

'Mountains become islands'

11.10. – 03.11.19

Curated by Alanna Irwin

'Mountains become islands' takes the idea of rising waters to its most extreme and imaginative end, where remote peaks and shrinking ecologies are transformed into our last refuge. Eleven artists depict landscapes that have been cleaved by water or human intervention by variously splitting stone, slicing photographs, and fragmenting images of nature across many panels. In this exhibition, mountains become rafts and the force of water swells across sound and surfaces, reminding us of relentless changes in climate.

We imagine flooding as a temporary calamity and climate change as a slow ominous march outside of our life spans; because we cannot *see* the devastation, it is a distant worry. If it were to come tomorrow, what messages and relics would remain? FAYEN d'EVIE and BRYAN PHILLIPS ask us to question these modes of communication and consider how we may continue to communicate to a future world. Their sensory sculptural work invites us to touch the contours of carved stone fragments and listen to the soft grinding of our fingers. Through connected audio lines, the touch of neighbouring viewers also filters through our headphones. Here, the same mountain in Muckleford, Victoria, has become three distinct islands installed around a corner of the gallery. The work bridges these fragments through a shared experience of "blundering, beholding and way-finding" along touch lines and through sound. This reminds me of the hunger stones in the Czech Republic's Elbe River, now exposed by low water levels that reveal historic carvings. These carvings archive droughts across the centuries, one mark in particular cut with the words "*Wenn du mich siehst, dann weine;*" "If you see me, weep." The stones are chiselled with a history of hardship that is both a moving memorial and an earnest warning for tomorrow. Similarly, D'Evie and Phillips' installation prompts us to listen to each other through stone today.

It might seem odd to focus on the force of water in a country preoccupied by drought, and it is often the *scarcity* of water that scars the land and the psyche in rural Australia. LIAM GARSTANG moves our focus inland, exploring the rituals that underpin the way we mark out territory through works made on his family's farmland in Wagga Wagga. Garstang's new drypoint print 'Holding Yards' references the penning in of sheep through an empty structure that teeters on abstraction. Trembling geometric lines float against a pulsing inky backdrop that, in the context of the show, takes on an almost post-apocalyptic feel. Threatening containment, this holding yard asks us to imagine how we would move and detain livestock in the future, and what this stock would look like?

Also unsettling our views of familiar terrain, PIERS GREVILLE'S paintings of Siren Song Creek in Kosciuszko high country read like a score across the gallery walls, increasingly fractured amidst eerie concrete-pigmented space. They are ecological climate atolls, cut across unnatural lines in searing blue and yellow. In real life, this landscape is re-inscribed by hydroelectric infrastructure, where redirected waters move and meet artificially at the flick of a switch through subterranean tunnels and expansive cloud seeding networks in the sky. Greville's works ask us to reconsider the ways that we mark out and claim land, hinting at both a colonial tradition of sublime landscape and the post-natural scale of contemporary ecological manipulation.

JANET LAURENCE'S 'Sacred Green: Chlorophyll Collapse' depicts pockets of nature jeopardised by the destructive force of the Savage River mine and other human interventions. Weaving aerial images of the Tarkine Forest of Tasmania with the mossy limbs of trees in Myanmar, we are encouraged to think about the interconnections between living forms and their precarious futures. As Laurence's ghostly multi-panel work wraps around our field of vision, it reminds us that these old growth forests live increasingly brief and broken lives as environmental protections are withdrawn to further industry. Our short memories make me think of J.G. Ballard's vision of 'The Drowned World', in which he notes that "each one of us is as old as the entire biological kingdom, and our bloodstreams are tributaries of the great sea of its total memory." 'Sacred Green: Chlorophyll Collapse' invites us to see humans as part of this primordial system, rather than simply an incurring force on lush, fleeting ecologies.

Bringing this vision of a drowned world into our everyday, LISA JONES and JULIA DAVIS' collaborative practice explores the concealed underground spaces that exist below the city of Sydney through large-scale works on

paper. Created in an abandoned train tunnel under Hyde Park, the project involves submerging paper in murky pools for a week, leaving traces of earthy residue once dry. This forgotten body of water lurking under the city could be cast as a post-apocalyptic mirror of our bustling world above. In this space, trees break through concrete in the dark and dust swirls in the water unsettled by trains sliding past in an adjacent tunnel. Here, the two artists act like archaeologists recording an index of a slower, subterranean Sydney, chronicling a time that has passed and is also yet to come.

Descendant of the Bangerang people from south-eastern Australia, PETA CLANCY'S 'Fissures in Time 2' also unearths hidden histories through her layered photographic process. This work sets its lens on re-directed water in Dja Dja Wurrung country that submerges the site of an Indigenous massacre and is informed by the Koorie Heritage Trust Massacre Map of Victoria. The soft, blushing waterway in this image is out of focus and slightly askew, masking the dark past of colonial frontier wars. To create the works, Clancy prints large-scale images of the landscape and attaches them to a custom-built frame on the same site where the image was first taken. She slices and re-photographs the image to challenge our focus on denied histories. Trees peer over the fault line of the divided image, combining two contemporary moments to instil in viewers a yearning to see what is behind and, in turn, remind us to look for the what is hidden below.

JULIA DAVIS builds on this with her single channel video 'Undercurrent', which emits a low frequency hydrophonic recording of Iceberg A53a breaking in the Antarctic Peninsula. This sub-oceanic sound rumbles quietly through the gallery, elongating the monumental fractures and calving chunks of ice that plunge into the sea. The video that accompanies this sound depicts an aerial view of the threshold between land and water, moving across the screen like twisting sound waves and seemingly washing up the walls. This vertical pull re-orientates our physical and temporal centre, pointing to seismic changes in our earth.

The mercurial textures of water are echoed in NIKE SAVVAS' 'Song to the Siren', a work that shimmers and scatters as you move around it. Extending on her fascination with visual tension and release, 'Song to the Siren' draws you in like an elemental call from the horizon line. As you approach the surface, the Sydney coastline dissolves into splintering materiality. Made with black diamond dust, Savvas' screen print sits between a static pictorial tradition of seascapes and alluring optical play that fragments our field of vision.

Covering the floor of the gallery between Davis and Savvas' works, KATIE WEST'S 'Clearing – fragments' creates a space for giving time. For the many viewers that customarily flit around exhibition spaces, her naturally-dyed cushions invites them to pause and form new habits that focus on listening, reading and lending space to cultural renewal. Each cushion has been dyed with eucalyptus leaves and puff ball fungus collected from urban spaces in Melbourne, then left in the sun and steeped in water to imbue the fabric with the smell and traces of the seasons. Texts by Bruce Pascoe, Kerry Arabena and Auntie Joy Murphy join the cushions, each in their own way unravelling our relationship to Country and encouraging reciprocity. Ultimately, West's installation asks us to acknowledge complicity in an incomplete system of knowledge and caring.

Also attuned to the passing of seasons, JOHN BEARD'S 'The Land's End' depicts a coastal rock rippling across seven panels that shift from dark to light. Beard treads deftly across the legacy of the Impressionists, exploring the gradations of light and atmosphere over time. He extends on this by calling attention to the artist's manipulation through the static-like texture of the image and the measured sequencing of the same subject, akin to an Eadweard Muybridge photographic study. Beard's persistent exploration of art history and of this particular site off the coast of Portugal is also present in his work 'ADRAGA / 19'; a crisp, tense image of the rock as an impenetrable silhouette amidst thrashing waves, ruptured by a thin cross between the four panels. The violent bravado of the waves and quiet intensity of the void speaks to nature as a theatre; one in which we have the choice to be actors or viewers.

We already live on mountains that double as islands; they shrink and expand every day. It is only when we step outside of these everyday rhythms that we are able to notice the perilous balance of water around the land's neck. Sensing this, these artists reflect on the ways that our slippery knowledge systems clumsily heft the weight of an ancient and unwritten geological knowledge. Their works invite a re-discovery of submerged histories, holding secret messages of healing that ask to be deciphered. They ask us to reconsider our present and the ways that people survey, pursue and care for country. Not only that, they ask us to turn to our future and the ways that we will navigate these new waters.