

ID: 446

Academic paper (20+10 min)

Topics: Digital and new materialist artistic and art educational practices and theories

Keywords: art science collaborations, energy systems

Looking for neutral ground in the polarised field of contemporary ecological and social crises

Andrew Thomas Styan

University of Newcastle, Australia; andrew.styan@gmail.com

What art strategies can break through the barrier between knowledge and belief when it comes to any of the ecological or social crises that the world faces? This question has underpinned my short but productive career as an artist and researcher.

After three decades as a metallurgist in manufacturing my art practice began in earnest in 2012, driven by a passion to make people aware of their contribution to climate change. The realisation that we are already aware of the issue - it is impossible to avoid - took another three years. Simply knowing something is not enough to make us believe it will affect us or inspire us to act.

Climate change cannot be separated from all the other issues we face and they are all issues of increasing polarisation: nationalism in response to globalisation and migration; 'left' against 'right'; increasing economic, cultural and geographic inequality; and mankind's fundamental denial of any interdependence with nature. There is little grey space for meaningful dialogue on these black versus white issues. Can art create the neutral ground needed to promote belief? This question motivates my current research and the findings should be applicable across many of these critical issues.

My practice began in landscape photography and has led to data-driven kinetic sculptures and installations, curated discursive exhibitions, a socially engaged practice and energy research collaborations. This paper will trace the development of my media art practice in the context of these questions.