



Focus: Ecology and Ceramics

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Opposite page: **Sally Cleary, *Silent River*, 2011**
 detail, tarpaulin with painted sticks
 Photo: Andrew Barcham, Project Space, 2011

While recently viewing the documentary *Chasing Ice*, I experienced the extreme emotional states of being uplifted and then utterly disheartened. James Balog and a devoted team of young adventurers used innovative time-lapse cameras installed within the relentlessly brutal Arctic climate to record the demise of the world's monolithic and supremely beautiful glaciers due to rapid climate change. Balog's mission was to "deliver evidence and hope to our carbon-powered planet" – hard proof of detrimental, climate change but expressed using the seductive aesthetic language of photography.



The artists in this special focus are not unlike James Balog. They are committed to representing the natural environment whilst encouraging audiences to bear witness to their concerns about the natural world with which humankind is unequivocally interconnected. The web of connections, and our place within its labyrinthine network, is what I consider to be a broad definition of ecology. Consequently, this edition's collection of articles spans a wide spectrum of interests relating to the environment – the conceptually powerful and ephemeral installations of Clare Twomey¹, Virginia Jones' transitory outdoor installations achieved 'through a sustainable working methodology', and Charlie Schneider's² recent collaborative, site-specific project based in Monticello, USA. Australian 'eco warrior' Steve Harrison expresses the importance of place whilst Liz Stops discusses the relationship between environmental activism and skills acquired through her ceramics practice. Many of the artists point to the high level of species depletion in a short space of time during Australia's environmental history. Cathy Franzi, Sally Cleary, Helen Earl, Vicki Hamilton and I express a strong consciousness for Australia's critically endangered flora and fauna.

Clay's direct connection to the earth and its capacity for transformation through fire continues to be a catalyst for Barbara Campbell-Allen and Yuri Wiedenhofer, activating environmental concerns about place and identity. Cathy Keys' hand-formed Bunya pines also engage with a sense of place – in this instance a 'touchstone, not only for Keys but for the places and people of Queensland'.

Returning to *Chasing Ice*, this documentary activates the distress and deep sense of loss taking place now, yet out of sight due to the inaccessible Arctic climate. The artists assembled in this issue are also experiencing a sense of loss due to irreparable climate change, but in a home place or local natural environment. Their common purpose is to remind their audiences that we are all living this experience.

Dr Julie Bartholomew, www.chasingice.com

¹ Clare Twomey, from London, visited Adelaide during October 2012 for the Subversive Clay conference.

² Charlie Schneider from the USA studied at COFA, UNSW and has participated in Sculpture by the Sea and numerous exhibitions in Sydney. He's known for his 'wallpaper' projects about invasive species within the Australian and USA contexts.