

GIRT BY SEA

They have abandoned the fiction of their elders, about the rugged admirable heroes of the inland. They don't give a bugger about the bush, and neither, really, did their parents.

Ronald Conway (1927-2009) Land of the Long Weekend 1978

Girt By Sea provides a staging point to consider artworks drawn from the City of Fremantle Art Collection that picture life connected to the beach.

The beach is a defining element in the life of Fremantle. It is a significant site of idle, sedentary and heroic performance, a place of constant surveillance rather than equality and a subject explored by artists to investigate links between myth and reality, Indigenous and foreign.

The beach is a mythological no-man's land, a space between the sea and earth, representing a boundary between home and the 'fatal shore', a destination proffered in the past at least, as a sanctuary for dissidents and refugees alike.

The backdrop for Shane Pickett's iconic painting *Waagyl and Yondock Story* 2004 is the meeting place of Derbarl Yerrigan (Swan River) and the Indian Ocean at Fremantle. Shane Pickett was an established and respected Aboriginal (Nyoongar) artist and teacher. He made paintings and prints about his strong connection with the creative spirit of his people and the land. This work incorporates a central figurative element with a landscape referencing early 19th Century illustrations of Fremantle at the time of European settlement. The Waagle, a revered ancestral creation figure for Nyoongar people, is depicted here at the point of rising up to strike the invading Yondock, dramatically representing the struggle that exists between salt and fresh water in the story of Walyalup (Fremantle region).

Responding to the same story and utilizing a unique painted collage technique, Gloria Bliss also locates the parable of the Yondock at the mouth of the Swan River. Significantly for senior Nyoongar artist Laurel Nannup the first interaction of Aboriginal people with white invaders also occurred at the unspoiled stage between land and sea.

The 'bather' has a significant place in western art history. Linked to allegorical genre subjects, the semi clad nude is synonymous with both a romanticized and idealized representation of the human body. It is the image of the bather; body surfer and sunbather which connect with the collective memory of the Australian identity.

Marcus Beilby brings traditional skills of painting and cements a modern neo-classical canon to a local subject. His *Art of Beach Etiquette* 2002 identifies with the beach as a place of constant surveillance and gratification associated with 'voyeurism' rather than restraint or inhibition.

Percy Ivor Hunt and Mary Macqueen both engage with ideas about the beach as an earthly paradise and carefree place of innocent freedoms. Gina Moores' *Beach scene II* 1997 tracks the playful capers of briny canines, set against the red dingo flour mill at Leighton dog beach. Tom Gleghorn's *Tiddy Widdy Beach Nocturne* 1979 also frames a nostalgic vision of a couple entwined on a beach.

The perfect vista and sun drenched splendour of WA surf beaches are encompassed in George Haynes' *Redgate* 1984 and Helen Grey-Smith's undated collage *To the Headland*. Peter Burgess uses photocopied photographs of Sydney Bays, combined with hand-made sheets to mimic pages from a photo album which suggest narrative possibilities and a personal history associated with the locations. The focus of each tumbling sequence of images is marked with a circle, diverting the spectator to look to the horizon and beyond to the popular Sydney surf beach of Maroubra. Each artist in this group employs equally distilled formal structures to create moments of contemplation and stillness.

Martin Parr's unstaged social documentary *Port Beach Polar Bears* 2011 captures the beach as a melting pot of active rituals, if not heroic performance. Parr's image presents the beach as a democratic site of symbolic freedom. Analogously, the absence of a swimmer in Helen Taylor's *Cottesloe Beach* inspired etching *Sunrise Bluebird* 1976 is a reminder of the grave risk associated with swimming at daybreak.

A post WW I photographic diptych of South Beach Hydrodome also included in this exhibition, records a popular Fremantle destination and 'safe' playground for the whole family. Opened in the summer of 1927, the South Beach venue boasted tearooms, a dance floor and sea baths enclosed by shark proof fence made from anti torpedo netting. The Hydrodome was demolished after storm damage in 1964 and continues to be a popular beach for backpackers and Fremantle residents today.

The ominous presence of warships in marine subjects is equally explored in works on paper by Frederick Elliott and Tony Jones. Elliott masks a distant battle cruiser amongst seagulls as seen from Sydney Heads while Jones, a keen sailor, negotiates the ill-matched balance between a visiting aircraft carrier of a 'friendly' power and pleasure craft in shipping lanes off, Fremantle. Alan Muller's *Abandoned Trolley and Toy* 2004 is a work depicting the picturesque western horizon marked with a container ship heading towards Fremantle port. In the foreground lies an equally menacing paring of two beached supermarket trolley's, seemingly marooned and out of place. The trolley is an ironic juxtaposition, reminding the viewer of the remorseless impact of global trade and development upon the 'perfect' beach front property.

Paul Uhlmann's evocative artist's book *Hallucinations - A Fragment* 2002 is a contemplative book of text, photographs, digital prints and etchings which reveal visceral responses to South West Australian landscapes, including the coastline near Bunbury. Uhlmann balances a delicate paper structure and old and new technology in what the artist describes as 'making the invisible visible.'



GIRT BY SEA

CITY OF FREMANTLE ART COLLECTION GALLERY

NOV 22 – JAN 29, 2015

CHECKLIST

Artworks are from the City of Fremantle Art Collection dimensions are given as height by diameter in centimetres.

Cover Image: Helen Grey-Smith (1916-2009) *To the headland*, undated, acrylic paint and collage, 98 x 78 cm
© Courtesy Susanna Grey-Smith and Mark Grey-Smith

Marcus Beilby (1951-)
The art of beach etiquette 2002
oil paint on canvas
36.4 x 29.3 cm
no.1041

Gloria Bliss
Confrontation of the waterways 2004
paper collage, acrylic paint on canvas
63 x 93.4 cm
no. 1069

Peter Burgess (1952-)
An unbound book of landscapes/Bondi/Tamarama/Bronte/Clovelly/Thompsons Bay/Coogee 1978
photocopy on perforated and embossed paper
80 x 60 cm each
no. 245-250

Frederick Elliott (1864-1949)
Not titled (Coastal subject with gulls and warship) undated
watercolour
50.4 x 38.3 cm
no. 36

Tom Gleghorn (1925-)
Tiddy Widdy Beach octurne 1979
acrylic paint, spray paint, pastel and charcoal
78 x 98 cm
no. 43

Helen Grey-Smith (1916-2009)
To the headland undated
acrylic paint and collage
98 x 78 cm
no. 52

George Haynes (1938-)
Redgate 1982
oil on canvas
43.2 x 51.3 cm
no. 872

Percy Ivor Hunt (1925-1971)
Early morning bathers, Cottesloe c1952
oil paint on masonite
67 x 97.5 cm
no. 62

Tony Jones (1938-)
Off Fremantle II 1987
pastel and ink
35 x 42.5 cm
no. 973

Mary Macqueen (1912-1994)
Brighton Beach undated
pencil
48.5 x 55.5 cm
no. 97

Gina Moore (1969-)
Beach scene II 1997
oil on canvas
40 x 46.6 cm
no. 972

Alan Muller (1953-)
Abandoned trolley and toy 2004
oil paint and pencil on canvas
30.5 x 30.5 cm
no. 312

Laurel Nannup (1943-)
First contact 2013
acrylic paint on canvas
62.3 x 92 cm
no. 1385

Martin Parr (1952-)
Port Beach Polar Bears Fremantle 2011
colour photograph
105 x 155.5 cm
no. 1326

Shane Pickett (1957-2010)
Waagle and Yondock Story 2004
acrylic paint on canvas
120 x 90 cm
no. 951

Helen Taylor (1943-)
Sunrise Bluebird 1976
coloured etching and aquatint ed.3/5
82 x 62 cm
no. 338

Paul Uhlmann (1962-)
Hallucinations - a fragment 2002
artist's book etching and digital print ed.2/13
24.5 x 20 x 1 cm
no.1048

Unknown
Not titled (South Beach Hydrodome & Tea rooms) c1930
silver gelatine photograph
33 x 64 cm
cofcc no.149