

ELIZABETH WECKES TIME MACHINES





3 April – 1 May 2010

8 Hunter Street, Queenstown, Tasmania

Supported by Arts Tasmania and Bendigo Bank

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Elizabeth Weckes LARQ 2009 Artist in Residence

German artist Elizabeth Weckes commenced a residency at LARQ Art Space Queenstown, Tasmania on 1 July 2009. Elizabeth was focused on the historic Lake Margaret Hydro Electric scheme where the power station and pipeline are undergoing current refurbishment. The residency was the third in as many years hosted by LARQ. William Ritchie from Newfoundland and Sue Jane Taylor from Scotland had completed successful residency projects making connection to the West Coast community through their artwork and importantly through their activities. LARQ makes the connections for the visiting artists, guides them through possibilities, transports them, sources materials and generally ensures their well-being. LARQ represents an ‘incubator’ for my own personal artistic development as much as a medium for finding connection and purpose with other artists and the host community of the Western Tasmanian region. ██████████

Elizabeth Weckes is a German painter with interests in a feral world – a transformed, constructed and manipulated nature. She also speaks good English and is a renowned hunter. She is working professionally at an international level. Her artworks are dynamic, full of life and edgy. Their ‘fecund nature’ references Beckman in approach. Their bold style and sense of shadowy collapse offer a foil to their initial ‘brightness’. Elements hint at catastrophe and subsequent weedy reclamation – a perfect mirror to the local Queenstown landscape – while other features hint at hard, technological framing of organic and windblown material. Her painting’s expressive qualities, in sympathy with German painting in general when it returned to figurative gesture in the 1980s, underline Elizabeth’s feeling for the great energy, almost frenzy within the growth and decay of the natural world. Their painted colour functions, as floral and cellular pigment always does, as signalling actions towards attraction and repulsion. The new Lake Margaret images integrate the phenomenological with the mechanical and Elizabeth’s exhibition *Time Machines* held at LARQ during April 2010 expresses something of this dynamic. ██████████

██████████ The Lake Margaret environment is a unique place that encapsulates both wild and technological forces. Hydro Tasmania is constructing a new wooden pipeline and renovating the power station to bring the system back on stream. In its combination of ‘old’ historic infrastructure and ‘sustainable green’ technology the station symbolises a way forward for alternative energy strategies – a type of efficient recycling. The Hydro in concert with a local committee have developed conservation management and site interpretation plans to ensure the successful transition of the current neglected and closed facility into a functioning centre for power generation and heritage interpretation. Item 7.2.3 of the *2006 Lake Margaret Interpretation Plan* flags the concept of artist residencies as a way of...’ extending the heritage and technological values inherent in the precinct beyond the site.’ ██████████ The project was funded by Arts Tasmania with substantial assistance from Hydro Tasmania. David Brown, Project Manager for the Lake Margaret Power Station refurbishment, was an efficient and constant supporter and Helen Brain from External Communications, Hydro Tasmania was an important contributor to the project. – **Raymond Arnold** LARQ



Stand quietly. **Be here now!**

The west coast of Tasmania contains many lakes of various sizes situated at high levels. The west coast range forms the first high land barriers to the moisture laden winds blowing in from the Southern Ocean. By the time the clouds strike the mountains they ride very low. Consequently the elevation of the range, which does not exceed 1500m, is sufficient to cause copious rain to fall. Lake Margaret forms a natural reservoir of about 150 hectares in area and is the result of glacial action and is surrounded by serrated conglomerate ridges. The natural disposition of the country provided an excellent site for a power station, thus, almost 100 years ago in the valley of the Yolande River, toiling men began the work to create the magnificent scheme. By 1914 the generating plant, dam and wooden pipelines were complete, including a village of graceful houses for staff. To step back to the turning-on of the station, when turbines became alive, and the energy flowed in 1914 can only be imagined but 75 years later I indeed did step back into this wonderland in search of work because the Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company were in need of a worker to assist in the upkeep and maintenance of the two miles of wooden pipeline. So it came to be that I became acquainted with the scheme; the village, the station, the tracks, the trails, the weather, the animals and the birds. In the days when men walked the country established tracks flowed across the landscape, sometimes cut into steep-sided hills leaving traces for us to see. Today, unused because of new sealed roads and bridges, the folk who once walked the country walk no more. The path from the village where I live up to the hill-top above the power station was a well-trodden path, when each day the 'Pipe Patrolman' would if he was fit, nimbly make his way to 1000 feet above the village. He would then walk to the lake; his duty being to observe all changes including lake level and rainfall, this information served the station operator. On his way, as observer, he would note any changes to the massive wooden pipeline, assessing new leaks and if necessary repairing them the same day. A change in water requirement to the turbines caused internal pressures to rise and fall and due to the age-weakened condition of the wood-staves water did escape and exit as powerful jets. My work upon the pipeline required new skills and awareness; the instancy of water and my purposes showed me the intelligence of this living responsive entity. Further reading suggests that water carries memory and consciousness, as do all living things; and working with it caused me to acknowledge the idea as a fact. Days of 'pipe-patching'

working alone in this grand landscape brought me close to Heaven, my days passing quietly and thoughtfully. ██████████ On his way to the Lake the walker may look to the gaunt distant peaks across wooded valleys, see far off waterfalls, witness rain falling from laden clouds. He may imagine, as I often did, the effect of millions of years of weathering and reductions of the land by wind and water. How much higher did the peaks extend? Views along the way show clearly the paths taken by the glaciers, the Yolande Valley gouged by the same glacier that sat upon the water body of Lake Margaret. This glacier appears from its footprint to be a mile-wide; the evidence of its pathway remains impressed upon the land. ██████████ In this great space of earth and sky the ‘Pipe-Patchers’ eye could be drawn to the soaring eagle, or perhaps a pair engaged in aerial acrobatics, steep diving, then gaining height without a beating wing to the point of stall, then tipping the body, wings in close to the body and into another steep dive. This display, which is done for their entertainment, is a thrill to witness. The wedgetail eagle appears to be less common, sensitive and shy, habitat destruction the most likely cause. ██████████ So too the black and white cockatoos, who obviously regard man as an invader on their land. To see and hear groups of black cockatoos high in the sky calling, passing information and connecting through great space is wonderful indeed. Because the Power Station still exists I am here. The village comprised now of six houses built by those who built the powerhouse so long ago afforded shelter and comfort to those who came, worked and left over the years. Children were born here. At times from earth itself will appear a man-made object, a glass marble, pottery fragment, the arm of a child’s doll. ██████████ The houses are empty and the people are absent. ██████████ Since a new wooden pipeline replaces the old, today pipe patrolmen/pipe patchers are no longer employed. Since the power station has become automated man’s presence is diminished. The earth on which I stand will remain. Water and Earth have memory and know the history. Stand quietly. Be here now!

— **TIM MUNRO** Miner, Tasmania



Pink berry 2009 oil on canvas, 71 x 51cm



Straight to the Antipodes – Elizabeth Weckes before, during and after Tasmania

In the time of extreme tourism there seem to be almost no places left that are totally unobserved by European eyes. Nevertheless, a trip to the Antipodes is still something bigger than what travellers normally participate in. ■■■■■ What makes a German painter leave the European summer for a Tasmanian winter into a landscape for which ‘remote’ seems to be an understatement. ■■■■■ Looking at the paintings that she brought back from Tasmania and painted after the trip, we find part of an answer but also new and deeper questions. On partly large scale watercolours and oil paintings we see landscapes and architectural formations that are coined by a strange botany. Machines seem to lead a mysterious life of their own. In some cases they are intact technical objects at the place of their origin but then they are also overgrown until sucked into diverse botanical and geological proceedings. It is remarkable though that in most paintings there is no complete synthesis of both worlds. Weckes rather stresses the hard clash and friction of the substantial components. ■■■■■ Very often the contradictions collide with such a force that the paintings seem to be torn apart. An example is *Big mountain* in which carved containers, bizarre turbines of an unknown phyto-technical civilization rotate around themselves. In perspectival succession they point towards a realistic Tasmanian verdure, which glows in the background like an unreachable pastoral scene from a postcard. Anxiety arises in the presence of such paintings. A feeling of rupture grows bigger since the counterparts obviously fail to produce a ‘poetic spark’ on a higher reconciling level that could resolve out of an antithesis. While Max Ernst developed a kind of romantic surrealistic poetry resulting from such unsolvable riddles, the new works of his admirer Elizabeth Weckes show a threateningly tense, confounded, entangled world. ■■■■■ The world of Elizabeth Weckes becomes and remains strange: Who or what confronts us in *Turbine*? A burning red ‘thing’ is threateningly poised on hind legs, ready to roll over us, yet still stuck in an unsolvable stupor. Although impressive in appearance the figure form stays anonymous and that is why it remains hollow even though its inside is characterised by uncountable intertwining and interlocking structures without a noticeable heart – the self portrait of a machine? The human spectator does not identify with such a thing. Its organic and technical limbs do not connect to an anthropomorphic system as they do for instance in Matta’s work, where they metaphorically mirror human alienation. Rather, it seems to be the other way around where in the connection between man and machine the first thing that gets missing is physiognomy. Is this a modern answer to the question of man’s role in a reality influenced by artificial intelligence, cyborgs and virtual realities? ■■■■■ Many artists today deal with this theme using all sorts of media. A ‘Vision broken like glass’ as Paul Virilio stated in 1993 influences their perception and the interpretation of reality – if you want to call it that. These disconnected worlds however, are not commercialised in a cheap ironical and decorative way and unlike many other artists Weckes does not take advantage of them. We find neither a ‘dance on the volcano’, nor a solemn rescue of the world through her art by trying to overtake reality.

Weckes stays both, metaphorical and pictorial. That is also the reason why she denies the eternal political correct German ‘inspection of the navel’ as a constant marketing strategy and way of perception. And that not just since Tasmania. Weckes does not use stereotypes applied to ‘German painting’, which does not necessarily help her abroad either. Here the market is also adjusted to rumored quotes from ‘German myths’ of the older and younger German past. And yet a gallery in Sydney classified her paintings as being too German. ■■■■■ If these paintings are really ‘German’ then perhaps in a long neglected and almost forgotten tradition in which the analysing naturalism of the surface is based on a thorough study of the anatomy and the structures below. A tradition which contemporary German artists have almost neglected since Dürer. This thoroughness manifests itself substantially in many layers, insights and vistas of Weckes’ paintings. Plants, creatures, the earth – complete landscapes are cut open, dissected, analysed so they reveal anything repressed, forgotten and hidden. Skeletons in the cupboard are released. Time structures of both, the individual and collective past appear. The view onto a painting becomes a trip into the depth of this past, and the painting becomes a time machine. This is not bearable for everyone, and is perhaps strenuous. Furthermore this description of the paintings’ contents is also true for the process of painting itself. Who ever has seen Weckes paint, is astounded at how rigorously she works on form and material. Nothing is left to chance through spontaneous action, but brought to a final concentration by continuous layers of paint. This is also true of the gouache and watercolours. There is no ‘charm of the incomplete’ nor a ‘gentle hint’ or other such stylistic device very often used for sensationalism in such media. Instead clear forms, a controlled range of colours, a consequent brushstroke that makes every inch of the painting an honest composition. That requires energy and that should be seen, too. So the many traces of her endeavors are not hidden but remain and are understandable as a Palimpsest in the layers of paint. In this sense Emil Schumacher’s dictum that every painting should ‘have gone through some bad times’ finds a relation and confirmation in Weckes’ paintings. Nevertheless, it is the joy of painting that will be perceived and not the labour. Or should one say that for this



Big mountain 2009 oil on canvas, 70 x 96cm



painter the joy results in the endeavor of her work? There are definite indications for that in her biography. ■ Born in the sign of Aries she is certainly a ‘person of quick and mostly successful actions’. And this is not only based on astrological auto-suggestion, but becomes reality in her long list of prizes and shows. However, you won’t find the shooting star there, but the continuing worker that stays on the track no matter how difficult times are always focussing on success. And it becomes quite clear that she not only presents her work in Germany but always desires to show it to a global community. Travels to the United States, Asia, Oceania and shows in Japan, England, France and Tasmania characterise her, true to her half English background, as a globe-trotter. As if this was not enough she seeks more challenges in battles between man and nature by attending atlantic ocean races, going hunting or, as an arachnophobiac visiting Tasmania. ■ Gottfried Benn’s stanza from the poem *Travels* stands in contrast to Weckes. It reads: ‘Stationstreets and Rues// Boulevards, Lidos, Laan-// even on the 5th Avenues // they are overcome by emptiness –’ ■ While Benn focusses on the German inner ‘adventure in the mind’, Weckes ventures and claims herself. And yet, at home in her studio she combines the many experiences and influences to complex compositions. ■ So we have a painter of contrasts: a productive traveller, a homely vagabond, a hunting friend of animals; a painter of contradictions: sensitivity and power, heat and cold, farthest distance and closest nearness, intimacy and a large scale representation. We can hardly think of a greater distance than that between Frechen/Germany and Queenstown/Tasmania. It is only understandable that she is drawn to one of the remotest parts of the reachable world. ■ However, while the traveller has to overcome maximum geographical distance, the painter chooses the direct path – straight through the centre of the earth. – **Matthias Brock** Germany



Power Station 2009 oil on canvas, 70 x 98cm





Banksia 2009 oil on canvas, 71 x 51cm



Silver eye 2009 oil on canvas, 71 x 51cm



Way of the water 2009 oil on canvas, triptych 71 x 91cm (each panel)



Prospector 2009 acrylic/watercolour on paper, 84 x 59.5cm



Tasmanian Hydro 2009 acrylic/watercolour on paper, 84 x 59.5cm



Morning at the power station 2009 acrylic/watercolour on paper, 84 x 59.5cm



Self portrait pioneer 2009 acrylic/watercolour on paper, 84 x 59.5cm



Painter's power station 2009 acrylic/watercolour on paper, 84 x 59.5cm



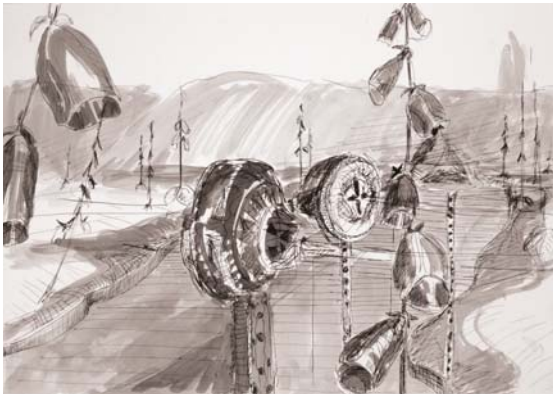
David and Goliath 2009 acrylic/watercolour on paper, 84 x 59.5cm



Valve self portrait 2009 acrylic/watercolour on paper, 84 x 59.5cm



Old man at the window 2009 acrylic/watercolour on paper, 84 x 59.5cm



Gum power 2009 liquid graphite on paper, 29.5 x 42cm



Meeting the power 2009 liquid graphite on paper, 29.5 x 42cm



Meeting the power II 2009 liquid graphite on paper, 29.5 x 42cm



Meeting the valley 2009 liquid graphite on paper, 29.5 x 42cm



Visitors 2009 liquid graphite on paper, 42 x 29.5cm



Locals 2009 liquid graphite on paper, 42 x 29.5cm



Guard 2009 liquid graphite on paper, 29.5 x 42cm



Abyss 2009 liquid graphite on paper, 29.5 x 42cm

Born in Willich, Germany in 1968, Elizabeth Weckes studied painting at the Academy of Arts in Münster. Coming from a German/English family her life has always been influenced by different languages and her many travels around the world. After completing her extra master/pupil year at the academy she joined the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque where she worked both as a tutor and student. After returning to Germany, she opened the studio with Matthias Brock in Frechen near Cologne. This became an essential base for her work between travels. ██████████ She later completed her teacher training and received a number of grants. These included the 1993 Max Ernst Prize (Brühl) and the 1997 Culture prizes of North Rhine-Westphalia (Düsseldorf) and of her home town Willich. In 2000 and 2003 she completed studio residencies in Paris. In 2004 she gave art forums at the Academy of Art, Launceston and the Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart. In the same year she was also a visiting artist at COFA, Sydney. In 2008 Elizabeth was invited by LARQ to attend the 2009 residency the work of which is presented in this show. ██████████ She is always drawn to distant places, curious about what to find and at the same time true to her own style which can be seen in a consistent body of work. Here the unknown and the well-known worlds unite to a kind of home for her. She has shown her work in more than 40 public and private galleries in Germany , Europe and overseas in solo and group shows. ██████████ For further information and to view more works visit **www.elizabeth-weckes.de**

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