

14 February 2017

***THE ISLAND* exhibition at Newcastle Art Gallery contemplates the plight of asylum seekers**



Alex SETON *Paper Armada* 2015 Bianco Carrara marble dimensions variable Artist collection

ALEX SETON: THE ISLAND

18 February - 7 May 2017

Known for his intricately-carved marble sculptures, Sydney-based artist Alex Seton also encompasses installation, photography and mixed media into his practice. This can be seen in the upcoming exhibition *ALEX SETON: THE ISLAND*, opening Saturday 18 February at Newcastle Art Gallery.

This compelling and highly topical exhibition contemplates and questions Australia's role in the asylum debate. Through his works of art, Seton investigates issues around the central theme of Australian immigration history and current policy. His installations raise questions and provoke viewers to confront their own beliefs and morals, without taking a particular stand on the issues.

'The humanitarian issues Alex has explored in his works are very topical right now, both here and overseas' says Newcastle Art Gallery Manager Laretta Morton.

'You often read in the media the importance of 'humanising' refugee issues, and this exhibition truly shows us the power of great works of art. When you think about it, these works are made largely of marble - a material more commonly seen in commemorative

statues of great statesmen - not unknown asylum seekers. With these sculptures of life jackets; paper boats or inflatable palm trees - the literal heaviness of the materials is quietly poignant."

Morton notes that we are seeing history repeated in Europe today, with the mass movement of refugees and asylum seekers displaced by war and poverty. Where once immigrants were embraced as a means to drive the health and economy of nations, today they are seen as suspect, with political discussion turning instead to the construction of walls and fences.

Through his marble sculptures and installation pieces, Seton reflects on the impact this change in attitudes toward refugees is having on the human condition.



A key work on loan from The Art Gallery of South Australia, *Someone died trying to have a life like mine* 2013 depicts strewn life vests across the Gallery floor, as if washed up on the shore. First shown in the exhibition *Dark Heart* at the 2014 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, this major work is inspired by an actual event where 28 life jackets were found on a beach of the Cocos Islands within Australian territory. Their wearers still remain unidentified.

Someone else's problem 2015 is a mass of apparently discarded boat paddles recalling the many people scrambling to flee war-torn regions around the globe, while the 2014 sculpture *Last Resort* shows carved marble renditions of theatrically-lit inflatable palm trees. Seemingly creating an idyllic postcard landscape, they are full of empty promises.

ALEX SETON: THE ISLAND is supported by an exhibition catalogue featuring an essay by Linda Jaivin and will be available for purchase at the Gallery Shop.

Image above:

Alex SETON *Someone died trying to have a life like mine* 2013 Wombeyan marble, nylon webbing dimensions variable Gift of John and Jane Ayers, Candy Bennett, Jim and Helen Carreker, Chris and Elma Christopher, Cherise Conrick, Colin and Robyn Cowan, James Darling AM and Lesley Forwood, Scott and Zoë Elvish, Rick and Jan Frolich, Peter and Kathryn Fuller, Andrew and Hiroko Gwinnett, Dr Michael Hayes and Janet Hayes, Klein Family Foundation, Ian Little and Jane Yuile, Dr Peter McEvoy, David and Pam McKee, Hugo and Brooke Michell, Jane Michell, Peter and Jane Newland, John Phillips, Dr Dick Quan, Paul and Thelma Taliangis, Sue Tweddell, Tracey and Michael Whiting, GP Securities, UBS and anonymous donors through the Art Gallery of South Australia Contemporary Collector's Director's Project 2014, Collection Art Gallery of South Australia

Related events:

Floor talk - Alex Seton and Linda Jaivin | Free

Saturday 18 February, 2-3pm

Join contemporary artist and sculptor Alex Seton, catalogue essayist Linda Jaivin and Newcastle Art Gallery Exhibitions Coordinator James Collis for a floor talk, held on the opening weekend launch of *ALEX SETON: THE ISLAND*. Listen to an exploration of Seton's art practice and the influences of the refugee and asylum seeker debate in Australia on his work.

Linda Jaivin is the internationally published author of seven novels and four works of non-fiction and a longstanding advocate for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees.

Teachers event - ALEX SETON: THE ISLAND | Free

Friday 24 February, 4-5pm

Join artist Alex Seton and colleagues from schools across the region for an exhibition tour through *ALEX SETON: THE ISLAND*. This is an opportunity to view Seton's intricately-carved marble sculptures, followed by a brief Q&A session with the artist on the role of political activism in his art practice. Gather free collection resources, and stay on at the Gallery to enjoy Last Fridays.

Last Fridays | Free

Friday 24 February and the last Friday of every month (except December), open until 8pm
Bring your friends and enjoy late-night access to current exhibitions and the Gallery Shop, or a drink at our pop-up bar. Starting from 5pm explore the exhibition *ALEX SETON: THE ISLAND* and experience a range of temporary sound installations by Newcastle-based artists, positioned in and around the Gallery.

Public talks: *Asylum in Australia* | Free, bookings required

Wednesday 8 March and Tuesday 21 March, 2-3pm

In celebration of International Women's Day (8 March) and Harmony Day (21 March) Newcastle Art Gallery presents a two-part series of free talks by inspirational speakers to expand on the ideas explored in the exhibition.

8 March - Shukufa Tahiri followed her father and family out of Afghanistan in 1998, after the Taliban ordered civilian massacres targeting Hazara people just like her family. She came to Australia in 2006, and today she works as an assistant policy officer for the Refugee Council of Australia, whilst studying law, aiming to be a human rights lawyer.

21 March - Tim O'Connor is the Acting Chief Executive Officer at the Refugee Council of Australia, a not-for-profit organisation whose aim is to promote the development of humane, lawful and constructive policies towards refugees and asylum seekers. Tim has worked in human rights, international aid and development for over 15 years.

For children:

School Holiday workshops | \$10 per child, bookings required

Tuesday 18 - Friday 21 April

Inspired by the exhibition children will create paper boat dioramas and explore paper-folding techniques as well as setting a scene and telling a story through a work of art.

Bookings: 4974 5100 or artgallerybookings@ncc.nsw.gov.au or visit us at the Gallery.