduate Research Coordinator (PhD program) and Head, Sculpture and Spatial Practice at School of Art, VCA & Music, University of Melbourne. From 2010 she will be the Head of the School of Visual and Performing Arts, University of Tasmania, Launceston.

Selected Exhibitions:

2008	<i>Avantgarden</i> , Toowoomba Botanical and Laurel Bank Gardens, Queensland
2007	<i>Almost</i> , Fitzgerald Frisby Landscape Architecture, Melbourne
2005&06	<i>McClelland Gallery Contemporary Sculpture Survey</i> , Melbourne
2004	<i>Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award</i> . collaboration with landscape architects Phin Murphy and Jim Sinatra (highly commended)
2004	<i>Roses and Thorns</i> , College of Fine Arts Gallery, UNSW
2003	<i>Floating Land</i> , Noosa Regional Art Gallery, Queensland
2003	<i>Sustainable Living Festival</i> , Federation Square, Melbourne
2002	<i>Yarra Array Sculpture Festival</i> , City of Melbourne (major award)
2001	<i>Old Landscape, New Garden</i> . Curated by Ken Scarlett, Seawinds, Victoria
1998	<i>Distribution</i> , published artwork in the magazine <i>Dialogue</i> , No 8, p 76, as part of the exhibition <i>The Bridge</i> , Melbourne
1998	<i>Post Dialogue x 7</i> , Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, as part of Next Wave Festival, Melbourne (catalogue)
1997	<i>A4 Art</i> , WestSpace, Melbourne. Curated by Brett Jones
1996	<i>Location, Location, Location</i> , Linden Arts Centre & Gallery, Melbourne. Curated by Ann Harris (catalogue)
1996	<i>Travelogue</i> , Ian Potter Gallery. Curated by Rachel Kent (catalogue)
1996	<i>Sculpture Walk</i> , Royal Botanic Gardens. Curated by Ken Scarlett (catalogue)
1995&96	St Kilda Festival Projection, projection onto back of Palais Theatre. Curated by Ian de Gruchy
1995	<i>Planning</i> , The Basement Project, Melbourne
1994	<i>Ipsa Photo</i> , Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (catalogue). Curated by Susan Fereday and Stuart Koop
1994	<i>Reading Public</i> , State Library of Victoria, Melbourne. Curated by Zara Stanhope
1993	<i>Do That Job</i> , McPherson's Building, Melbourne, organised by 200 Gertrude Street
1993	<i>Take Me to the River</i> , Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
1992	<i>Justice</i> , 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne
1992	<i>Polite</i> , First Draft West, Sydney
1991	<i>Fulcrum</i> , Artsite, Brisbane (catalogue)
1991	<i>An Image from Within and Without</i> , Linden Arts Centre & Gallery, Melbourne
1990	<i>Seer and Seen</i> , ArtMoves at the Trust, Australian Sculpture Triennial satellite
1989	<i>Sink or Swim</i> , Galerie Cannibal Pierce, St Denis, Paris

Selected Bibliography:

2007	Patrick Jones, 'Words and Things', <i>Artlink</i> , Vol 27, no 1, pp 42-45
2006	Erica Cervini & Jeffrey Gangemi, <i>Weekend Australian Financial Review</i> , 13 May, Business Education, p 16
2006	<i>The Age</i> , Careers in the Arts, 3 May
2006	Robert Nelson, <i>The Age</i> , 18 January, Metro, p 18
2004	James Stuart, 'From Text to Texture', <i>Cordite</i> , issue 20 'Submerged', www.cordite.org.au
2004	<i>The Age</i> , 31 March, Domain, p 9
2004	Robert Nelson, <i>The Age</i> , 10 March, A3 Arts, p 8
2004	Kevin Wilson, <i>Artlink</i> , March, Vol 24, no 1, p 46
2003	Greg Burchall, 'Art and About', <i>Monument</i> , issue 007, May, p 108
2003	Andrew Mackenzie, 'Art in Public', <i>Monument</i> , issue 013, November, p 68
2002	Megan Backhouse, <i>The Age</i> , 9 October, The Culture Review, p. 6
2002	Alison Barclay, <i>Herald Sun</i> , p. 5
2001	<i>World Sculpture News</i> , Vol 7 No 2 Spring 2001, 'Old Landscape, New Garden'
1999	Rose Lang, 'Talking about Ethics: Marie Sierra takes on her audience', <i>Artlink</i> , Vol 19, no 2, p 24