

*The smallest measure* | 2021 at Stanley Street Gallery | 11 – 27 February, 2021

Jessie Boylan

Sound by Linda Dement & Jessie Boylan

Slow emergencies are forms of harm and damage that are not acute but occur gradually and imperceptibly to most of us — like climate change, environmental pollution and radiation. Yet despite remaining largely unseen over time, the effects of slow emergencies are palpable, their relative invisibility rendering the harm they wreak all the more entrenched and difficult to address. How can we recognise and respond to the slow emergencies that are threatening life on earth? In their video and photographic work, *The Smallest Measure*, Jessie Boylan proposes that we stop to deeply honour that element that we rarely see and take almost entirely for granted: air. Boylan's approach to representing air's fundamental importance is to visualise the work that climate scientists do to take care of air, rigorously studying, capturing, measuring, observing, and comparing samples in some of the world's most remote locations. In particular, Boylan has trained their attention on Cape Grim in lutruwita/Tasmania, a historical Aboriginal massacre site and the location of an air pollution monitoring station and science program, jointly managed by the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), and CSIRO Oceans and Atmosphere lab at Aspendale south of Melbourne. Untouched by land, the wind that arrives at Cape Grim after blowing over the Southern Ocean is one of the cleanest in the world and is considered 'baseline' air: that is, it represents the background atmosphere and thus grants insights into the driving forces behind anthropogenic climate change.

Using a range of bespoke and complex instruments, the dedicated scientists at Cape Grim and Aspendale measure greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide; stratospheric ozone depleting chemicals, such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs); concentrations of natural and anthropogenic aerosol particulates; reactive gases; radon and solar radiation; wind speed and direction; rainfall, temperature, humidity and air pressure; and solar radiation, including harmful UV-B radiation. Boylan's works infuse these processes with wonder and love, connecting us to the caring ethics the scientists bring to every act of research: the smallest measure they take contributes to a sustainable future for us all. Boylan allows us to see these relationships between micro-level scientific gestures and macro-level effects, between scientific integrity and care for the planet.

Changes in air quality and changes in the health of human and non-human species are interdependent. Yet the pervasive, slow and violent effects of climate change and global warming are still being perceived as if they are yet to come or may never arrive. Boylan's work seeks to capture how the atmosphere, land, water and science interact in the formation, collection and analysis of the air, and the ways in which global changes in this seemingly invisible matter affects all life-forms. It also brings us up close to the rigorous, careful, long-term work done by climate scientists and reminds us that they belong to the broad spectrum of caring practices necessary to respond to this slow emergency and secure future life.

*The Smallest Measure* is the latest iteration of the Care Project that profiles artists invested in how we relate to the world from a position of care. As part of a larger research project, its presentation here is a work in progress in an evolving response. The Care Project is a long-term research project facilitated by Associate Professor Jacqueline Millner at La Trobe University Visual Arts, Bendigo, and includes a large network of artists, writers and thinkers from many disciplines and places around Australia, producing symposia, exhibitions, artworks, and publications imagining alternatives to the harms of neo-liberalism through care ethics and caring practices: [Contemporaryartandfeminism.com/care](http://Contemporaryartandfeminism.com/care)

The artist acknowledges the Palawa people of lutruwita/Tasmania, as the traditional owners of the land and waterways, where this work was made. Their history, knowledge and culture is embedded within the stories, land, water and air at Cape Grim and is present in the formation of the work shown here.

*The Smallest Measure* is supported by the Australia Council and proudly sponsored by Regional Arts Victoria.





1. *The smallest measure (10metre air inlet), Cape Grim, lutruwita/Tasmania, 2021*  
120 x 90 cm, digital pigment print, Canson Baryta photographic paper



2. *The smallest measure (Southern Ocean), Cape Grim, lutruwita/Tasmania, 2021*  
120 x 90 cm, digital pigment print, Canson Baryta photographic paper



3. *The smallest measure (Poa labillardierei), Cape Grim, lutruwita/Tasmania, 2021*  
120 x 90 cm, digital pigment print, Canson Baryta photographic paper



4. *The smallest measure (Melaleuca ericifolia)*, Cape Grim, lutruwita/Tasmania, 2021  
120 x 90 cm, digital pigment print, Canson Baryta photographic paper



5. *The smallest measure*, 2021, two-channel video, 15:10 mins