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CITY OF DEVONPORT NATIONAL ART AWARD

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26 November 2016 – 29 January 2017

Introduction

It is with great pleasure and anticipation that we present the 2016 acquisitive *Tidal: City of Devonport National Art Award*. The *Tidal Award* encourages experimentation within and across media, and promotes excellence in contemporary visual art that reflects on natural, cultural, personal or political concerns related to the sea and coastal regions.

After careful consideration of this year's entries, judges Jane Devery, Curator of Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and Jane Stewart, Principle Curator of Art, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) arrived at a short-list of 22 art works for the finalist exhibition. The selected works come from artists across Australia working in a variety of media including textiles, photography, printmaking, painting and video. These artists have interpreted the theme *tidal* in distinctive ways, creating work that traverses personal, political, social and environmental issues. The focus on environmental concerns is strongly felt in this year's work, highlighting a growing awareness and concern for the future of our waterways and coastal regions.

The Tidal Festival takes place in the last week of the *Tidal Award* and provides the community and visitors to the region with a program of workshops, talks, walks and events that unite with the discourse of *tidal*. Festival coordinator Dianne Sheehan has assembled a rich and varied program that features an artist-in-residence who will create sculptural works around the Mersey Bluff. Also included in the program is an outdoor cinema at 'Drift', a 'secret art' street project, indoor and outdoor workshops, forums, and much, much more. The range and calibre of the program has come to fruition this year with assistance from Community Services staff at the Devonport City Council. In the lead up to the Festive season in December, the inaugural *Tidal Artisan's Street Market* will materialise in the Rooke Street Laneway and at the Gallery.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our new partners who have invested in the *Tidal Festival*: Think Creative Design Studio, Impress Print, Ghost Rock Vineyard, Fairbrother, Cradle Coast NRM, Hill Street Grocer, and Gowans Toyota; our current partners Collins Real Estate for supporting the Peoples' Choice Award and the DRG Friends Committee for their contribution to the major *Tidal Award*. This year's finalists are testament to an Award that continues to inspire contemplation, debate and hope about the way we navigate and manage the seas that ultimately shape our lives, and our futures.

Ellie Ray
Gallery Director

Turning the Tide

While the tides are intrinsically linked to the gravitational forces of the moon, the sun, and the Earth's rotation, the works in this year's *Tidal: City of Devonport National Art Award* exhibition focus instead on the less predictable personal, cultural and political relationships we have with the sea. Despite our often romantic perceptions of the ocean as a mysterious entity, we have collectively demonstrated our ability to harness its power for great benefit and pleasure, detriment and injustice.

In responding to the theme *tidal*, this year's finalists have uncovered myriad ideas about, and associations with the sea. Through visual representation they have provided a commentary on the ways in which human actions continue to impose upon the natural environment. These artists have reflected on the ocean as a passage for the movement of people throughout history; discussed the role coastal regions play in our construction of a national identity; shared poetic metaphors and recalled personal memories. This collection of works truly reveals our inherent and multifaceted connection to the sea.

Just as the oceans envelope the globe, the issues explored by many of these artists are global in their reach and consequence. Two predominate concerns identified are contentious contemporary political issues: our complicity towards our role in climate change, and our attitudes and policies on asylum seekers, particularly those reaching our shores by boat. In regard to the former, we are now widely considered to be in the era of the Anthropocene: the period from which human activities and actions have substantially impacted our ecosystems. While culturally we have a preoccupation with the ocean as a place of beauty and a source of personal reinvigoration, collectively we remain unable, or unwilling, to initiate real strategies for altering the projected course of climate change. We continue to ignore the reality of the burdens we will impose on future generations; the impacts of polluting our oceans, of rising sea levels on coastal areas, and of endangering plant and animal species and forcing them to adapt to shifting ecosystems. Whether referencing specific events such as oil spills and the detrimental effects of climate change on particular species, or nostalgically reflecting on childhood memories of pristine ocean environments, several artists challenge our persistent complicity towards environmental matters.

However, it is perhaps the later of these two political issues that both dominates our current social and political climate and emerges most strongly as a theme in this year's exhibition – our perceptions of the ocean as a connecting or separating body, and the impacts of

these standpoints on human exchanges. Several artists reference the vast history of passage across the seas, from personal family experiences of migration, to the broader cross-cultural exchanges which have stemmed from shipping trade throughout history. Such works envisage the sea as a connecting force; a network between lands and the people and traditions of those who inhabit them. As Australians we inhabit an island nation, where the coast and the ocean often signify unbridled opportunity and freedom. However, from the outside in, our coastlines are increasingly being perceived as a hostile barrier, a reality welcomed by some while exasperating others.

The notion of mapping and recording constantly shifting coastlines as fixed borders is also raised in this exhibition, and relates to a key concern of many of this year's finalists: the plight and the rights of refugees seeking asylum on Australia's shores. Several artists seek to hold us accountable for our collective detachment from this issue. The history of Australian settlement and immigration, and the turbulent atrocities, conflicts and progress that have eventuated from these arrivals, offers an alternate perspective on our own sense of belonging and ownership of this continent. The problematic nature of the persistent myth of the Australian identity, as a beach loving, Anglo-Saxon, 'fair-go' persona, is also raised. While our coasts represent leisure, relaxation, and quintessential 'Australianness' for some, for others our coast is a closed border, hostile or indifferent to the plight of other people. The negation of a plethora of stories and identities emerging from this myth of 'Australianness' reinforces our detachment from demonstrating a collective conscience about the current global refugee crisis.

While ecological and political issues have dominated associations with the theme of *tidal*, several artists have contemplated the sea through poetic metaphors. The notions of a 'storm in a teacup' and the fortune the tides may bring and take away are reflected upon. What's hidden beneath the surface is pondered, and awe is expressed at the ability of humans to overcome the power and energy of the sea. It is these works which serve to add depth to the debates surrounding climate change and asylum seekers, as they reveal the beauty, the expanse, and the treacherousness of the ocean.

Now over a decade old, *Tidal* continues to trace our collective knowledge and attitudes towards a multitude of environmental, social and political issues. Each *Tidal* to follow will undoubtedly uncover fresh perspectives on this provocative theme, and we may remain hopeful that a number of the recurring, contentious issues raised will move towards a resolution in years to come. In the same vein as the poetic metaphors of the sea to be found in this exhibition, it is perhaps the idiom to *turn the tide* that best reflects the thoughts of this year's finalists. Just as tides reveal the *unseen* beneath the water's surface, the artists' collective rhetoric endeavours to reveal and incite a shift in the persisting issues and tensions underlying Australian society at present.

Erin Wilson
Curator of Collections,
Devonport Regional Gallery

Alex Davern

My Fantasy Book Collection: The tide will rise and kill us all (detail), 2016
28 drawings, ink on paper, framed
100 x 110 cm, (each sheet 13.6 x 10.2 cm)
Courtesy Bett Gallery, Hobart

Amber Koroluk-Stephenson

Marooned, 2016
Oil on canvas
84 x 102 cm
Courtesy Bett Gallery, Hobart

Anne Zahalka

Rising Tide, 2016
Pigment Print on cotton rag art paper
80 x 80 cm

Anthony Johnson

Untitled, 2016
Pigment inkjet print
84 x 55 cm

Carole Wilson

Lebuh Chulia, 2016
Hand cut atlas pages
75 x 75 cm (nine panels each 21 x 21 cm)

David Stephenson & Martin Walch

TimeSlice: Derwent Estuary looking South from Hunter Street, Hobart, 2016
HD video, duration 8:03

Diane Allison

Taken Out of Context, 2016
Paper, pins
101 x 31 x 3 cm

Evelyn Vyhnal

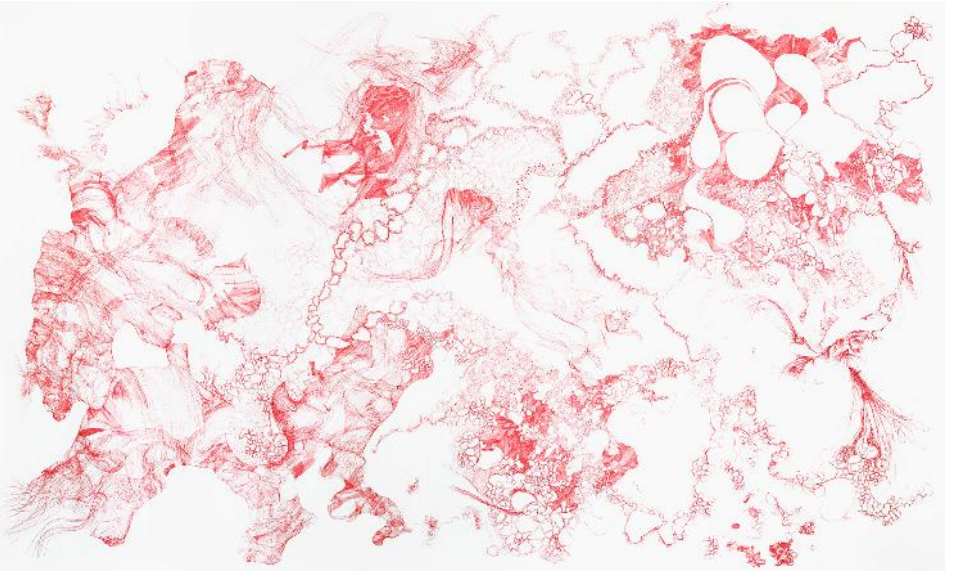
Treasury, 2015
Coastal found objects, cardboard
100 x 95 x 14 cm

Helga Groves

Macro Terrane #2, 2016
Folded archival pigment prints on cotton rag
80 x 180 cm (framed)
Courtesy the Artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Photography: Andrew Curtis

Janet Bush

The Red Alert, 2016
Red ink on paper
150 x 250 cm



Joey Gracia

Neighbours, 2016
Pigment inkjet print (diptych)
42 x 59 cm

Home and Away, 2016
Pigment inkjet print (diptych)
42 x 59 cm

Julie Fragar

Antonio Departs Flores on the Whaling Tide, 2016
Oil on board
122 x 162 cm
Courtesy NKN Gallery, Melbourne
Photography: Carl Warner

Katherine Hattam

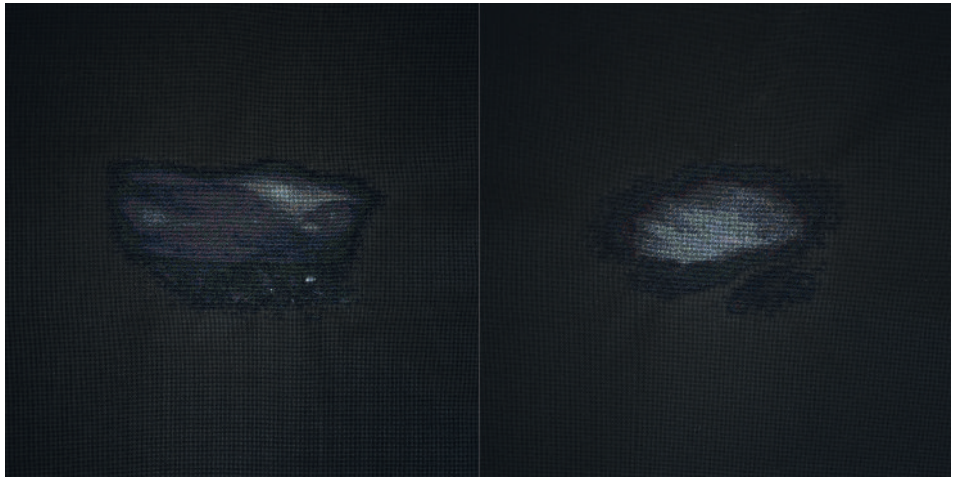
Thinking About William Buckley, 2016
Gouache on board
162 x 122 cm

Liam James

His touch turned the sand by the water into gold, 2016
Pigment inkjet print
147 x 110 cm
Courtesy Bett Gallery, Hobart

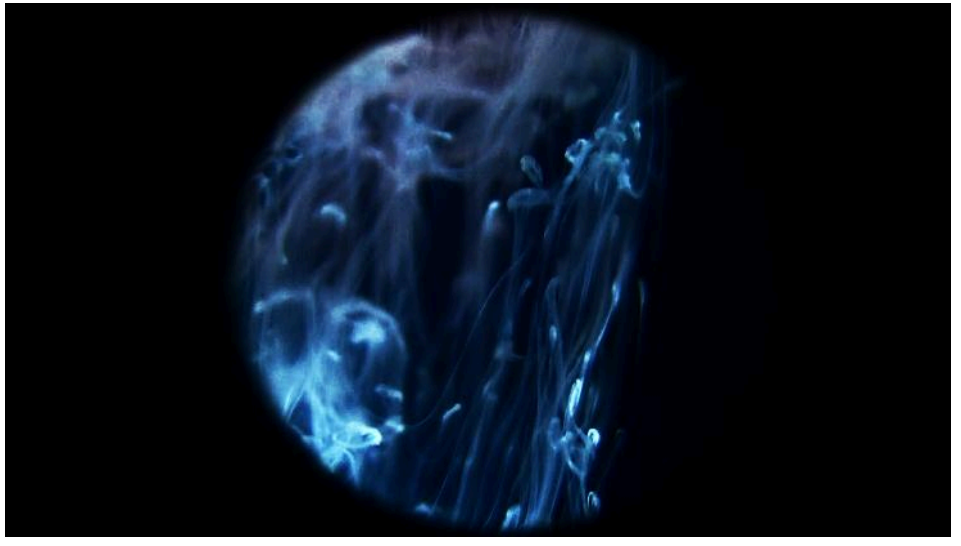
Louisa Bufardeci

Mi mortis, 2016
Wool, cotton
43 x 43 cm
Image courtesy Louisa Bufardeci and Anna Schwartz Gallery



Matt Warren

Storm In A Teacup, 2016
Video & sound
Duration 6 mins 15 secs



Megan Walch

Syzygy, 2016
Oil and enamel on composite panel
150 x 150 cm
Courtesy Bett Gallery, Hobart

Michael Muruste

Untitled (Tasmanian Riviera), 2016
Acrylic on paper
120 x 96 cm

Penny Mason

Between Waves and Tides–Marrawah Rock pool, Boat Harbour Blues, 2016
Watercolour and ink on paper
6 panels (each 34 cm diameter unframed)

Sara Manser

Urban Shift, 2015
Plaster, cement render, acrylic, graphite and gold leaf on pine panel
96 x 100 cm
Photography: Alex Shaw

Tess Campbell

The Burning Beach, 2016
Video
Duration 4 mins

Troy Ruffels

The Intervals of Distance, 2016
Pigment inkjet print on aluminum
120 x 120 cm
Represented by Bett Gallery, Hobart

Acknowledgements

Our sincere gratitude is extended to the Devonport City Council and the DRG Friends Committee for their ongoing support of the $15,000 Tidal Award and Collins Real Estate for sponsoring the Peoples' Choice Award. Gratitude is also extended to Think Creative Design Studio, Impress Print, Ghost Rock Vineyard, Fairbrother, Cradle Coast NRM, Hill Street Grocer and Gowans Toyota. Thanks to Erin Wilson for her insightful catalogue essay and the DRG team for their work in promoting and administering all things Tidal!

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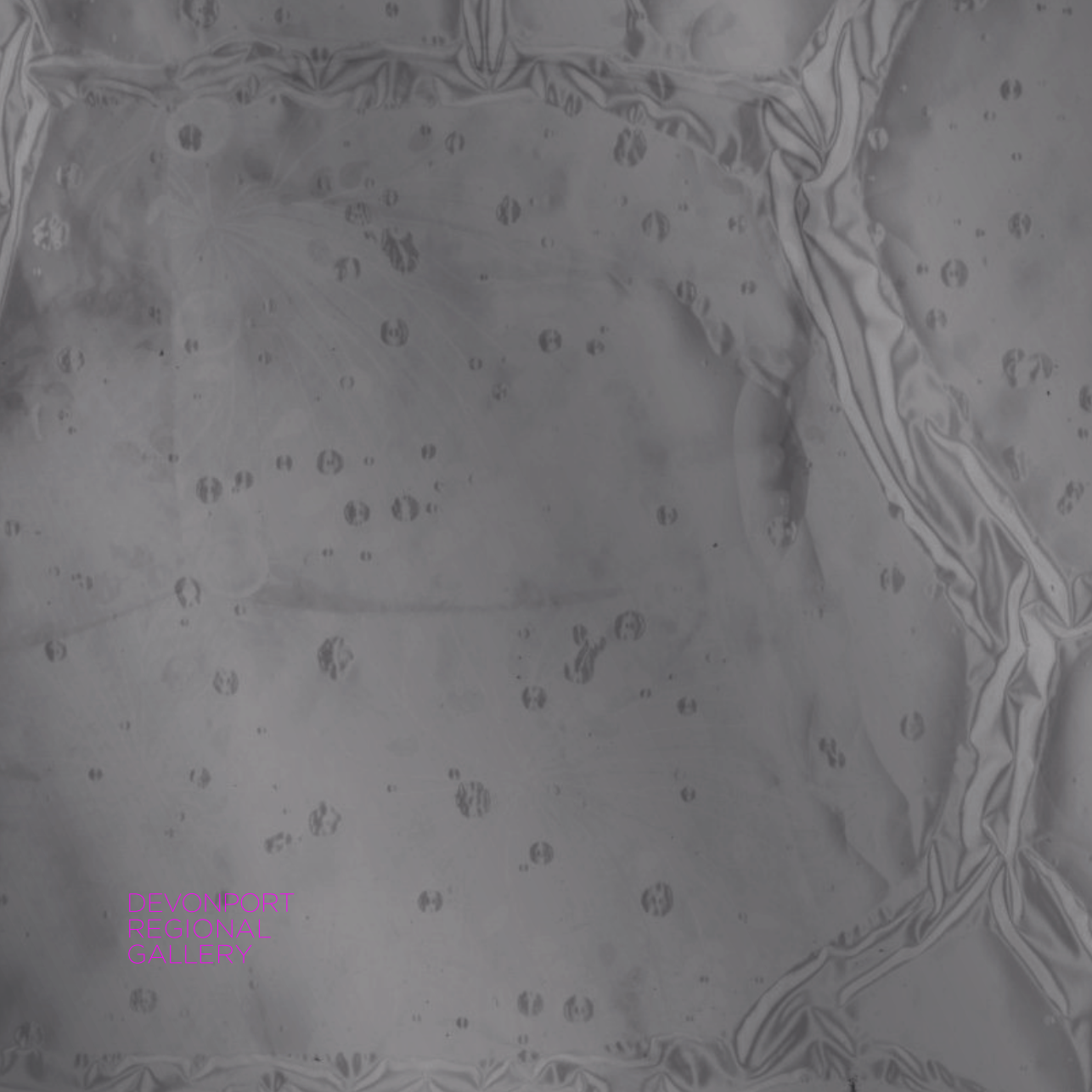
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