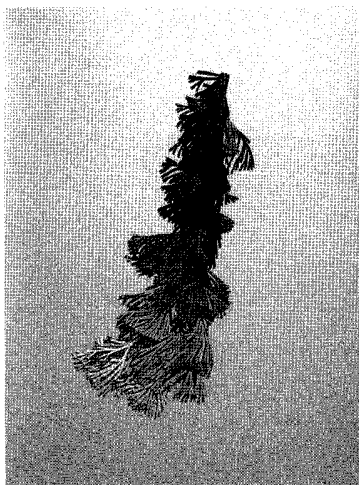
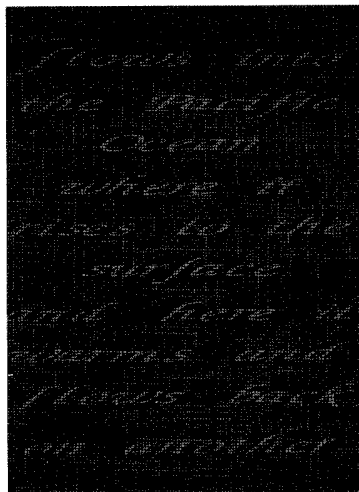


tidal



Marian Crawford  
From the Series  
*Acropora*, 2004  
Gouache on cut paper  
76 x 56cm



Sebastian Di Mauro  
*Swell*, 2004  
Neoprene, timber  
22 x 200 x 30cm

Helga Groves  
*Deep Ocean Current*,  
2004  
Hand woven fishing  
line and sand  
blasted glass  
5 panels each  
65 x 39cm (framed)



There are times when the immensity and significance of the sea is difficult to comprehend. It is an enigmatic force — a seething, majestic body of water that encompasses and infiltrates the earth. Tidal patterns are formed by the magnetic guidance of the moon, while gravity and the wind generate the endless, surging movement of the ocean. Rising and retreating tides control the shape of the earth, causing it to expand and contract in a monumental, breath-like motion. The sea is without boundaries and connects the earth's continents, islands, and inland waterways to create an aqueous network between different landforms, climates, cultures and species. But these timeless properties of the sea are countered by contemporary circumstance and intervention. Entire ecosystems are endangered, expanding cities threaten coastal environments, contaminants disturb natural cycles, and as the polar regions melt, the tide line encroaches further upon the land than can be remembered.

The 20 artists selected to participate in the inaugural *Tidal: City of Devonport Art Awards* have each responded to Australia's sea, coastal environments or communities. The biennial exhibition is supported by a \$10,000 Major Award and \$2,500 Tasmanian Artist Award, and seeks to contextualise the historic connection between art and the sea by providing a contemporary platform for visual interpretations of the marine environment.

The sublime nature of the sea is epitomised in the works by David Stephenson and Melissa Coote. Stephenson has interpreted a heavy industrial coastal site as a place of extraordinary beauty, and Coote has refigured an enormous whale skull, referencing the iconographic power of the inanimate and the perpetual cycle of birth and decay. Though their artistic processes are vastly different, each artist has alluded to the sea as a symbol of transcendence. They caress and reinvigorate subjects traditionally considered unpleasant to unveil the transformative powers of the sea.

Many of the painters in the exhibition have depicted their physical and emotional experience of the sea. The paintings of Tim Burns and Michael Muruste reflect our sensory engagement with the environment and resonate with the textures, rhythms and colours of the sea. Patrick Grieve, Philip Wolfhagen and Ian Parry draw from their personal knowledge and familiarity with the particular stretch of water they depict to respond to the sea's ever changing moods, capturing a strong sense of its weather and temperament to stir feelings of both oneness

and isolation. And Jonathan Kimberley paints abstract depictions of coastal phenomena that is always moving, such as reflections, clouds, falling leaves, and water, to represent both migration and connection to place.

Information and observations gathered on-site are also an important component of the works by Larissa Linnell, Helga Groves and Patrick Pound. Linnell collects sound samples from the shoreline and translates the information into drawings that visualise the 'movement, vibrations, and alterations' of water as it touches the shore. Groves pays homage to the ocean's momentous thousand year cycle — from the north pole to the equator to the Antarctic — and has travelled between these places to study the differences between the seas. Pound's photographs of the coast are part of a much larger collection of images that interpret the world as an 'endless list' — the coast being one of many global environments.

In Australia, a substantial amount of urban environments are located in coastal regions, and the sea plays a significant role in the everyday life and cultural identity of our people. Simon Cuthbert, Matt Calvert and Katherine Hattam observe aspects related to the habitation of coastal environments. Cuthbert's photograph of *Shangri-La*, an art-deco Bondi Beach house decorated with sailing boats, ironically references the connection between the inner suburban building and the hidden paradise in James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*. Calvert's road sign reflects the danger of winding coastal roads and his experience of growing up on the North West Coast of Tasmania where Bass Strait is always in sight when driving from town to town. In contrast, Hattam uses pages from Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* to recall the exodus of city dwellers to seaside towns and compare the moods of the sea with the psychologically charged events in the novel.

James Newitt and Sebastian Di Mauro each evoke the sense of escape associated with surfing — Newitt through a documentary-style film, and Di Mauro through a horizon line made from blue neoprene, the fabric used for making wetsuits. In each work, the sea references freedom, either through the rising sun and breaking waves, or the infinite possibilities suggested in the horizon.

And yet, the natural and cultural integrity of the sea and coastal regions described by the artists just mentioned, are burdened by the ominous consequences of environmental mismanagement. Marian Crawford and Neil

Haddon make sharp statements on the devastating effects of global warming to coral reefs and unsustainable coastal development. Their artworks are a protest against policy that threatens marine habitats, drawing attention to the fragility of coastal environments.

Megan Keating's paper cut of smoke clouds and naval ships refer to the sea as a battle zone, where international borders are slippery and the water forms a defence barrier for every coastal country.

The collaborative work between Zoe Ali and Christos Tsiolkas draws our attention to another political issue. For them, the Australian coastline represents journey and destination with relation to asylum seekers. The text empathises with the confusion and hardship of inhabiting a foreign country, and the photographs of the horizon allude to many things — the extraordinary distances travelled by boat, the subsequent distance of the places left behind, the endless possibilities of a new country, national border lines, and an unknown future.

The breadth of issues and attitudes covered in the *Tidal* exhibition is a reflection of the diversity and significance of the sea in Australian culture and art. For Devonport, the Award is particularly pertinent because here the sea infiltrates the lives of all. We are a city on the edge of Bass Strait and our harbour anchors the ferries that carry people to and from Tasmania. Container ships loom taller than the city's highest buildings, the foreshore is a stone's throw from the CBD, and the Roaring Forties continue to shape the land around us.

*Tidal: City of Devonport Art Award* seeks to inscribe a place in our cultural landscape by reflecting the various attitudes towards the sea in contemporary Australia — but the title also provides a universal metaphor for shifting cultural perspectives, the polarisation of political thought, and wavering human emotions. It is anticipated that in years to come, *Tidal* will echo changing responses to the natural, cultural and political climates shaped by the sea, and that it will continue to generate debate about the contemporary attitudes and approaches to both art and the water that surrounds, divides and connects us.

**Jane Stewart**  
Director, Devonport Regional Gallery