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ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SEA AND COAST: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT: This article explores artistic representations of Australian seas and coasts, and the power of art to sustain seas and coasts. Research into artworks at the National Gallery of Australia was supplemented with a study of other local public and private works. A number of substantive themes emerged in viewing the paintings; the sea and coast has been represented as: sea country, sovereign territory, sublime spaces, a Romantic space of yearning, a psychological journey, a literal journey, a site of social and political comment, social places, ecological places and a site for industry. We discuss these themes, reflecting on the various expressions of human-sea relations and the cultural, political and ideological values that inform the artworks. This article points to possible artistic representations of sustainable seas and coasts. In turning to the power of art in sea and coastal sustainability, we discuss the potential of art to create shifts in consciousness and relationships by challenging humans to imagine the sea differently.

KEY WORDS: Sea; coast; art; culture; representations; sustainability

Introduction

This article is a voyage of discovery about artistic representations of the sea and the power of art in coastal sustainability in Australia, and the possible implications of their efforts to the future of our coastal places. In an online introduction to his TV series, 'The Power of Art', the historian Simon Schama asserts: "The power of the greatest art is the power to shake us into revelation and rip us from our default mode of seeing. After an encounter with that force, we don't look at a face, a colour, a sky, a body, in quite the same way again. We get fitted with new sight: in-sight. Visions of beauty or a rush of intense pleasure are part of that process, but so too may be shock, pain, desire, pity, even revulsion. That kind of art seems to have rewired our senses. We apprehend the world differently" (Schama 2006).

In addition to this transformative power of art, David Malouf in his 1998 Boyer Lecture series identifies the real work of culture as 'enriching our consciousness' and developing our sense of place. This process begins, he suggests, by intensifying, substantiating, and raising our sensory awareness of our world, and especially our landscape. Then we

transform this sensory experience, through paintings, photographs and literature, 'so that we possess the world we inhabit imaginatively'. This is often a complex and subtle process. When this 'real work' is done, 'a landscape that at first seems unfamiliar and estranging, to lie outside any possibility of response, can be brought into the world of feeling'. Malouf suggests that painting is one way of possessing the land imaginatively. This transformation process is essential if we are to feel grounded, at home in a particular place. In Australia, such places include the sea. According to Malouf, '[o]nce again the idea of ocean has been essential to how we define where we are and who it is we are most closely related to' (Malouf 1998).

In this article, we explore first the question of what in principle might be the power of art to sustain the sea and coasts. We suggest, following Malouf (1998), that artistic representations can help transform the objective world of the coast and sea into a world that we find meaningful as coastal residents and beachgoers: something for which we have feelings. We also discuss the power of art to create shifts in consciousness by challenging humans to see the sea differently, to imagine different types of relationships with the sea, and to engage in a form of public dialogue about these relations.

Second, we ask, how have artists in Australia represented the sea and coast? There is a wide variety of artistic responses to the Australian sea and coast, as well as a body of work around these responses that build a sense of values, understandings and identities in relation to the sea. Many of the ways artists have represented the sea and coast in Australia draw attention to conventional Western understandings and relations such as the sea as an aid to human transit, as a site of industry, as a social and political arena and promoting a sense of awe and wonder. Seascapes are often underpinned by an understanding that the sea exists to serve and please humans: the sea itself is a backdrop to the material and psychical activities of humans. However, other representations of seas and coasts challenge conventional Western tropes, providing interpretations that seem to point towards a more placial, sustainable relationship between humans and the coast. We present a discussion of Australian acrylic and oil paintings of the sea and coast sorted by themes that emerged while viewing and reflecting on the paintings. Within the themes, the paintings are largely discussed chronologically to give an idea of how representations have changed over time.

In the final section, we return to the question, 'What might be the power of art to sustain seas and coasts?' specifically in relation to the artworks examined. We conclude that sea paintings can help us explore and develop our sense of identity and belonging on the coast in Australia that may lead to care and stewardship. We also point to possible representations of sustainable seas and coasts.

The research presented is not a comprehensive survey of artworks or an attempt to critique the artworks themselves but to reflect on the various expressions of human-sea relations and the cultural, political and ideological values that inform them. Our responses are necessarily speculative.

Methodology

The National Gallery of Australia database was searched for any artworks with the word 'sea', 'beach' or 'coast' in the titles; it returned a prolific number of artworks, primarily drawings and watercolours, making it necessary to limit the search to acrylic and oil paintings as a way of constraining the project. Four sessions of viewing the paintings took place at the Gallery and an off-site storage room where less commonly hung paintings are stored. Many more paintings were viewed than is possible to discuss in this paper. Hence, this paper presents only a sample of the paintings from which the themes of this paper emerged. Many of the paintings discussed in this article can be viewed using the search function on the National Gallery's website (<http://nga.gov.au/>). Research at the National Gallery was supplemented with other local public or private works, some of which the Gallery research led to. The Bill Nix exhibition (2008) at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Darling Harbour was also viewed.

The power of art in sustaining seas and coasts

Artists have the opportunity to organise the viewer's vision, drawing attention to, even popularising, what they want the public to see (Rees 1973). Artists can stimulate the visual imagination with representations of the sea, which viewers then apply to an appreciation of the seascape or place itself. The Romantic Movement's landscape painting facilitates this effect. Romanticism's reverence for nature is thought to have laid the groundwork for modern ecology and natural history (McKinley 1969, cited in Rees 1973). As Cosgrove (2008) demonstrates, pictorial images, including paintings, played a powerful role in shaping environmental thought and discourse throughout the 20th C.

Art can create shifts in consciousness by challenging people to see the sea differently and to imagine new types of relationships with the sea. While scientific text, figures and statistics are regarded as the most legitimate form of knowledge for policy and management of the coasts and seas, shifts in mind-sets are not always achievable by cognitive, scientific and didactic methods. Emotional and affective responses to the natural world and environmental concerns can be more engaging and decisive than government reports or scientific data (Miles 2010). Developing a deep awareness of places in the sea and along the coast through the senses and affections (Cosgrove 2008, Phelan 2007) has considerable power to motivate 'nature-protective behaviour' (Kals, Schumacher & Montada 1999, p.197). It may be that exposure to both the power of cognitive scientific evidence *and* imaginative representations in a variety of projects and conditions will have a cumulative effect that leads to awareness and personal action (Miles 2010).

Artists, furthermore, contribute to debate about the sea and coast with their artworks. An artwork expresses what the artist values amongst a host of other values. In thinking and reflecting back and forth between each other, and back and forth to viewers, about the values of seas and coasts, artistic communities are engaging in what can be thought of as a deliberative democratic process.

Artworks are layered with social and cultural meaning that can be identified by 'visual interpretation and contextual investigation of symbolic imagery' (Cant & Morris 2006, p.857). In analysing the paintings presented in the next section of this article, we work with an understanding that representations of the sea and coast are best understood within the historical, material, socio-economic and culturally specific contexts in which they are created. The rationale for our approach is that representations of the sea and coast have conceptual and material consequences through the relations they express between humans and the sea, some of which we consider better than others in sustaining seas and coasts. In presenting the works by theme, however, we are to some extent collapsing the different historical periods and contexts in which these artists work(ed). A more detailed study of how socio-cultural semiotics influenced their depictions would make a valuable further study.

Paintings of Australian seas and coasts

Sea country

Paintings of sea country by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are rarely simple, naturalistic representations of the sea and usually show an interconnection of dreaming stories, fishing and hunting, meeting places and biological depictions. Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander paintings of sea country draw heavily on the use of sacred symbols and designs and many are specifically intended to show enduring ownership of, and commitment to, coastal lands and waters.

Gawirrin Gumana's painting, *Dhalwanu at Garraparra* (n.d.), depicts the sea country of the Dhalwanu clan, land and water of Djalma Bay, a part of the larger Blue Mud Bay on the western side of the Gulf of Carpentaria, East Arnhem Land. The painting is read from top to bottom. Red and yellow represent land and beach respectively. Beginning with the beach at the top, the first eighth of the painting shows choppy water. A large black lens shape, a low relief sand sculpture, is used by the Dhalwanu clan for mortuary rites, signifying Dhalwanu ownership of this water. Ancestral hunters are depicted below the sculpture with their canoes and quarry, the turtle. Waving ribbons of water change to diamonds depicting fresh water intrusion. Elliptical shapes denote saltwater. This area is sacred, a 'birth place' of the Dhalwanu clan, conceptualised as 'a reservoir of souls' (Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre 1999, p.42). This place is characterised by submerged rocks (red ovals). An exposed rock in the centre is guarded by queen fish and a heron. The next panel depicts two more submerged rocks guarded by eels. The water then becomes salty, deep and rough. Yolŋu (Aboriginal inhabitants of north-east Arnhem Land) men must endure canoeing in these waters to gain knowledge of this place in order to look after it. In this place is an island surrounded by rocks. The next panel depicts the ancestral hunters coming to grief in deep, dangerous waters under the storm clouds. Three thunderclouds represent three different clans (Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre 1999).

Dhalwanu at Garraparra is a complex story that defines and integrates aspects of the clan's life and relationship to the sea. The painting weaves together material dependence and a complex set of cultural and spiritual values and responsibilities in relation to sea country. *Dhalwanu at Garraparra* is also a political document. This painting is a part of a group of paintings called *Saltwater Country* that toured nationally as an exhibition between 1999 and 2001. The paintings attempt to assert ancient and inalienable ownership of saltwater country (Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre 1999). Entitlement to this sea country is expressed in the Dhalwanu clan's intimate knowledge of its geography and ecology: the currents, rocks and marine life. One way of storing this knowledge is in images.

Sea as sovereign territory

While Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make claim to sovereignty over land and sea, so too the colonial British Government also made claims on Australian sea as sovereign territory. The form of pictorial representation is, not surprisingly, very different in style, concept, scope and purpose. *Portrait of Bungaree* (c.1826) by Augustus Earle and *View of Sydney Harbour Showing Sydney Cove* (c.1850) by Conrad Martens depict colonial era developments in Sydney Harbour. The intent of these paintings is primarily to show occupation of the sea and coast by England and the gradual civilisation of the coast for colonial purposes.

Portrait of Bungaree depicts Bungaree, an Aboriginal man from the Broken Bay area of New South Wales (NSW) in military uniform and in the background, Fort Macquarie, Sydney Harbour. Bungaree was a well-known personality around Sydney and an important member of three major naval expeditions (National Library of Australia, n.d.). He cooperated with the colonial government and earned their appreciation as a result. Governor Macquarie proclaimed Bungaree 'Chief of the Broken Bay Tribe', 'a completely fictitious title' (McCarthy 1966, p.177). Bungaree often wore military and naval uniforms and hats given to him (National Library of Australia, n.d.). This painting can be interpreted as an attempt to depict the colonisation and assimilation of both the coast and the Australian Aboriginal people by the British. This type of representation has been referred to as a 'scenic special' in relation to literature (Gray 1986): an attempt to portray the exotica of 'overseas' places with all their colour, romance, adventure and novelty. In the present case, the artist showed that the coast and its inhabitants were not only exotic and novel but also colonised. It has also been argued that Earle was attempting to parody colonial society and to depict the tragedy of Indigenous people's loss (National Gallery of Australia n.d.a).

Conrad Martens, 'the undisputed leader of landscape art in New South Wales' (Radford 2007, p.15) depicts the gradual development, building and assimilation of the landscape into the colonial world in *View of Sydney Harbour Showing Sydney Cove* (c.1850). The growing mercantile city of Sydney is portrayed including the island of Fort Denison, the promontory Fort Macquarie, the spire of St. James' Church and the newly completed Government House. In contrast to Gumana's *Dhalwanu at Garraparra*, these colonial

representations of ownership have little to do with knowledge of the sea but rather share a link in representing the colonies' use and development of it. Embedded in colonial art (whether consciously or not) was the all-surveying eye of ownership and dominion. A recurring observation in non-Indigenous Australian representations of the sea is the lack of interest in the sea itself in favour of a focus on the usefulness of the sea or in its symbolic value, as discussed in sections below.

Sea as journey

Sea journeys, whether they be literal, metaphorical or both, are a popular theme. All passengers travelling to Australia, including convicts, free migrants or tourists, came by sea until civil aviation developed in the 1930s (Broeze 1998). In the early days of the colony the sea presented a great danger to travellers with vast distances to cross in small boats under trying conditions. People died regularly, either on the voyage over or in shipwrecks. In *The Wreck of 'George the Third'* (1850), convict artist, Knut Bull, recreates the shipwreck of the convict transport, *George the Third*, at Hobart, in 1835. Over half of the two hundred and twenty prisoners died in the shipwreck either because they were trapped in the hospital on board the ship or held in the galley at gunpoint by the military guard. One cannot separate Bull's painting from his own sympathies: this bleak and frightening sea refers Australians to the politics of convict transport and population of Australia to secure and exploit its land [1].

Sea journeys can also be for pleasure and novelty value. *Seagoing*, by Ron Lambert (1950-1971), portrays a colourful steamer and a jolly time at sea. This painting is full of fun and life and suggests either a happy holiday on a luxury liner of some sort or a twilight party boat on the harbour.

Rick Amor portrays the sea as an internal and frightening journey in his painting, *Nightmare* (1982). A solitary figure appears stranded on the wreck of a jetty in a dark and violent ocean about to be consumed by waves. *Nightmare* is a highly charged, dream-based painting (James 2002) that takes one to a place of absolute terror beyond all reason where a storm is threatening to completely overwhelm.

Transposed by Nien Schwarz (2005) (plate 1), tells a story of early European migration to Australia, suggesting a sense of finality and possibly desperation that migrants may feel when the ship sails away leaving them and their luggage dumped on the shores of Australia, for better or worse. In this installation, the sea separates the migrants from the ship as it sails away as well separating them from their former lives. The three-dimensional object of the luggage aligns in the photograph with the STS Leeuwin some distance offshore from the installation, an incident that was serendipitously but thoughtfully but captured by the artist. *Transpose* was part of a longer sequence of works (as detailed on her website <http://www.nienschwarz.com/>) that address the theme of migration among other matters. This is the story of the sea as an agent of Diaspora: ships travel around the world dispersing humans and their different cultures.

The sublime sea

The aesthetic discourse of the sublime is about the human subjects' attempt to give expression to experiences of anything vast, overwhelming and incomprehensible. Historically the sea has evoked this sense of experience (Raban 1993, Corbin 1994). The sea has been celebrated as that which gives rise to sublime experience on account of its capacity to act on a monumental scale that exceeds all human control and comprehension. That representations of sea journeys often depict terrible ordeals, as we have seen, reflects the pervasiveness of the sea as sublime. The sublime sea is, however, as much a psychological sea as a geographical sea. The sublime sea is a projection of the artist's state of existential isolation, rapture and terror.

The sublime sea is evident in James Cant's *The Lonely Coast* (1939). Cant depicts a vast and powerful sea pounding mercilessly at the rocks and clouds darkening overhead. The sea is emptied of signs of marine life and human interaction to create a mental image of the ocean as an immense void. A somewhat darker version of the sublime sea is found in Amor's painting, *Leaving the Islands, Bass Strait* (2001) (plate 2). Although the view is from the back of the boat and the amount of sea seen is very small, the sea threatens to overwhelm with its vastness and power. It is perhaps more usual to use the term 'sublime' for those standard works of land and seascape of the 19th C with large overwhelming vistas. The works reviewed here are smaller scale studies but nevertheless point to a link between an interior monologue and the all-powerful sea.

Sea as Romantic home of the soul

The Romantics (1800-1900), inspired by the philosophical sublime of Edmund Burke (1729-1797) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), represent the sea as a sphere of spiritual reverie, uplift and salvation from the world (Corbin 1994). A key theme of Romantic painting and literature is a desire for the self to merge with the other, the lover and the beloved, self and world, all the while continuing to feel alone. The subjects' solitariness is often represented in paintings by contrasting the smallness of the subject to the vast sea, drawing out a feeling of humility. There is an emphasis on private, soulful relationship between the person and the sea.

Arthur Boyd's painting, *Potter Drawing by the Sea* (1967-68), depicts Boyd's father, Merric Boyd, as an artist in harmony with nature and yet lonely and isolated from society by a vast sea (McKenzie 2000). Boyd paints 'a universal image that places man in the infinite space of life (the sea), against the menacing and inevitable shadow of death' McKenzie (2000, p.22). Arthur Boyd has emphasised the connection between the artist, the artist's enterprise and the sea by illuminating a patch of sea, the artist's face, drawing equipment, edge of his paper and the seagull. The sea in this painting is not a particular place but a universal space, an idea that is central to both Romanticism and the sublime.

Sea as a site of social comment

The symbolic power of the sea and its near universal availability as a site of projection lends itself to political and social comment. Influenced by Surrealism, Arthur Boyd's paintings dating from World War II embrace the idea of symbols and dreams to convey situations that seemed fundamentally irrational to the artist. In Boyd's *The Beach* (1944) (plate 3), a couple make love on the beach, a place commonly associated with leisure and eroticism. However, death and terror in the form of a monster and coffin-boat, lie not far across the sea and are nearly upon the shore. The couple are painted in the crucified position. It has been suggested that Boyd uses the crucifix as a sign of suffering (McKenzie 2000) and from this we deduce that the couple's love and intimacy was about to be sacrificed either as the man was drafted to war or possibly as Australia was invaded. In this painting the sea is symbolically evoking invasion and death as well as psychological impacts of the events of war overseas.

Albert Tucker, a friend of Boyd, also painted surreal representations of the sea during World War II. *Sunbathers* (1944), is part of Tucker's *Images of Modern Evil* series. Tucker, 'deeply affected by the war' (Radford 2007, p.46) comments in this painting on the darkness of the human condition. For Tucker, 'even the day was dark' (Radford 2007, p.46), an idea represented by the dark sea and sky. By contrast, Tucker illuminates the absurdity of the pleasure-seeking narcissism of Australian social life and beach culture by portraying human figures as 'brutally depersonalised, lumps of meat thrown down to sizzle on a glowing barbecue' (Radford 2007, p.46).

Sea as site of industry

Many paintings celebrate the sea as a site of industry, for the achievements of colonialism, the world of the long shore men and the labour movement, and as a symbol of the triumph of science and technology over the physical determinism of the coast.

Arthur Streeton painted *Circular Quay* (1892) in Sydney as the depression of that era was coming to an end. Streeton celebrates the commerce and industry returning to the Quay, Sydney's preeminent landing stage. Grace Cossington Smith, in *The Bridge in Building* (1929-1930) (plate 4), celebrates the ability of technology to overcome the physical determinism of coastal geomorphology (National Gallery of Australia n.d.b). Cossington Smith depicts the geometrical architectural components and complexity of the structure of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Viewers are awestruck by the sight of two giant arms coming together across the water. The building of the bridge evoked a new era of hope and possibility in Sydney society at this time. These images bring into focus two common experiences of the sea – as an access point to the wider world and as an expanse that can be conquered by technology.

In David Wadellton's *By the Sea* (1990), the sea appears as a passive, pale and peachy background to the main action of a huge bronze character completely dominating the sea

with instruments of gastronomy around his feet. *By the Sea* depicts human domination and exploitation of the sea for the purposes of consumption and gastronomic pleasure. At the same time this powerful character appears shackled to the sea.

In contrast with the large scale of the subject matter of *Circular Quay* and *The Bridge in Building*, are Bill Nix's human scale representations. Nix portrays his memories of working in the shipyards of Sydney Harbour's Cockatoo Island in *Boys from Cockatoo Island* (2002); his works were exhibited in late 2008 at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Darling Harbour, Sydney. Nix worked on Cockatoo Island from the 1960s to the mid-1970's (Australian National Maritime Museum, n.d., Seabreeze n.d.). Using oil and charcoal on canvas he shows the day-to-day routines of the workers, neither romanticising nor demonising industry.

Sea as social place

From the earliest times of colonisation settlements grew around ports with sites like Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle ports being amongst the first substantial townships. As well as celebrating the industry of Circular Quay, Streeton represented the residential areas associated with Sydney Harbour. The panorama *Amethyst and blue* (1926) depicts an already substantial Sydney city with many high-rise apartments and office buildings dominating the city skyline and casting shadows onto the water (Smith 2000). With Streeton's (1926, cited in Smith 2000, p.31) comment '...lord, how the staring white flats have cropped up in only two years time: it's a hardship to one in revealing the beauty of Sydney', Streeton foreshadows some challenges to sustainability that coastal urbanisation presents. Subsequent paintings featuring the coast as a residential site including both modernist representations like Rah Fizelle's, *Elizabeth Bay* (1931 or 1932) and contemporary representations like Marion Ahern Fisher's *South Fremantle* (2000), depict the comfortable relationship of physical form with natural form. Few works viewed critiqued the impacts of urbanisation on coastal health or beauty in the way that Streeton indicated.

The sea and coast as a site for social interaction is for many Australians how the sea is best understood because it is the way it is most often experienced. The appeal of the coast and the beach to non-Indigenous Australians, particularly Australian beach culture, has received growing attention in recent years from academics (Huntsman 2001, Booth 2001) and writers. Tim Winton and Robert Drewe write about 'the beach as a place where coastal dwellers pass through many rites of passage and significant life experiences: learning to swim as children, first sexual encounters and beach parties as adolescents, honey-moons as newly-weds, summer holidays as families and retirement pleasures' (Stocker & Kennedy 2009, p.394).

There are many paintings of the beach as a place for leisure and recreation such as family outings, sport, eroticism and fashion. The infancy in Australia's modern-day fascination and affection for the beach is documented in *Bronte Beach* (1888) by Charles Condor,

which reflects an unproblematic, middle class enjoyment of the beach. The sea is kept at a safe distance from the ladies promenading on the beach. Daylight swimming was banned in Sydney at this time partly because of the physical danger the government thought it presented to people but also for moral reasons. '[M]ixed bathing lowers the morals of the people and has a tendency to animalise the race', one letter to the Sydney Morning Herald complained as late as 1917 (Huntsman 2001, p. 59). There was a concern by the establishment in the 18th C that early convicts and settlers, rather than being drawn to gainful employment and industry, would instead adopt by the Aboriginal coastal lifestyle, perceived as subversive, indolent and idle (Huntsman 2001, pp. 26-27). Of course, a relaxed coastal lifestyle has indeed become an important part of the Australian identity, perhaps an example of how landscape and climate assert themselves over people as much as people impact on and construct the environment. We can see from the examples below that the coast and its inhabitants are mutually constitutive.

Clarice Beckett's *Sandringham* (1933) captures the sense of colour, fun and sensuality of the beach Australians are familiar with today. By the early 1900s the prohibition of daylight swimming was abandoned. People were now swimming regularly at the beaches and the surf life saving clubs had emerged (Huntsman 2001). Adrienne Gaha's, *Going to the Beach* (1992) (plate 5), depicts the domestication and taming of the beach for its use by young families. Exotic creatures from overseas engage in the Australian lifestyle of beach going. This experience of the beach also reflects the trend in Australian society towards a diverse, multi-cultural society. The beach can be seen here as a common thread that binds Australia's diverse society together. Huntsman (2001, p.219) notes that despite the diversity and 'sometimes competing interests and allegiances' of Australians, the beach 'contributes to the fragile network of bonds that holds a people together'.

Fremantle artist, Angela Rossen, depicts the Indian Ocean as a social place. In *Port Beach Triptych* (2000) (plate 6), families play in the water, and people are walking or lying on the beach. The surf life-savers form a sentinel: their reassuring presence implies that there is danger even in such a Utopian scene. On the horizon are container ships passing through the Gage Roads sea channel off the coast of Fremantle. This suggests an impact on an environment that our society is both enjoying and destroying at the same moment. In other of her paintings, families and dogs share the social space of the sea; or people snorkel in clear water looking at the fish and sea grass meadows. Most are seeking relief from a baking Western Australian summer.

Sea as ecological place

The sea as an ecological place emphasises specific dunal, estuarine, inter-tidal and sub-tidal places. Rossen celebrates the ecology of Cockburn Sound, Western Australia, in *Garfish and Seagrass* (2000). Few people have thought to represent sea grass beds as an artistic image. Cockburn Sound is a place most often associated with the highly polluting activities of Cockburn Cement and marinas. By painting the sea grass in an environment where it exists despite the ravages of industry, the artist draws attention to the fragility and

preciousness of this habitat. She intends to create a culture of marine and coastal conservation through her paintings (Rossen, personal communication).

Barrow Island Mangroves (1999) by Rossen shows a detailed understanding of the relationship between the sea and the land and where they meet in the form of mangroves. Rossen's picture of *Birds and Rocks* (2000) also depicts the intertidal zone where land and sea meet that provides an ecological and aesthetic richness. Rossen's *Turtle Swimming* (2000) captures the feeling of snorkelling up through the clear waters and seeing a beautiful creature like a turtle. Rossen portrays details of the marine ecology, as well as a lyrical appreciation of coastal and marine environments.

Sustainable seas and coasts

Many of the representations of Australian coasts and seas in the paintings discussed draw attention to conventional Western understandings and relations that often conceptualise the sea as the backdrop to the social, political and industrial activities of humans. The sublime, by contrast, places the sea in the foreground, as the object that triggers a sense of awe and wonder in the subject. The sublime draws to our attention an awareness of human limits in relation to the sea, encouraging humility and respect. And yet in drawing on the sea as a trigger for the sublime, the sea is often emptied of signs of marine life and human interaction to create a mental image of the sea as an immense void (for example, in Kant 1952, p.122), as 'wild' and 'pristine', a sea that humans cannot impact (Byron 1993). Herein lies the sublime's peril: sublime and Romantic representations of the sea do not engage with the sea in a way that genuinely recognises the social, cultural, economic or ecological issues that threaten it (Stocker & Kennedy 2009).

Social and environmental theorists have critiqued sublime representations of the natural world as wilderness where humans are conceived as outside of nature because they are concerned about the habits of thinking that flow from such a dualistic vision of humans and nature (for example, Cronon 1996, Langton 1996, Plumwood 1993). In setting humans and nature at opposite poles, opportunities to explore what a sustainable place in nature might look like are forgone (Cronon 1996). The 'sea as wilderness' is a particularly hazardous construct for those Indigenous societies who perceive themselves as part of the sea. Where the sea country that supports and is supported by Indigenous societies are viewed as 'pure nature', they are not seen as homes and territories, erasing Indigenous histories and specific relations with sea country (Kennedy 2007).

In shaping environmental attitudes and experiences, we can attend to the binaries that divide humans from nature utilising the imagination and power of the image (Cosgrove 2008). Artists influence our view of the sea and the coast, and so can encourage a sustainable perspective. Rossen, for example, does not reduce coasts or seas to their biological dimensions; viewers are encouraged to attend to the intimate interrelationships between the human and non-human world, for example in *Summer* (2000). Rossen, nevertheless, decentres the human subject and of all the non-Indigenous paintings

discussed in this paper, her work takes us closest to a sustainable vision of the sea and coast.

Sustainable representations require artists to be cognisant of their unique ecological, cultural, social and economic communities and to promote life-affirming and life-sustaining relations. Although necessarily a fundamentally contested term (Kane 1999, Robinson 2004, Davison 2008), like 'art', 'science' or 'democracy', sustainability is a higher-order process (Dovers 2005) in which fully engaged communities create healthy places and long term futures characterised by creative synergies among cultural, social, ecological and economic imperatives, and by openness to ongoing dialogue among different perspectives. Place attachment is an important aspect of sustainability that we highlight in a number of paintings below because of the possibilities for place commitment and ecological stewardship that can flow from it (Stocker & Moore 1999). In this respect, artworks that enhance the social, spiritual and ecological appeal of a place and that are context-sensitive representations of human-sea interaction may also inspire a sustainability consciousness. Site-specificity and sense of place been of concern to artists since the 1960s and there is a wide body of research about how these might nurture or disrupt notions of belonging (Lippard 1997, Cook 2000, Kwon 2002, Hogue 2004, Mackenzie 2004, Graham 2006, 2007). There is also an educative value in the historical understanding of paintings: an awareness of a place over history through a study of images of can also inform and enhance sustainability consciousness.

The concept of 'place' is often envisioned as 'space' instilled with social and spiritual meaning, sometimes underpinned by biophysical characteristics that are important for those meanings (Vanclay 2008). We suggest the term 'seaplace' be used to describe coastal places that are rich with meaning and culture. Paintings of sea country by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders portray this concept of place. Some non-Indigenous artists have also painted seaplaces by giving to water and coastal lands a particular character and geography.

Fred Williams, one of Australia's most celebrated landscape artists, painted *Beachscape, Erith Island 1* (1974) (plate 7), a remote island in the Bass Strait. In this painting, Williams has carried out a study of place. During 1974, Williams camped on this sparsely populated island with friends, fellow artists and historians, where they were confined by stormy weather for considerable time (James 2001). Williams has made a detailed study of a particular seaplace on the island: the liminal and littoral place where the sea meets the land. Williams depicts the geology and geomorphology that makes up that particular part of the coastline and the life in the intertidal zone that exists between the sea on the left and the land on the right. Williams also shows a reflective rather than Romantic relationship between artists and the sea in this painting. In the top right hand corner a little umbrella and a person are depicted representing the artists' camp. Footprints in the top panel depict a going to and fro from the artists' camp, their temporary community. In the third panel a cross depicts what was probably the cemetery or an individual grave.

Most of Rossen's work discussed in this paper depicts particular seaplaces on the south west coast of Western Australia or in the Indian Ocean. Rossen pays particular attention to social and ecological aspects of the coast, often depicting the various communities (human and non-human) that interact with the coast. In *Leighton Beach* (2000) Rossen captures not only the sense of fun and movement of sharing the beach with many people and dogs but also a sense of community intimately connected to the beach and water at the edge of the Indian Ocean. Rossen's *Surfing at Seconds* (2000) pictures a winter sea between the headland of South Cottesloe and Leighton Beaches. This painting captures a community of surfers for whom this small stretch of the Indian Ocean has considerable recreational, social and perhaps spiritual value.

Recent research demonstrates that people are more likely to respond to environmental and sustainability issues such as climate change through images of local environments that are meaningful to people rather than generic or fearful images (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole 2010). Moreover, local images are more likely to motivate and sustain environmental action (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole 2010).

Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artwork of sea country is a significant platform to communicate a concept of sustainability to the general public. Overwhelmingly, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists depict long-held beliefs that everything is interconnected, employ local materials and are community-based (Moore 2007). Representations of land and sea interweave cultural, spiritual, ceremonial, territorial and economic systems together with communal property rights. Identity, ownership and custodianship are tied together with place. There is a 'two-sided belonging' or 'interchange' between people and sea country, as felt by the Yolju people of northeast Arnhem Land: 'the people become part of the sea world and the elements of the sea world become part of them. This ... is a domain of intense feeling and emotion' (Sharp 2002, p.12). Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representations promote a holistic approach to stewardship that challenge narrowly defined and utilitarian-economic notions of the coast as resource, commodity or property (Stocker & Kennedy 2009).

Melanie Evans' *Reconciliation Mural* (1999) (plate 8), prominently located on the north wall of the Spare Parts Theatre in Fremantle, Western Australia and inspired by Bibbulmun [2] people and country, is a sustainable vision of the local coast. This image shows the spirit Wargul (Rainbow Serpent) as the creative life giving force. On the upside of the Wargul's curves is the sea and in the patches below the wetlands and rivers. The mampakut (the ocean) and the derrbil yarrigan (the fresh water) are represented by blue and green water. The ocean and fresh water exist separately, with their own identity and stories, but they can also coexist. Thus, the ocean and fresh water symbolise both the differences that exist among people as well as their ability to co-exist. The painting, furthermore, signifies that 'everybody born in this country is part of the land and can identify themselves by looking at the land' (Evans 1999). Evans notes that, 'With this identity and belonging comes the responsibility to care for land and to acknowledge the history of this land through the Bibbulmun people'. The dancing figures of people are spirits breathed out by the Wargul to

be reborn as strong people that can join and rejoice with other Australians. These figures are depicted with love in their hearts, living in harmony along the coastline. At the bottom is a timeline showing 50 thousand years ago to the present.

Evans' mural ties the notion of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous people in the south west of Western Australia together with attachment to place and the need to care for it, all important aspects of sustainability that promote life-affirming and life-sustaining relations.

Conclusion

In the present paper we chose not to comment critically on the works' artistic, intrinsic value or merit. Rather, we discuss how an artwork and indeed a body of artworks can potentially reflect and affect socio-cultural norms with regards to society's understanding of the coast. Our present efforts are a form of active co-production in the sense that we interpret the works to make our own point.

Human relationships to the sea have been the subject of several contemporary art studies (Snell 1988, 2000). Artists have represented Australian seas and coasts in a variety of themes: as sea country, as sovereign territory, as sublime spaces, a Romantic yearning space, a psychological and literal journey, a site of social and political comment, social and ecological places and a site for industry. Many of the paintings discussed in the present article draw on conventional and often taken-for-granted understandings of the sea as background to the activities of humans. At the same time, we have drawn attention to the paintings of sea country by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for their sustainable representations of the sea and coast. In addition, we have highlighted aspects of sustainability – place, community and ecology – depicted in the paintings of seaplaces by contemporary artists such as Williams, Evans and Rossen.

We suggest that any *individual* artwork is unlikely to have a transformative effect on viewers or society, although this can happen in the case of a work like Picasso's *Guernica* (Schama 2006). Nevertheless, if people are exposed to a variety of art works over the course of their lives their consciousness may be raised so that they are open to different perspectives and to changes in their own cognition, affect and behaviour. We agree with Cosgrove (2008) that pictorial images, including paintings, have played a powerful role in shaping environmental thought and discourse. Art may prove powerful in encouraging coastal sustainability and adaptation to climate change, where more literal, didactic methods of education and technical policy processes seem to be failing on their own (Stocker et al 2010; Wood & Stocker 2009).

We have argued that art is potentially a means to shift mind-sets towards sustainability through a variety of related processes. Artists increase people's appreciation of particular seascapes, by making these places alive to our collective imaginations. Paintings of the sea and coast can help Australians to explore the history, norms, values, ideas and relations

held about the sea and coast in a process of on-going cultural dialogue. Such a process can unsettle conventional understandings and create shifts in consciousness. Aesthetic responses to the sea and the coast may, furthermore, act as a catalyst to sustainable action. Paintings of seas and coasts can help Australians explore and develop a sense of identity and belonging on the coast that may lead to care and stewardship.

We want to inspire people to take action for sustainability, not from fear but from a deep understanding of the coast and sea. Painting is one way of inspiring people.

Further research will focus on more contemporary mixed media works which grapple with the sustainability and climate issues of today. This future work will address in more detail what sustainability might need, and how art might promote sustainability other than through picturing landscapes.

NOTES

[1] This painting parallels the critique of cruel practices at sea offered by J.M.W. Turner in his famous and controversial painting, *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying — Typhoon coming on* (1840). The Captain of the slave-ship, *Zong*, threw overboard dead and dying slaves so that he could collect insurance money available only for slaves 'lost at sea'.

[2] Evans refers to the Bibbulmun people although Indigenous people from the south west of Western Australia more commonly refer to themselves as Nyungars.

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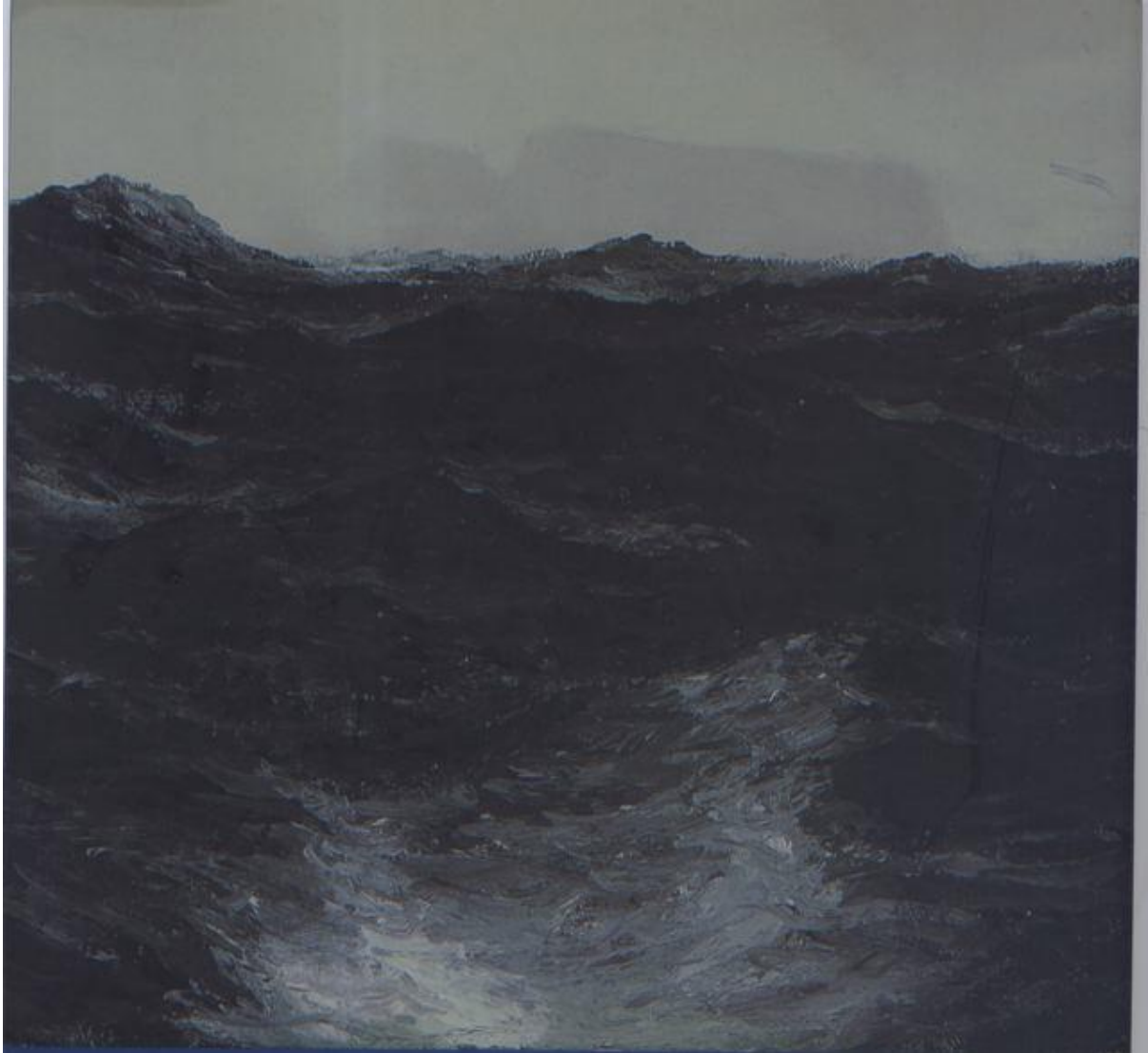
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PAINTINGS

Plate 1. Transpose (Nien Schwarz, 2005)



Plate 2. Leaving the Islands, Bass Strait (Rick Amor, 2001)



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Plate 3. The Beach (Arthur Boyd, 1944)

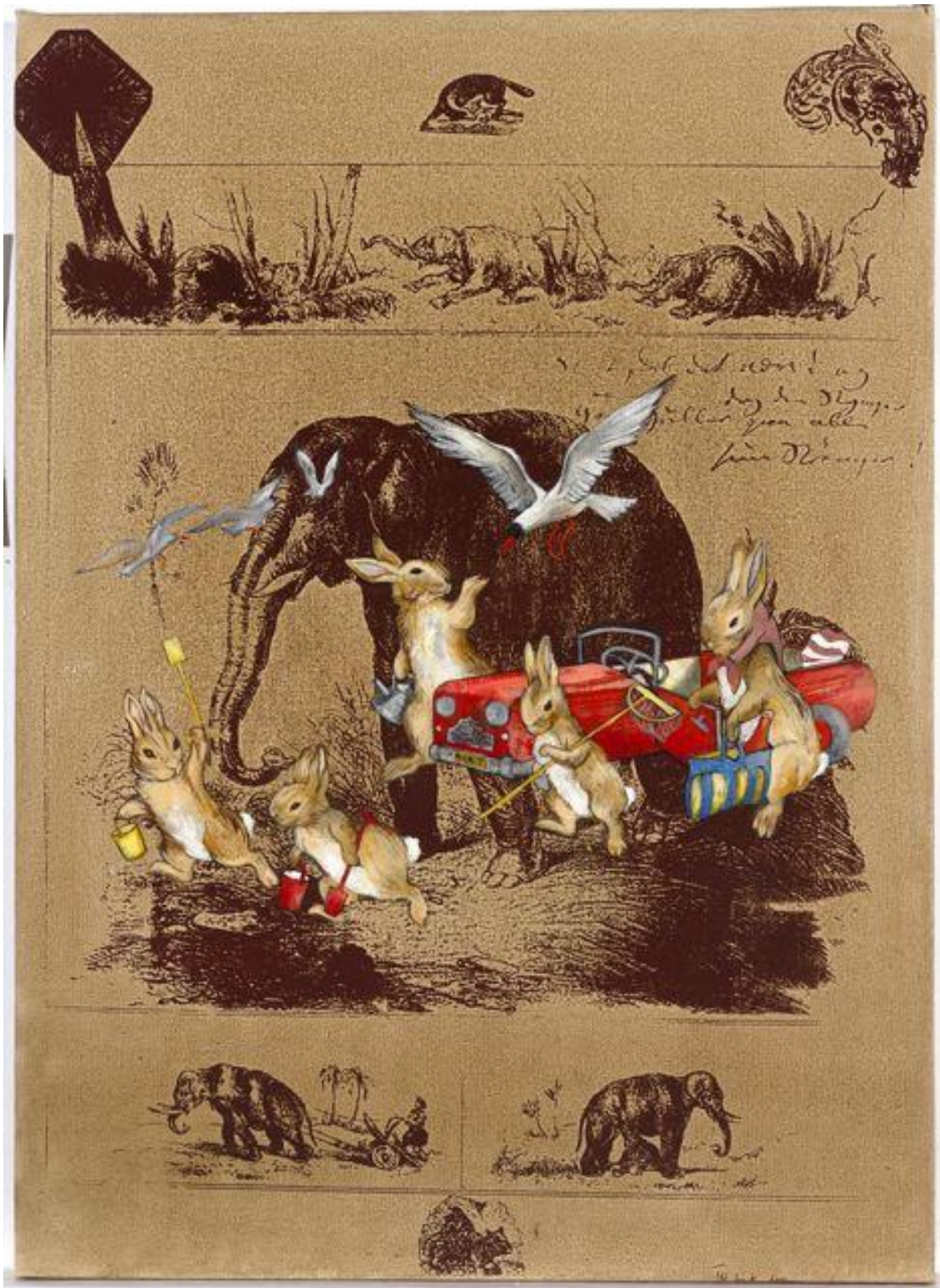


Plate 4. The Bridge in Building (Grace Cossington Smith, 1929-1930)



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Plate 5. Going to the Beach (Adrienne Gaha, 1992)



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Plate 6. Port Beach Triptych (Angela Rossen, 2000)



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Plate 7. Beachscape, Erith Island 1 (Fred Williams, 1974)



Plate 8. Reconciliation Mural (Melanie Evans, 1999)



Associate Professor Laura Stocker is a marine ecologist by training. Currently, she researches and teaches in the area of coastal sustainability, climate change policy, sustainability education, sustainability mapping, cultural models of the coast and conceptual aspects of sustainability. She completed her BSc and MSc at the University of Auckland's Marine Laboratory at Leigh, on the ecology of subtidal marine invertebrates. She then completed a PhD on subtidal marine invertebrates at the University of Sydney. By the end of the PhD she wanted to find a more interdisciplinary field that incorporated human dimensions. She was employed at Murdoch University in 1989 where she shortly established Australia's first course in sustainability, focussing on the interaction among social, economic, social and ecological fields. In 2008 she was employed by Curtin University, along with several other colleagues to form the new Curtin University Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute. Here she coordinates the Masters Course in Sustainability Studies. She is deputy leader of the nationwide project Coastal Collaboration Cluster on enabling science uptake in the coastal zone, funded by CSIRO. This project uses innovative methods such as participatory Google Earth Mapping and participatory modeling to engage stakeholders in processes that change their levels of cognition, concern and behaviour.