

## CAROLINE ROTHWELL

### *Weather Maker, 2014*

Caroline Rothwell's work is deceptive. At a distance, the images and their materials seem familiar motifs of industrial modernism: smoke stacks, cannons, and airships. The materials, as well, are at first sight reassuringly frank: bronze, rubber, paper, ink. We are in what appears to be a 19th century archival project, a half affectionate documentation of a past safely dead and buried. On a second take, however, there is something clearly wrong here. The cannons emit only billowing smoke. The zeppelins remain tethered to strange moorings. The clouds, at first sight all silver lining, emit their rain vertically upwards, and their rain is black.

The subject of these works is technology, but speculative contemporary technology rather than steam punk. What is documented here is a nascent industry: weather modification and climate control. Devices that Caroline Rothwell has studied include Artificial Trees, Cloud Whiteners, the mysteriously named Mission 2013 Air Scrubber and SPICE: Stratospheric Particle Injection for Climate Engineering. All these technologies are the serious subject of research and development. Seeing that the atmosphere does not respect national borders, the potential market for such devices is by definition global. The hubris behind such projects—that only technology can solve technology's problems—is familiar.

The artist can't do much in response to this hubris other than set an example, bringing their production of materials back to a domestic scale. Rothwell does this by melting her own white bronze on a camping stove, and producing her own inks. Lamp black, for instance, is a pigment produced from the incomplete combustion of what, in a 1920s American Encyclopedia, were poetically called "the dead oils", or what we call 'fossil fuels'. It is a fine pigment, lightly carcinogenic in rats and with a tendency to stain. A common ingredient from Renaissance painting to 19th century printing, it can be produced by carefully burning oil cold pressed from the kernels of peaches, or scraped from the exhaust of a typical family car, which is where Rothwell gets her supply from.

Contemporary climate modification technologies are usually presented with high-techno-triumphalism; Rothwell shows them as perverse 19th century fantasies, products of an juvenile industrial revolution in a state of hormonal disarray. What at first appears to be an airship is a Stratospheric Particle Injector dispensing a puff of smoke across the page. The cannon is a prototype cloud buster, referring back to Wilhelm Reich's fantasy of irrigating the world with latent sexual (orgone) energy. PVC zeppelins, like vagrant ovaries, are hitched to insectile armatures or battleships, all accompanied by the silvery and black clouds that accompanied our first tentative steps in the industrial production of bad weather. Rothwell's work makes it impossible to ever look at Duchamp's *the bride stripped bare by her bachelors*, even in the same way—all of a sudden Duchamp's masterpiece of sexual innuendo becomes retrospectively transformed into a giant weather station, a hot and heavy harbinger of the anthropocene.

This is the fertile stress at the heart of Caroline Rothwell's practice. A meticulous researcher, she produces work that looks artisanal and figurative, but is ultimately conceptual and process driven.

Adam Jasper, 2014

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Caroline Rothwell has been exhibiting nationally and internationally for over two decades. Recently, Rothwell was included in the *2014 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Dark Heart* at the Art Gallery of South Australia, curated by Nick Mitzevich, which incorporated a solo show, *Urpflanze Street Plants* at the Museum of Economy Botany. In 2014 Rothwell was selected for the prestigious Omi International Arts Center Residency in New York. In 2012, Rothwell's bronze *Youngsters* were permanently installed at George and Barrack Street and *Symbiosis* was commissioned for the Brewery on Central Park, Sydney. In 2009, Fabienne Nicholas of London's Contemporary Art Society, curated Rothwell's *Dispersed* for The Economist Plaza, London. In 2015 she will complete an invitational research and print folio project (through the Australian Print Workshop) at Cambridge University and the British Library, London. Also in 2015 Caroline Rothwell will present a major commission of six bronze sculptures for Rhodes Foreshore, Canada Bay Council and Robert Blackson will curate a project for Temple Contemporary at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. Rothwell's work is held in major public collections

including: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Art Gallery of South Australia, Shepparton Art Museum, University of Queensland Art Museum, State Library of Victoria, Artbank, Auckland Art Gallery, Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand. *Weather Maker* is Caroline Rothwell's first exhibition with Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.