

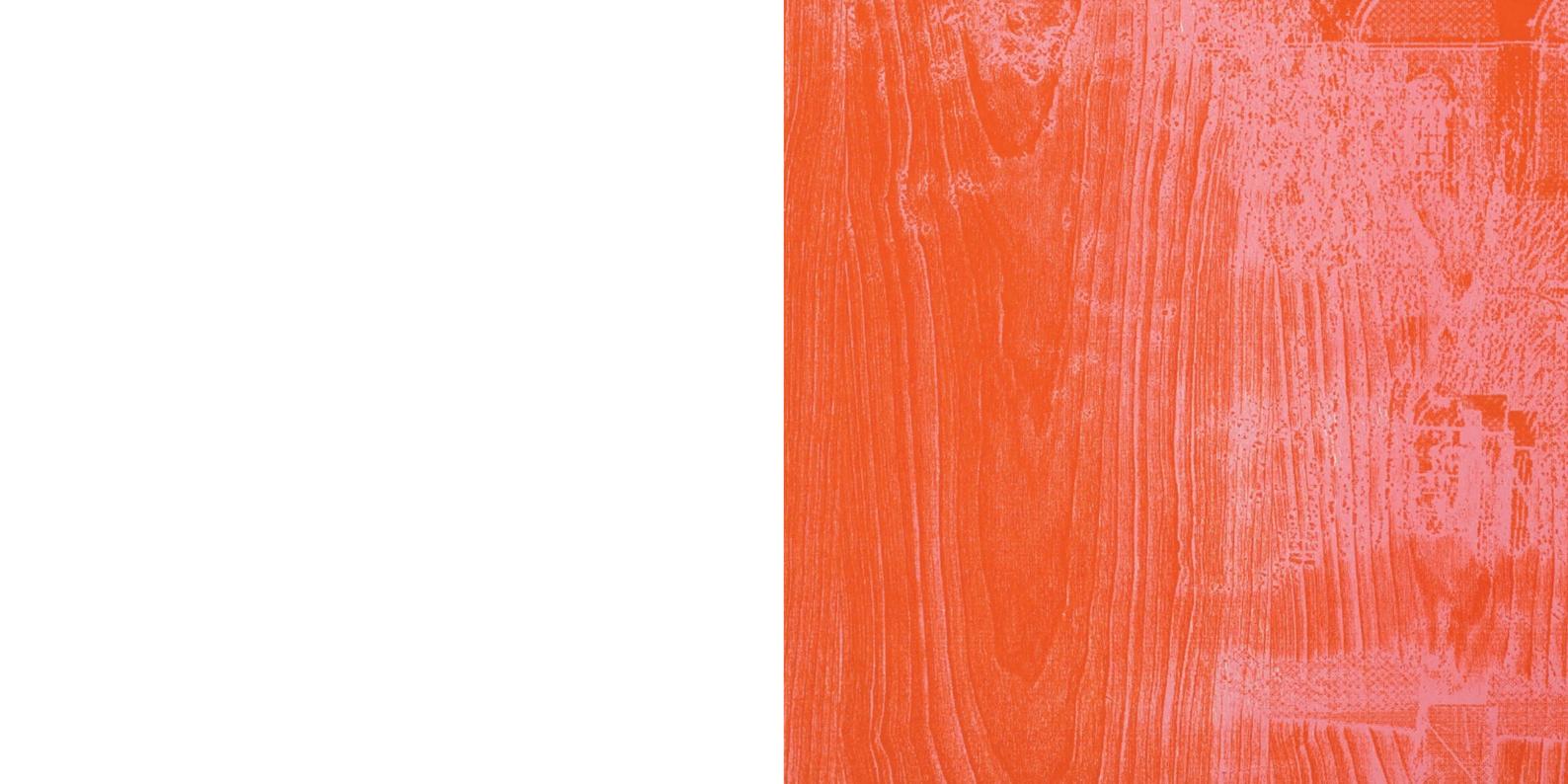
KATHERINE HATTAM BACKWATERS

A LUMA | La Trobe University Museum of Art Exhibition

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THE PLATYPUS AND THE SHOPPING TROLLEY: CHANCE ENCOUNTERS IN BACKWATERS

ANITA LA PIETRA

In his book Les Chants de Maldoror (1868), the Uruguayan-born French poet Isidore Lucien Ducasse, writing under the pseudonym of the Comte de Lautréamont, describes a young boy who is as beautiful "as the chance encounter upon a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella." Fifty years after its publication (and Ducasse's death) this description was adopted by Surrealists as an exemplar of the particular kind of poignancy, or frisson, which can be created when disparate objects find themselves in an incongruous occupation of the same territory. André Breton first used Ducasse's description in his Manifesto of Surrealism (1924) and then instigated the republication of his book in 1927, thus ensuring its place within the canon of French literature. However, the idea of the chance encounter or the way in which chance can be incorporated into the process of art production, has arguably been even more influential, engaging a range of artists from Duchamp to Felix González-Torres.

Hattam may not be a Surrealist but much of her work – both historically and in this exhibition – pivots on the chance encounters and incongruous meetings that occur between the objects she represents, the viewers of her work and her method of production. Indeed the woodblocks, which are a key component of the *Backwaters* series, only came to hang on the gallery wall because her son happened to visit while Hattam was working on the prints they had rendered. While conversing with his mother and watching her work,

he noted that the blocks were interesting objects in their own right.

What followed from this chance observation is a body of work that is both a meditation on, and exploration of, the process of creating a work of art. This process begins with the chance encounters Hattam invites when she trawls the backwaters of Melbourne, camera in hand. Her forays along the Merri Creek have provided her with the kinds of incongruous meetings which Surrealists dreamed about – where a platypus settles in next to a shopping trolley and the golden dome of a suburban church rises up amongst the gum trees. In her own account of these walks, Hattam describes the sense of open space and nature that the creek gives, even as it wends its way through a dense suburbia peopled by joggers, children fishing and brightly coloured plastic bags tumbling by on the breeze. Hattam photographs these scenes and the images produced provide the backbone for all the works in this series.

Musing on the scenario proposed by Ducasse, the French philosopher Jacques Rancière described the strange relationship between the objects as one that is exemplified by collage. Likewise, the incongruous and unexpected meetings which occur in the backwaters being explored in this project are eminently suited to Hattam's previous work, which has relied heavily on collage, a technique that remains central to her practice. The photographs are cut up, sometimes drawn, reassembled, re-photographed, digitally inscribed onto woodblock and sometimes printed - not necessarily in that order. This process is in many ways more than a method of documenting her encounters. It is a re-enactment of the sense of incongruity and activity that resides in the backwaters of urban centres. Hattam cuts up and reassembles her photographs until the landscapes they depict become uncanny simulations of the world around. In this series of works some familiar objects from her previous works – like the books and household objects in her drawn collages - return (her environment is, in fact, 'rewilded'), whilst others are rendered unrecognisable and can only be viewed through the scree of woodgrain and ink.

Hattam's disassembling of the world around her has been noticed by other writers, not least in a provocative essay by Sophie Cunningham for Hattam's 2007 exhibition at the Bendigo Art Gallery. Cunningham interprets the act of cutting up books as a liberating one. Although Cunningham (and perhaps Hattam) acknowledge – and dismiss - the possibly transgressive nature of this act, it is impossible to ignore it. especially when one considers that many of the books she used in her earlier works were inherited from her late mother's collection. Hattam's past sculptural works, in which the old family chairs, replete with grubby finger marks and swinging shoe dents, were dismantled and then reassembled as monolithic blocks, should also be mentioned here. Although the resurrection of these objects extended their life cycles (the alternative being to relegate them to landfill), this does not alter the fact that they result from an act of destruction. Destruction can be liberating, but it can also be political. Art historically, it is impossible not to recall the photographic collages of John Heartfield and Hannah Hoch – and in fact, the backwaters depicted in this exhibition are heavily politicised locales, as both Victoria Hattam and Brian McGrath demonstrate in their essays, included in this catalogue. The charged and fraught environments produced by these backwaters, whilst perhaps not overtly present in Hattam's imagery, are certainly latently present in her process.

The similarity of both Ducasse's imagery and the collage with Freudian dislocation or *Unheimlich* is fairly clear (and of course it was this similarity which originally appealed so strongly to Breton and his surrealist cohorts). Perhaps more unexpected, and therefore interesting, is the place of Freud in Hattam's personal landscape and previous work. Graham Little, in his 1999 essay "Seashores and Porcupines," firmly establishes her reliance on and use of Freudian analysis and terminology in her work, and indeed many of the books she used in her earlier collages derived from her mother's collection of Freud's works. Kate Reeves' essay in this catalogue explores the way in which Hattam's familiar objects repeatedly return in her works, evoking "the sameness of our everyday lives but never really the

same" (p. 25). Reeves pays particular attention to the clock motif – one of the most significant symbols from Freudian analysis – which has appeared in many of Hattam's works and reappears once more in *Home Depot*, one of four of the drawn collages included in this exhibition (p. 73). The sense of dislocation this creates, as Reeves notes, is further enhanced by the fact that although people are largely absent from Hattam's work there remains a sense of active movement – a "jostling" – which makes it impossible to apply the descriptor of the still life to any of Hattam's interiors.

In 2002 Chris Wallace-Crabbe wrote that Hattam "is above all a painter of interiors, even if they are interiors yearning to look out through the window." The Backwaters series marks a major shift in Hattam's work, in both medium and content. The works in this series are predominantly exterior scenes made using photographic collages, which are digitally inscribed onto woodblocks. Although the process involves Hattam's own physical occupation of the outside world of the backwaters, the effect produced by both the distorting grain of the woodblock and the texture of the ink she uses gives the unsettling impression of looking through thick glass or water at the world outside. This is particularly the case for the blocks which are included in the exhibition, notably Graffiti Merri Creek (p. 40) and Sign Merri Creek (p. 43). People do sometimes appear, but when they do it is through this inky haze, and they are seen from behind, moving away from the viewer (Exercising and Exercising in a Stripey Tshirt, p. 49 and 51). In many ways, the sense of yearning which Wallace-Crabbe describes is still present in these exterior scenes – like the photographs from which they originate, the people and objects remain somehow outside of time and just out of reach.

The effect produced by both the inclusion of the blocks and the method of using highly textured wood grain to produce monochrome prints in thick vivid colours, is that in this series of work, the medium is ever present. Much of this is the result of chance – Hattam's son recognising the blocks as artworks in their own right – but much of

it is a more intentional nudge towards the process of the production of a work of art, and the detritus which is created therein. Again, Hattam's use of collage is central here, and we are made to consider the fact that a collage based work is not simply about cutting up and rearranging images, it is essentially a cutting away of those parts of a scene that are considered unimportant, non-essential or inappropriate for a finished work of art. It is significant that Hattam begins this exploration in the same series of works in which she begins to use photographic collage predominantly – as at its inception, the inclusion of the things excluded by academic painting, was exactly why the proponents of photography lauded its arrival (Wendell Holmes). By including the printing blocks in this new series of works, Hattam has provided the viewer with a glimpse of what is usually missing from the gallery walls – the detritus, as it were, of the artwork. As any artist will testify, every complete artwork leaves a trail of debris in the studio – pencil stubs, old brushes, paint tubes, materials cut away, experimental prints and canvases, sketches, coffee cups, empty food containers. By including the blocks in this new body of work, Hattam is alerting us to the pieces which are cut away from the finished piece, and to the apparatus that remains behind in the studio when the works are finally hung on the gallery wall. Again, there is something Freudian about this type of excavation.

There is a corollary here too, with the subject of this series of works: the backwaters of urban centres. As the essays included in this catalogue make clear, these works are part of a larger collaboration between Hattam and her sister Victoria, who discovered that they, and colleague Brian McGrath, shared a love of backwaters. These sometimes seedy but often-used locales are central to the identity and activities of local residents, but remain hidden – or cut away – from the more common photographic representations of cities reserved for the developed waterfront. Both Victoria Hattam and McGrath, who write about the Gowanus Canal and the Suzhou Creeks respectively, explore the importance of these waterways and the ways in which the real character of a city – which often includes its criminality, political

activism and industrial waste – reside in these hidden backwaters. These are just the kinds of spaces that were sought out by both Freud and later the surrealist artists; the kind of place where behaviour isn't inscribed, monitored or enforced. The kind of place where covert activities can coexist with family picnics, and chance encounters happen everyday.

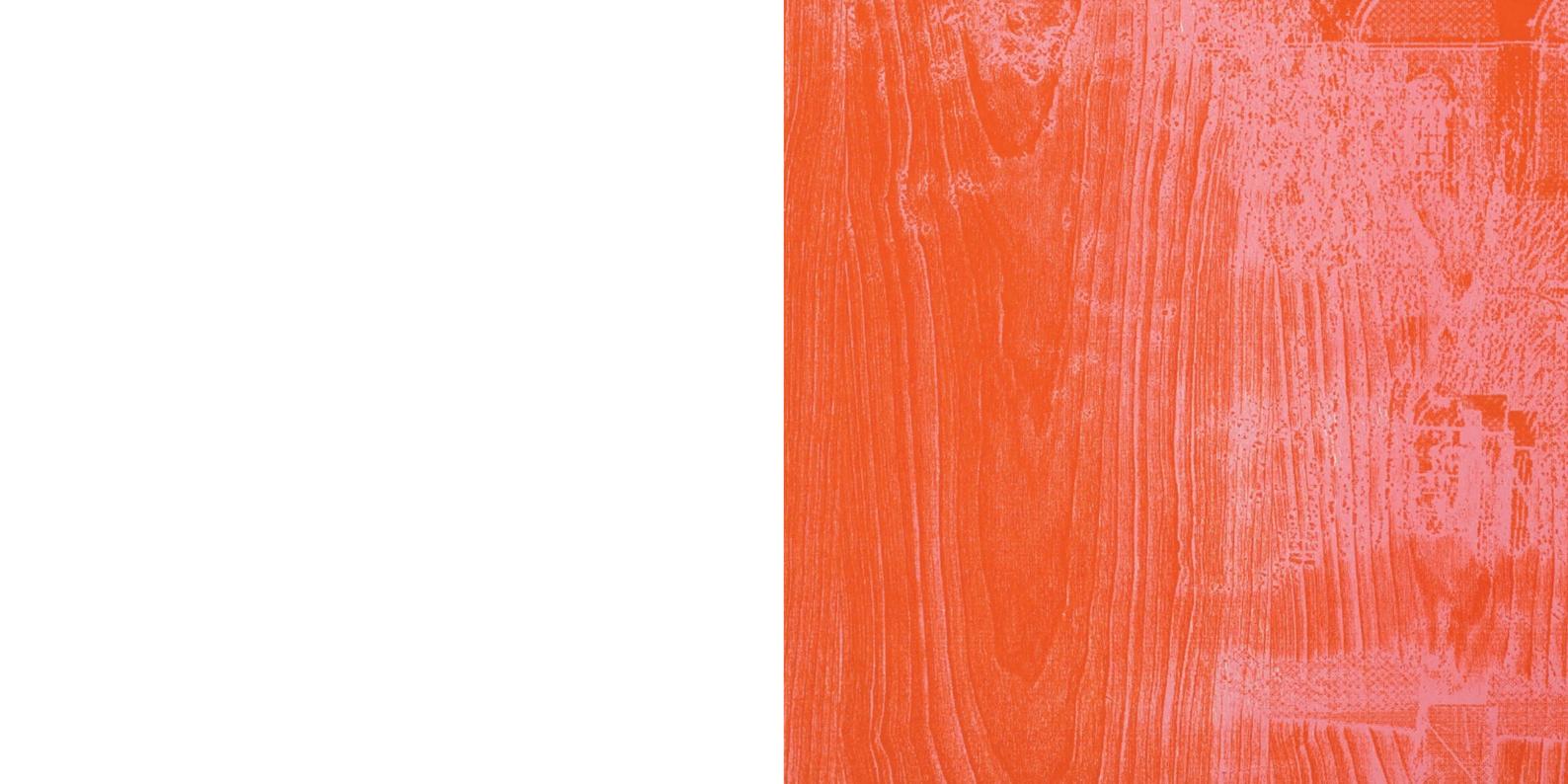
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INDUSTRIAL REWILDING: URBAN CREEKS IN NEW YORK, MELBOURNE, AND SHANGHAI

VICTORIA HATTAM DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS NEW SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH NEW YORK, NY 10003 AUGUST 19, 2014

I have walked the Gowanus canal for twenty years. The stench, the little bridges, the scrap metal piles draw me in. What exactly is the allure of industrial creeks---or backwaters---as my colleague Brian McGrath, calls them?

There is a mix of space and politics that I want to explore. These unassuming places carry within them the politics of the city.

The ghosts of imperial ambition haunt their banks; the toxins of industrialization lie within their muddled waters; and rumors of resistance and regeneration swirl about. Power is enacted, challenged, and reimagined in these disheveled spots. If you want to understand how power works in city life, pick up any map and follow the thin blue lines that mark these obscure waterways.

Quite inadvertently, I discovered that my artist sister, Katherine Hattam, was undertaking a parallel encounter with the Merri creek 12,000 miles away in Melbourne, Australia. We began a joint project on backwaters meeting in Shanghai in the summers of 2009 and 2013, and in New York on several occasions. We now have a three-city project going among the Gowanus canal in New York, the Merri creek

in Melbourne, and the Suzhou creek in Shanghai.

It has been a fascinating collaboration: We have found remarkable parallels across the Gowanus, Merri, and Suzhou creeks despite their radically divergent national frames. There are intriguing parallels in which geography, history, art, and politics weave together across all three backwaters. Having left Australia thirty-five years ago, I am not one to think of geography as destiny, but the backwaters have led me to consider the relationship between space and politics again.

All three creeks are minor waterways---small tributaries to larger rivers and prestigious waterfronts: the Bund, South Bank, and the East River. The waterfronts are showplaces where the fashionable and powerful gather. The tributaries---the little creeks---are hidden. One has to look carefully even to find them on Melways or its equivalent. If one stumbles upon them, they are usually smelly affairs seen by most as needing remedial action.

For me, it is precisely their obscurity---their insignificance---that gives creeks their allure. And their power.

Imperial Encounters

Interestingly, many first encounters between settler colonialists and indigenous peoples took place on the banks of creeks. Consider for example that Batman's Treaty with Wurundjeri elders was signed on the banks of the Merri Creek in 1835 in order to secure 600 acres of land around Port Phillip. Similarly, on the other side of the Pacific, settlers were securing land on the banks of the Gowanus creek. Indeed, the very name Gowanus was a derivative of Chief Gauwane, who "sold" the Gowanus land tract to early settlers in the 17th century. No doubt the links between imperial encounters and the creeks stem in large part from the fact that early exploration frequently proceeded by boat. Like Batman in Melbourne, both Henry Hudson and Giovanni da Verrazzano explored the marshy waters of the Gowanus creek during their early forays into New York Harbor. In a two decades long

project (1849-69), the Gowanus creek was straightened and turned into a canal so as to facilitate transportation into the emerging New York port (Boyce and Merlis).

The Suzhou Creek in Shanghai has an equally stunning past. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the "mother creek," as Suzhou creek is known, served as an important political boundary among multiple imperial powers laying claim to Shanghai. The 1884 map of the international concessions, below, shows how the creek separated the American settlement north of the creek from the British and French concessions to the south.

From 1937, Suzhou again became an important fault line when the Japanese invaded Shanghai. The Japanese, like other foreign powers before them, used the creek to demarcate political authority in the wake of occupation. The Waibaidu Bridge and the stinky creek below became the de facto border between the International Settlement and Japanese occupied Hongkou. Passage across the creek was a contentious and tightly regulated affair with Japanese and British sentries placed at either end of the Waibaidu Bridge making the multiple sovereignties in play readily apparent to all. Crossing the bridge meant navigating political boundaries: foreigners were required to bow to the Japanese sentry and Chinese were frequently humiliated when they crossed the bridge (Heppner).

On February 14, 1994, the Shanghai Municipal Government declared the Waibaidu Bridge a piece of Heritage Architecture. Today one can even walk across a scaled replica of the bridge in the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Center.



1884 Map of Shanghai International Concessions, Map from the United States Library of Congress. http://www.loc.gov/item/gm71005225/. The American settlement is colored in faded orange, the British and French concessions are colored blue and faded red respectively, and the old Chinese city is in faded yellow. The American and British settlements united to become the International Settlement in 1863, but interestingly the two are still colored differently here.



Weibaidu or Garden Bridge, July 29, 2013

Industrial Entrails

Many industrial creeks also have served as the entrails of industrialization. Toxins, garbage and raw sewage often are dumped there. The Suzhou creek is said to have had a notorious stench until the government spent billions cleaning it up for Expo 2010. Even today the Suzhou remains a fantastic yellowish-green color that makes one wonder what flows therein. In that same year, the Gowanus canal was designated a Super Fund Toxic site---the highest rating given in the United States to the most polluted areas in need of extensive remediation. After a heavy rain, the Gowanus gives off a particularly strong stench as the additional runoff overwhelms the sewage treatment plant and raw sewage spews directly into the canal. Even the Merri Creek, clearly the least polluted of the three, is strewn with rubbish, plastic bags, and upturned shopping carts.



Scrap metal yard and Kentile sign alongside the Gowanus canal, July 6, 2014

The Gowanus' industrial past is captured in the large industrial signs that stand along the canal. Industrial sculptures if you will. The Kentile sign shown in the images above and below has become a landmark in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. Alongside the old, numerous small industrial businesses persist along the canal. A large number of Chinese suppliers have relocated there: stone masons, stainless steel sink makers, and scrap metal yards abound. Many feed the booming real estate and renovation business in nearby brownstone Brooklyn. All have to compete with the hipster cafes, bars and event spaces that have moved into Gowanus with a vengeance.



Side view of Kentile sign, Gowanus, 2nd St. Brooklyn, February 6, 2014



Scrap metal yard near Gowanus, 19th St. Brooklyn, July 12, 2014

Sadly the Kentile sign was just taken down on June 20, 2014 to make way for condo developments. Other beautiful industrial signs remain, but they are an endangered species that at best might be preserved in an artificial way. Their grand industrial charm, reminders of an older industrial era, will likely disappear.

In Shanghai too, large sections of the Suzhou creek have been cleaned up and overly designed. The wild disordliness destroyed---replaced by brushed steel railings, rock walls, and shade tents. Tellingly, one park along the Suzhou has been renamed the "Environmental Theme Park of Suzhou."

Refuge

Alongside the remnants of imperial and industrial power, creeks have long served as spaces of refuge and resistance. Artists and renegades often are linked to creeks: Ned Kelly was born on the upper reaches of the Merri creek. Sidney Nolan's Kelly paintings, with the upside down and sideways policemen along with the crossdressing Steven Hart, capture the challenges to authority that creeks can afford. Interestingly, the reclusive painter, Ian Fairweather, who was born in Scotland and later settled in Australia, lived and painted for many years on the Suzhou Creek. Fairweather arrived in Shanghai in May 1929 and lived opposite the General Post Office overlooking Suzhou---when the Suzhou was still filled with sampans, pollution, and bustling trade. The General Post Office was built in 1924 and occupied pride of place on the bend of the Suzhou, just a short distance up river from the Waibaidu Bridge where the creek and larger Huangpu River join. Novelist and biographer, Murray Bail, notes that Fairweather read and spoke Mandarin and worked variously as a park-keeper, road inspector, and in an asphalt plant, while painting the Suzhou creek. Fairweather left Shanghai in 1933 on his way to Australia (Bail).



The General Post Office with clock tower on the Suzchou creek. Photograph in the public domain.

There is also a deep history of refuge tied to Suzhou during WWII. As an open passport city, Shanghai was one of the only places to offer refuge to Jews during the war. No papers were needed to enter Shanghai. Between 1937 and 1941, approximately 20,000 Jewish refugees settled in Hongkou just a few blocks north of the creek. One can still visit the International Refugee Distribution Center on Huoshan Road. It was recently renovated and is a little Disneyfied for my taste, but many beautiful red and grey buildings remain unchanged. For now, Hongkou has escaped the heavy hand of high rise development. But not for long; Skyscrapers loom on the edge of the old Jewish quarter and large swathes of low rise housing are sectioned off---slated for development.



Red & grey buildings in Honkou (left); renovated International Refuge Distribution Center (right), July 29, 2013.



Low rise buildings in Honkou with high rise towers looming behind, July 29, 2013



Residential lane in Hongkou, July 29, 2013



Haiman Rd, Hongkou. Low rise houses walled off for development, July 29, 2013

The mythic quality of creeks as places of refuge is perhaps best captured by rumor rather than fact. After WikiLeaks burst upon the scene, local rumor had it that Julian Assange had hidden in the Merri Creek. Although no one really believed it, the idea circulated anyway....conveying more about the politics of creeks than the travels of Assange. In the social imaginary, creeks serve as spaces of refuge beyond the easy grasp of the law.

Rewilding

Creeks do more than offer refuge--they also hold within them the capacity for regeneration and change. When early Heidelberg School painters went en plein-air, Tom Roberts and others were drawn to the upper reaches of the Merri creek to paint directly from nature. Robert's "A Quiet Day on Darebin Creek (Merri Creek)," now hanging in the National Gallery of Australia, captures the dynamic relation between creek and painter (McCaughey). Nature's generative force can be seen more literally with the appearance of animals in the urban core as the platypus has reappeared in the Merri Creek and a baby whale was found briefly in the Gowanus canal in April 2007. The unexpected appearance of these creatures within urban metropoles has been hailed by many as evidence of an ecological regeneration from within the urban core. Despite our fears, it seems that "nature," can poke its head through the piles of everyday garbage and industrial pollution that pervade creeks/canals.

But the generative capacity of creeks is greater than a return of nature. They have the capacity to transform our notions of human subjectivity as well. I draw on my colleague, Rafi Youatt, here who has written beautifully about the rewilding of New York; creeks too offer opportunities for imaginative experimentation or what John Cage elegantly called a "purposeful purposelessness" (Youatt, Cage). Katherine and I were delighted to find an urban wilderness alongside the banks of Suzhou in Shanghai. Parts of the riverbank remained unruly despite the decade long Expo cleanup. There was still a chance

to get off the grid, to get lost inside this enormous and in many ways tightly scripted city.

At the end of our boat trip down the Suzhou, we got off our boat unsure of exactly where we were. The captain of the small fiberglass boat, did not speak English, but gestured for us to follow. We walked behind, with an eye on his Captain's cap, as he walked quickly away from the dock through an empty lot. Much to our surprise, we found ourselves in shoulder high weeds walking through several blocks of abandoned industrial buildings, some with squatters clearly living in them. It was exhilarating to walk, even if for only a short while in this unpolished, ramshackly backwater with the city at once present and absent. The bright pinks, oranges, and greens in Katherine's Merri creek paintings capture this generative capacity of creeks---a rewilding through color. Unexpected energies emanate from these abandoned spots.



Boat Captain in the weeds along the banks of the Suzhou creek, July 29, 2013



Abandoned industrial buildings on the banks of the Suzhou creek, July 29, 2013



Squatters' pot plants carefully arranged in an abandoned lot, Suzhou creek, July 29, 2013



Seeking refuge under bridge over Suzhou creek, July 29, 2013

The summer of 2013 in Shanghai was a record heat wave with multiple days reaching well over 40 degrees Celsius. On one of those blistering days, we took a small fiberglass boat down the Suzhou sweltering in the covered cabin. Along the way, we saw many men gathered under the bridges crossing Suzhou. It was never quite clear whether they were more permanently squatting or simply getting out of the heat. Either way, the creek and its many bridges provided a place of refuge.

Creeks are amazing places. They offer a portal into the politics of the city---taking us back to imperial conquest and industrialization, moments of refuge and resistance. Most important for me, they offer much needed spaces for those of us interested in industrial rewilding through which we can rework the social imaginary at its core.



Victoria Hattam Rewilding Collage, July 16, 2014

Acknowledgements

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All photographs taken by Victoria Hattam unless specified otherwise.

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BACKWATER URBANISM

BRIAN MCGRATH JULY 29, 2014

Every night enormous crowds throng the promenade along Shanghai's Bund. Students, workers and tourists enjoy the cool air along the Huangpu River bank and marvel at both the new skyscrapers of Pudong across the river and the concession era monuments lining the river. Solid stone banks, hotels, trading houses and insurance companies march for one mile along the gently curving riverbank, running between the old native walled settlement to the south and industrial Suzhou Creek to the north. The Bund is a quintessential example of waterfront urbanism designed to create a prosperous face and public spectacle.

While Paris, London and New York's most important buildings did not historically face their busy, messy rivers, Western traders built thick stone billboards to greet ships at the end of their long journeys to the East. These architectural mirrors in the familiar neo-classical styles of the colonial metropolis conformed to a global, urban system of centers and peripheries. Pools of fixed capital were assembled in key locations, marking key waterfront gateways with splendid architectural façades. The messier aspects of Shanghai's industrial production and waste streams were kept hidden, along with the native working classes, tucked upstream along Suzhou Creek. Resource extraction, industrial production, garbage and labor remained hidden along the city's backwaters, where more intrepid visitors to the city can still discover the messier reality of Shanghai's past and present.

Concession era Shanghai was built along a sandbar - a bund -

downstream from the mouth of the enormous Yangtze River delta. The deltaic plane appeared with the increasing deposit of silt resulting from upstream deforestation during the expansion of wet rice cultivation in China. In contrast to Shanghai's more extroverted waterfront urbanism, the nearby ancient cities of Suzhou and Hangzhou unfold hidden splendors of scenic water gardens behind multiple walled enclaves. Formal gates and courtyards filtered various layers of society until one reached the exalted private interior center rather than exterior public front. Suzhou and Hangzhou represent a backwater urbanism – a more introverted spatial model for city building in contrast to the speculative real estate development of contemporary cities around the world.

I

For millennia, politics and ecology were fused between two tributary river systems of the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers. The rivers begin in the glacial and forested headwaters of the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau to the southwest, providing a reliable supply of water and nutrients downstream. These waters were intensively manipulated to feed the enormous population of Dynastic China. In between the tributary streams a backwater landscape was cultivated to feed empires and designed to delight the senses of a sophisticated ruling elite. Li Bing of the Qin Dynasty developed the technique of cutting across a low watershed and back-channeling water of the Minjian River into the Chengdu Plain. This solved the river's chronic flooding problem, while at the same time relieving drought in the plain. The surplus of backed-up water also provided a primary material for constructing micro-landscapes that reflect the larger territorial system.

The Grand Canal was constructed at the turn of the 7th century, eventually linking the Yellow and Yangtze as well as three other great rivers, the Haihe, and Huaihe in the north and the Qiantang to the south. At the termination of the Grand Canal between the Yangtze and Qiantang, Qian Liu of the Wuyue kingdom dredged the hydrologic

net of Taihu Lake, forming a huge reservoir; the headwater of Suzhou Creek is nested amongst hundreds of canals. Suzhou and Hangzhou are cultural pearls within the vast irrigated basin between. They manifest a long indulgence in the sensual pleasures of being political backwaters once the capital of Imperial China moved to Beijing in 1279. The Grand Canal provided a direct barge route for the transfer of goods, but also for the Imperial Court to visit the splendors of their inheritance.

Suzhou Creek flows into the Huangpu River at the north end of the Bund. But both waterways are part of the great Yangtze Delta marked by the rhythmic tidal flow of the East China Sea. This twice-daily ebb and flow of fresh and salt water reflects the movement of people and the goods, information, stories, images and memories that they carry. While the Bund waterfront may present the public image of both the colonial and post-revolutionary capitalist city, it is the region's backwaters that bear witness to long history and varied experiences of urban life in coastal China.

Ш

The city of Suzhou lies ninety kilometers up Suzhou Creek from Shanghai. At this ancient city, called the "Venice of the East", Suzhou creek splits into an elaborate maze of canals before meeting Lake Taihu. Like in Venice, canals were the main transportation infrastructure of the city, but they also were the water sources for the numerous classical scholar gardens for which the city is known. It is within these gardens that one can fully appreciate the formal and spatial difference between waterfront and backwater urbanism.

Within the walled gardens of Suzhou, front and back, inside and out, as well as land and water are continually paired, mirrored, inflected and interconnected. Water is the primary element of these gardens, occupying the center of every property. Rather than a house or villa sitting upon a green lawn, open pavilions are scattered along the

periphery of water bodies sculpted in a prescribed variety of forms. There are no facades or grand entries but instead visitors slip into a side entry and enter an endless microcosm of sensual delight composed in a variety of artistic and poetic "scenes".

Water is shaped in Suzhou's gardens to reflect the great variety found in nature, still and moving; straight and winding; flat and cascading. The landscaped scenes are not pictures in the Western painting tradition, but places for attuning the senses to the ephemerality of place and provoking new thoughts about human's role in coexisting with nature. Delighting and inspiring through subtle discovery rather than overt symbolism, Suzhou's gardens are the epitome of backwater art and design.

IV

Waterfront developments are invariably straight lines with high embankments, reducing the nature of water to a visual backdrop for the triumph of human hubris. If the Bund is a monumental display of colonial capital accumulation and real estate speculation, Suzhou's gardens are private scholarly retreats from political and economic life, nurturing the creation and contemplation of art, poetry, gardening and architecture.

The Bund has been recently restored as the monumental urban showpiece of the new China introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1979. However, the glittering waterfront acts as a neoliberal mask to the deep contradictions of contemporary life in Shanghai. The restored Bund contains more touristic than financial functions and it now faces the carefully planned new towers of the Pudong financial center, with its skyline mimicking Manhattan, the epicenter of capitalist urban development.

The Bund's restoration occurred contemporaneously with the massive redevelopment of industrial waterfronts around the world.

Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were contemporaries of Deng

Xiaoping, and their neoliberal world order unleashed massive areas of new waterfront developments in post-industrial cities worldwide. The Inner Harbor in Baltimore was an early model for this new type of waterfront urbanism, and the Festival Marketplace developed by Rouse Corporation in 1980 was soon repeated in Boston's Quincy Market and New York's South Street Seaport. Industrial backwaters were reclaimed as urban "waterfronts" creating the new face of global capital.

V

The massive post-industrial waterfront developments in New York and Melbourne represent the self-colonization of cities replacing urban backwaters with concessionary public places in their wake. However, both cities contain forgotten creeks and industrial canals that lack the spectacular frontage of the new development sites, and which serve as inspiration for new backwater urbanisms and for new political, cultural and literary practices.

New York's Gowanus Canal, Brooklyn's backwater, was rediscovered and mapped by architects Mojdeh Baratloo and Clifton Balch in their 1989 book ANGST: Cartography. Their project juxtaposes cryptic drawings layered over old fire insurance maps and solarized photos of an industrial wasteland with quotations from Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities. Calvino's novel is an imaginary conversation between Marco Polo and Kubla Kahn, where Polo describes the many cities he visited in China – including Suzhou. Yet, he may, in fact, be describing the various faces of his hometown of Venice – the ultimate labyrinth of urban backwaters. Built as a protected enclave within the shifting tidal currents of a large lagoon, Venice is shaped by a sinuous aquagraphy rather than a geo-graphy.

ANGST: Cartography comes from a tradition of urban backwater explorations pioneered by the artist Robert Smithson. Smithson's excursions to New Jersey 's cultural and aquatic backwaters:

Monuments of Passaic (1967) and Swamp (1969) document the displacement of the geographical centers of cultural hegemony from the privileged white cubes of Manhattan to poetic retreats available to everyone.

Monuments of Passaic is a photo essay published in Art Forum in 1967. Here Smithson wonders if Passaic, New Jersey, named for the river that powered its old factories, had replaced Rome as The Eternal City. The monuments he photographs include an old bridge over the Passaic River with a wooden sidewalk, a pumping derrick in the river, a series of pipes, and a sandbox (which he labeled "the desert"). Survey maps reveal that at the time of his visit a large highway was being constructed along the river, which in fact straightened the waterway outside of this old industrial mill town.

Smithson's Passaic monuments were the leftover artifacts amidst the massive earth moving enterprise of highway construction. Highway 21, which parallels the river, in fact displaced the river itself, as well as numerous factories in Passaic. Likewise Swamp, Smithson's excursion with Nancy Holt through the high reeds of the New Jersey Meadowlands, followed Tony Smith's interview in Art Forum where he described his ride on the unopened New Jersey Turnpike through the Meadowlands as a revelation of art as experience rather than artifact.

Baratloo and Balch's end-of-Regan-era rediscovery of Brooklyn's post-industrial backwater follows Smithson's excursions within the ruins of new suburban America. Smithson's landscapes displace the critical location of cultural activity from center to periphery – but then ANGST: Cartography places the periphery back in the center again. The real estate speculation that is overwhelming many Brooklyn backwaters today follows this cultural rediscovery, yet is accompanied by rapid gentrification. Places like Passaic remain entrenched in decline, poverty, and neglect.

V

While I have never visited Melbourne, I am confident the same uneven geography of development plays out between the city's waterfronts and backwaters. Tracing Merri Creek's tributary path to the Yarra River on a map, I can see it is far removed from Melbourne's own massive waterfront redevelopments near the city center. Merri Creek, like Gowanus Canal and Suzhou Creek, has nonetheless emerged from an industrial past to attract the imaginative wanderings of new cultural literati, collectively inventing varied practices of backwater urbanism. Katherine Hattam might be seen as an inheritor of both Italo Calvino and Smithson in her wanderings and renderings. Her work comprises superimpositions of multiple journeys along urban backwaters from her home near Melbourne's Merri Creek, to Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal, and to Shanghai's Suzhou Creek, where I met her last summer.

Like in Suzhou's garden scenes, Hattam's imaginary worlds blur natural and cultural views and turn them inside and out. Front and back flip forming palimpsests of comings and goings, exploratory movements and contemplative stasis. Her scenes are therefore windows into the cultural logic and spatial politics of late capital, perhaps guiding us to new modes of thought when confronted with capital's backwaters. Hattam provides us with windows into the new possibilities of a backwater urbanism for our time: mysterious, intimate, and continually unfolding in unexpected ways. If waterfront urbanism invites grand panoramas and displays of power, backwater urbanism relies on artists like Hattam to convey more complex provocations towards creative thought.



INSIDE AND OUT. KATHERINE HATTAM'S ATTENTIVENESS

KATE REEVES

Have you noticed that in Katherine Hattam's interiors the people of the house are never there? Have a good look as you wander the gallery, not just a three second glance but a really good look at the works on paper. You'll notice lots of everyday objects but no people. And yet the presence of the people missing from these rooms is intense.

Perhaps it's because of the dynamism of colour and the surface volatility, all blocks, grids and sharp diagonals, that you get such a strong sense of the press of humanity just out of view. Or perhaps it's because of the dynamism of the things themselves, these common memento mori of Katherine's; the chairs, teacups, vases, mobile phones, power cables, laptops, clocks, and books.

Once when visiting Katherine in her studio I heard a fellow guest refer to her interiors as still lifes. Yet there seems nothing still about them. How can they be still lifes when everything is constantly on the move? From the cables carrying in energy, to the laptops bringing and sending information, to the landscape out the window that never seems to stay put. Whether it's the Souzchoo creek in Shanghai, the strangely Eiffel tower-like pylons carting electricity across Thornbury, or the through-arch bridge spanning Merri Creek, the view is spliced and diced to become part of a simultaneous grid of everydayness; not existing outside our perception or consciousness. To the clock, perhaps the motif par excellence in Katherine's storehouse, and the key to reading these interiors as an affirmation of the continuity of everyday life. The sameness of our everyday lives – but never really the same – is what the clock evokes; that optimism of getting up everyday and making ourselves and our worlds anew, what William

James calls 'the same old me again...(in) the same old bed, the same old room, the same old world'.

You can imagine the clocks in Katherine's interiors being wound or at least the batteries replaced (or in the case of the digital clock reset), just as you can imagine all the everyday objects being used in the daily rhythms of the house, a house where something essential is allowed to go on. Because we sense that the users of the objects, these missing people, are not so much passive consumers as actively creating. We sense the missing people are using these things for good in their lives. And they are ready for use, these objects, marked with the design of the people's eventual action on them. Especially the books. With titles like Parables for the Theatre, The Normal Child, Know Your Own IQ. The Myth of the Birth of the Hero. The Good Woman of Setzuan Changing Places, Spotlight on Asia, these books are stand-ins for them, the missing ones. They are references of absence that give us a sense of the type of people we are dealing with, their emotional psychology, their world view, and their spirituality, albeit a day to day secular spirituality, as well as a sense of the ongoing flow of life and ideas through their and our lives.

If I can draw a long bow, it's a strategy that in its subterranean literariness reminds me of how Virginia Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway* gives the reader a sense of that quintessential creature-of-habit Clarissa Dalloway's connectedness to the world through the things that surround her; the French windows at Bourton, Peter Walsh's pocket-knife, a china cockatoo at Bath House, the writing pad on the hall table, the flowers she brings home from Mulberry's to put in vases on the mantlepiece, Big Ben chiming the half hour.

People may be missing in Katherine's interiors but they are strongly connected presences through the things represented.

But what happens when Katherine leaves the house to make art? How does the world change with Katherine's excursion into the woodcuts that are not only made outside her home studio but depict, almost without exception, an exterior world? How do we as viewers change?

You would imagine the possibilities for action would multiply once we're out in the world and not just looking at it through the window. But in fact, there seem to be less possibilities. We seem to be observing our surroundings through a literal haze, with slick layers of ink obscuring the surface in a way that removes the thing from our grasp, seemingly removing the images into a timeless present, where no clocks exist, so that they may speak of an exotic or unnameable memory only. A bright orange platypus that once swam in a river, a transparent orange Shangri-La seen through willows that is or was a suburban church, a stormwater drain as black and vacuous as the entrance to Hades and as shapely as Van Gogh's *Bridge at Arles*, a swampy sign-infested canal, a sci-fi bridge.

There's a powerful quality of absorption about these works, as in the stillness of a self-absorbed agent walking through a paranoid, dark, bleak, numinous landscape. If I may continue to draw a long bow... If the sheer thingness of the world represented in Katherine's interiors reminds me of the way Woolf conjures up Clarissa Dalloway's relation to everyday life, then the woodcuts in their intriguing exteriority remind me of another character in *Mrs Dalloway*, Septimus Warren Smith, whose connection with the world is far more tenuous, consisting of random moments of startling perception unrelated to real time: 'and there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre...'

But does time really stand still in Katherine's woodcuts? It may be tempting to view these woodcuts as if we're looking backwards through time, as remembered or immaterial images (especially given the absoluteness of human absence as compared to the out-of-frame human presence of the interiors), yet the woodcuts speak as much about our experience of time passing as the interiors do, only in a different way. What the works share is an embodied attentiveness to the world that varies not in quality but in kind.

There is distraction invoked in the object-laden interiors; the distraction

of the everyday when common objects move position, fill up and empty, subtract and multiply, vanish and reappear, drift and return without us really noticing at all; a habit of mind we become so used to that it precludes conscious awareness. We become deeply inattentive. By confronting us with these larger-than-life objects as they flow, jostle and displace themselves, Katherine's interiors alert us to this gap in our experience of our everyday worlds, reminding us of our inattentiveness to the great moving continuity of life.

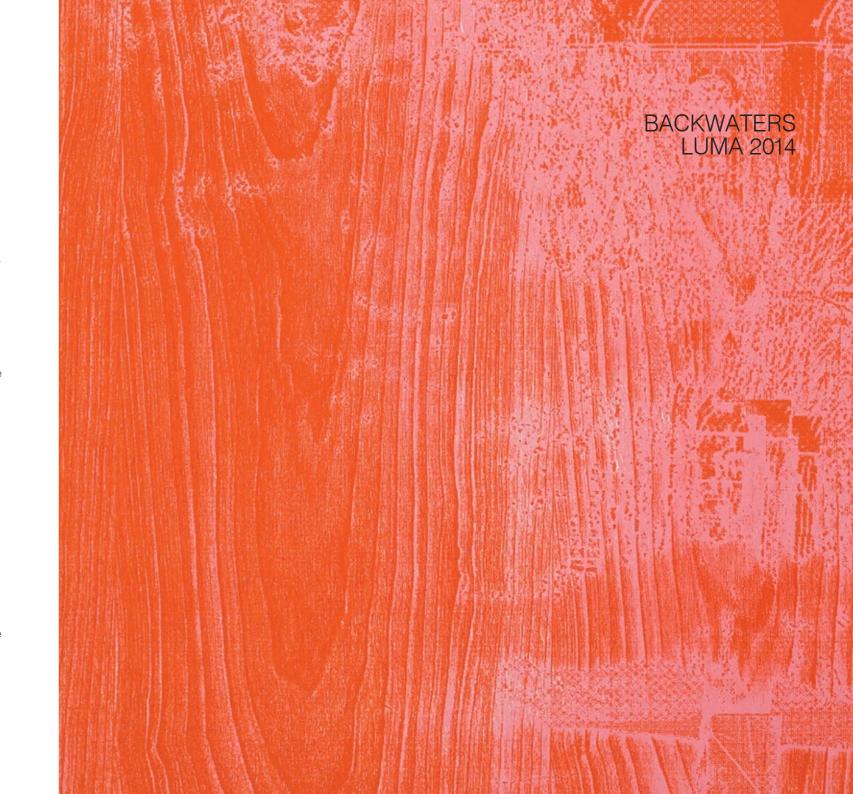
The woodcuts demand our attention in a subtle and more insidious way. It's in the veils of ink that, paradoxically, I think the answer lies. There's no getting away from the fact that the gauzy layers of ink move as you move, becoming either more or less opaque or more or less transparent, more shiny and glimmery, or more matte and dull, not just when we walk past or shift stance, but even as we scan. Amazing whorls ripple through the wood, catching the light, adding to the surface tension. These accidental effects hint at a loss of control and convey an extraordinary physicality that blurs our apprehension of the thing in the scene, shifts our gaze, and makes us think twice about what we're seeing.

Imperceptibly, compellingly, you find yourself looking at the thing in a way that you're not compelled to look ordinarily, fully focusing on it, experiencing it at a sensory level, as something fugitive and delicate; the sort of distilled impression that we bypass too readily as we become used to looking at and naming things. Instead we become active players, thinkers in the creation of an act of attentiveness.

Whatever the mode. An exemplary moment. The duration of being. Katherine Hattam's works in *Backwaters* force us to consider the value of time in all its varieties.

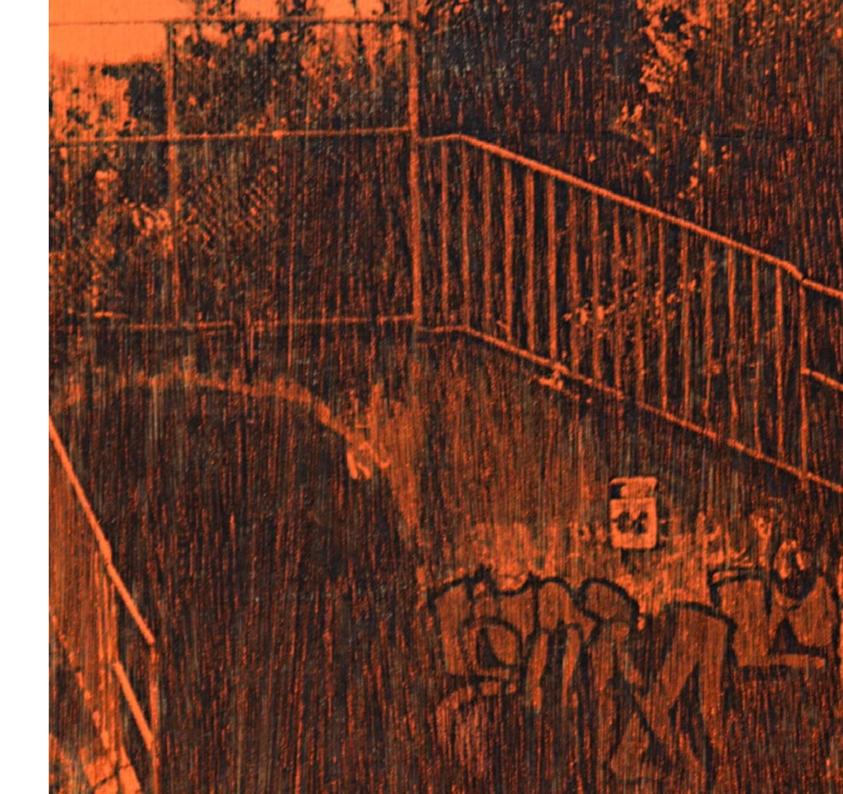
Everyday life is now.

Kate Reeves is a Melbourne writer.





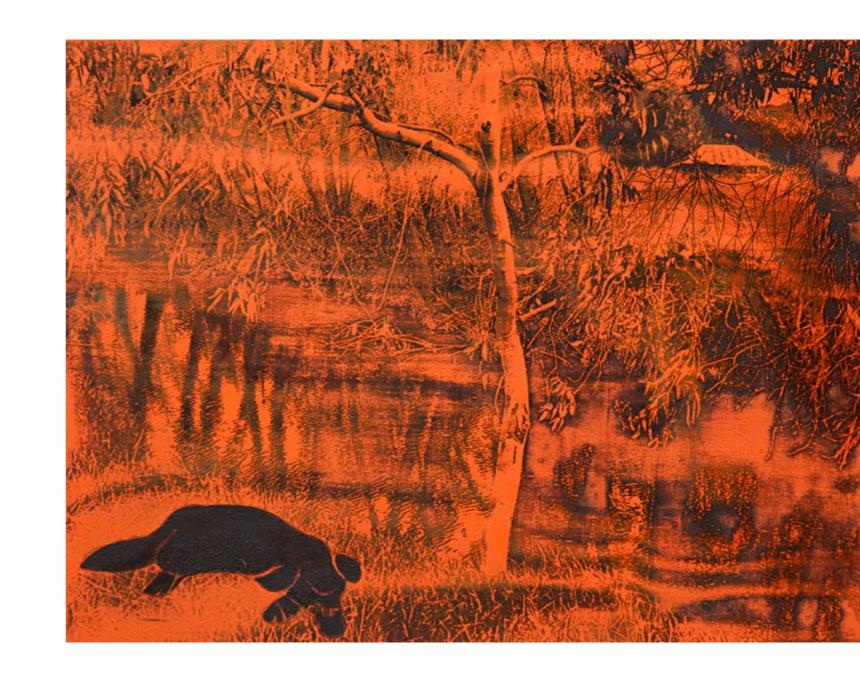
Culvert No 1 2012





A Quiet Day on the Merri Creek ; after Tom Roberts 2013

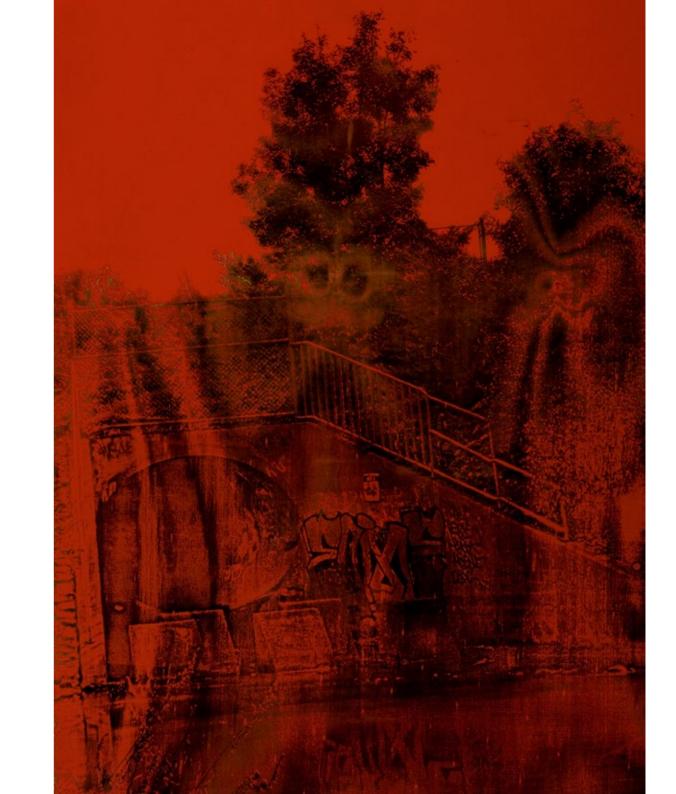


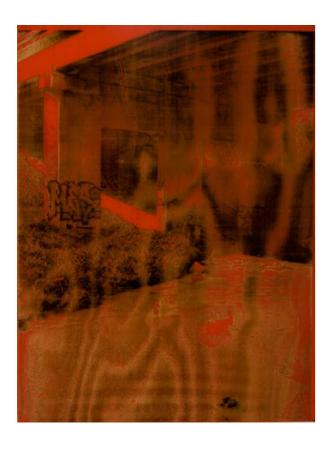


Rewilding 2013



Walking Track 2012





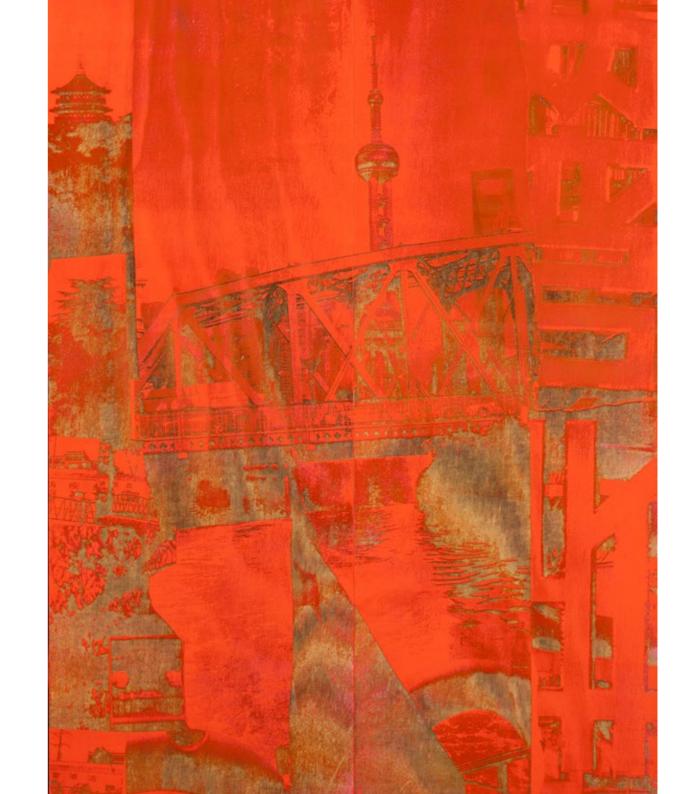
Graffiti Merri Creek 2012



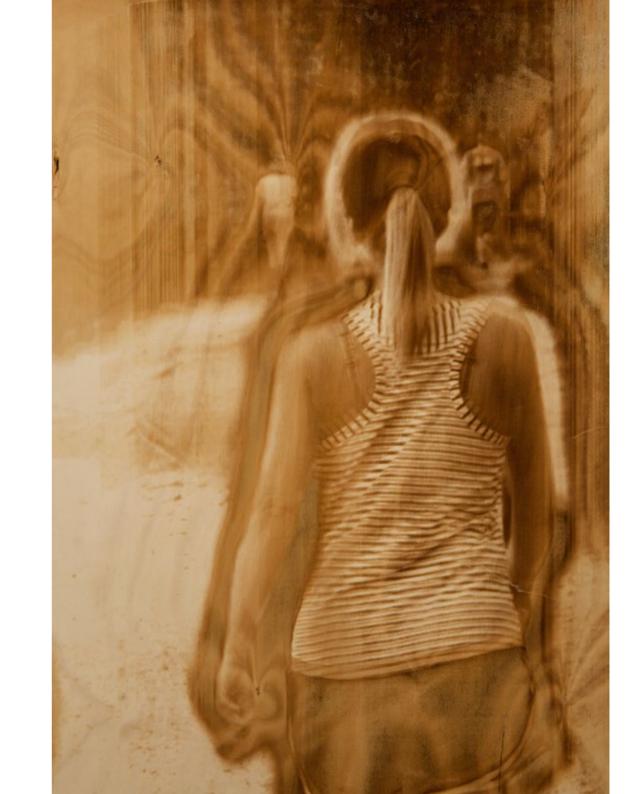




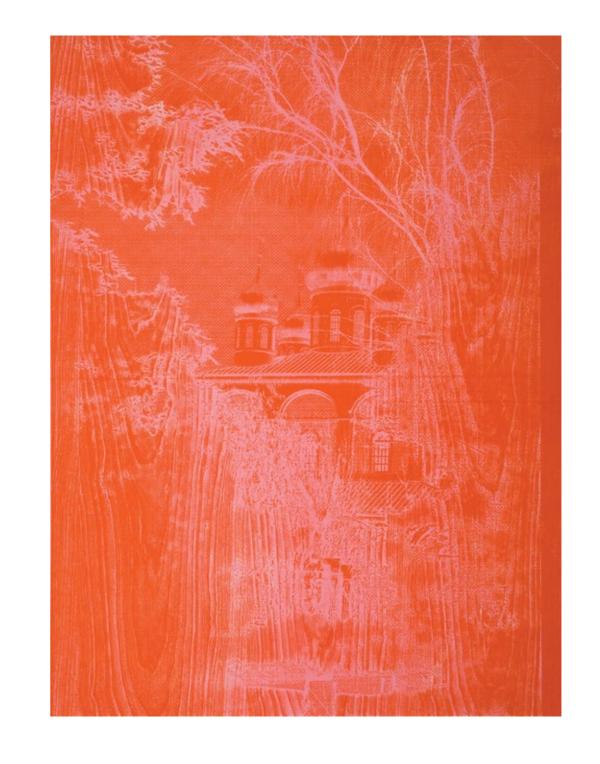
When Flooded Turn Back I 2014











Suburban Church 2013



Bridge Merri Creek 2014





When Flooded Turn Back II 2014

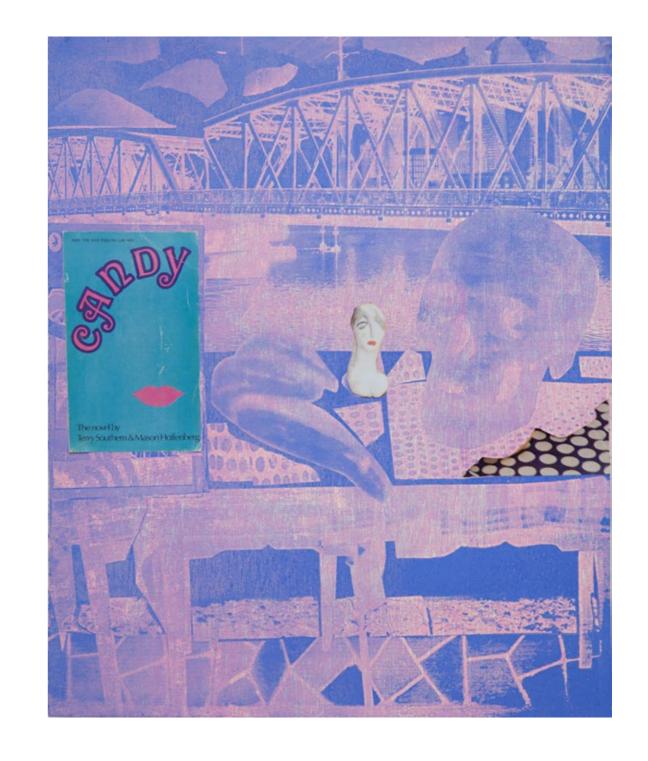




The Platypus and the Shopping Trolley II 2014

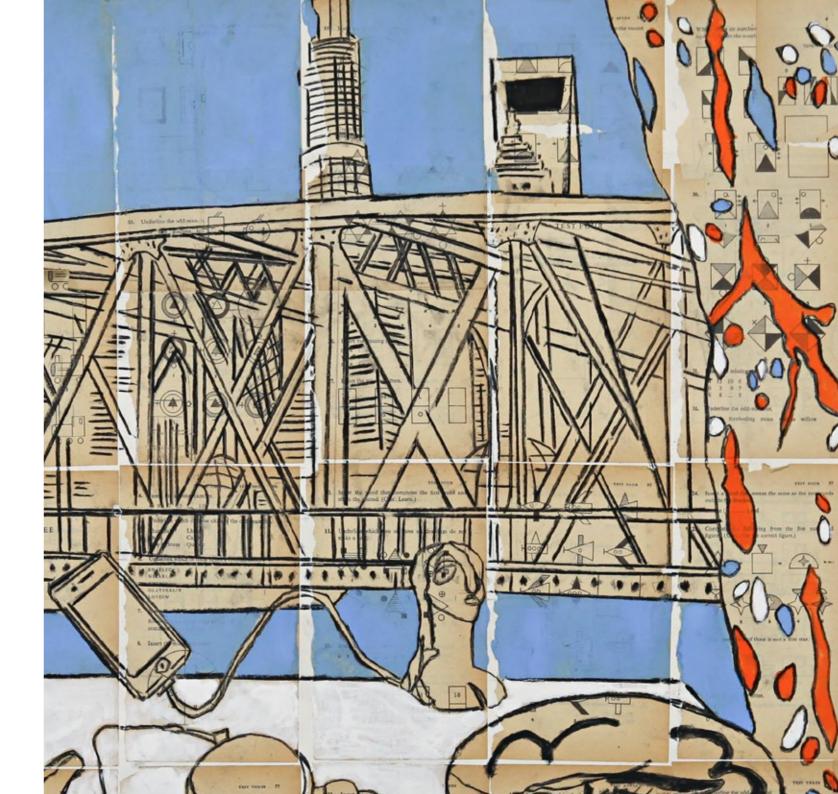


The Mother Creek Pink 2014



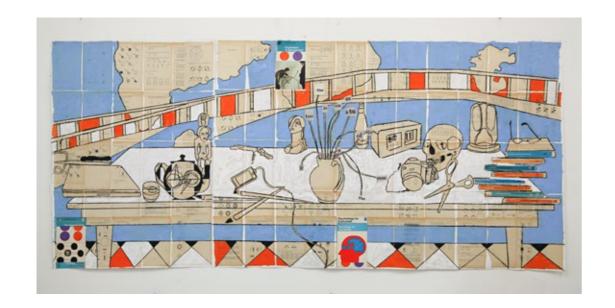
Candy 2014



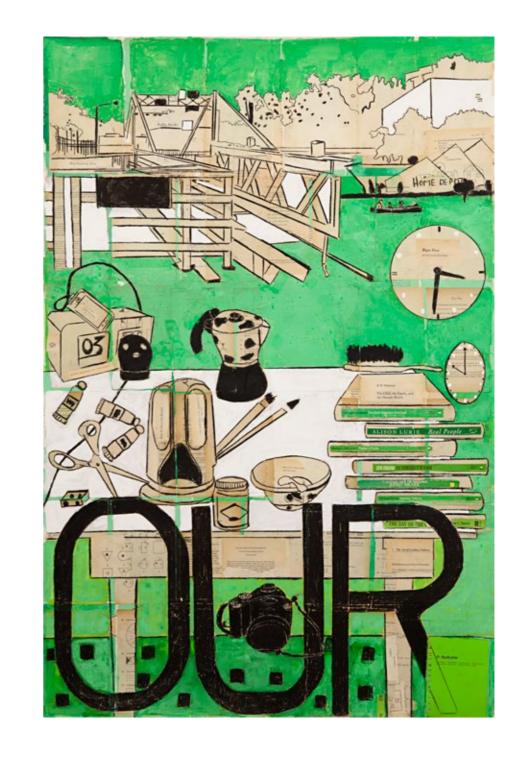


The Good Woman of Setzuan 2014

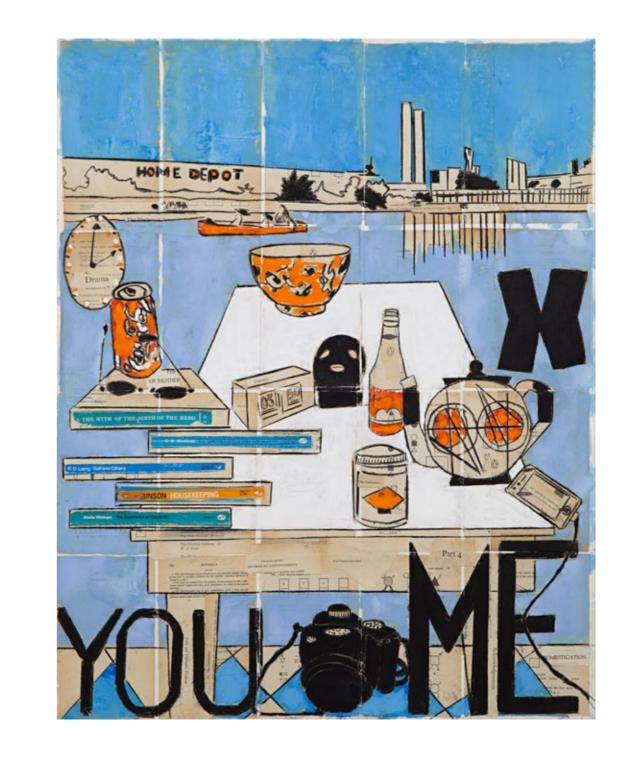




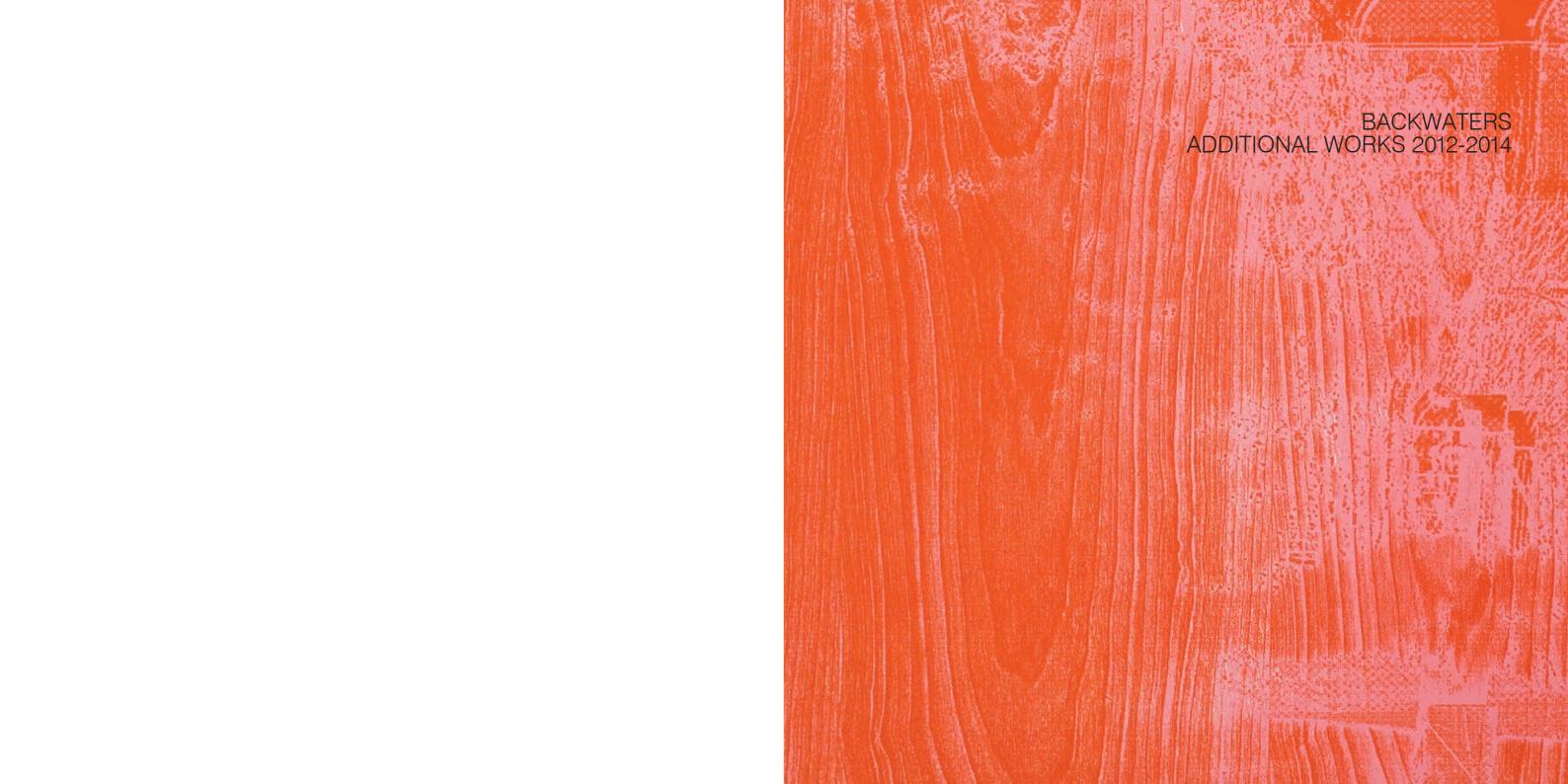




Home Depot 2014



The Gowanus Canal 2014





Drain Merri Creek



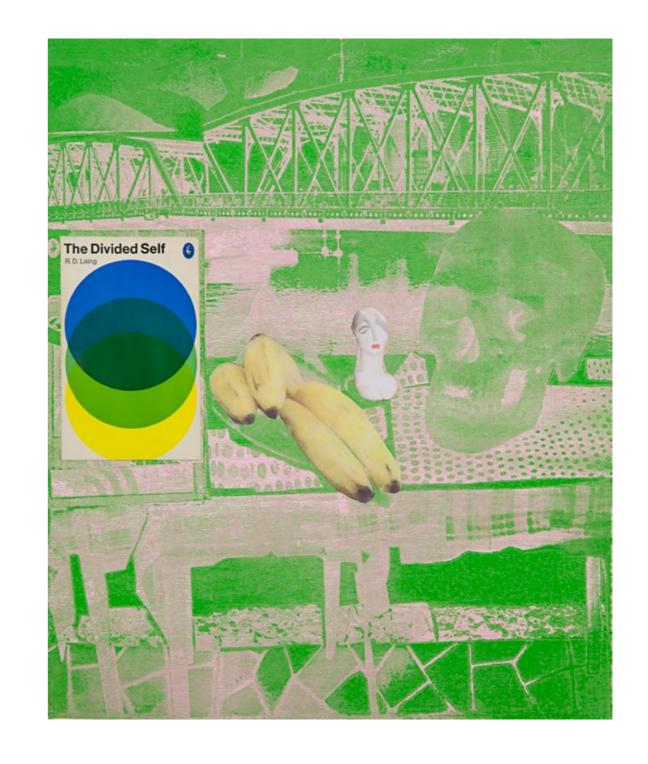








The Mother Creek Red 2014



The Divided Self 2014



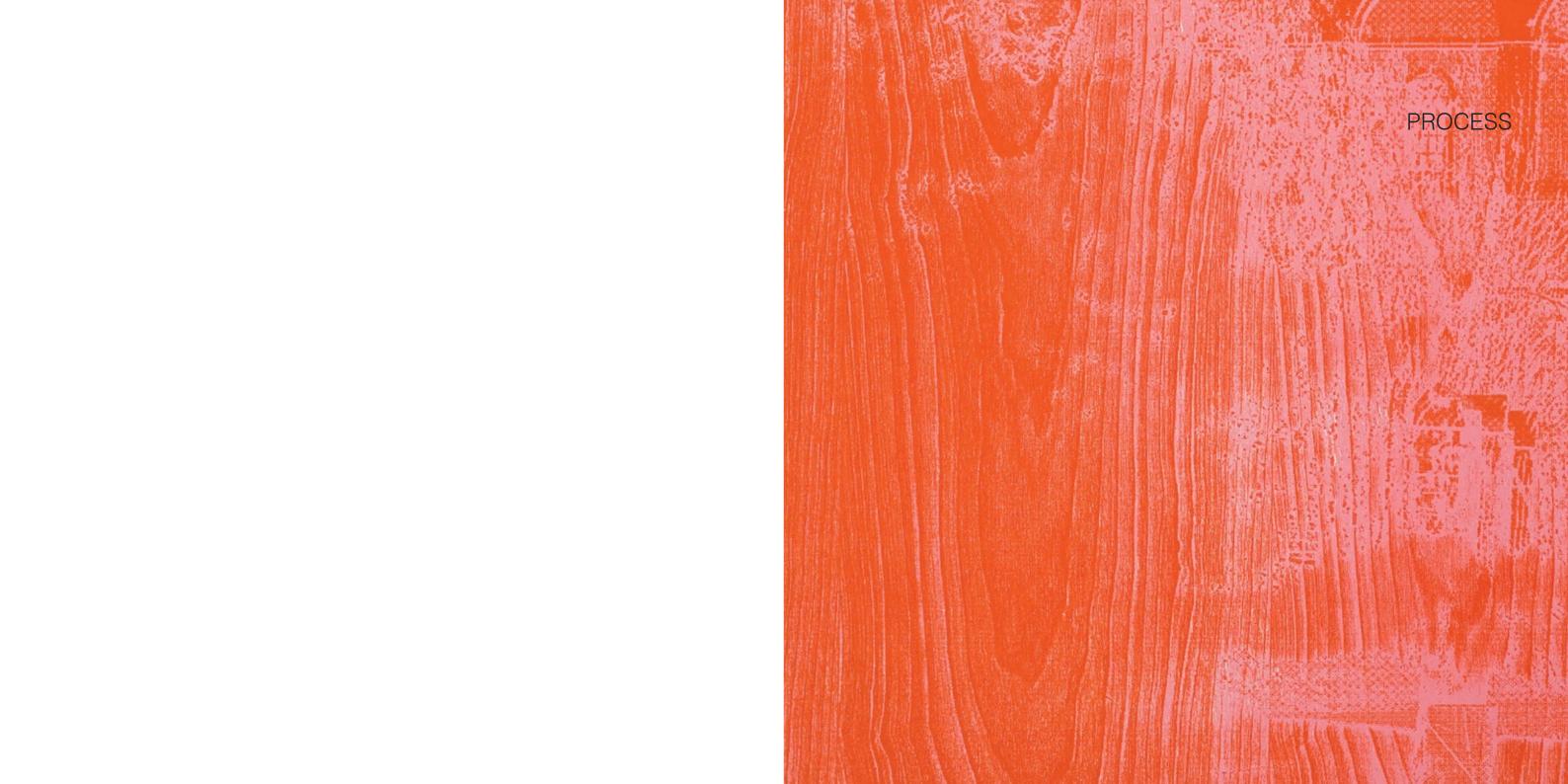
Contrary Imaginations 2014



The Boy in the Bush 2014







MY PROCESS

'When Flooded Turn Back' and 'The Mother Creek', the most recent of the relief prints, come after the documentary style, 'Suburban Church' - two plates from a single photograph of mine taken on a daily walk along the Merri Creek - what matters in this print is the swirl and grain of the plywood, leading to the literal 'Bridge, Merri Creek' where the `images of the interior and outside world are digitally collaged - I then returned to 'hand of the artist' photo collage where hi-tech laser machinery inscribed the image into old-fashioned plywood - as in a woodblock - all but the suburban church are monochrome, where the image is rolled up in a single collage, then put through the press.

The process, inscribing the image by laser into the wood, beautifully mimics that of the landscape or an interior being inscribed into the psyche or consciousness - the block in printmaking traditionally is a means to an end - the print. In my process, there is a consistency to the print once the image has been achieved; the block, however cannot be replaced - each one is unique: variations due to the particular timber, the depth of the inscription, or amount of black in the image, can only be partially determined by the number of passes etc. - for all these reasons each blocks is unique.

Japanese woodblocks, the 'Grotesquerie' prints of Brent Harris, the hand-cut jigsaw prints of Munch and Gauguin, the laser-cut jigsaw prints of William Mackinnon, have all been influences. And I was very interested to hear, at a talk during the NGV's exhibition of Dürer's 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse', that Dürer drew the complex images and then someone cut them out for him.



The Bridges collage







When Flooded Turn Back collage (top) block (middle) print (bottom)





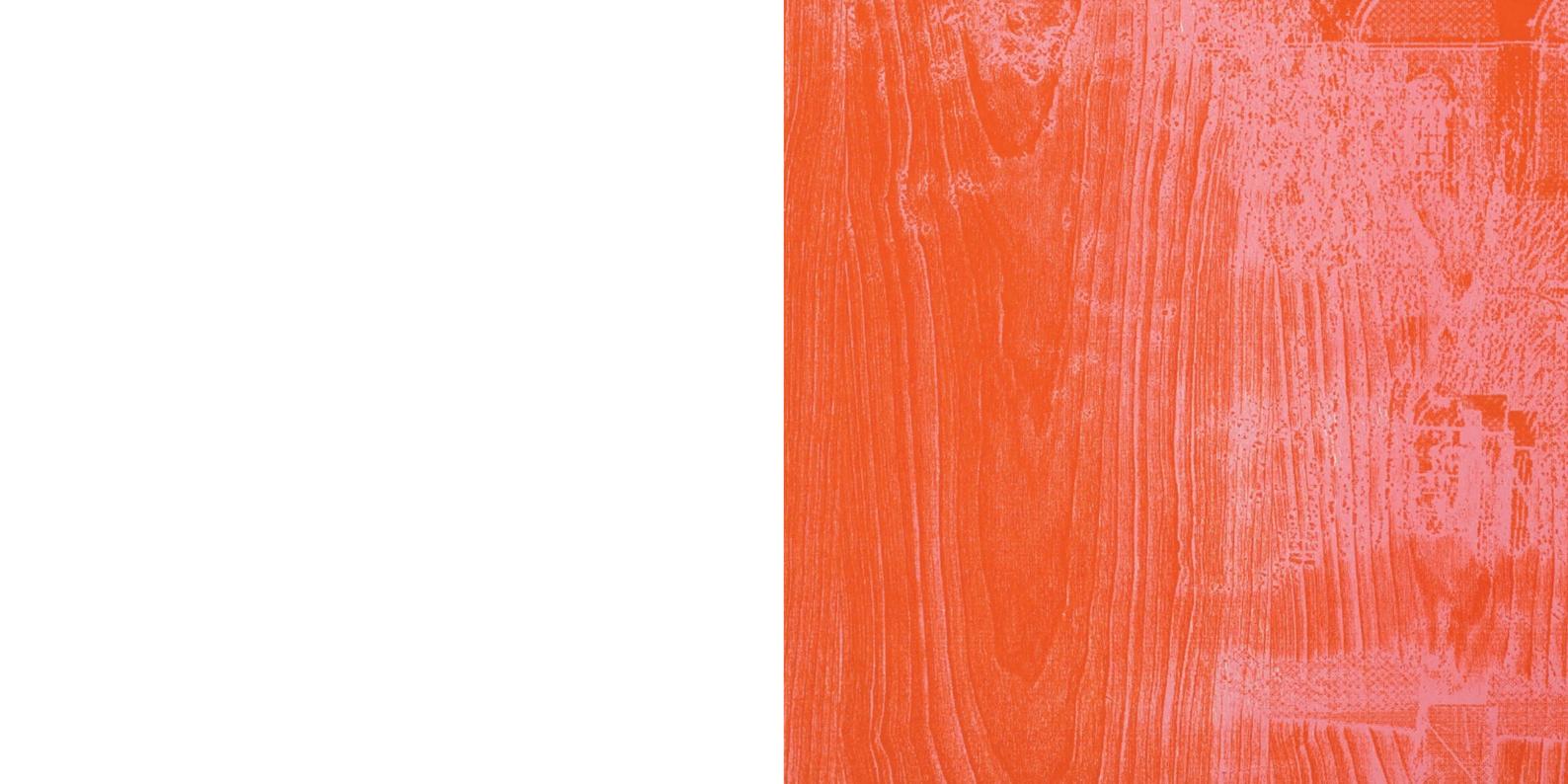






The Mother Creek Collage (top left)
Block (top)
Print (middle)
Print (bottom)

100 101



LIST OF WORKS

Measurements: height precedes width in centimetres of image All works courtesy of artist and Daine Singer Melbourne unless otherwise indicated

A Quiet Day on the Merri Creek: after Tom Roberts 2013

Oil on Plywood block 120 x 160 Collection William MacKinnon

Bridge Merri Creek 2013

Oil on plywood block 100 x 180

Bridge Merri Creek 2014

Oil relief on paper 100 x 180

Candy 2014

Oil relief on paper 55 x 45

Contrary Imaginations 2014

Mixed media on paper 120 x 160 Private Collection, Melbourne

Culvert No 1 2012

Oil on plywood block 60 x 80 Collection William MacKinnon

Culvert No 2 2012

Oil on plywood block 80 x 60 Collection William MacKinnon

Drain Merri Creek 2013

Oil on plywood block 60 x 80 Private Collection, Hong kong

Exercising 2012 Oil on plywood block

81 x 60 Collection William MacKinnon

Exercising in Stripey Tshirt 2012

Oil on plywood block 82 x 57 Collection William MacKinnon

Family and Friends 2014

Mixed media on paper 90 x 50

Graffiti Merri Creek 2012

Oil on plywood block 80 x 60

Suburban Church 2013

Oil relief on paper 80 x 60

Home Depot 2014

Mixed Media on paper 128 x 93

Housekeeping 2014

Mixed media on paper 78 x 61

Platypus 2012

Oil relief on paper 60 x 80

Rewilding 2013

Oil on plywood block

60 x 80

Sign Merri Creek 2012

Oil on plywood block 80 x 60

Sociology of the Family 2014

Mixed Media on paper 91 x 194

The Boy in the Bush 2014

Mixed media on paper 89 x 70

The Divided Self 2014

Mixed media and oil relief on paper 55 x 45

The Good Woman of Setzuan 2014

Mixed media on paper 94 x 104

The Mother Creek I 2014

Oil on plywood block 80 x 60

The Mother Creek Pink 2014

Oil relief on paper 80 x 60

The Mother Creek Red 2014

Oil relief on paper 80 x 60

The Platypus and the Shopping Trolley I 2014

Oil on plywood block 80 x 60

The Platypus and the Shopping Trolley II 2014

Oil relief on paper 80 x 60

The Second Sex 2014

Mixed media on paper 50 x 90

Walking Track 2012

Oil on plywood block 60 x 80

We 2014

Oil on plywood block

41 x 29

When Flooded Turn Back I 2014

Oil on plywood block

60 x 80

When Flooded Turn Back II 2014

Oil relief on paper 60 x 80

Womens Consciousness Mans World I 2014

Oil on Plywood block

55 x 45

105 104

KATHERINE HATTAM CURRICULUM VITAE

1950 Born Melbourne

BA Hons MU 1974, MFA Painting VCA 1992, PhD Deakin University 2004.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Solo Exhibitions

2014 Latrobe University Museum LUMA 'Backwaters'

2014 Raising Consciousness, Daine Singer

2013 Landscape of Longing, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery

2010 Inventory, John Buckley Gallery, Melbourne.

2009 Book Covers, John Buckley Gallery, Melbourne.

2008 Staying on Message, Australian Galleries, Melbourne;

2007 - 2008 Under The Influence, Warrnambool Art Gallery (with Will Mackinnon)

2007 Family Romance Australian Galleries Sydney.

2007 Innocent Works, Bendiao Art Gallery,

2006 Bookworks, Australian Galleries;

2006 Bookworks, Stonington Stables, Deakin University, Melbourne.

2005 Pickled Art Centre, Beijing.

2004 Crossley Scott, Melbourne.

2002 The Vocabulary of Chairs, Geelong Art Gallery.

2002 Span Galleries, Melbourne.

2001 1998 John Buckley Fine Art.

1999 Perfect Day, Bendigo Regional Gallery.

1998 Seashores and Porcupines, Latrobe Street Gallery.

1994 1991 1990 1988 William Mora Gallery.

1991 Ray Hughes Gallery.

1988 Warrnambool Art Gallerv.

1987 70 Arden Street.

1978 George Paton & Ewing Gallery, Melbourne Selected Group

EXHIBITIONS

2014 Domestic Bliss, Deakin University Art Gallery

2014 Swan Hill Print & Drawing Prize

2013 Fremantle Print Prize

2012 2009 2006 2005 2004 2002 2001 2000 1996 Dobell Drawing Prize, AGNSW.

2012 2008 2006 2004 2002 Impressions Australian Print Workshop

2012 Bundoora Homestead The River

2011 John Buckley Conversation

2011 Australia-India Institute Retreat, Mornington Peninsula;

2011 2009 2003 Arthur Guy Prize Bendigo Art Gallery, 2010 Stick It!, National Gallery of Victoria; The Naked Face, NGV.

2010, 2009 2008 2007 2006 Paddington Art Prize;

2005 All Killer, Joint Hassles.

2006 Decade Acquisitions, Bendigo Art Gallery,

2006 Small Tapestries, Australian Tapestry Workshop.

2006 2005 2004 2002 2001 2000 1999 1998 National Works on Paper Prize, Mornington.

2006 2005 2004 2003 2002 Robert Jacks Prize Bendigo Art Gallery.

2005 Banyule Works on Paper Art Prize.

2005 Sydney Art Fair, Sydney Art on Paper Fair

2005 Seoul International Works on Paper Fair.

2005 NGV, This and Other Worlds - Contemporary Australian Drawing, 1995-2005,..

2004 Please Be Seated, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery.

2002 2004 Sulman Prize AGNSW.

2000 Australian Drawing Biennial, Drill Hall, ACT.

2008 (acquired) 2001 1998 1997 1996 Kedumba Drawing Prize.

1998 Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Prize Grafton (acquired).

1991 Recent Acquisitions Murdoch Court NGV,

1986 Ray Hughes Group Drawing Show. 200 Gertrude Street Shipwrecked.

PRIZES AWARDS GRANTS & RESIDENCIES ETC

2011 Festival of Ideas, 'The Pull of the Landscape: The Artist's Share'

2011 Aust-India Institute Residency

2008 Residency Printing Department RMIT;

2008 Kedumba Drawing Prize (acquired).

2006 Robert Jacks Drawing Prize.

2005 Banyule Works on Paper Art Award.

2005 2003 1986 National Works on Paper Prize (acquired).

2003 Australia-China Council Grant Studio Beijing Art Academy.

2003 Australia-China Council Residency, Beijing.

2003 Artist in Residence, Bundanon Centre, NSW.

1999 Fisher's Ghost Award Campbelltown NSW (acquired)

Collections

RACV Collection

National Gallery of Australia National Gallery of Victoria Warrnambool Art Gallery Bendigo Art Gallery Mornington Art Gallery Minter Ellison Collection Grafton City Art Gallery National Bank of Australia Potter Warburg Collection Bankers Trust Collection Queen Victoria Hospital Collection Box Hill City Art Gallery George Patterson Collection Smorgon Collection The Darling Foundation Hamilton City Gallery Heide Museum of Modern Art Queensland University of Technology Artbank Queensland Art Gallery

University of Queensland

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REVIEWS

Emma Cox 'Home Sweet Home: Domestic Bliss', Deakin University, Melbourne, 2014 Wendy Garden 'Works on Paper', Mornington Peninsula, 2014 Chong Weng Ho 'Good enough to Eat' - Artlink 2011 Harriet Morgan 'Desire and the Impossible' - Inventory Nov 2010 Gabriella Coslovich 'Colours of the Hectic City' The Age Nov 2010 Sophie Cunningham 'Breaking Up is Hard to Do' The Age 24 March 2007 Sophie Cunningham 'Bookworks' cat. Australian Galleries 2006 Leigh Robb 'Making History Present' Not Anxious? Cut & Paste Beijing 2005 Helene Sommer 'Conversation Piece' cat. This Side of Paradise 2005 Chris Wallace-Crabbe cat. Line 2003 Robert Nelson 'Artists go through the emotions' The Age 15 June 2002 ABC TV Arts on Sunday August 2002: Elwyn Lynn Weekend Australian 13-14 July 2001 Morag Fraser Layering cat. The Australian Drawing Biennale 2000 Drusilla Modjeska 'Personal Space' The Australian's Review of Books August 1999 Drusilla Modjeska 'The Vocabulary of Chairs' cat. Jenny Long cat. Perfect Day Bendigo Art Gallery August 1999 Graham Little Art Monthly August 1998 cat. Seashores and Porcupines 1999 John McDonald SMH May 1995. Diana Gribble cat. Ray Hughes 1991, Melbourne Weekly 1994 Robert Rooney The Australian 1993, Judith Cooke cat. for Warrnambool Exhibition 1988 Gary Catalano The Age 11 December 1985 8 April 1987 4 Apr 1990

FORTHCOMING

2014 TCB, 'Reraising Consciousness' with Harriet Morgan & Fayen Devi. 2015 Deakin Survey Show

Acknowledgments

The 'allure' - as my sister Vicky puts it - of the Backwaters, first took hold on me ten years ago, when I moved with my family down the road from Merri Creek that became my daily walking path, my access to nature, spoilt/impure in its contrasting mixture of upturned shopping trollies, brightly coloured plastic bags and occasional sightings of platypus, koalas, fish and birds – so this has been an enduring project. It was Patrick McCaughey who revealed to me that my take on this landscape was in fact 'ironic', when inviting me to participate in Melbourne University's Festival of Ideas saying, 'talk about your ironic landscapes' and when I objected they were not ironic, realised that, of course, they were – my ironic perspective being the inevitable outcome of two marriages – consecutive, to farmers where I had the gift of not just seeing but living in country Australia in both high and low rainfall, experiences which I now saw changed me deeply.

My son. William Mackinnon, also an artist, discovered and introduced me to the process whereby I inscribe plywood - and then encouraged me to pursue it. Printmakers, Andrew Sinclair and Adrian Kellet, have been, not only essential in transferring these boards into the blocks and prints they become, but have been willing to experiment in an adventure into the unknown with me – the photography, an integral part of this process, has been all mine, amateur as it is, yet for this catalogue it has been the professionals: John Brash, Christopher Sanders and Clare Rae.

La Trobe University Museum of Art is the perfect place for this exhibition, not just by the geography of its location but, because former director Vincent Alessi and then Michael Brennan and curator Anita La Pieta have from the outset understood, not just the project but its context in my work. Anita La Pieta's particular interest in and knowledge of photography has been especially relevant.

Being asked to write an essay on an artist's work must be a mixed experience – having to spend days in someone else's head...the writers I chose all from very different disciplines and parts of the world, bringing particular insight to the project - the exploration of the three backwaters: the Merri Creek (Melbourne), Suzhou Creek (Shanghai) and the Gowanus Canal (Brooklyn, New York). These essays both interpret the work, but also stand alone and run parallel to it, qualities for which I'm grateful.

Kate Reeves is a novelist and, over the years, we have viewed, read and criticized one another's work - a strangely mutual process. My sister, Victoria Hattam, professor at the New School, New York, first invited me to Shanghai in 2009 as part of a conference about cities - my thanks to the inspired Ashok Gurung who enabled me to participate in the conference where I met Brian McGrath, Dean of the New School for Social Sciences, New York, who was already onto the 'allure' of the backwaters and agreed to bring his knowledge and perspective to this more intimate and personal project, elevating my work in viewing it through that theoretical prism.

Deciding on the works that are in the exhibition, I realised they are all, one way or another, works on paper, even the blocks which are part of a print, so it is perfect that Cathy Leahy, Senior Curator of Prints and Drawings at the National Gallery of Victoria, has agreed to open the exhibition. Though the subject of the show is 'Backwaters', another is the process by which I respond to these places: collages, works on paper, prints and blocks.

During that very hot August week, when my sister and I met halfway between Melbourne and Brooklyn, discovering we shared a fascination with our particular backwaters – minor waterways – so that my Merri Creek is her Gowanus Canal. Realising, not just our cities but most share these 'not the main' waterways. We decided to collaborate. 'Backwaters at LUMA' is the first public expression of this collaboration and is the place for me to acknowledge and thank my sister – it's not just been interesting but challenging to work together – also fun.

While half the kitchen table has been strewn with images /drawings of Backwaters for months, I have taken advantage of support and criticism from daughter Harriet Morgan and son Charlie Mackinnon, of which I actually take note. Yet the most important and difficult thanks must go to my husband (as opposed to partner), writer Jim Morgan, who has been integral to the project - from sharing our walks along Merri Creek, to editing this acknowledgment, daring to both criticize and praise the work while stacking the dishwasher...

Also many thanks to my dealer, Daine Singer.

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Katherine Hattam: **BACKWATERS**

A LUMA | La Trobe University Museum of Art Exhibition

22 September – 7 November 2014 La Trobe University Museum of Art

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Cover image

Katherine Hattam Suburban Church (detail) Oil relief on paper 60 x 80cm

Image courtesy the artist and Daine Singer Melbourne

