



# Ephemeral Coast, S. Wales

Celina Jeffery

Published on the occasion of the exhibition:

Ephemeral Coast  
Mission Gallery  
14th June—3rd August, 2014

ISBN-13:  
978-0988234048

ISBN-10:  
0988234041

Curator: Celina Jeffery  
Catalogue Design: Matthew Otten

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# RHAGAIR

Amanda Roderick, Cyfarwyddwr Oriel Mission

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Mae gan Oriel Mission uchelgeisiau hir dymor o ddatblygu ei raglen ryngwladol ac felly mae'n hapus i ddechrau ar y prosiect yma i archwilio'r croestoriadau rhwng celf gyfoes ac ecoleg, a fydd yn cymryd lle a datblygu mewn lleoliadau ar draws y byd.

Mae'n bleser gennym gynnal yr arddangosfa yma 'Ephemeral Coast' a'i lansiad yn Ne Cymru, ynghyd a'i guradur, o Ganada, Celina Jeffery. Yn dilyn ei phreswyl curadurrol yn Oriel Mission, ymchwiliodd Jeffery i artistiaid o Gymru, gyda'r rhan fwyaf ohonynt wedi eu cynnwys yn yr arddangosfa yma. Perthynas creadigol wedi ei ddatblygu ar hyd nifer o flynyddoedd ydyw ac rydym yn gobeithio meithrin a datblygu'r cydweithrediad yma dros y pedair blynedd nesaf.

Mae gan Oriel Mission ddiddordeb yn natblygiad partneriaethau, gan ffocysu ar adeiladu menter gydweithredol gynaliadwy rhyngwladol, gan ddatblygu ei broffil rhyngwladol trwy bartneriaethau allweddol.

Rydym hefyd am gydweithio'n bellach gyda'r rhwydwaith agos o orielau ar draws Cymru, gydag ethos a dulliau tebyg. Bydd Oriel Gelf Glynn Vivian ac Elysium yn Abertawe, ynghyd ag Oriel Myrddin yng Nghaerfyrddin, yn ymuno â ni i archwilio arfordir De Cymru gydag arddangosfeydd a digwyddiadau

cydweithriadol ar ddychwelyd Ephemeral Coast i Gymru yn 2017. Mae'r rhain yn bartneriaethau cryf; sefydliadau cysylltiedig gyda dulliau ac ethos tebyg a rhai fydd yn chwarae rhan allweddol yn natblygiad y prosiect ac fel daw i'w derfyn.

Hoffwn ddiolch i holl artistiaid *Ephemeral Coast*, *De Cymru* ac fe fydd y prosiect yma yn cyfleu cam arwyddocaol yn eu hymarfer ac hefyd diolch i'w guradur, Celina Jeffery; mae hwn yn arddangosfa bwysig ac rwy'n edrych ymlaen at barhad ei drafodaethau ac archwiliadau dros y blynyddoedd nesaf.

I Oriel Mission, mae ein hymnglymiad yn y prosiect yma yn golygu cyflawni sylfaen cryf i brosiectau a gwaith rhyngwladol y dyfodol. Mae'n deyrnged i'n rhaglen ddeinamig eisoes ac mae'n ein helpu i barhau i wthio ffiniau celf weledol gyfoes gyda hyder.

**Amanda Roderick, Cyfarwyddwr**

Oriel Mission, Abertawe

Mehefin 2014

## PREFACE

Amanda Roderick, Director of Mission Gallery

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Mission Gallery has had long held ambitions to develop its international programme and are therefore delighted to embark on this project examining the intersections between contemporary art and ecology, which will take place and develop in locations all over the world.

We are proud to host this exhibition '*Ephemeral Coast*' and its launch in South Wales, alongside its curator, Canadian based, Celina Jeffery. Following her curator's residency at Mission Gallery, Jeffery conducted research into Wales based artists, most of whom are included in this show. This is a creative relationship established over a number of years, and we intend to nurture and grow this collaboration over the next four years.

Mission Gallery is interested in partnership development, focusing on building sustainable international collaborative initiatives, developing its international profile through key partnerships.

We also wish to collaborate further with the closely connected network of galleries in Wales, with similar approaches and methodologies. Glynn Vivian Art Gallery and Elysium in Swansea, alongside Oriol Myrddin in Carmarthen, will join us in exploring the South Wales coastline with exciting collaborative

exhibitions and events on *Ephemeral Coast*'s return to Wales in 2017. These are strong partnerships; organisations connected by similar approaches and ethos and ones which will play a key role in how this project develops and is eventually realised.

I would like to thank all of the artists in *Ephemeral Coast, South Wales* for whom this project will represent a significant step in their practice and to also offer thanks and congratulations to its curator, Celina Jeffery; this is an important exhibition, and I look forward to a continuation of its conversations and investigations over the coming years.

For Mission Gallery, our involvement in this project means achieving a strong foundation for future international work and projects. It complements our already dynamic programme and helps us continue with confidence to push boundaries in contemporary visual art.

**Amanda Roderick, Director**

Mission Gallery, Swansea

June 2014

# INTRODUCTION

Celina Jeffery, Curator

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*Ephemeral Coast* identifies the coastline as a site and indicator of the radical shifts in geography—literally taking place now as a result of environmental change—and proposes that curating contemporary art is a unique process through which we discover, analyze, and re-imagine the emotive discourses surrounding these ecological and cultural transformations.

We are living in an unprecedented era in which the effects of the ‘Anthropocene’ (a term coined by Nobel Prize winner Paul J. Crutzen to describe the human dominance of biological, chemical, and geological processes on earth resulting in an imperialist trajectory of nature) are rewriting the atlas in part by fraying the edges of the world’s land mass. With the acidification of the oceans, rising temperatures, pollution, and the whole-scale destruction of island and coastal communities through storm surges, flooding, and drought, it is inevitable that cartographies of the coastline are now highly mutable and contested, resulting in a new coastline cartography (Nicholls, Flannery, ICS 2013). A recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that seventy percent of coastlines worldwide will be affected by trends toward ‘extreme high sea levels’ (IPCC, 2013). With these vanishing and changing coastlines comes the loss, exile, or destruction of coastal cultures and, in its place, new and uncertain cultural geographies.

Earth scientist and climate change researcher Mike Hulme advocates for the need to ‘re-insert’ culture and meaning into our experience of environmental change. (2009) Reciprocally, curatorial and artistic practices, histories and theories of art are currently in the process of a major paradigmatic shift that not only recognizes the necessity for globalized perspectives but also situates

climate change as a major ethical concern (Bennett). *Ephemeral Coast* is situated within the debate revolving around art and ecology but specifically focuses on how curating can address environmental changes within coastal cultures and communities. As a university professor and curator, I’m interested in how alliances between the visual arts, academia, and community can be achieved to support such endeavours.

I’ve been pursuing ideas of artistic —local and global — interactions for some time and, more recently, have considered the ecological ramifications of globalization. A project about coastal connectivity seemed like a more subtle way of framing trans-national ecological concerns. Swansea Bay, which boasts stunning beaches that sit side by side with a significant industrial past and a commercial present is an obvious choice for the location of one of the *Ephemeral Coast* exhibitions. It offers potential for many facets of the exhibition’s goals: with the gallery situated in the maritime quarter, it has the capacity to connect through geographic proximity to the cultures of the coast. Moreover, South Wales, along with the West of Wales, and most regions in the South of England, have experienced startling changes to their climate patterns. Record storm surges and flooding are remapping the physical contours of the coastline with serious ramifications on how we conceptualize living on the coast.

I grew up in one of the more industrial areas of South West Wales and carry intense memories of the surprising and often sublime contrasts between this coastal region with its coal, steel, and chemical works that dominate the coastal edge, and the hills and valleys that envelop the habitats of the communities within. Major aspects of these industries and their associated cultures have now

recessed, thwarted by lack of economic regeneration, while the long-term impact of industrial pollutants upon the environment have yet to be fully realized.

Each of the artists produced new work based on the curatorial premise of the exhibition: Stephan Caddick, (Abergavenny, Wales) responds to the recent floods in the region with a diorama inspired by J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* that alludes to nihilism and biblical floods as well as contemporary migrations; Fern Thomas's (Swansea, Wales) *From the Watchtower* utilizes sound recordings of her own performative practices of observing the sea; while Julia Davis's (NSW, Australia) video installation presents a comparative geography in which the artist positions herself 'at the edge' of an encounter—with nature's wonder and imminent ecocide. Meanwhile, Gemma Copp, a Swansea-based artist, has produced a film in which she contemplates the breath of the sea and its figurative death.

*Ephemeral Coast* is a four-year curatorial project with several exhibitions planned internationally. It will return to multiple locations in Swansea in 2017/18. Comparative in scope, these exhibitions will seek to give rise to creative strategies for understanding new and uncertain coastal ecologies and the loss, exile, and reconfiguration of their associated cultures and geographies.

This catalogue presents the work of the artists in the exhibition, discusses the curatorial process, and incorporates essays by guest authors who re-contextualize *Ephemeral Coast* within discussions of regional climate change and also a cultural theory of swimming.

## Biography

Celina Jeffery is a curator, writer and associate professor of Art History and Theory at the University of Ottawa. Recent research projects include *Preternatural*, 2011-12, at venues across Ottawa, Canada; *Hold On*, co-curated with Avantika Bawa at Gallery Maskara, Mumbai, 2011; *Afterglow* (featuring Ghada Amer, Alfredo Jaar and Bill Viola, amongst others) in Lacoste, France, 2007, and *Wangechi Mutu: The Cinderella Curse* at the ACA Gallery, Atlanta, USA, 2007. She is the co-editor with Gregory Minissale of *Global and Local Art Histories*, 2007. An edited anthology, *The Artist as Curator*, is to be published by Intellect. She is a founder and editor of *Drain Magazine*, *A Journal of Contemporary Art and Culture*, [www.drainmag.com](http://www.drainmag.com).

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Broughton Bay, Gower



Margam, Port Talbot

# NAVIGATING COASTAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Dr Mary H Gagen, Associate Professor of Geography, Swansea University

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What is it about life on the coast that speaks to us, and how do the powerful emotions we associate with coastal living interact with the fears we have about our changing environment? As a climate scientist living in a coastal area (which still shows patches from last winter's storms), what does coastal threat mean to me? When contemplating this question I had many conversations with the people around me, most of whom, like me, are not natives of their beach-side town, but for whom the coast has become vital to their sense of well-being. A friend, a native of Toronto now living in Swansea, mentions the feeling of clean air from the Atlantic, which he associates with the frequent storms that hit our southern Welsh town. He tells me that the coast's dynamic nature is enthralling to him; "have you noticed that, when you have a conversation with someone, sitting on the beach, you don't look at them? Everyone sits in a row looking out to sea, even if they are talking to each other. You don't do that in a park". For those of us lucky enough to live here, the coast quickly becomes something that we simply cannot take our eyes off.

I was born and raised in Manchester, a large post-industrial town in the north of England. At the age of 17 my family moved to Mumbles, a nineteenth century Welsh fishing village, close to Swansea. The sound of the sea kept me awake at night, and I yearned for the sound of planes landing at Manchester's International Airport. Two decades later, I cannot imagine living away from the coast. My coastal years formed my decision to train as a physical geographer, and finally as a climate scientist. The beach near to my new home was –unbeknownst to me at the time– one of the most famous sites in the UK to anyone studying the sea level changes that accompanied the last great ice age.

Rotherslade Beach has long been considered the marker for the final point reached by the ice sheets which covered Britain until 10,000 years ago. The precise location of that point, whether it does indeed lie in Rotherslade Beach, or to the north of the city, is still contested.<sup>1</sup> To a geologist, the beach is a place to examine the pebble layers above today's high tide mark and contemplate their origin.

It is surely one of the great strengths of those living in the coastal regions of our planet that they are extremely good at dealing with change. Coastal change is continuous and spans every imaginable scale, from the ebb and flow of the tides, which in Swansea transform the landscape twice a day in one of the largest tidal ranges in the world, to the severe storms that occasionally strip enough beach sediment to expose long submerged forests, to the glacial cycles which, over the last three quarters of a million years, have altered the local sea level by tens of metres. The beaches of Swansea also bear the marks of huge outwash fans that flowed from the glaciers to the north of Swansea, refilling the Bristol Channel over the course of a few thousand years, as the ice melted.

Understanding what natural climatic processes could possibly have caused such powerful shifts in the British coastline occupied nineteenth century geologists in much the same way as understanding human-induced climate change does now, and the ice age theories that were developed during that time played a critical part in our current understanding of natural climate variability. At the heart of this understanding was a question: how is it possible to change the temperature of the surface of the Earth?

The answer to this question is to be found in a physical understanding of how energy bounces around our blue planet's atmosphere. The answer has nothing to do with one's personal view on alternative energy sources, or the numerous complexities involved in trying to predict how the climate of a specific place will change over a specific time period. Our planet is a large ball of earth, water and gas. It has a large surface area and contains a great deal of water. It is extremely hard to change the temperature of a large sphere with those properties, and requires a colossal amount of energy. There are in fact only three ways to change the temperature of the Earth, and they are the same whether the change in temperature occurs naturally, or is enhanced by our behaviour.

There is a small amount of residual heat left in the planet from its early days, and a small amount in radioactivity from rocks, but the vast majority of our heat comes from the sun. Any change in the brightness of the sun, or its heat output, has an impact, although a surprisingly small one, on Earth's temperature. In fact, the sun undergoes such changes all the time, if you are considering Earth's history over many thousands of years. However, the sun's brightness and temperature has remained more or less stable through the period in which both the greenhouse gas content of the atmosphere and the temperature of the surface of the Earth have been rising. In other words, solar output does not act as a thermostat for the Earth. The second way to change the Earth's temperature is to change the reflectivity of its surface. Dark surfaces, such as deserts, forests, and cities absorb more of the sun's heat than do light surfaces, while white surfaces like snow and ice reflect more energy back to space. Any change in the

distribution, or amount, of light and dark surfaces on the planet will affect the surface temperature. However, nor does this method act as a thermostat: by melting the ice, the surface becomes darker, warming the planet more, not less. The third method is the greenhouse effect, and it is this effect that forms our planet's long-term temperature thermostat, trapping just enough of the sun's energy in our atmosphere to sustain life on Earth, but not too much to make life uncomfortable. It is this thermostat that we have altered. When we increase the amount of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere, we are in effect simply turning the thermostat up. More gas and more energy is bounced back to the surface of the Earth, rather than back out to space.

Over the last one hundred years the surface of our planet has warmed by slightly less than one degree Celsius, and in doing so we have enhanced the greenhouse effect<sup>2</sup>. The value of that change and its cause are certain, but predicting how that change will be translated into climate impacts in specific places at specific times is riddled with uncertainty. It is that mismatch in scientific certainty which adds to our fear and confusion when extreme weather events impact our daily lives. When are these events just 'weather' and when are they a sign that something more permanent is shifting in our planet's climate? It can be just as confusing for scientists as for members of the public to work out who or what is at fault when climate rolls us a six, and the media frenzy that invariably arises after any extreme weather event can be difficult to interpret. It is easy to understand, when lives are impacted so dramatically, suddenly and violently, why society seeks someone to blame. Who threw the six and are there more on the way?

One of the many tools used by climate scientists to try to reduce this morass of uncertainty is to look to the past: our science is underpinned by a saying, coined by a geologist and loved by Churchill, 'the past is the key to the present'. Those interested in climates of the past look to our planet's natural climate archives: trees, lakes, ice sheets, for example, for information about past climate change that might give us clues to present and future changes. The study of palaeoclimate is much like a lawyer's hunt for precedent: *Has this happened before and, if so, what did it mean for the planet?* Most of my palaeoclimate work takes me away from Wales. I work on the records of climate contained in the annual rings of ancient trees, and Wales lost most of its ancient forest long ago. However, this past stormy winter not only destroyed Welsh beaches, coastal properties, and paths it also uncovered the remains of coastal forests. Ancient tree stumps are a regular feature on South Wales beaches. Our coast was forested when the sea level began to rise out of the last ice age, submerging and preserving these forests. They tend to be found as single stumps or pairs, but every now and again a particularly ferocious storm will uncover the stumpy remains of a larger patch of forest. These submerged forests, appearing only occasionally and always briefly, are a wonderful reminder of the pace and scale of coastal change when we look far enough back in time.

For those living in coastal areas, scientific uncertainty surrounding sea level change adds another uncomfortable layer to our fear and confusion. When the sea level changes of the last 100 years are averaged across the globe we find a rise of around 20cm.<sup>2</sup> When we try to translate that change and bafflingly varied changes in storminess, into a local picture of sea level rise, that uncertainty is magnified. The majority of the

mean global rise in sea level change is driven, not by melting ice, but by thermal expansion in warmer seas and in fact, this is something of a lucky break. Our planet's oceans are vast, deep and cold, and by warming, they are almost certainly protecting the atmosphere from a larger dose of the warming.<sup>3</sup> However, warm water takes up more room than cool water, causing the sea level to rise. Add to thermal expansion the melting of mountain glaciers all around the world and the loss of ice from the polar regions, and the picture, already seemingly riddled with uncertainty, becomes alarming to anyone living in sight of a much-loved beach.

When contemplating the difficulties of climate predictions and what they mean to those of us living with coastal climate change, I turn to my friend and colleague from the climate modelling community, Eduardo Zorita. A familiar conversation takes place between us, in which each line of 'warmist' evidence that I present he counters with the position of uncertainty. Atlantic storminess will increase, that's scary isn't it? Well actually, some future climate models show a decrease in storminess. But we can expect more storms for Europe? Well actually, it's really hard to be certain about future trends. In the end I become frustrated and ask him why, as scientists, when we are asked about climate change by those who fear it, we cling to uncertainty. His answer is that we are continually walking an uncomfortable tightrope with the need to wait for scientific truth on one side, and the need for rapid decision-making regarding climate change on the other. On the one side is the position of the scientist working in a vacuum, the search for truth, for an explanation that rules out all other possibilities: what will be the average sea level rise for Wales by the year 2100? At any point in that search, if there is more than one possible answer for that question then any

one answer is unproven and that question, remains uncertain. That position is challenged every day by the decision maker's need for choices to be made on the basis of risk. The decision maker cannot wait for extra measurements and for scientific certainty, he or she feels the risk now and must act on it. The conversation comes to an end and Eduardo asks me to imagine myself piloting a plane. My airplane starts to give me three different readings as to what my altitude is: as a scientist, I want to take more measurements before I decide which one is right; as the pilot, with care for a planeload of sleeping people, I must decide which reading is correct, using my best judgement, and I must act. Eduardo tells me that this difference in position is the root cause of the many arguments between the climate 'warmist' and the 'sceptic'. It is the clash between the scientific community, searching for the right answer, and the decision maker, waiting for the next storm. Most of these clashes take place behind closed doors, yet when they leak out into the wider press they can do serious damage to people's understanding of climate change and to confidence in the scientific community.<sup>4</sup>

So why does the coast mean so much to so many people? Perhaps it is because the coast offers us the opportunity to consider all that is important about the natural world, in a single vista. Coastal erosion reminds us of the *fragility* of our beloved landscapes, storms of the *power* of nature, the ebb and flow of the tides of our planet's *dynamism* and *endurance*. Perhaps our fascination with coasts comes from this condensing vista: when we look at the coast we see earth, water, and atmosphere – we quite literally see our planet. Heading home along Swansea's beautiful coastal path I find myself wondering if it

is time for climate science's terrified pilots to stop arguing for more measurements. The consequences of waiting for certainty could be catastrophic.

#### Acknowledgments

Thanks to Dr's Tim James and Eduardo Zorita for helpful discussions.

#### Biography

Dr Mary Gagen is an Associate Professor of Physical Geography at Swansea University, and a member of C3W, the Climate Change Consortium of Wales.

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Rotherslade Beach



# CURATING EPHEMERAL COAST

Celina Jeffery, Curator & Associate Professor of Art History & Theory, University of Ottawa, Canada

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The coastline offers a rich metaphorical context for artistic consideration of concepts of dwelling, relatedness, and habitat at the centre of the ecological imagination—an imagination now struggling to deal with the challenges of global warming resulting in dramatic disturbance and loss of ecosystems.<sup>1</sup> *Ephemeral Coast, S. Wales* seeks to investigate our difficult relationship to the coast as a threshold and frontline to climate change and considers the possibilities of understanding art in relation to what may be described as an unparalleled event.

In my initial research for *Ephemeral Coast, S. Wales* the notion of the coastal encounter seemed pertinent: how does the visual imagination of these borders, with their posthumous memories of the imperialist conquest of nature and indigenous peoples, interact and transact with what could be described as the ecocide of the present? James Cook's cartography formulated a highly visual and gendered system of marking, naming and controlling the atlas, and created a narrative legacy through which the earth's coastal contours are known. Anne Salmond describes the narrative of James Cook's three voyages (1768-1780) as having essentially 'fixed' the cartography of the world's coastlines, bringing both wild nature and barbarians into the 'controlling gaze of Enlightenment science' (2004, xi). Cook's colonial legacies of conquest are still with us: the Enlightenment construction of the coast as a social border and transnational space of violence, conquest and commerce is prevalent within late capitalism. Yet, the new challenges of climate and environmental change

1. Climate change, which is caused by air pollution in the atmosphere has, as Tim Flannery argues, assumed such a voracious and 'unnatural pace' that our planet is warming with drastic consequences: glaciers are melting 10 times faster than anticipated; greenhouse gases have reached staggering proportions and species are becoming extinct.

are having the effect of unfixing known cartographies and spurring an increasingly ferocious violence and disappearance of ecological habitats.

The cartographic processes of *Ephemeral Coast, S. Wales* as well as its implicit consideration of the role of exploration within ecological thinking and aesthetics have been foregrounded in the writings of Rebecca Solnit. In *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*, 2010, Solnit resituates the atlas as an unstable and 'converging form' (vii), whose information is both arbitrary and transgressive. Here, she argues that climate change renders all atlases with coastlines out of date, and creates a new sequence of cartographies that 'float, fall and drift' (3). Similarly, the artists in this first manifestation of *Ephemeral Coast* present conceptions of the physical and ontological cartography of the coastline as radically shifting and altering, suggesting a new kind of cultural space that endures the effects of anthropocentric behaviour. Here, I consider the ways in which these artists develop particular responses to these new cartographies based on ideas of indeterminacy, apprehension, awe, exploration, memorialization and forecasts of the uninhabitable.<sup>2</sup>

Stephan Caddick's *Drowned World*, 2014 comes closest to addressing these concerns holistically through a post-apocalyptic, post-anthropocentric installation in which the world, now asunder, has rendered the biosphere uninhabitable to humankind. Caddick's installation takes inspiration from J. G.

2. Caddick, Thomas and Copp are all artists who live and work in South Wales, have a history of engaging with the culture of the coast and all work with processes and materials that are implicitly 'ephemeral.' I also chose one artist from New South Wales, Australia, to demonstrate both the potential differences in regional climate change—one is 'flooding,' the other is 'baking'—and the potential relatedness of the two regions.

Ballard's 1962 science fiction novel of the same name in which the central character—one of a few human survivors—is mesmerized by a world transformed by melting ice caps (caused by solar radiation), flooding, soaring temperatures, and augmented evolution. Caddick uses Ballard's primeval tropical rainforest as a beginning point for his diorama, which is incongruously situated in the apse of the Mission Gallery—a former Seaman's Mission.

A patchwork of wood, invoking reconfigured edges of the world's landmass, conceals the entrance to the apse, save for a small entrance that gives way to the new ecosphere. A dark and densely sub-tropical forest, rendered in a block graphic, is papered to the walls while a boat containing miniature supplies sits on top of a roughly hewn platform. Numerous cultural references are immediately evoked: Conrad's voyaging into the unknown in the *Heart of Darkness* and the questioning of dominion and wrath in Noah's Ark amongst them. Yet, it also inevitably alludes to the Borth prehistoric forest that was uncovered in West Wales during the extreme storms and flood tides of the winter of 2014 (*The Guardian*, February 21st, 2014). The trunks of this ancient forest, estimated to be 4,500 years old, appeared in utterly surreal fashion after a storm stripped the sand from the beaches of Cardigan Bay. Like Ballard's vision of an enchanted and wild world, there is something about Caddick's lush rainforest that is alluring and preternatural, even in its continuous push and pull between order and the marvelous, the mundane and the astonishing, which render the 'natural' and artificial obsolete (Jeffery, 2011, 14). So de-stabilized are these categories that there is no 'natural' world left: no requisite structuring—scientific or moralizing—only the wonder and terror of human

beings not being a definitive part of the earth.

Caddick is an artist who is concerned with the 'amateur' and frequently investigates DIY aesthetics and open source as a result. *Drowned World* is a contemporary form of the diorama—a model, associated with amateur hobbyists in the nineteenth century and common within natural history displays of the same era. Furthermore, the entrance to the apse has been largely boarded up by an assemblage of rough medium-density fibreboard (MDF) and 'found' pieces of wood. The boat, whilst acting as a kind of Noah's Ark, is also a prototype of a craft, which for Caddick speaks to the survivalist potential underpinning this work. *Drowned World* is a world in which civilization has been ruptured, stripped away, and the predatory and primeval have re-emerged; all semblance of (human) habitat and future is replaced by an ambiguous exploration of mass extinction and the possibilities of lone survival.

The idea of the coast as a threshold and transitional space, which transgresses the binaries of wild and cultivated, is most evident in the works of Fern Thomas and Gemma Copp, who both live and work in Swansea. Thomas's *From the Watchtower*, 2014, and Copp's *Leaving Tide*, 2014, are contemplative video works that entail concentrated observations of the sea and investigate the speculation, apprehension, fear, and yearning they associate with the experiences of living and working on the coast.

Thomas, who developed the post-apocalyptic research unit *Institute for Imagined Futures & Unknown Lands*, is an artist whose core practice deals with exploratory and intuitive readings of ecological disturbance. In *Watchtower*, her daily observations of Swansea Bay

are performed and then recorded as a series of video and web-based broadcasts that seek to engage, resist, and derail anthropocentric observation. The artist describes 'keeping watch' over the sea and explores ways of thinking about and caring for it. In one of her installments she sits with a spotlight, reading prose of a daily encounter in which she navigates the physical and conceptual boundaries of the water's edge. Thomas's inquiry into 'looking with the sea,' collapses the division of land and ocean, encouraging a sense of connection.

Copp's *Leaving Tide*, 2014, is a 40-minute video that depicts the artist standing on the shore of Swansea Bay as the tide slowly ebbs. Copp is an artist who largely locates her work in secluded or isolated areas on the coast and is concerned with subverting these seemingly familiar spaces through her private, performative acts. In *Leaving Tide* we see the figure of Copp, dressed in black and facing the sea, standing motionless for 40 minutes on a plinth immersed in the water as the tide recedes. Shot in real time and then reversed, there is a sharp transition from light to blue to darker blue half way through, which creates a visual and emotional flow that is at once peculiar and absorbing in its reversal of time and space.

For the viewer, the experience is subtle and immersive; it follows a long tradition within the history or art of sustained observation and reflection upon the vastness of the ocean, which collides with its sublime and lonely Other. Yet, there are important revisions too: the artist's body is a marginal (female) body in a peripheral space, suggesting a subtle feminist and post-colonial subversion of anthropocentric coastal vision. Copp describes her figure as breathing with the tide while fearing that the breath of the ocean—our carbon

sinkhole, which has been ravaged by garbage, plastic, oil, the effects of global warming and now, acidification, threatens to stop.

Thomas and Copp's intense watching and beholding brings our attention not only to the sea as a constant shifting of micro and macro regionalities but also to its amorphous and largely hidden levels of pollution and ecological disturbance. From such a position then we are encouraged, as viewers, to consider that which is 'in between'—the unstable, polluted, and defiled—a consideration of some importance in the Swansea Bay, which has suffered extensive and long-term pollution from the industries that flank its coastal edge.

All of the artists in the exhibition share a solitary and, at times, lonely engagement with the new coastal cartography. Indeed, it's this kind of cultural particularity that may act as a critical counterpoint to the vast and overwhelming remit of climate change—an issue so global that it eludes us as individuals. Tim Morton describes global warming as the ultimate 'hyperobject'—a spatial and temporal concept so vast that it evades all categorization and leads to apathy and an inability to connect the ethical imperative to the local (2013). The realization that we are not the world is, he argues, central to countering the trite over-familiarity with climate change.

The solitary figure positioned within the immense and astonishing spectacle of ecosphere is central to Julia Davis's video installation *Consilience: As the World Turns*, 2013/14. Davis is a site-specific artist based in Sydney, Australia, and a distinct portion of her practice is concentrated on the water's edge: salt lakes, coastal precincts, and docklands amongst them. The idea that

land and sea are cultural as well as geographic spaces are also central to her work; whereas the ephemeral condition—in which loss and reclamation are in constant cycle, are pivotal to the conceptual remit of her practice. The title *Consilience* means ‘a coming together, a connectivity, a mergence, arriving at the same point from unrelated sources, a unity of knowledge’ (Davis). Here, the coast is understood as a meeting point between land, lake and sky—in which the artist visualizes the often invisible ecological systems of connection.

The time-lapse video installation depicts a silhouette—the artist herself—standing and then gradually moving through the dark waters and celestial night sky. It is not easy to identify where the land, lake, and sky separate and, indeed, they blur, reflect, and refract one another in a magnificent mirroring effect. Davis stood for five hours to get the 07:49 time lapse, which was shot on Lake Tyrrell, a 180-square-kilometre salt lake in the NW of Victoria. The area is renowned for its astonishing and exceptional astrological occurrences, which feature prominently in Indigenous cultural heritage.<sup>3</sup> Davis chose the region because it’s an ‘ephemeral’ site—subject to significant changes from salt in winter to water in summer; meanwhile, climate change is shrinking the water levels dramatically. Even though it’s moderately inland, it’s considered coastal due to its large scale. Moreover, for Davis, the concept of the coast is as much an unconscious space as a physical one:

I see the Australian coast (in terms of a geographical unconscious) as a point where we look out to sea

3. According to Hamacher and Frew, the Boorong word for Tyrrell, ‘tyrille,’ meant sky and had special significance within the oral traditions of Aboriginals who once resided there.

with both wonder, intimidation and fear of what lies beyond: at the same time with our back towards the desert with mostly a romantic view that denies a territory that can never be tamed . . . We hover above both the land and the sea in that regard and are not ‘at home’ in either.

There are genealogical antecedents of the colonial—explorer here, William Edward Stanbridge being the first European to ‘encounter’ the Tyrrell region; yet the visual and ontological experiences of Davis’s celestial navigation and encounter are decidedly otherworldly and subversively so. Davis has encapsulated the sense of wonder associated with this ethereal region in which transient celestial phenomena and atmospheric effects of the constellations, solar systems, and galaxies become visible: shooting stars, meteors, and bright, effervescent clusters of the Southern Milky Way encircle the standing figure. These images are foiled by the deep, subterranean sounds that are, in fact, a mix of two space voyages to Saturn—the giant gaseous planet named by the Romans as the god of agriculture. Far from a romantic or deep ecological inquiry into a recovery of ‘lost psychic or cultural wholeness’ through nature, it is the very ‘unearthly,’ and at times, jarring series of flows and intensities that position it as something far more contemporary (Clark, 16). Such atmospheric connections are as dynamic in this aesthetic realm as they are in life: ‘The CO<sub>2</sub> from a breath last week’ writes Flannery, ‘may now be feeding a plant on a distant continent, on plankton in a frozen sea’ (2010, loc. 249).

*Ephemeral Coast, S. Wales*, began as an investigation into how ecological awareness is best articulated, as

Ursula Heise describes, from localisms that have a globalist environmental perspective tied to territories and systems (2008, 221-237). The artists in the exhibition structured the notion of an 'ephemeral' coast in numerous ways: the cycle of continuous loss and reclamation; the destabilization of the binary between the so-called 'wild' ocean and the culturally infused sphere of the land, and of excess giving way to a certain kind of lonely, peripatetic cartography—a single boat in an 'uninhabitable' world and an individual female figure standing motionless in the ocean. Re-orienting vision from the shore to the ocean to the above and below are also pertinent to Thomas and Davis, in whose work wonder is used to de-objectify 'nature'—to re-situate nature as ecological: related but indeterminate. Finally, particularities of place are evident while alluding to the migratory and wider systems of cartography.

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The Missions to Seamen  
Swansea



ST. NICHOLAS  
SEAMEN'S CHURCH  
1868 - 1919

The Seamen's Mission moved to  
New Cut Bridge 1919-1941  
and to Prince of Wales Dock  
1947

Mission  
Gallery





STEFHAN CADDICK



# STEFHAN CADDICK

Abergavenny, S. Wales

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“The low night sounds of the jungle drifted over the water; occasionally a marmoset gibbered or the iguanas shrieked distantly from their eyries in the distant office blocks. Myriads of insects festered along the water-line, momentarily disturbed as the swells rolled in ... slapping at the canted sides of the pontoon” J.G. Ballard, ‘The Drowned World’, 1962

Taking its starting point from Ballard’s novel of the same name, *Drowned World* comprises a functional, scaled down prototype of a junk-rigged, floating survival craft. The craft sits at the centre of a fictional, faceted environment, reminiscent of early video games.

Like Ballard’s 1962 novel, the installation asks questions about what happens to people when the edge is redrawn; and the enduring allure of natural catastrophe –‘the-end-is-nigh’-ism- as evident in the biblical flood story as it is in contemporary debates about climate change. It also stumbles into issues about migration and whether there’s a survivalist thread hidden within the contemporary ‘maker’.

I am interested in the savagery of the natural world, misremembered episodes from political history, the three-minute single and not knowing the way. My work,

whilst taking a range of forms from film to installation, drawing to performance, is unified by an intellectual and aesthetic rigour. I approach the act of making work with an interest in the process itself and will sometimes invent ornate, often ridiculous systems or methodologies as a mode of production. My work is at once darkly melancholic and blackly comedic.

## Biography

Stefhan Caddick is a Wales-based artist who works in video, installation and performance. His practice is often a collaborative engagement that sources its materials from institutions, communities and individuals. With an interest in process itself, Caddick invents ornate systems of production that are both melancholic and comedic. He is the recent recipient of the Major Creative Wales Award from the Art Council of Wales (2013), and has been commissioned for various artistic projects including Pickle Lane (2013) at the Fourth Wall Festival, Ghost Parade (2012) at the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad Festival and The Magician’s Cat (2004) at the Welsh National Opera. Caddick is currently a visiting lecturer in Creative Sound and Music at the University of Wales College, where he also earned his MA in Documentary Photography.



*No Future*, 2011

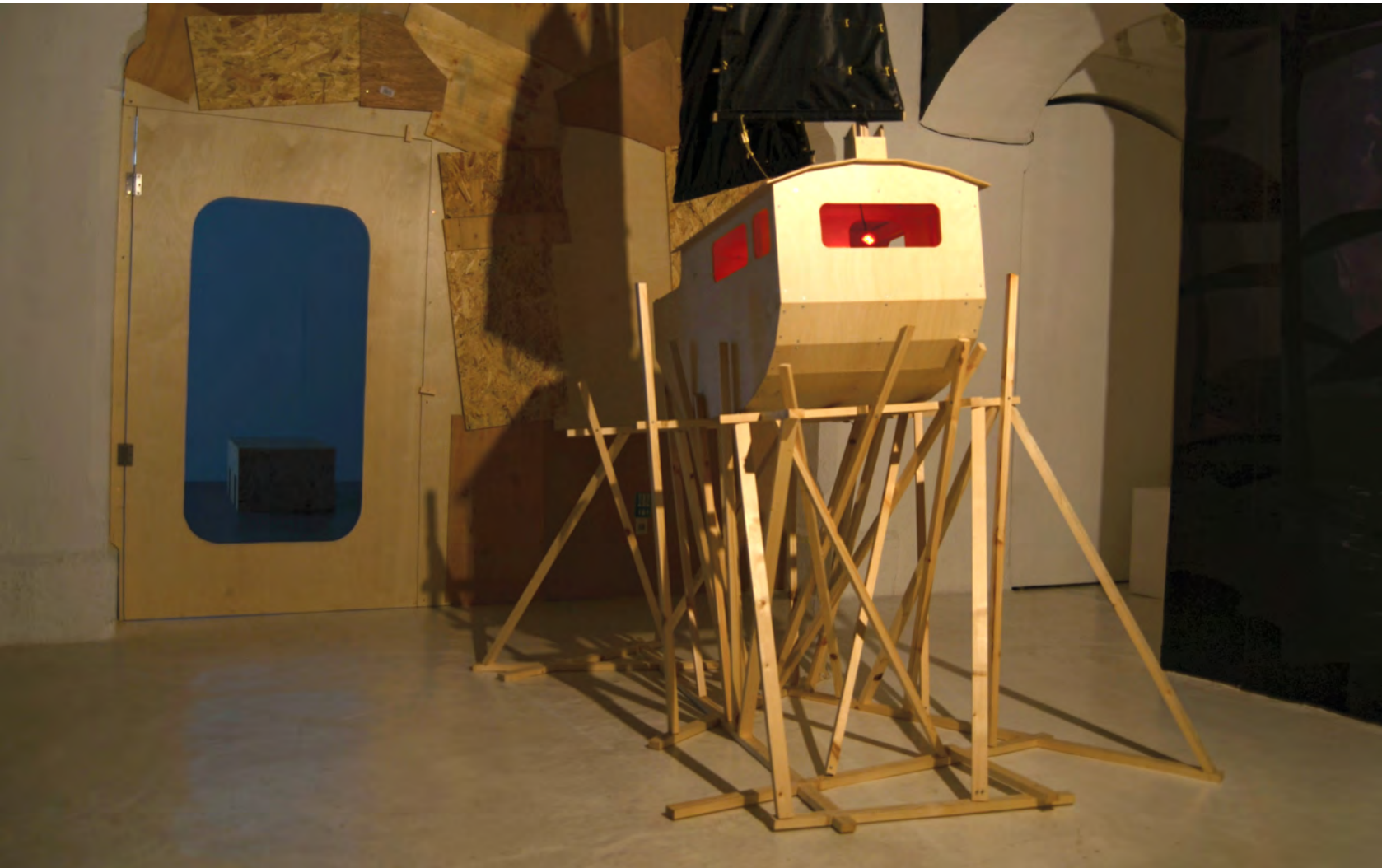
Outdoor installation. Plywood, electronics and hand built turbine.



We Are All Going

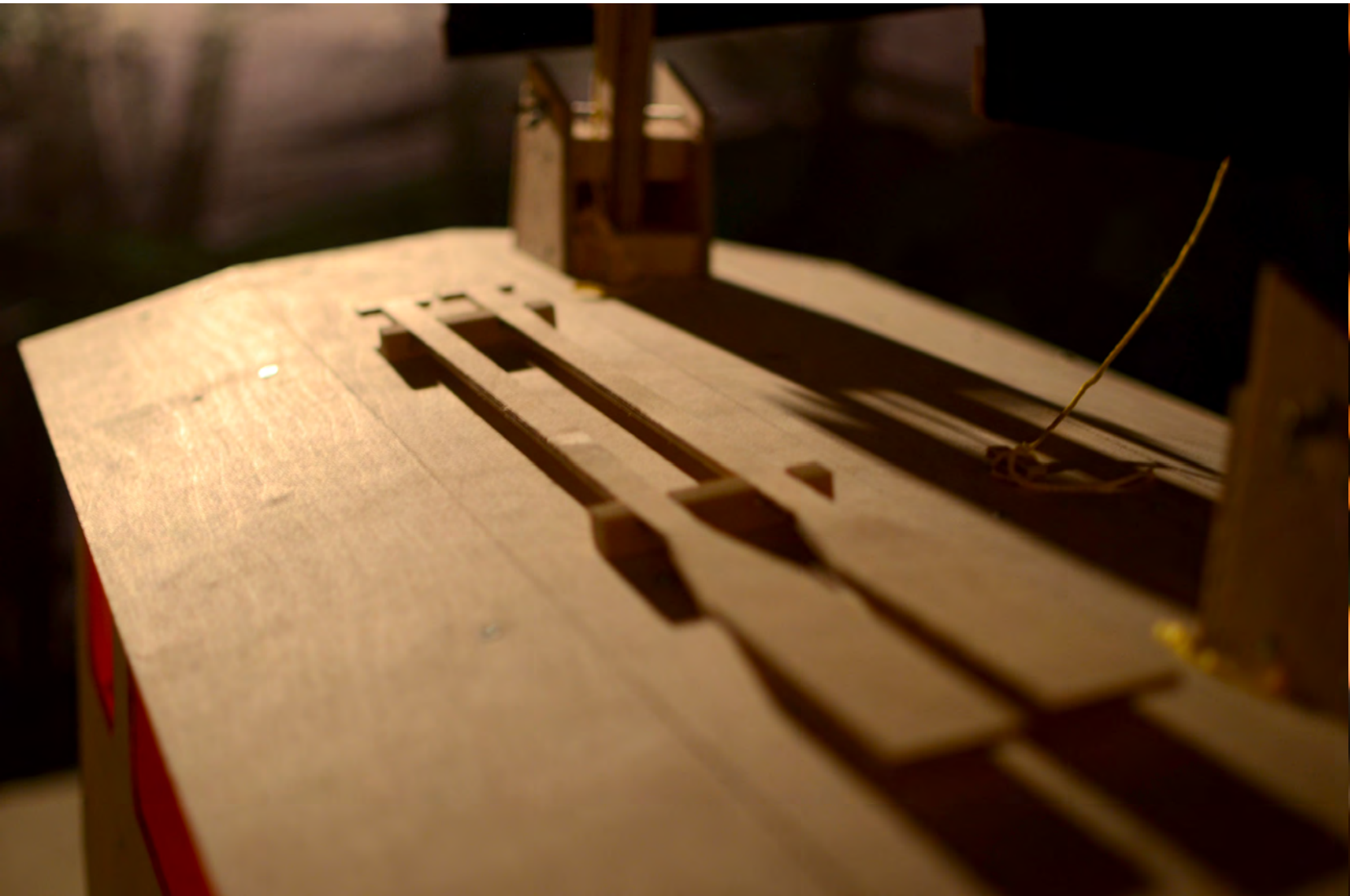


*The Nihilists, 2011* | Outdoor Installation & Event. Photography by Nic Finch





Stefhan Caddick, *Drowned World, Ephemeral Coast*, Installation View



*Drowned World, Detail*



*Drowned World, Detail*

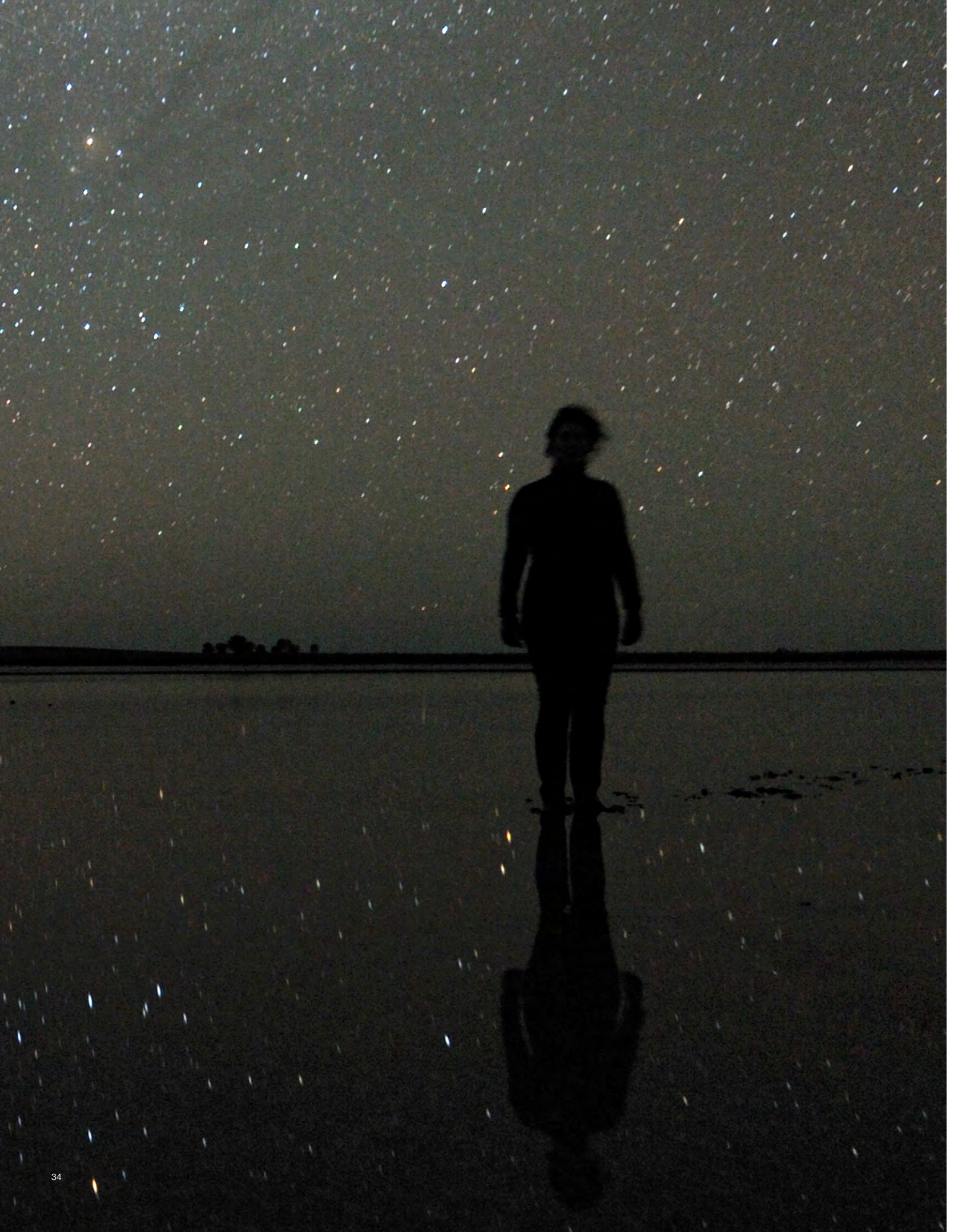




*Drowned World, Detail*



*Drowned World, Detail*



JULIA DAVIS

# JULIA DAVIS

New South Wales, Australia

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My work explores the effect of time on understandings of the body in relation to landscape and how this underpins our sense of self and place. I often work in 'active' landscapes such as deserts, volcanic areas, coastal precincts, and salt lakes and am interested in the idea that landscape is cultural space - a space informed by and informing culture.

In geological time, the landscape moves, pulses, and crashes in processes of coming into and out of existence. The often, violent imagery of turbulent volcanic ash clouds used in recent works translates here in this vast Southern Hemisphere sky which elicits contradictory feelings of foreboding and rapture. Tension between anticipated loss and subsequent renewal, as well as the duality of processes that create and destroy, corrode and protect are ongoing interests in Davis's art practice. The 'active' places she refers to mirror the fragile human experience of movement, instability, rhythm, reflection, and change. In my work, geological time and human perception merge into a single spatial experience and take us closer to a sense of the world as our place.

Through this work, I explore what Elizabeth Grosz calls in her book, *The Nick of Time*, the "brute world

of materiality, a world regulated by the exigencies, the forces of space and time." I question how our immersion in time and place affects both our sense of embodiment and our perception of ourselves. Her installations, videos, and prints evoke desire, vulnerability, and anxiety; a sense of being poised at the edge of a world that is fraught with man made and natural disaster.

## Biography

Julia Davis is a site-specific artist based out of Sydney, Australia. Over the past decade Davis' work has been installed in salt lakes, deserts, coastal precincts, parklands, galleries, and built environments. Her practice explores the perceptions and relationships between objects, places, and spaces. More recently, Davis' work has attended to the viewer's experiential reading of space in terms of temporality and duration. She has exhibited in Australia, Germany, Italy and Spain, and is the recipient of numerous awards including the NAVA NSW artist grant (2011), the Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award (2007), the Woollahra Sculpture Prize (2006) and the NGSW Director's prize (2002). She currently teaches sculpture at TAFE and holds an MVA from Sydney College of Arts.



*Horizontal Fall, 2012*  
HD video, stereo sound, water



*Headspace* (Lake Brown), 2010 | Cast Salt



*Headspace*, 2010 | Cast Salt







72 beats per minute, 2013 | Video Still





*Consilience: As The World Turns, 2013/14*

Time-lapse HD Video, Stereo Sound. 07:49 (Loop) Concept/ Performance: Julia Davis Camera: Alex Chemey, Composting: Matt Fezz,  
Sound: Paul Huntingford, Julia Davis Thanks to NASA for extracts of sound from Voyager 1 & 11's first recording of interstellar space and encounter with Saturn 1980.





Installation view, *Ephemeral Coast*, Julia Davis and Stefan Caddick



FERN THOMAS



# FERN THOMAS

Swansea, S. Wales

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*From the Watchtower* will see the transformation of citizen into learner/observer into active participant.

Expanding on a daily practice of watching the sea from her top floor flat overlooking Swansea Bay, the 'Watchtower' will be activated by Thomas through a series of day-long observations of the sea.

Across several weeks, set days will be dedicated to the act of observing the sea or 'keeping watch' from a high window overlooking the sea where shifting tides, colours, and unknown phenomenology will be observed. Set within the context of an 'Ephemeral Coast', *From the Watchtower* will explore our relationship with the sea, the potential future of the oceans, and the processes of understanding through observing. Working with an imagined future, the work will also question what 'keeping watch' of the sea might mean.

Rooted in the processes and principles of Social Sculpture, her work explores the potency and transformational capacities of the image in its broadest sense and interrogates her relationship with the ecological, archetypal, and mythological world. Manifesting in action –live or documented– her process-

led and intuitive explorations often take the form of a physical interaction or 'meeting' between herself and a place, a dream, a history or another being.

## Biography

Fern Thomas is the winner of Mostyn Open (2011), was a recipient of the Arts and Humanities Research Council Award (2011/2012), was awarded the Interdisciplinary Arts Prize (2013) at Oxford Brookes University for her work during her Masters in Social Sculpture, and received a Creative Wales Award in 2014 to support her ongoing research into participatory forms and their relationship with sustainability. Thomas received her MA in Social Sculpture from Oxford Brookes University, working with Shelley Sacks, where she developed the post-apocalyptic research unit Institute for Imagined Futures & Unknown Lands.

She co-initiated the collaborative and pedagogical groups Art's Birthday Wales and Forever Academy, works closely with her key collaborator Owen Griffiths, and is a member of the Social Sculpture Research Unit based in Oxford, UK.



*From the Watchtower, 2014 | Still 1*

permitted to  
witness their union.

Flashes of white,  
an escaped wave  
turns seagull.



I never know  
what colours will greet me.

The tide is coming in.





GEMMA COPP

# GEMMA COPP

Swansea, S. Wales

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With its continuous body of salt water covering most of the earth's surface, the sea is seen as a geophysical body with the tidal rhythms acting as its lungs. The sea is a constant reminder of life, where its continuous tidal motions breathe existence into nature's habitat and fuel the cycle of regeneration. But what if that were to stop? Life is given value because of its transient and impermanent nature, and the coastline can be just as fragile and ephemeral. What if the rhythm were to be damaged and the cycle broken? Would nature's balance disappear with the low tide, never to return? Within the piece you see a melancholic, motionless figure, dressed in black, with her back to the viewer. It appears that she stands balancing on top of the sea, as the waves repeatedly roll around her. The sea appears to be in balance at this point but as the once high tide turns to low tide and disbursts around the figure, it gives the impression that something menacing is about to happen. The colour and focus of the horizon, that once was clear and inspiring, creating feelings of happiness and limitless possibilities, instead now offers the viewer visceral feelings of concern and desolation.

*I work predominately with film and installation, often filming in isolated and secluded places or places perceived to be so by the viewer. My work aims to raise a flux of visceral emotions relating to identity and basic human emotions and concerns.*

## Biography

Gemma Copp is a Welsh artist, who currently resides in Swansea, her city of birth. Graduating with a BA in Fine Art from Swansea Metropolitan University in 2006, Copp went on to complete an MA in Contemporary Dialogues in 2009 at the same University. Copp has recently taken part in the Glynn Vivian's Artist in Residence program. Copp has shown work nationally and internationally and has recently exhibited work at the Talbot Rice Gallery in Edinburgh, and at the Mannheim Film Festival in Germany, where she received a special commendation from the judges. She was awarded Welsh Artist of the Year in 2012.



*Leaving Tide*, 2014. Film, 40 mins.







# THE EPHEMERAL COAST: ON THE EDGE OF THE OTHERLY REALM

Ian Buchanan, Director of the Institute of Social Transformation, University of Wollongong, NSW

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The coastline –the space between the ocean and the land– is a both a barrier and an invitation to go beyond the land’s edge and enter an otherly realm. Humans have skated over the water in boats and other kinds of watercraft for thousands of years. But they have always been (and continue to be) reluctant to immerse themselves in the ocean. Despite humanity’s eons long interaction with water, as Charles Sprawson’s marvellous paean to swimming *Haunts of the Black Masseur* documents, it is only the past 150 years or so that humans have been swimmers and not bathers.

Water is endlessly fascinating to artists and poets, and indeed some of our greatest artists and poets have also been great swimmers (Lord Byron is the most well-known of the poet swimmers; Swinburne was no slouch either) but that fascination has always been tempered by fear, and the deeply felt sense that water is not a human domain (this was Shelley’s view, which he effectively proved by drowning – Shelley wasn’t the only poet to drown himself, either; Hart Crane also chose this mode of death, as did Virginia Woolf).<sup>1</sup> To swim, then, is to immerse oneself in an otherly realm that is both deadly to humans and teeming with its own life as great ocean-explorers like Jacques Cousteau and Hans Hass revealed in the middle of the twentieth century.

Swimming is among the most sensuous of all the forms of mobility humans have contrived. In water one can feel one’s own skin–the most taken for granted, but also the most powerful, of our senses, namely touch, suddenly comes alive. The water caresses us, even as it cleanses us, which is doubtless why the bath has become such an emblem of ‘self-care’ in Foucault’s strong sense of that idea (as opposed to the way advertisers conceive of it).<sup>2</sup> French poet Paul Valéry goes so far as to

1. Sprawson 1992: 32-33; 99-101; 103-105.  
2. Foucault 1986.

describe swimming as “fornication avec l’onde”.<sup>3</sup> Great swimmers like Ian Thorpe and Michael Phelps attribute their success in the pool to their ‘feel’ for the water and as their respective autobiographies make clear, this is as much a matter of emotional feel as it is tactility. Terry Laughlin’s *Total Immersion*, advises that swimmers need to let their nerve endings be their coach because in contrast to other sports the results of swim-training can only be felt, not seen.<sup>4</sup> This, according to Sprawson, is the reason competitive swimmers ‘shave down’.

In order to intensify this feel for water, Australian swimmers of the Fifties started shaving down their legs before important races. The idea spread to America in 1960 when [Murray] Rose moved to Los Angeles. [...] Rose described the immediate sensual awareness of water as he dived in, the feeling that he was suspended, united with the element, the sudden surge of power like that experienced by ballet dancers who remove their hair to activate their nerve-endings.<sup>5</sup>

Johnny Weissmuller, five time Olympic gold medallist and ubiquitous star of the Tarzan films, wrote in *Swimming the American Crawl*: “Water is elusive, but you can get ‘hold’ of it if you know how to go after it”.<sup>6</sup> Swimming or drowning, one surrenders to the water. Before one can catch the water, as Weissmuller enjoins us to do, one must first of all submit to the water, and enter its domain and go with its flows. This is a relatively easy thing to manage (cognitively, if not physically) in a pool with its defined depths and transparent water, but much more daunting in the open water of oceans, lakes, and rivers where currents and creatures (real and imagined) conspire to torment the hapless water-goer.

3. Cited in Sprawson 1992: 101.  
4. Laughlin 2004: 70.  
5. Sprawson 1992: 14.  
6. Cited in Taormina 2012: 22.

Little wonder, then, that before “the late seventeenth century, the sea was regarded [by Europeans] as a place of danger and death, the aspect of houses was directed inland, sailors were not taught to swim in order to foster in them a true respect for the sea. The ocean stank, was dangerous, belched up seaweed and flotsam, and was full of marauding pirates and monsters.”<sup>7</sup> The shark hysteria that erupts every few years in Australia is a continuation of this same elemental fear of the open water that European cultures have and reflects the degree to which Australia’s settler peoples remain at odds with their ‘home’.<sup>8</sup>

In Australia’s geographical unconscious, open water is more for looking at and moving across than swimming in, which perhaps explains our relative lack of care for our oceans and waterways as well as our lack of knowledge about them. Jellyfish kill far more people than sharks do, and not only that, they are steadily killing off large sections of the ocean, strangling the life out of it, yet it is sharks that we fear.<sup>9</sup> We pollute our natural waters and exploit them because they are not part of ‘our’ spatial domain. It is telling, I think, how few words swimmers have for varieties of water compared to say sailors or surfers – it is either clear or murky, smooth or rough, cold or warm, moving or still, but beyond these crude binaries we have no words for the many other nuances of water swimmers experience.

Water’s power to bring out our contemplative side is not only known to swimmers. One of the most striking things about Australia’s beaches and waterways, apart from their startling natural beauty, is how most of them, particularly the more beautiful examples, are ringed by

7. Shapton 2012: 289.

8. Europeans imported their fear of sharks to Australia. See Tiffin 2009.

9. On our fear of sharks see Tiffin 2009; on the lethality of jellyfish see Gershwin 2010.

towering concrete edifices with multiple viewing-platforms built into them that function like gargantuan ‘walls of separation’ standing between the lifestyle ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. Australians, particularly, like to live, work, spend their leisure time, in sight of great stretches of water, the more expansive the better. So powerful is this desire, Australians want to possess this view, own it, and prevent others from sharing it. In contemporary, real-estate obsessed, neo-liberal society only the privileged few get to enjoy both proximity to the water and the view.

Freud famously described religion as an ‘oceanic sensibility’, by which he seemed to mean that it is an encounter with a fathomless immensity. Perhaps one can say that the ocean calls to mind something of the same order as a God, a kind of transcendence on earth, or what Kant referred to as the sublime (his key example in this regard was the forest). Freud’s disciple, Otto Rank, thought the appeal of the ocean was that it recalled the liquid confines of the womb. In any case, the sensibility Freud speaks of is a reverential attitude, one that treats the ocean as an ‘other’ realm, an unearthly space that one should not, and in a certain sense, one cannot enter.

But if the ocean is the inspiration for our notion of what it means to be religious, as Freud supposes, then it is clearly losing its power, or else globally we are more secular than we realised. Just as Nietzsche said, humanity is killing its god: The ocean is today more imperilled than any of us really knows or understand. It may be that we cannot breathe in its watery depths, but without its carbon-scrubbing powers, we soon will be unable to breathe in our own realm. We worry about being inundated by rising tides as the polar caps melt, but the real threat to the future of the planet is the loss of the ocean as the essential oxygen-producing machine that gives us all life. If the ocean dies, then so do we. Thus, to stand on the coast is to stand before life itself.

## Biography

Ian Buchanan is professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Wollongong. He is the author of the Dictionary of Critical Theory (OUP) and the founding editor of Deleuze Studies.

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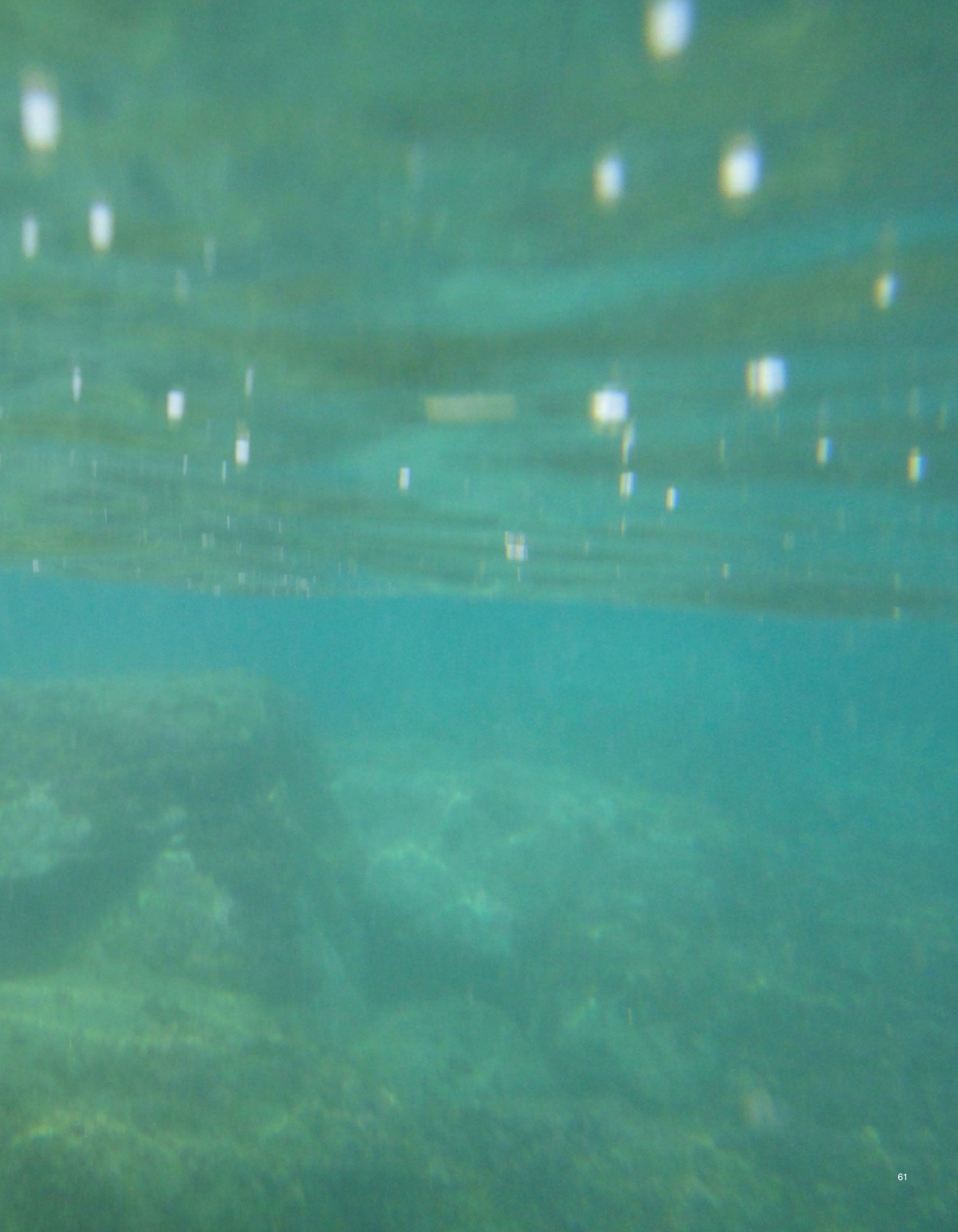
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ephemeral Coast, S. Wales

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## Celina Jeffery

I would like to thank Mission Gallery for their support in the production of *Ephemeral Coast, South Wales* – without the involvement of Amanda Roderick and the wonderful staff, the first manifestation of *Ephemeral Coast* simply would not have happened. In turn, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the artists who have participated and The Arts Council of Wales for supporting the production of their work.

I am particularly appreciative of Mary H. Gagen and Ian Buchanan, who contributed texts to the catalogue and in so doing, have provided valuable vantage points on the thematic and contexts of the exhibition.

An exhibition catalogue has been generously supported by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ottawa, Canada. I am extremely grateful to the continuing support of the research office at the Faculty and also of my friends, colleagues, and mentors at the University – Luci Hotte and Lori Beaman amongst them.

Finally, I am indebted to the assistance of Monica Elena Reyes, who has provided much needed administrative support in the production of the exhibition and website.

## Mission Gallery

Deirdre Finnerty, Exhibitions & Marketing Assistant.  
Lucy Donald, Learning & Participation Officer.  
Rhian Wyn Stone, Retail & Front of House Supervisor.  
Gail Wynter, Finance & Administrative Assistant.  
Viv Wood, Building Maintenance & Technical Support.  
Karen Tobin; Sean Olsen; Rachael Leahy,  
Volunteer Gallery Assistants.  
Bella Kerr, Chair of Mission Gallery.

Technical Support: Keith Bayliss; Aled Simons;  
Jason&Becky.

Design & Documentation: Matthew Otten.

Sian Griffiths and Louise Wright, Arts Council of Wales.  
Elen Roberts, Wales Arts International.  
Meg Anthony, Oriel Myrddin.  
Jenni Spencer Davies & Katy Freer, Glynn Vivian Art  
Gallery. Jonathan Powell, Elysium Gallery.  
Celina Jeffery, Julia Davis, Stefnan Caddick,  
Fern Thomas, Gemma Copp, Angela Maddock,  
Shellie Holden, Mission Gallery Board & Volunteers

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[www.ephemeralcoast.com](http://www.ephemeralcoast.com)



With these vanishing and changing coastlines comes the loss, exile, or destruction of coastal cultures and, in its place, new and uncertain cultural geographies.

from Celina Jeffery's *Preface*



Jeffery, Celina

*Ephemeral Coast, S. Wales*

punctum books, 2014

ISBN: 9780988234048

<https://punctumbooks.com/titles/ephemeral-coast/>

<https://www.doi.org/10.21983/P3.0079.1.00>