HANNAH BERTRAM

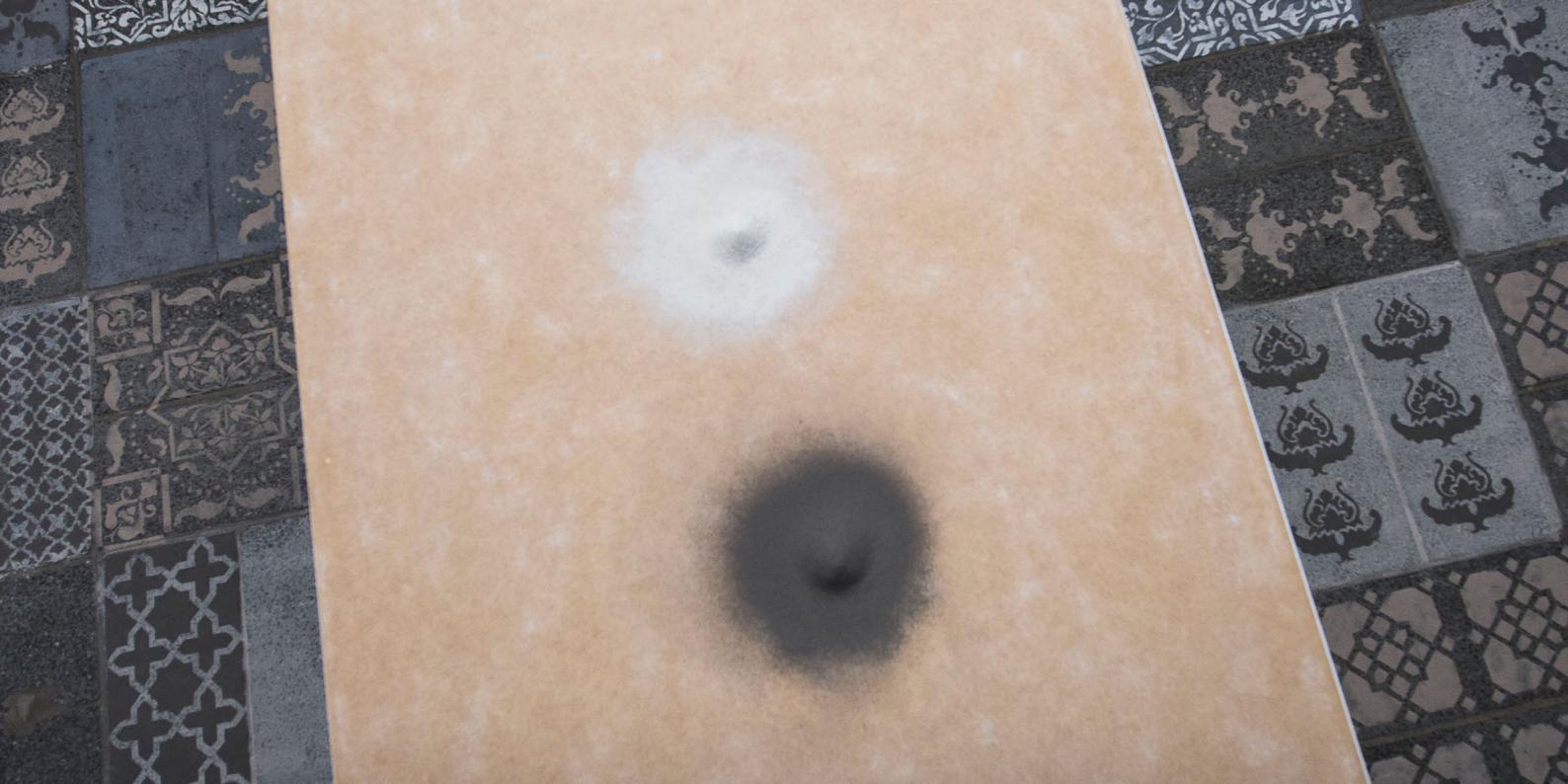
THE GLOBAL DUST PROJECT: AISLES OF THE DEAD



THE GLOBAL DUST PROJECT: AISLES OF THE DEAD

LUMA | La Trobe University Museum of Art, Melbourne 15 April – 19 June 2015

Curated by Michael Brennan and Anita La Pietra





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TO BE CONTINUED

...something of the previous work, bringing with it the re-collected particulate matter of the earlier installation and combining it with newly collected dust in the realisation of this current composition. As such, the work has a history. You are entering it part way through. What came before, you may not have been privy too. And likewise, you may not be around to see what it later becomes – comingled with dust gathered from another location, arranged in a new space and represented in a different form. What you are witnessing is the process of transformation that acts upon everything in the universe. Only here its passage is amplified – made visible by virtue of the material's lightness, fragility, mutability and the intervention of the artist's hand in the choreography of this global dance.

Bertram's work rattles our sense of stability and permanence – the fixity of objects that we try to surround ourselves with in order to make sense of our worlds. Instead, she gives us artfully arranged dust configurations of exceptional delicacy and exquisite beauty; laboriously composed with the intent of breaking down from the moment they are conceived. These methods and momentary realisations of form raise questions about beginnings and ends – about the boundaries of things - of substance - permanence and transience – being and not-being. Our frame of reference experiences a shift. Instead of entering the museum space and encountering objects cloaked in an atmosphere of permanence and preservation, we are immediately aware of the fragility of what we have happened upon, and what's more, the apparent worthlessness of the stuff from which it is fashioned. That which typically endures - fine art - is made to be swept aside in an instant. It's place of importance - and somehow, by extension, our own - is replaced with a casual gesture that is gone not long after it is performed. This, in turn, says something about our own fleeting existence. The added knowledge that these

works – or parts thereof – have had a previous incarnation, further changes and challenges the scale of our experience. It's all very Hindu ... or Buddhist ... or Big Bang. Maybe.

In the tradition of ephemeral art – a challenge to the permanence and commodification of the art object, its tradable value raised above its aesthetic or conceptual intent – Bertram's practice defies collectability, its very form becoming and dissolving before our eyes. I guess this was somewhat at play when the suggestion was made to Hannah that she could collect the dust for this project from the University Art Collection storerooms. Over the course of several weeks, Bertram carefully and fastidiously harvested the barely perceptible dust that had gathered in our storerooms over time – wiping down the frames of individual works and compiling the material amassed; sweeping out the cavities and crevices of their storage spaces and mixing it with the dust collected from the works that inhabited them. An art making and conservation project in one, you might say.

The evidence of this process is on display in the gallery alongside the intricate arabesque dust patterns that adorn a section of the darkened gridded floor. The rags that were used to cleanse the extremities of art works hang in a ramshackle collection in their own frames, scattered across the wall (gravitating towards the corner, as dust is prone to do) in a sporadic salon style hang. This display reminds us that Bertram's project is about process, not product. The tools of Bertram's artmaking procedure are arranged in the gallery in the space where end products are usually encountered. Here, method becomes form.

Elsewhere in the space, projected onto the back of a work borrowed from the Collection titled 'Isles of the Dead', we are presented with a slide show documenting Bertram making her way down the storeroom aisle, taking the time to look at each of the objects at her disposal – offering each the respect of a private viewing – before she brushes them clean.

Poetry is in abundance in Bertram's work. From the importance bestowed on the detrital and the ordinary, to the coalescence of 'aisle' and 'isles' to evoke the idea that art works in a large collection can sometimes be exiled to a forgotten fate, through to the notion that the material for this exhibition was literally taken from the University Art Collection, if not in the customary way. And then, of course, there's what Hannah does with her dust. Having collected this material – sorted and stored – Bertram shifts from noun to verb in her understanding of her medium and what she sets out to achieve - from 'dust' to 'to dust'. Hand cut stencils, purpose made for the space, are delicately laid out on the floor, the collected material gently scattered across their carved negative space. Carefully peeled back, they reveal their intricate patterns and forms, merging with the floor upon which they rest. The challenge to the viewer here – particularly in the current display – is that to experience the work – in fact, even to be able to see it in its entirety – one must walk across it, destroying (or perhaps simply transforming) parts of it in the process. As observers, we are forced to acknowledge the role we each play ourselves in the evershifting act of becoming and un-becoming - creation and destruction on the world.

And so Hannah Bertram's Global Dust Project is never a fixed entity – never a finished work. Instead it is a project in constant flux. There is evidence that activity has taken place and its form is even briefly crystallised in designs so elegant and ethereal that we wish we could hold onto them forever. But that would negate the purpose of Bertram's work. Instead we are simply allowed to glimpse what this material can be – making a brief appearance – before continuing its ceaseless journey of impermanence and shape-shifting. There is no beginning and no end – only process and change. A project full of memory and potential – one that...

Michael Brennan
Acting Artistic Director
LUMA | La Trobe University Museum of Art

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WE ARE DUST ENTHUSIASTS

Amatho (dust) -philia (fondness for)

Hannah Bertram shapes dust into fine ornaments. When I first saw her work I was amazed it was truly made of dusts. The fragility is so great it inspired in me the contradictory desire to stop breathing, motionless, or to run through it just to see what happens!

She uses dust to tell a story. And so do I, but from a completely different viewpoint. We both spend lots of time thinking about and handling tiny particles that we may call dust, dirt, sediment or soil. The reason why I was asked to contribute to this catalogue is because just like the artist, I am a dust enthusiast. I am a geoscientist studying the magnetic properties of the fine particles that accumulate in the bottom of lakes and oceans, or within burned archaeological artefacts, rocks and soils. I use these different types of "Earth dusts" to better understand how our planet works. The magnetic particles I am interested in only represent a very small fraction of those dusts, typically less than 1%, and yet they have amazing stories to tell. Those fine magnetic particles are iron minerals that may have been eroded from the bedrock and transported by winds and rivers to a lake or an ocean, or synthetized in situ chemically or by some living organism such as magnetotactic bacteria. Along their journey the iron mineral can oxidize or reduce; they are very sensitive to changes in their environment. Dust is weathered, transported, settled, and transformed. Until one day some magnetist picks it up and brings it to the laboratory to try and understand how the geomagnetic field evolved, how climate changed, how catastrophic events and anthropogenic pollution happened. I am working with Earth dusts, but other magnetists also study the dust of other celestial bodies, from the famous Apollo mission on the moon to the Rosetta mission that recently reached the comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko, and

where the Philae lander reported a dust cover of 10 to 20 cm. Dusts clearly have heaps of stories to tell and exciting discoveries will come through, on Earth and elsewhere. After all, we know from the popular saying that "we are all made of star dust". Dust is pretty exciting, isn't it? I believe dust is the most extraordinary story book providing an understanding of the past, and also crucially important for our society.

Dust stories

Think about time. How long does it take for dust to accumulate behind couches, in a shed, in a prison cell, or for ashes to build up in a fireplace? These are just some of the places Hannah Bertram has previously collected dusts for her artwork. Newer dust continuously builds up on the older dust. It takes roughly 10,000 years to accumulate 1 cm of dust on the Moon, 1000 years in the ocean and 100 years on land and in lakes. The faster dust or sediment accumulates, the more detailed the story will be. For an analogy, places with higher accumulation rates can be seen as thicker story books. Exceptional places such as near a glacier discharge, levees of submarine canyons, and protected harbor basins can reach even higher rates of sedimentation. Moreover, catastrophic events such as flood, storm and tsunami can deposit considerable quantities of material in one place almost instantaneously, over only hours or days. Thus natural sediment archives can provide a very detailed story of what happened through time at a particular place. One important part of the job of a paleoclimatologist is precisely to find where on Earth the perfect archive with the best accumulation rate can be found to answer a specific question, and ultimately better understand how our planet works. We learn important stories from Earth dusts on a wide range of topics, from the frequency of paleo-earthquake, -hurricanes and other catastrophic events, to the timing of mass extinctions and the evolution of the atmosphere and ocean circulation patterns around the globe, among many others. Arguably one of the greatest scientific breakthroughs in paleoclimatology came from analyzing deep sea sediments that accumulated over the last few hundreds of thousands

years; the discovery that orbital forcing has been an important factor in driving the ice ages. Orbital periodicities (eccentricity, obliquity, precession) give the pace for global climate over long periods of time, however details on regional climate mechanisms and feedbacks remains poorly understood. Fascinating yet unanswered questions about dust and past climate in the Southern Hemisphere include: why the atmosphere was so much dustier during glacial periods? What is the contribution of Australian dust to the Southern Ocean biological productivity and CO₂ ventilation during glacial and interglacial periods?

Dust and society

What place has dust in our society? Dust is crucially important for our health, from the air we breathe to the food we eat and where we live. In particular, soils result from the accumulation of dust on land, and their sustainable management is celebrated this year with the 2015 international year of soils and its slogan "Healthy soils for a healthy life". Soil quality importantly forms the basis of our agriculture and dusts can be seen as essential nutrients for the vegetation growing on land. The same is true at sea, where clouds of dusts originating from continents travel offshore and provide key nutrients for microscopic marine algae at the base of the food chain. Satellite imagery provides truly stunning pictures of these dust clouds in different areas of the world. Here in Australia dust storms are a regular occurrence in some regions, and these events are intimately linked with drought and land erosion. Severe historical dust storms include the Melbourne dust storm in 1983 (1.8 million tons of dust), and the extraordinary 2009 dust storm which moved 15 million tons of dust over southeast Australia. This dust, eroded and transported by winds, also contributes to the quality of the air we breathe, and the same is true for volcanic ashes and dusts that can rapidly travel around the globe, impact air traffic and even alter the short-term climate. One example of volcanic dusts acting as an enormous solar radiation filter is the infamous 1815 eruption of the Tambora volcano in Indonesia, which likely caused

"The Year Without Summer". That eruption is the greatest recorded in historical times and the following year, unseasonably cool summer temperatures and frost led to failed harvests, famine and poverty throughout Europe and North America. Dust clearly plays an important role in our health and in the Earth's climate, making dust central to the challenges of extreme events our society faces today.

Will you think about some of this next time you dust?

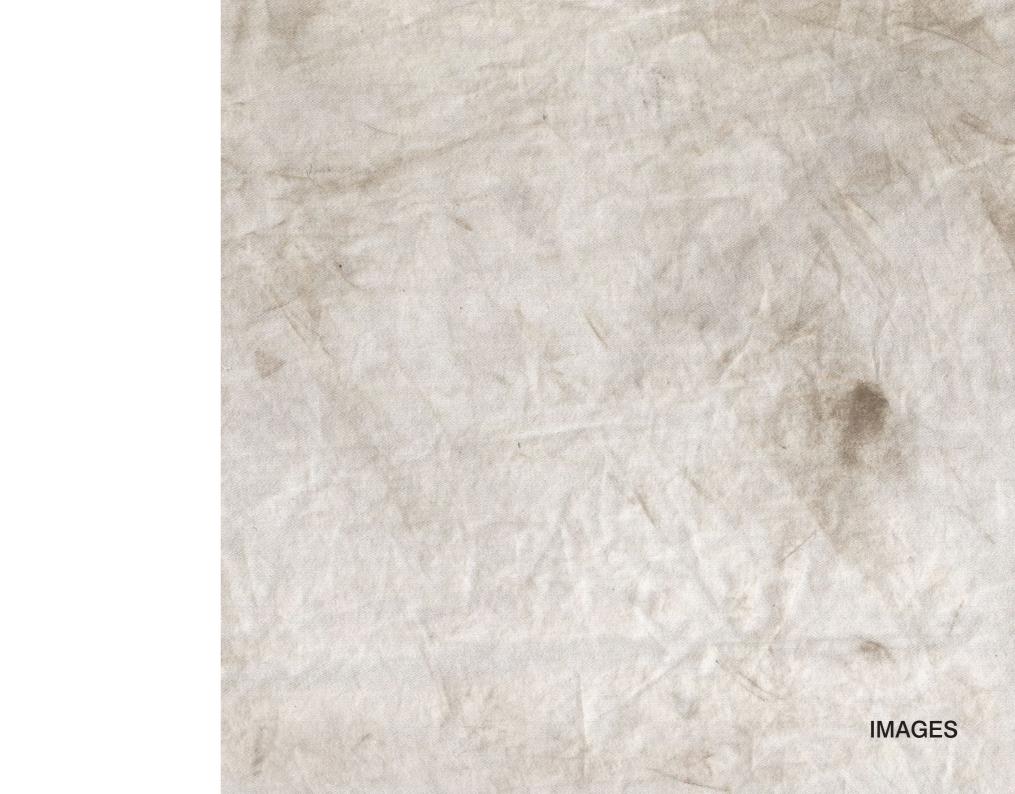
At the end, I like that Hannah's artwork is so fragile and temporary. Dusts beautifully take place somewhere, out of their original contexts, and they will undoubtedly move on, blown away by someone or by the elements. Be lucky enough to see it while it lasts. It will bite the dust. Ashes to ashes.

Agathe Lisé-Pronovost Research Fellow, La Trobe University Earth dusts. Lake Selina in Tasmania and cube sampling of its colorful sediments for magnetic analysis. The pink quartz near the lake (visible in the forefront of top picture) is being eroded through time, providing dust to the lake and giving a pink color to the minerogenic glacial sediments (visible in the cubes on the right of the lower picture). In contrast the sediments deposited during warmer interglacial periods like today are darker and organic-rich.



top Michael-Shawn Fletcher (www.msf-photograph.com); middle and bottom Agathe Lisé-Pronovost

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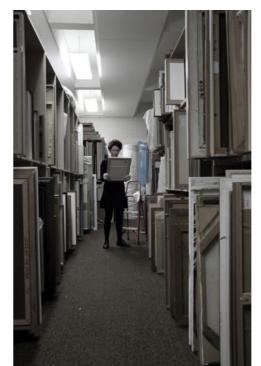




































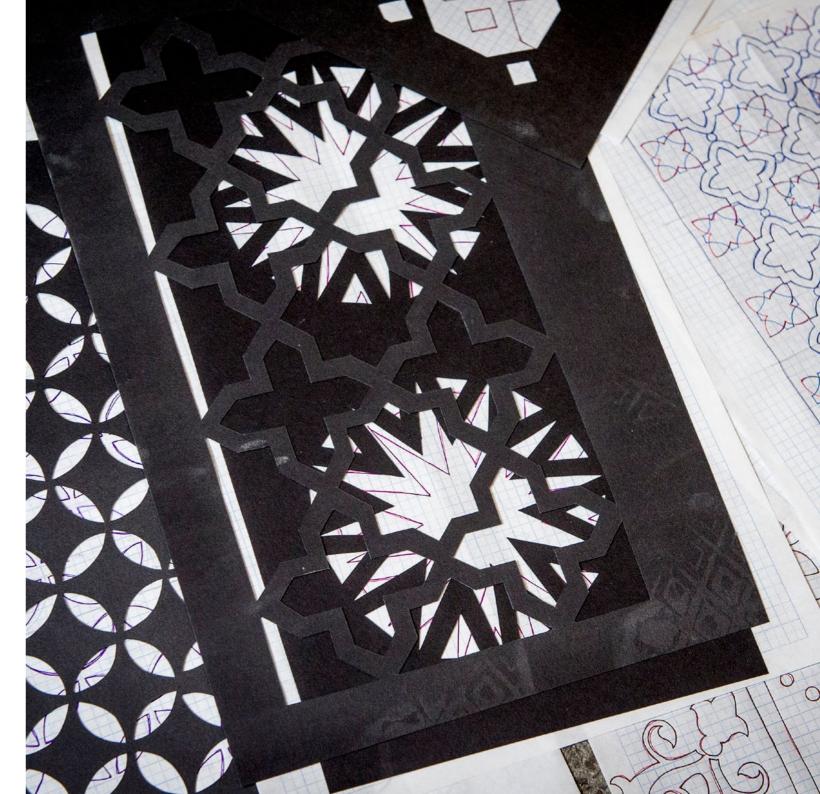




















THD DUST ARCHIVE 2013- ONGOING

- 1. ASH. Unknown
- 2. MARBLE DUST. Kutztown, USA
- 3. FIREPLACE ASH. New Jersey, USA
- 4. **CEMENT DUST**. Unknown
- 5. CLAY DUST. Kutztown University Ceramic Studio, USA
- 6. CLAY DUST. Kutztown Studio, USA
- 7. CHARCOAL DUST. Main St Art Store, Kutztown, USA
- 8. BASEMENT DUST. East Main St, Kutztown, USA
- 9. DRY WALL DUST (ONLY). Miller Gallery, Kutztown, USA
- 10. SAWDUST. Furniture Studio, Kutztown, USA
- 11. DUST COLLECTOR FINES. Northampton, USA
- 12. VACUUM DUST. East Main St, Kutztown, USA
- 13. VACUUM. Unknown
- 14. VACUUM. Unknown
- 15. VACUUM. Unknown
- 16. CARRY'S VACUUM DUST. Dixon Dormitory, Kutztown, USA
- 17. SAW DUST. Dale, Norway
- 18. SIFTED FINES DUST. Northampton, USA
- 19. BURNT DRAWINGS FROM OCT DEC 2013. Dale, Norway
- 20. DRYER LINT, OUTDOORS VACUUM, BEDROOM DUST. Honeybrook, USA
- 21. **SAWDUST**. Unknown
- 22. STONEWALL DUST. Dale, Norway
- 23. CARBON POWDER DUST. Unknown
- 24. SHEETROCK. Unknown

- 25. APARTMENT DUST. Unknown
- 26. ATTIC DUST. Latrobe, PA, USA
- 27. DIXON VACUUM. Kutztown, USA
- 28. CEILING FAN DUST. Blanton, USA
- 29. SAWDUST. Foundation School, Kutztown, PA, USA
- 30. PAINT DUST. Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, USA
- 31. FABRIC DUST. Thornbury, Australia
- 32. PLASTER DUST. Gasworks Studio, Port Melbourne, Australia
- 33. PINE SAWDUST. Artists workshop, Hampton, Australia
- 34. FLOOR BOARD GAP DUST. Artist studio, Melbourne, Australia
- 35. FLOOR BOARD GAP DUST. Artist studio, Melbourne, Australia
- 36. DUST. Artist studio, Docklands, Australia
- 37. STUDIO/APPARTMENT. South Yarra, Australia
- 38. SPRAY PAINT DUST. Prahran, Australia
- 39. BATHROOM DUST. Baggiou, Philippines
- 40. BONFIRE ASH. Baggiou, Phillipines
- 41. STREET DUST. MRT Station, Botanical gardens, construction site, Singapore, Singapore
- 42. DUST. Unknown
- 43. CARPET DUST. Power St, Hawthorn. Australia
- 44. VACCUM DUST. Footscray, Australia
- 45. STONE DUST. 5th 6th century Carthage Rome, Italy
- 46. DUST. Catacombs, Paris, France
- 47. PLASTER DUST. Eastern State Penitentiary, Pennsylvania, USA
- 48. STOREROOM DUST. Latrobe University Art Storeroom, Bundoora, Australia

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HANNAH BERTRAM

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A LUMA | La Trobe University Museum of Art Exhibition

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All images:

Hannah Bertram

Global Dust Project: Aisles of the Dead

Installation views

Vials of gathered dust, dusty rags framed in op shop frames, dust mono-print on tracing paper, video projected onto the reverse side of a painting, dust collected from the LUMA storeroom, dust sanded from a plinth, a projection to hold in your hands.

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