



RUSSELL CRAIG: ***FIVE TO ONE***

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22 June – 3 July 2016

POP Gallery, 27 Logan Road,
Woolloongabba QLD

Cover image

Beneath the Water Line – Surfboard 1, 2 & 3 2014

Drawings digitally composed and printed on
fabric inlaid into the top deck of each surfboard,
each board 208.3 x 53 x 7cm

from the depths 2014

digital print on Hahnemühle paper, 110 x 572cm

Opposite page

In the time of coral reefs (detail) 2016

charcoal on Montval paper, 440 x 184cm



Five to One Introduction

Five to One was an exhibition of charcoal drawings, surfboards inlaid with images, and large digital prints. These works reflect on the beauty of our natural world as well as the mystery of the subconscious through hybrid images and marine forms designed to trigger the viewer's imagination.



The work also references the strange and poetic lyrics of the 1960s rock group The Doors. They inspired a generation with songs that evoked imaginings of the human psyche.

This body of work originated from an interpretation of the real and imagined forces beneath the sea as well as a concern for the longevity of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Doors' spirited song "Five to One" is a call for revolution and, in this regard, works such as *In the time of coral reefs* are an attempt at making people aware of the importance of saving this beautiful natural phenomenon.

This concept developed largely because of my long involvement with the sea through surfing and swimming. Many of the free-flowing forms in these works describe the power of the ocean and/or the mystery of its strange and evocative marine creatures.

I am inspired by both the real and imagined beings from beneath the water line as well as those from our own subconscious.

This investigation into natural forces immerses the viewer as a body moving through the ocean rather than as a passive observer. It is also an experience full of turbulence, fear of the unknown, and wonder.

It is interesting to consider the following responses to my work from two members of the public:

...for me, your work is more about the body moving through the ocean than the ocean itself. When you dream about the ocean, it describes your relationship with your unconscious mind. ... your swimming and surfing over the years ... has to have an impact on your drawing and even the way you draw.

Jude Roberts, 2016

Homage to Victor Hugo's 'Ma destinée', for me they evoke fear, turbulence, [and] scary times as a younger man when I would charge anything! I think that is why I like them so much.

Sam Leach, 2016

While the digital and surfboard art were exhibited in the Crane International Project Space, Philadelphia, in 2014, this was the first time they had been exhibited in Australia. The large-scale charcoal drawings that accompanied them were new works created for the show.

—Russell Craig, 2016

Opposite page *Beneath the Water Line – Surfboard 1* 2014

Drawings digitally composed and printed on fabric inlaid into the top deck of surfboard, each board 208.3 x 53 x 7cm

Russell Craig standing with:
Beneath the Water Line – Surfboard 1, 2 & 3 2014
Drawings digitally composed and printed on fabric inlaid into
the top deck of each surfboard, each board 208.3 x 53 x 7cm
from the depths 2014
digital print on Hahnemühle paper, 110 x 572cm





Above
Homage to Victor Hugo's 'Ma destinée' (2) (detail) 2016

Opposite page
Homage to Victor Hugo's 'Ma destinée' (2) 2016
charcoal on Montval paper, 293 x 152cm



Above
Homage to Victor Hugo's 'Ma destinée' (1) (detail) 2016
Opposite page
Homage to Victor Hugo's 'Ma destinée' (1) 2016
charcoal on Montval paper, 293 x 152cm





Matt Foley on Opening Night

Opening Night Speech

For millennia on this land Meanjin near the river Maiwah, Aboriginal people have celebrated visual arts, dance and song. I acknowledge the traditional custodianship of the Turrbal and Jagera peoples and express the hope that one day we may achieve a modicum of their understanding of and studious care for this land, its waters and winds.

Russell Craig uses charcoal, black burnt wood, to show us the whirling waters of his surfing at Stradbroke Island (also known as Quandamooka). As an environmental defender, he also adopts the fighting words of The Doors' song "Five to One":

*They got the guns
But we got the numbers
Gonna win, yeah
We're takin' over
Come on!*

Woolloongabba is a good place for both endeavours. Its name is derived from either *woolloon-capemm*, meaning "whirling water", or from *woolloon-gabba*, meaning "fight talk place".

Consider, for example, the whirling waters in Russell's two large charcoal drawings inspired by the graphic work *Ma destinée [My destiny]* of French novelist and artist Victor Hugo, which Russell saw on a visit to Paris in 2011.

In Russell's works, mountainous waves smash against a rocky headland. The scale and power of these two massive images blow in your face. They transport us to the elemental. They put us in the point of view of a lone surfer on a wild sea.

For that surfer, Russell has crafted a choice of four surfboards clothed in marine shapes and sheathed in glass. In the words of the great Judith Wright in her poem "The Surfer", Russell invites us to:

*Take the big roller's shoulder,
speed and swerve;
come to the long beach home
like a gull diving.*

But Russell takes us beyond the mere surface, however turbulent, into the world below, into Davy Jones' locker where not death but life prevails. We see strange images—are they submarine plants or exotic creatures of the depths? Is this not a journey beyond the normally apparent into the sub-stratum, the subconscious, the refulgent slime oft ignored but upon which all life depends? Is this not a cleansing of the doors of perception?

Over two centuries ago, the visionary English poet and printmaker William Blake wrote in his beautifully illustrated long poem "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell":

*If the doors of perception were
cleansed, everything would appear
to man as it is, infinite.*

This passage inspired the title of Aldous Huxley's famous philosophical essay from which, in turn, the 1960s psychedelic rock band The Doors took their name. Their lead singer Jim Morrison challenged a generation to explore the depths of the human psyche, just as Russell's art now challenges us to explore the depths of nature.

But art is not just about **seeing** stuff. It is also about **doing** stuff. Russell calls us to action in his ironically named large drawing *In the time of coral reefs*. Are we to be remembered in history as the generation that sat by mute and absurd while the Great Barrier Reef was bleached to oblivion?

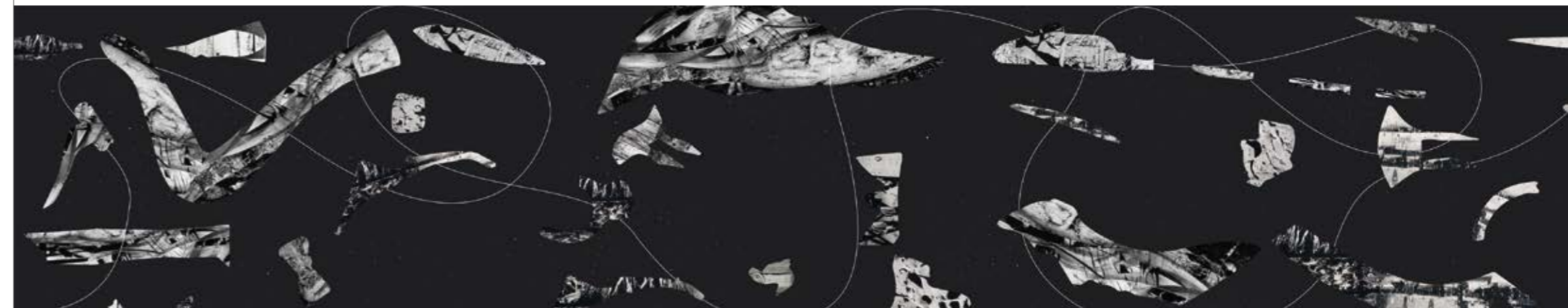
Russell's artwork here in this "fight talk place" reminds us that there is nothing inevitable about the shocking loss of marine life of which we are the custodians however great the might of polluting industry, and however the odds may be stacked against us, as in The Doors' song "Five to One":

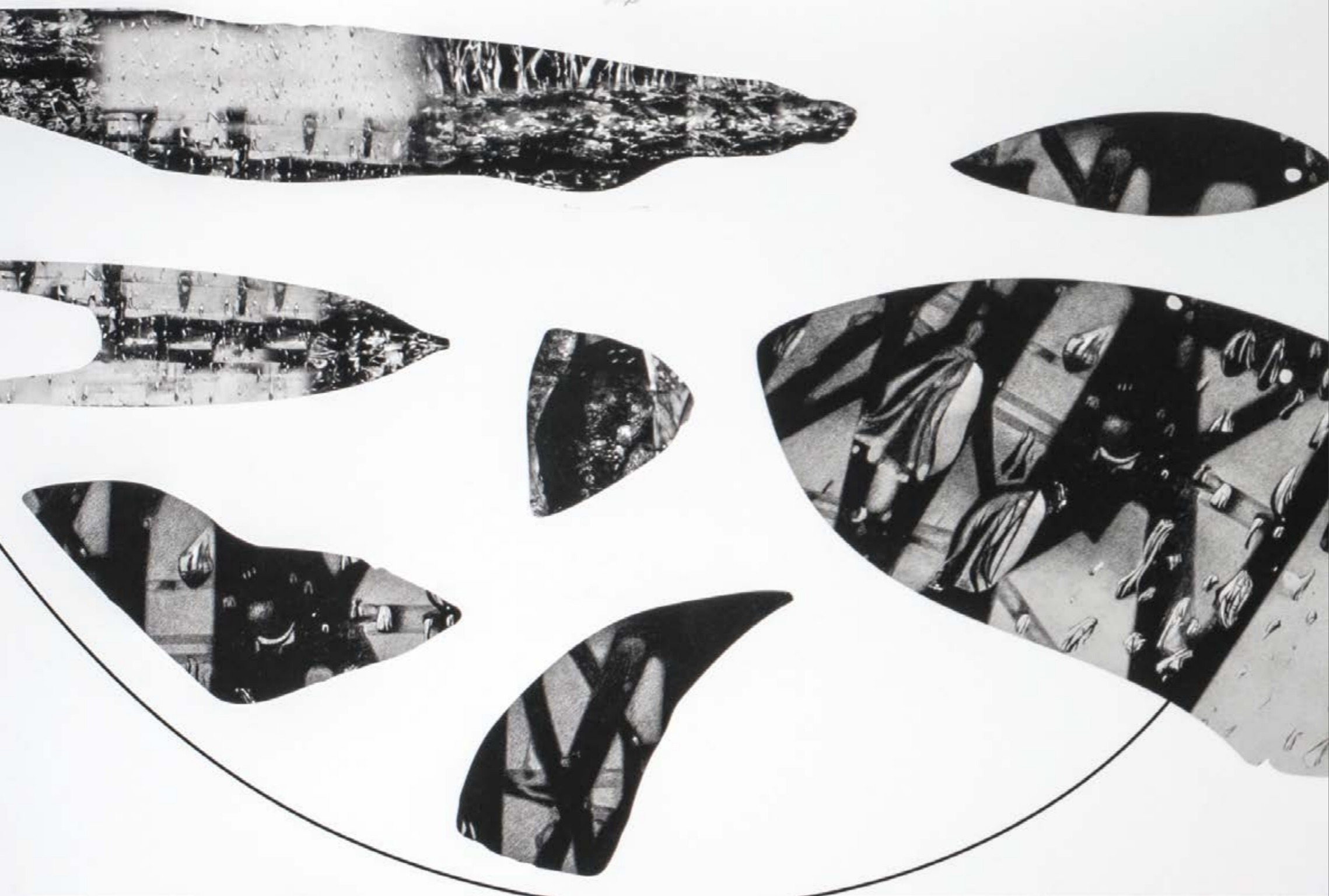
*They got the guns
But we got the numbers
Gonna win, yeah
We're takin' over
Come on!*

I declare this fascinating exhibition well and truly open.

—The Hon. Matt Foley, 2016

Below from the depths 2014, digital print on Hahnemühle paper, 110 x 572cm

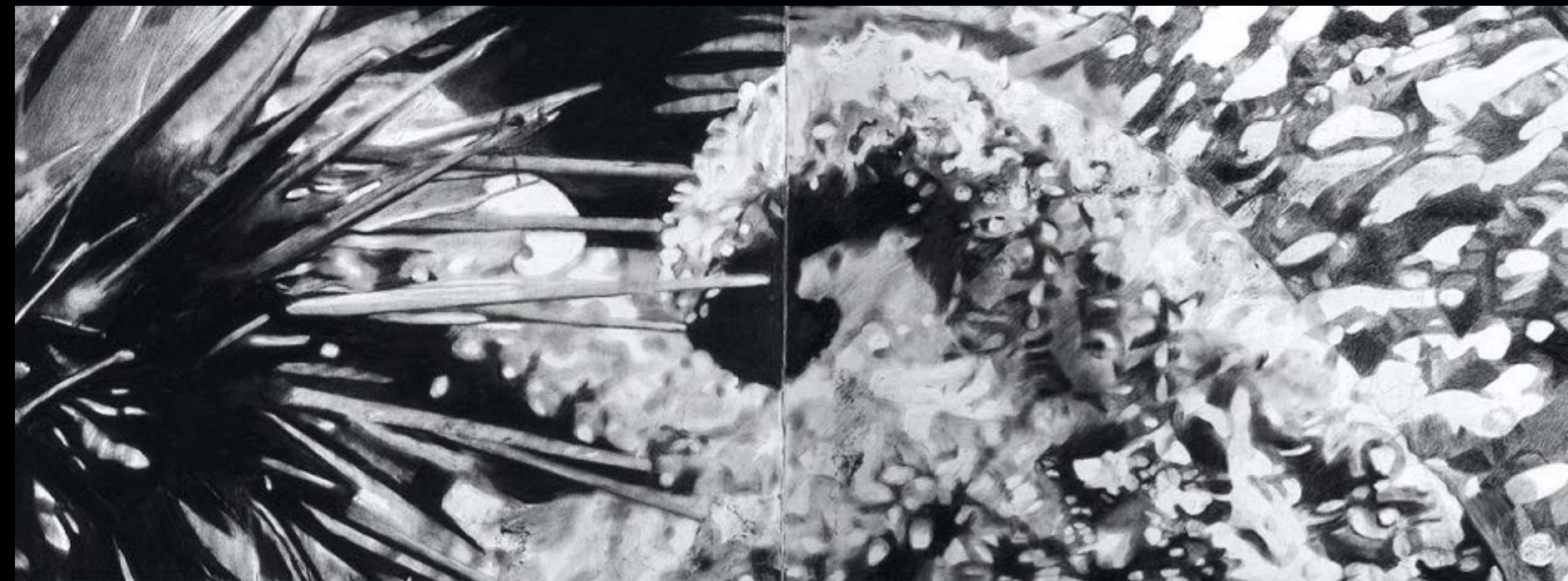




Unknown sea (detail) 2014
digital print on Hahnemühle paper
110 x 473cm

from the depths (detail) 2014
digital print on Hahnemühle paper
110 x 572cm





Above
In the time of coral reefs (detail) 2016
Opposite page
In the time of coral reefs 2016
charcoal on Montval paper, 440 x 184cm





In the time of coral reefs 2016, opening night

Ethos, Benthos, Pathos



Russell Craig in his studio

A triple anagkê [~constraint] weighs upon us. There is the fatality of dogmas, the oppression of human laws, the inexorability of nature. In Notre Dame de Paris, the author denounced the first; in the Misérables he exemplified the second; in this book he indicates the third.

—Victor Hugo, author's preface to *The Toilers of the Sea*

Russell Craig's latest solo exhibition brings together different elements of his practice. *Five to One* features prints, illustrated surfboards, and charcoal drawings that elicit the feeling of walking along an overcast seaside. Slowly surfacing in the works are window panes flayed with rain; hand-made, salt-encrusted fishing nets; and wooden boat decks stained by the guts and scales of catches made on them.

Three surfboards hang in line, the first made with Japanese surfboard glasser Yoshiro Takeda and Gold Coast shaper Darren Handley. Each of the boards seals an inlaid printed linen image, reminiscent of waves surfed, both real and remembered. Yokohama rain, fishing in Morocco and Melbourne, and surfing on Stradbroke come and go as tides of spent time. (*Ethos.*) The glassed, polished prints speak of the board's objecthood and form. A montage of Craig's earlier prints are impressions from his travels and residencies to places including Japan, Morocco, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Craig's manipulation of white and black, shadow and form, carve monochromatic presences as one would with a thruster. Fibreglass reflections and fins trace the white lines that fall between shadows and senses. Different places, cultures and times are set on a backdrop of water which floats upon the circumference of the Earth.

Sections of Russell Craig's existing prints are digitally manipulated to form a series of shapes that emulate subconscious cetaceous shadows. The large scale of the work *from the depths* presents the audience with a panoramic view into a field of unknown forms. Its arrangement alludes to water, motion, creatures, nets and shadows that could be viewed as an abstraction of Paul Klee's *Fish Magic* (1925). Craig's reluctance to be figurative causes the spectator to explore texture and shading. Gestures and motifs cause the eye to engage in a series of fleeting glimpses of terrains and textures, seabeds and surfaces, preventing a static focus. (*Benthos.*)

In the front room, *In the time of coral reefs* drapes from ceiling down onto the floor, sighting pandanus, rhyolite and a high tide; on the opposite wall, two works delicately trace the uprising and crashing of a tempest. Both Craig's *Homage to Victor Hugo's 'Ma destinée' (1)* and *(2)*

charcoal drawings utilise chiaroscuro, yet the shading and surface textures draw from Craig's printmaking skills. This wave rises insidiously as though filled with the lyrics of Jim Morrison (taken from his revolutionary call to arms "Five to One"). Given the sombre tone of these charcoal works, it would appear more befitting if Radiohead's Thom Yorke could provide the chief lyrics here. Their song "There There" gives an emphatic account of the human condition through oceanic allegory: "There's always a siren singing you to shipwreck/ Steer away from these rocks/ We'd be a walking disaster." Craig is equally inspired by the lesser known paintings and drawings of Victor Hugo. In particular, a series of ink drawings made of a lighthouse being battered by the sea, which Craig saw during a visit to the Maison de Victor Hugo in Paris. The epigraph used for this essay comes from the author's novel *Toilers of the Sea* (1866), written while Hugo was in exile on the isle of Guernsey. Its tale is one of humanity's

struggle against the elements, equally inciting the fight against internal human nature and our fated interactions with each other. (*Pathos.*)

Both prints *deep-sea (1)* and *(2)* display soft corals and gentle flowing imagery that recompense the swelling waves and their collapse. In the vein of Hugo's novel or Morrison's lyrics, Craig's works elicit the questions of our time: What is out beyond the break? What is beneath? Where the high tide mark is of peak civilisation? In an age wherein our society increasingly separates itself to droplets, his artworks solemnly seek unity from the oceans of society. Craig's prints and drawings conjure universal emotions and experiences that evoke bewilderment at the future of our blue marble, and wonder at when the next wave will be.

—Graeme Auchterlonie, 2016



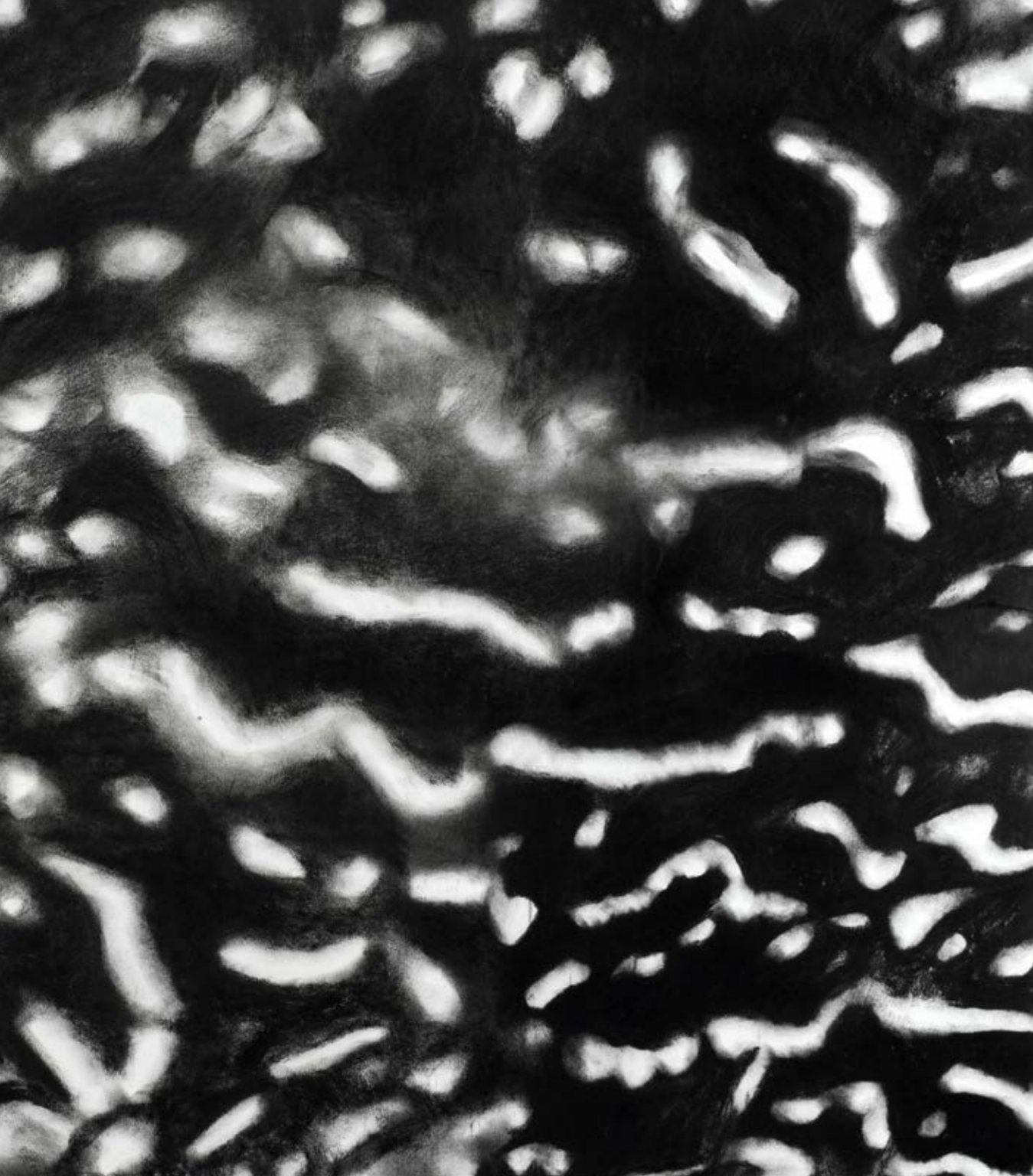
Left
In the time of coral reefs 2016, opening night

Opposite page
In the time of coral reefs (detail) 2016
charcoal on Montval paper, 440 x 184cm





Above
deep-sea 2 (detail) 2016
Opposite page
deep-sea 2 2016
charcoal on BFK Rives paper, 80 x 120cm



Left

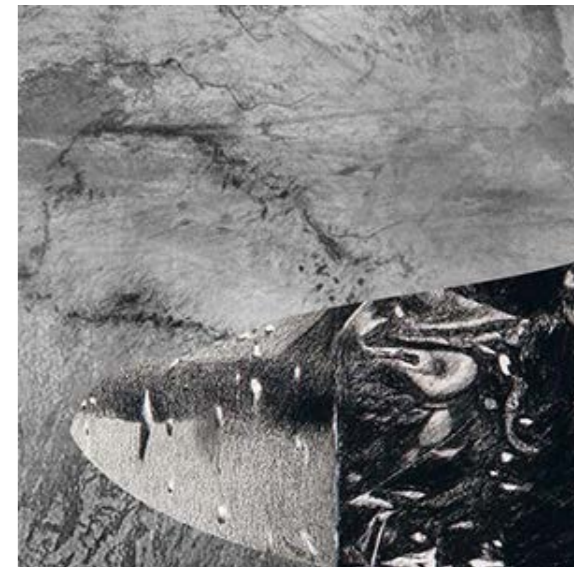
deep-sea 1 (detail) 2016

Opposite page

deep-sea 1 2016 (in situ)

charcoal on BFK Rives paper, 80 x 120cm





Above and opposite page
Subterranean (detail) 2014
digital print on Hahnemühle paper
110 x 160cm

Acknowledgements

Russell Craig would like to thank the following individuals and institutions for their valued contribution to this exhibition project:

Queensland College of Art, Griffith University

Griffith Centre for Creative Arts Research

The Hon. Matt Foley

Graeme Auchterlonie

Jo D'Hagé

Scott Avery

Jude Roberts

Gabriel D'Hagé-Craig

Jordan Crisp

Surfboard & digital prints: Darren Handley, DHD Gold Coast, for shaping the boards; Yoshiro Takeda, Takeda Customs, Gold Coast, for glassing each surfboard; George Chapman, Managing Director at 3E Innovative, for printing the large digital images; and Eugene D'Hagé-Craig, UI/UX Designer at Temando, for assisting with the translation of the drawings to a digital format ready for printing.

Photography

Carl Warner and Jonathan Tse

Contact the artist

Mobile: 0418725297

A/h: (07)33999330

Website: russellcraig.com.au





ISBN: 978-1-925455-14-4

Authors: Russell Craig, Matt Foley, Graeme Auchterlonie

Editor: Evie Franzidis

Exhibition:

RUSSELL CRAIG: *FIVE TO ONE*

Where: Pop Gallery
27 Logan Road
Woolloongabba
Brisbane

When: Wednesday, 22 June – Sunday, 3 July 2016

Opening event: Thursday, 23 June 2016, 6–8pm

Officially opened by The Hon. Matt Foley

