



Alexander Boynes and Mandy Martin ahead of their art exhibition 'Hi-Vis Futures' at Canberra Museum and Gallery. Picture: Elesa Kurtz

Painting an environmental future

Amy Martin

STANDING in the middle of the *Hi-Vis Futures* exhibition at Canberra Museum and Gallery, you can hear the two main pieces calling to each other.

Created by Alexander Boynes and Mandy Martin, with sound by Tristen Parr, the two 10 metre-long installations both take on environmental issues from different perspectives.

"They kind of call and respond to each other from across the space," Boynes says.

The works are made up of three key elements.

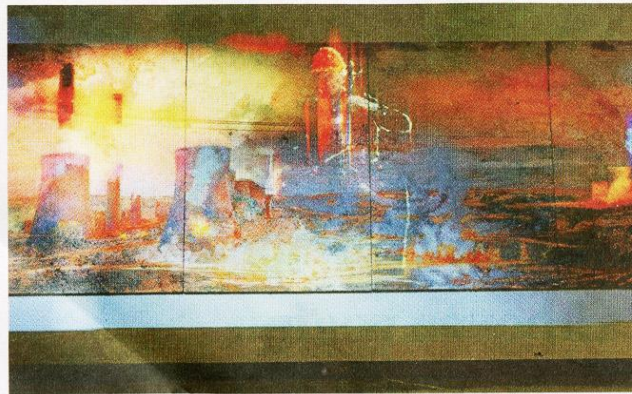
The layering of Boynes' video imagery animates Martin's static painting with flashes of fire burning, cars speeding, a gentle breeze in an ancient forest and workers in hi-vis clothing navigating through industrial sites. All the while, the images are accompanied by Parr's haunting cello.

The result is one which encompasses a web of issues - political, environmental and social - that the artists feel is representative of the present day.

And with video footage taken from specific communities - including Geelong and Morwell in Victoria - it's hard to argue with that.

This week, especially, with fires burning through New South Wales and Queensland, *Hi-Vis Futures* seem more timely than ever.

"For me these works are not about pointing fingers, they're not about casting blame. It's about acknowledging the time and the situation that we are dealing with,"



One of the two main pieces in 'Hi-Vis Futures'. Picture: Elesa Kurtz

Boynes says.

"We're all complicit in a way. We all have something that we need to do to address our changing planet, our changing world.

"It's not about laying blame on anyone, it's more about acknowledging where we are at and trying to find a positive, hopeful future."

Hi-Vis Futures is a family affair. Boynes is Martin's son and Parr is her son-in-law. Perhaps that is why these works are so coherent with each element fitting nicely into the puzzle which is the final piece.

When it comes to connecting with the pieces, every element has a different way of conveying emotion.

"They kind of release or they fire at different rates," Boynes says.

"You can hear one bar of a piece of music and it can make you incredibly happy or sad - it triggers things really fast but it might die away pretty quickly.

"Whereas video can extend out that period of time and something can grow and build on you a bit more gradually and painting is the thing that people have done since way back and it burns incredibly slowly. It might hit you more slowly but it also burns very slowly.

"The interesting thing is the way that you can release different kinds of emotions

and draw on different feelings through a collaboration like this."

Martin says she believes the key to the exhibition - and the issue of climate change - is to engage with people.

"Rather than being didactic, we wanted people to linger and think and speculate," Martin says.

"We find that people watch these works through a couple of times whereas if they're at a gallery they tend to just do a skim, and then go and have a drink and chat. But people really do engage, particularly young people.

"Canberra is not immune to climate change. I think because it is such a liveable city and we think it's really clean and green. But these threats are right there chasing us.

"There are fires and extreme winds and temperatures and we all need to make big changes very quickly to our lives. And think about how we can be sustainable."

To accompany the exhibition are four events - three expert panels and one children's art workshop.

The first sees Boynes and Martin in conversation with environmental historian Libby Robin and social scientist Jamie Pittock for Art + Emotion = Action on November 28.

On December 4, Parr, Martin and Boynes will discuss the collaboration in *Hi-Vis Futures* at 2pm. There will also be a Youth Climate Forum on February 1 to discuss ideas on climate activism.

Hi-Vis Futures shows at Canberra Museum and Gallery until February 1.