

# **Boats at Sea, Life at Home**

Ian Howard

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Ian Howard's exhibition of triptychs brings together fifty-four 'skins' of our time. Eighteen are profiles of boats at sea, eighteen are direct impressions (lost wax rubbings) from television screens, and the final eighteen are up close views of the paraphernalia of a secure life. We variously deal with such relationships formed between disparate but competing elements (for attention and reaction) on a daily basis. Picturing these inconsistencies through scale, juxtaposition and aesthetics tilts at insights that are otherwise allusive.

exhibition dates

7 April – 29 April 2017

opening date

Saturday afternoon, 8 April 3pm – 6pm

Woolloongabba Art Gallery

613 Stanley St, Woolloongabba, Qld, Australia 4104

<http://www.wag.com.au>

## ***Dead TVs***

I flinch when I walk or drive past an abandoned television set. My earliest memory/experience of mass media comes from the 1950s, sitting around the family radio at a prescribed time in the evening to listen to a serialised melodrama. Equally exciting, at the conclusion of each episode my father would attempt (usually successfully) to 'tune' the radio to intercept the local police 'two way' communications. So, when television arrived it was a big deal, although for many years we could not afford to buy a set of our own.

Consequently, today's profligate consumption is most powerfully represented to me by the abundance of television sets dumped on the pavement, by the road side, anywhere, everywhere. I should not feel too bad because these TVs have had a chequered history. Certainly, bringing news, views and entertainment into our lives but also affecting an absorption with trivia that has turned out many a light and line of enquiry. A dense closure on information is more likely an outcome than lively debate, interaction and action.

In an exhibition at Watters Gallery, Sydney in 1972, I exhibited a rubbing of a television set resplendent with a spiral (not rabbit ears) indoor antenna on top. It must have been an interesting enough art work to somebody as it sold for \$100. Not satisfied, I always wanted/intended to revisit the 'tele-vision' phenomenon and the mounting street litter added momentum. However, this time I would address the consumer object at its rightful industrial scale. I ended up finding it surprisingly personal.

Having undertaken a risk assessment analysis, and been integrated into a traffic management plan and wearing a high-vis vest, I became

part of my local government area's Electronic Goods Recycling Sunday. My art materials were set up to the side, and I could command council workers to bring forth any television being dropped off that appealed. The supply was endless. I completed the rubbing process on my 20 canvases by early afternoon. Most delivering their TVs for recycling were visibly pained to see them go. Many brought the remote control taped to the screen along with the instruction manual still in its plastic sleeve. 'It works perfectly well' a driver would report as he/she drove off. For these worst cases council workers tried, although not always successfully, to delay the heaving of the set into gigantic skips filled with other TVs, along with probably dead, maybe just out of toner, printers and washing machines that needed their bowl filters cleaned.

Back in the studio, my selection of TVs could not be resuscitated. Not only were they dead in the present, they also either refused to give up any colourful histories or they accurately represented the densely impenetrable inertia, even subterfuge, of their life cycle.

## ***Live (and dead) People***

Each year there are approximately 238M television sets produced and 128M babies born.

Since I had that exhibition at Watters Gallery in the early 1970s (it does not seem so long ago) the population of the world has doubled.

Over recent years I have contributed to more conferences about geography than art. The International Association for Borderland Studies recognises that inter and cross disciplinary approaches to

borders and forced people movements will likely provide solutions for this worldwide problem. Geographers, political and social scientists, defence and security experts along with a smattering of artists meet to confer over evidence, experiences, goals, policies and strategies. For many years a consensus appeared desirable and seemed achievable.

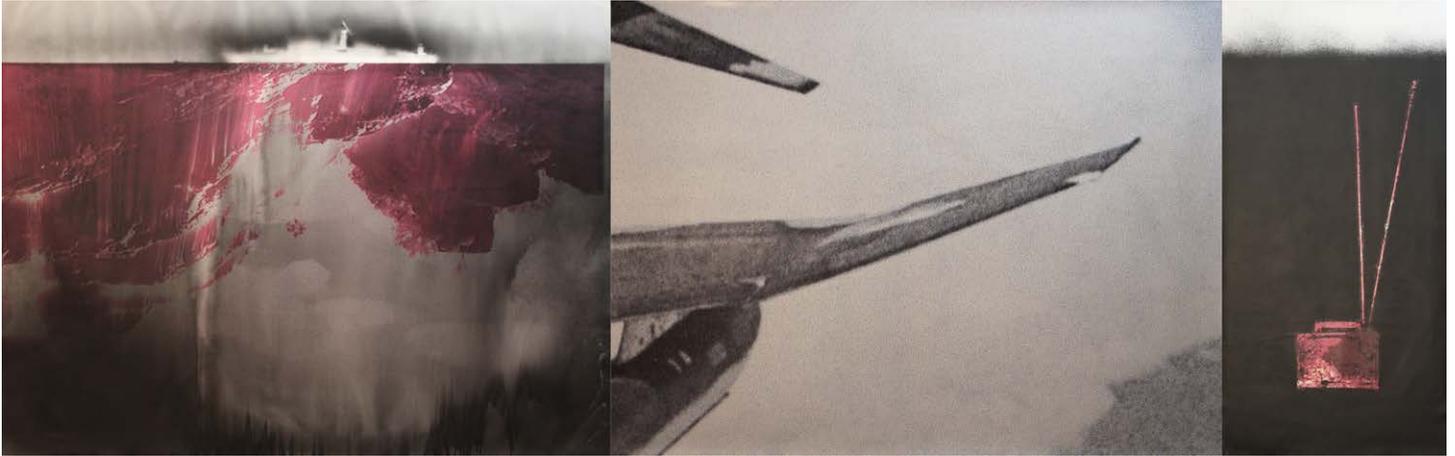
At a 2016 gathering in Montreal, the Israeli claim was one of vindication, arguing that the tumultuous year in the Mediterranean and Europe proved that walls (similar to the Israeli Barrier in Palestine) were both necessary and effective. Participants who self-identified as women of colour argued that there was no international migratory crisis, rather a crisis of/for international white supremacy. Any consensus was blown. At this gathering I presented a project I have been working on for a number of years with the Australian War Memorial and the Australian Defence Force representing the work of the ADF in its lead role in Operation Sovereign Borders. In this context, for obvious reasons, my work was equally and strongly criticised and acclaimed.

At an earlier Montreal meeting Professor Reece Jones from the University of Hawaii in Manoa elaborated on his concept of a global system of apartheid, citing the US, India and Israel (and their border walls) as powerful nations selectively excluding by race and colour, whilst protecting their access to resources (Op Ed New York Times 27/8/2012). The world is/has always been like this, it's just that the pressure is building, from all sides. Alternate thinking/ideologies/strategies are rare and difficult to come by. The designer and engineer Buckminster Fuller identified and offered at least a conceptual and technical solution to this international problem within his Global Energy Grid.

*Graphs of each of the world's 150 nations showing their twentieth-century histories of inanimate energy production per capita of their respective populations together with graphs of those countries' birthrates show without exception that the birthrates decrease at exactly the same rate that the per capita consumption of inanimate electrical energy increases. The world's population will stop increasing when and if the integrated world electrical energy grid is realized. This grid is the World Game's highest priority objective. (Critical Path, 1981, Fuller and Kuromiya)*

His concept of a World Game was not frivolous nor playful, rather he stressed 'we are all in this together'. Noting: by 2016, we have divided our Spaceship Earth into 195 separate nation states not 150. A million refugees migrated to Europe in 2015. In 2016 more than 5000 drowned at sea attempting the journey. Best records indicate approximately 1200 people have drowned in their efforts to reach Australia by boat over recent years. Forced migration will continue and likely at a pace. Boats at Sea are inevitable. Ferries are better than people smuggler rafts and leaking hulks. It appears that around the world there is an urgent need for human services and less for redundant consumer goods, those extra TVs. Economies will not collapse, employment opportunities will increase and Life at Home will be the better and more secure as a result.

**Ian Howard**

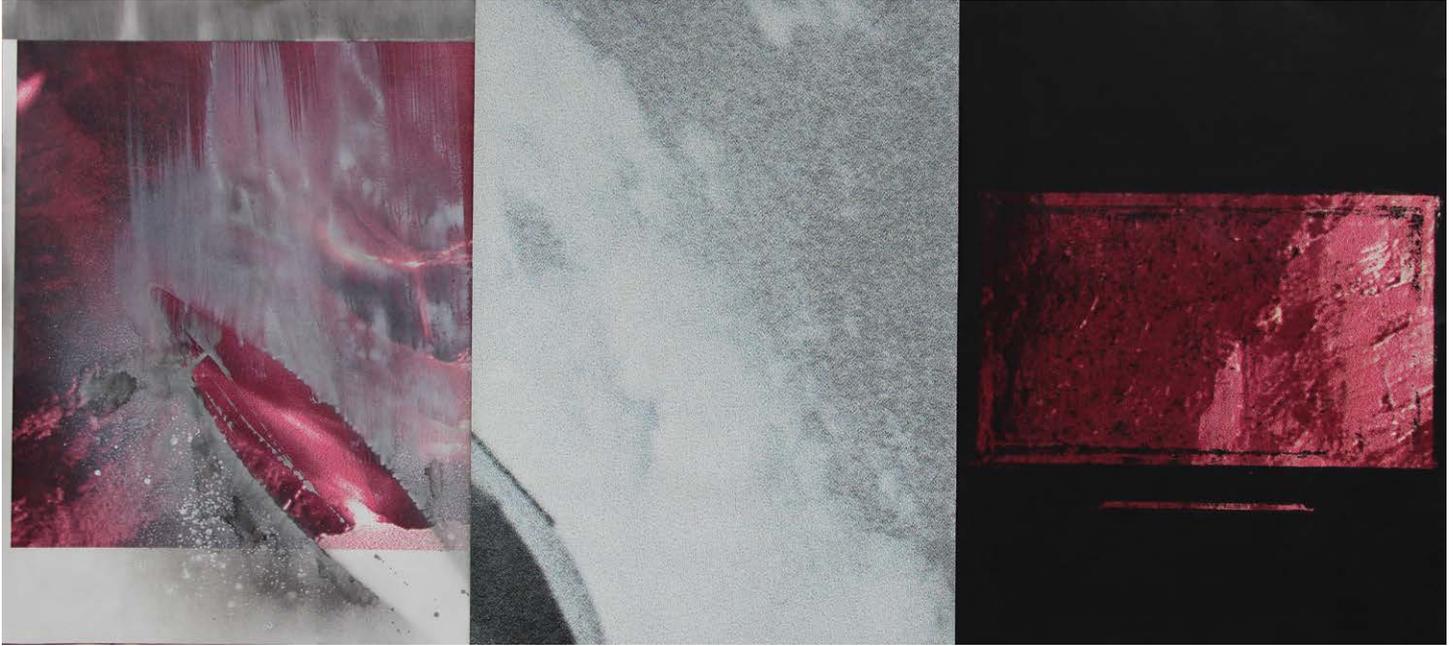


### #1 Longitude-Altitude-Latitude

3 panel triptych 1.9M x 6.0M

Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

It is near impossible to comprehend the world (our little planet) in its various dimensions. We live in a local present, understand that other people will have their live situations, somewhere (else) but find it difficult to knit the patchwork together. Down the street, beyond the horizon, across the oceans and continents, amongst the peoples of the world, is overwhelming, incomprehensible, debilitating in terms of engagement.



**#2 Depth Beneath the Surface**  
3 panel triptych 1.7M x 3.8M  
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

The difference between image and reality is similar to comparing electrically charged ionized gases to water.



### #3 Foreign Land of the Unknown

3 panel triptych 1.6M x 3.8M

Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

Travelling from home, no matter how hostile that place may have been, is seriously daunting. In the imagination, fired by the stories, reports, even sightings, contribute nothing in predicting the landscape ahead.

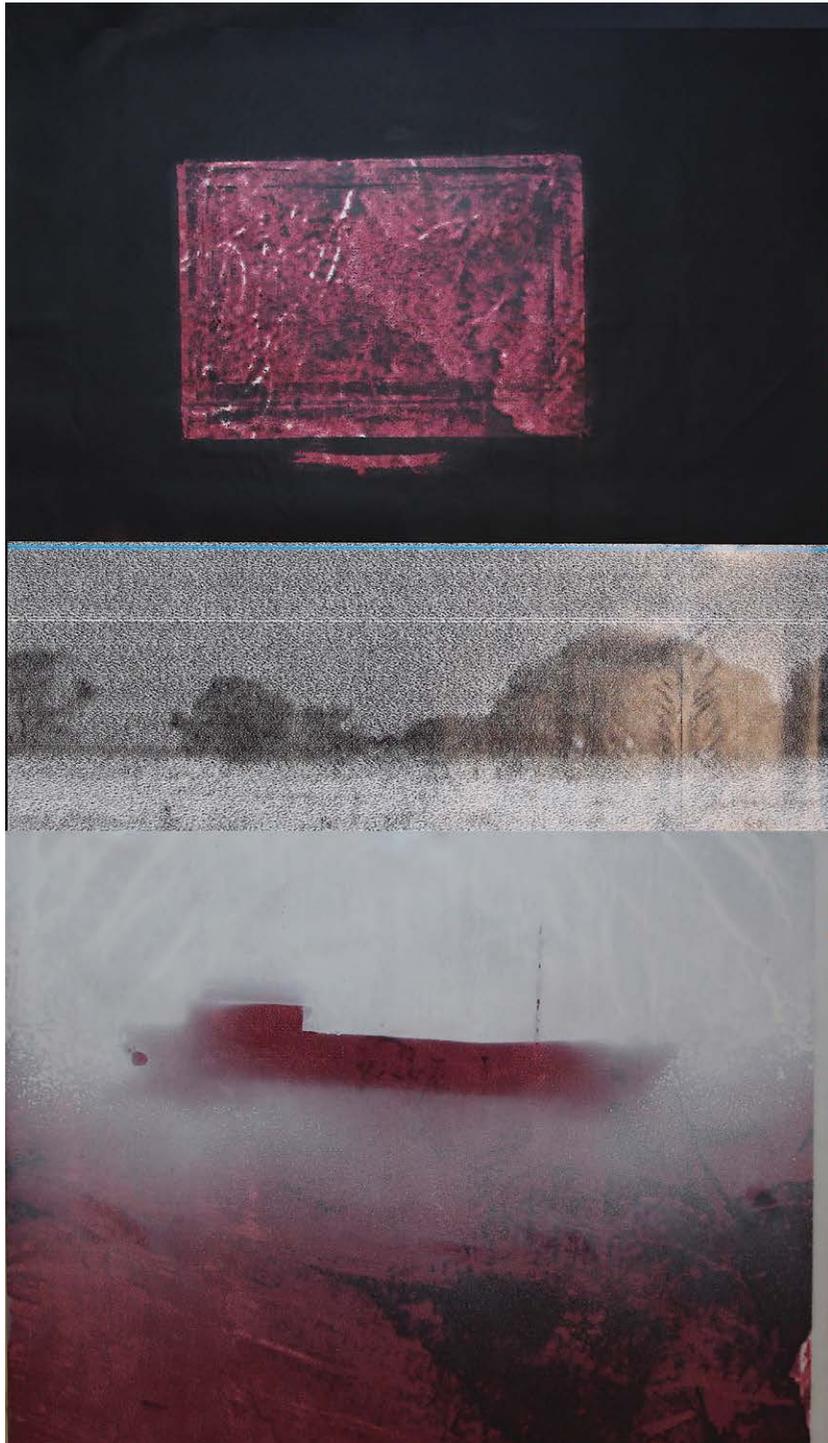


**#4 Unaligned Parties**

3 panel triptych 1.9M x 1.9M

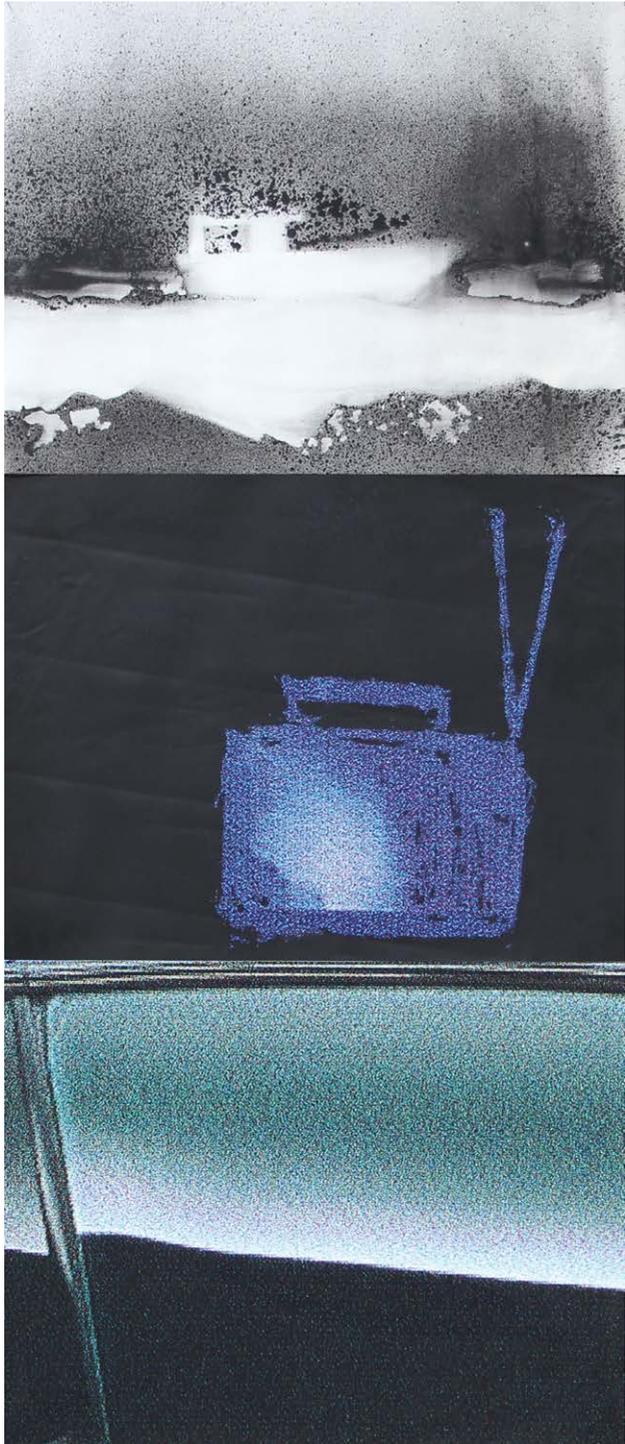
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

Tides, waves, tidal waves beat compassion, media crackles with tragedy.



**#5 Reception at the Coast**  
3 panel triptych 3.0M x 1.7M  
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

Like everything on Earth, the scale of impact has increased exponentially. Measures and countermeasures escalate with technical prowess. Perhaps the oldest natural phenomenon- 'coming ashore' is highly conditioned, partitioned for recourses and race.

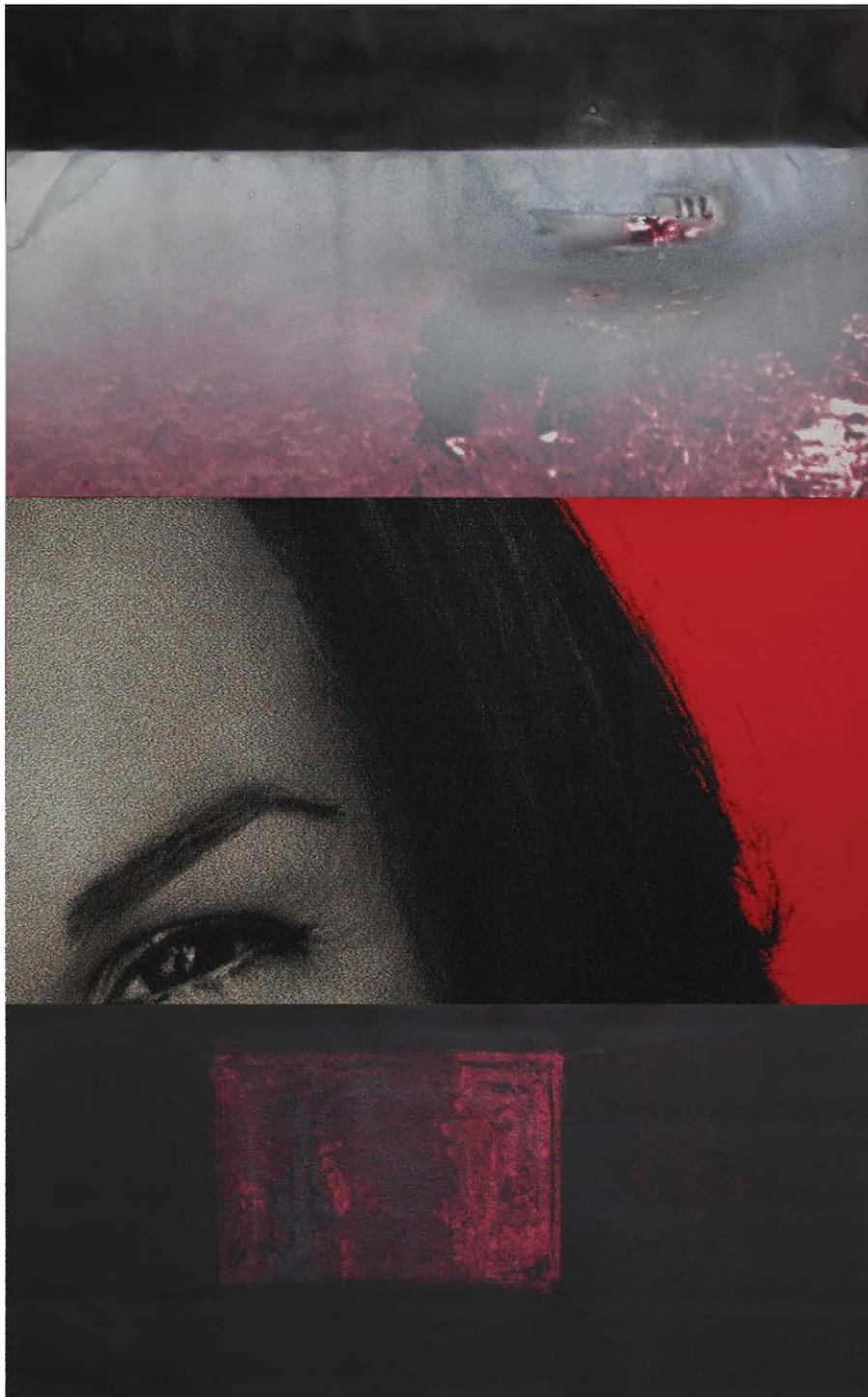


### **#6 Interference**

3 panel triptych 1.6M x .7M

Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

The glare of products remains mesmerising. As with headlights in the eyes of any animal, there is a distracting, dazzling blindness, experienced momentarily. On gainful employment, the need for human services appears endless.

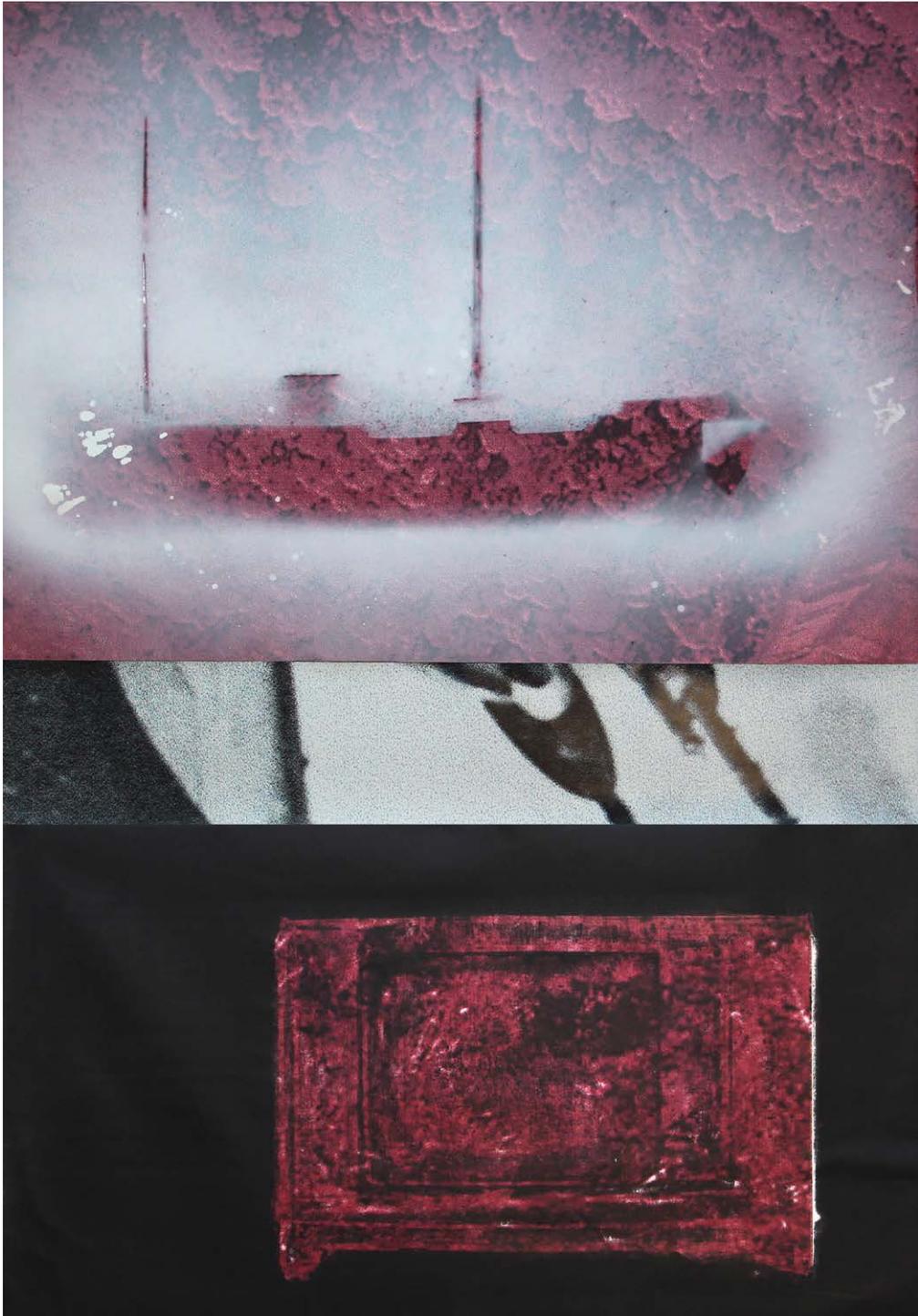


**#7 Out of the Dark Night**

3 panel triptych 2.6M x 1.6M

Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

Endeavour, compassion and accommodation are only limited by ideas, resolve and resources. Each having uncertain limits, and in competitive demand, hope and horizons can darken.



### #8 Superstructure

3 panel triptych 2.7M x 1.9M

Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

The scale and cost of forced migration constitutes a new economy. Transport, logistics, security, food, medicine and shelter are boom industries. They should be 'floated' as a package on the stock exchange.



**#9 All the World's Oceans**  
3 panel triptych 2.4M x 1.5M  
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

It is constant, relentless. Across the oceans of the world the boats set sail. Comprehensible only as technical data, attempts to humanise the crossings fail, creating dichotomies of black and white.



**#10 White Water Dark Screen**  
3 panel triptych 3.4M x 1.3M  
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

Adrift and losing hope, the greater world is opaque to you, whilst the ocean depths are perfectly clear.



**#11 Not the First Time**

3 panel triptych 2.2M x 1.5M

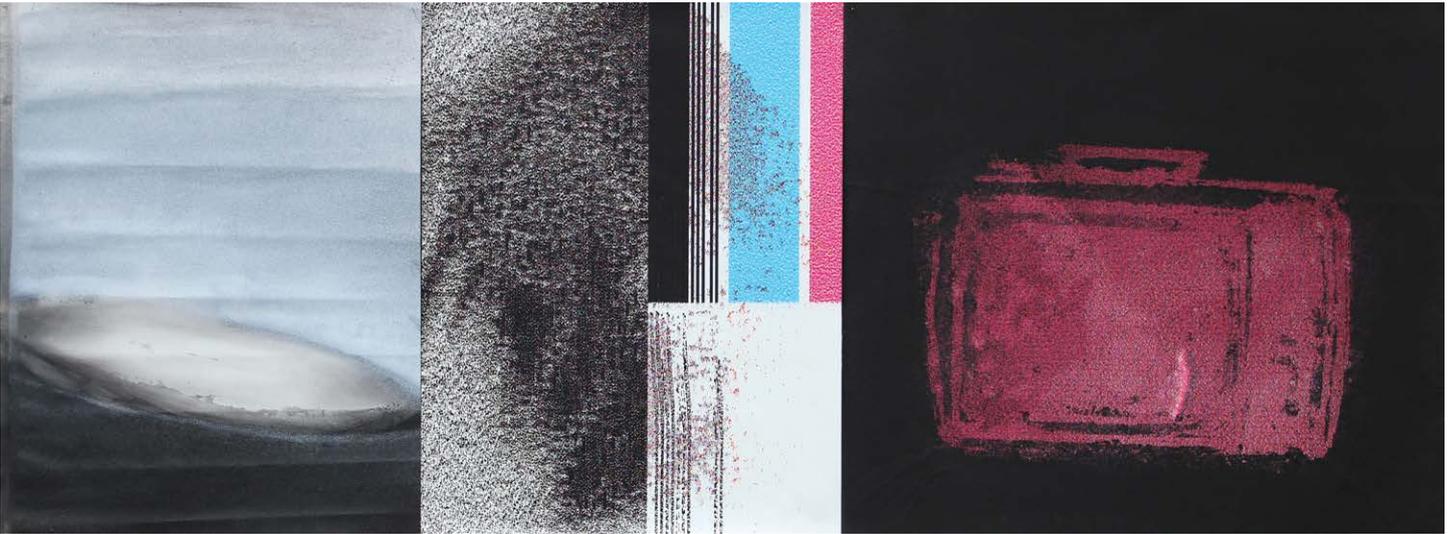
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

Forced migration has previously been sporadic, prompted by world wars and other major conflicts as they occurred over time. Never easy, resettlement has been a waiting game, a game of chance with consequences for all players. Paradoxically, early migrants typically raise the stakes against those who would come lately.



**#12 Eye of the Storm**  
3 panel triptych 2.5M x 1.1M  
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

There is a point where all is lost. Life, the body, falls apart from its inherent grace.  
Dose/will history and all its technology redeem them? And for what matter?

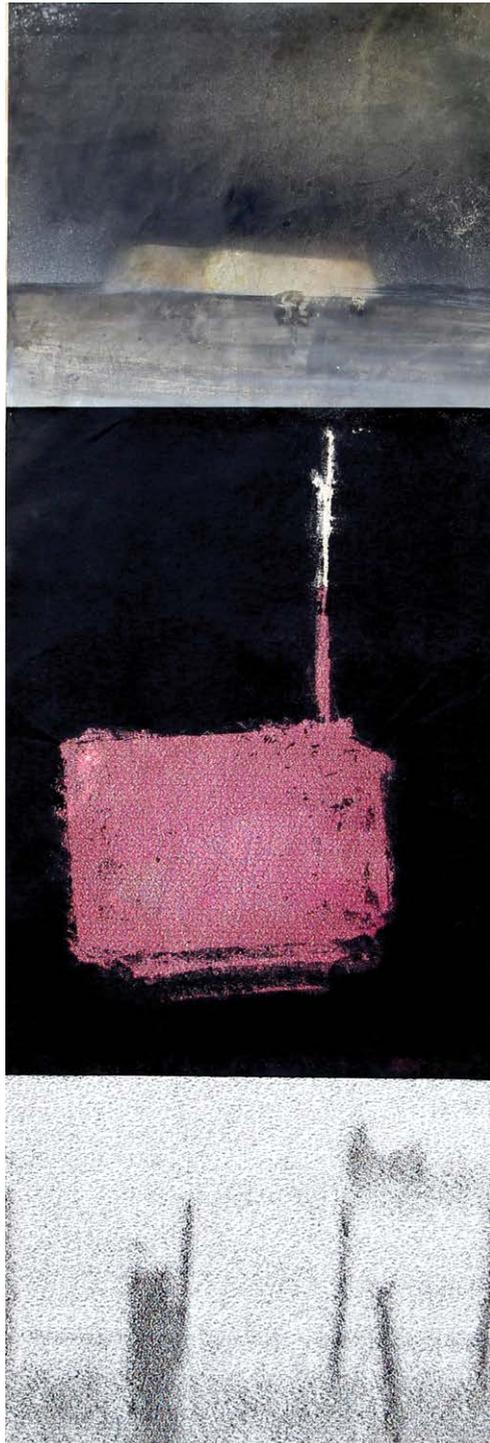


### #13 Ghost Ship

3 panel triptych .7M x 1.8M

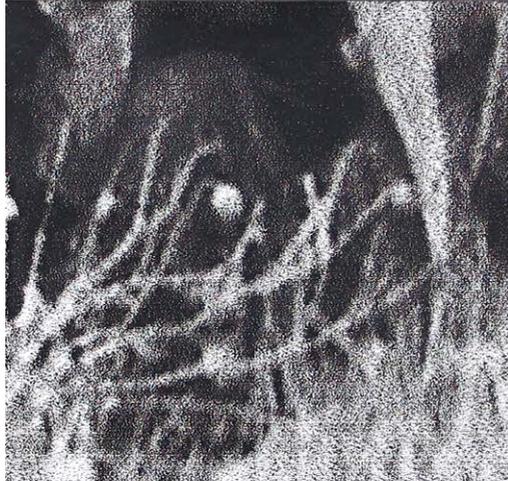
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

There is a completeness about advanced cultures that is near impenetrable. Rarely can extraneous material break through. Foreigners by definition remain in a shadowy world, sometimes relegated to the underworld, only occasionally breaking through, disturbing the order of things.



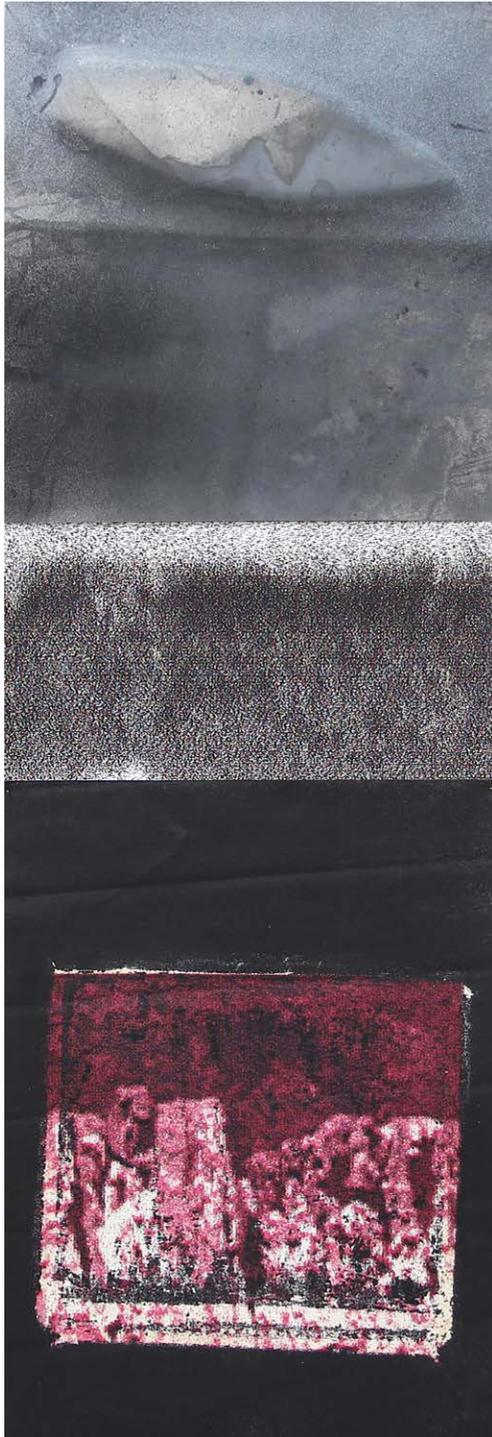
**#14 Signals Along the Shoreline**  
3 panel triptych 1.8M x .6M  
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

A tragedy will send a strong signal. Multiple markers merge and quickly fade.



**#15 The Un-calmed Sea**  
3 panel triptych 1.8M x .6M  
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

Drifting is not a stable state of movement. As a powerful two thirds of the Earth's surface, the oceans will dictate what pace and what fate.



**#16 The Shoreline**

3 panel triptych 1.6M x .6M

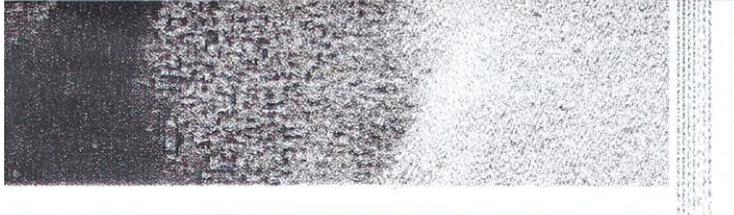
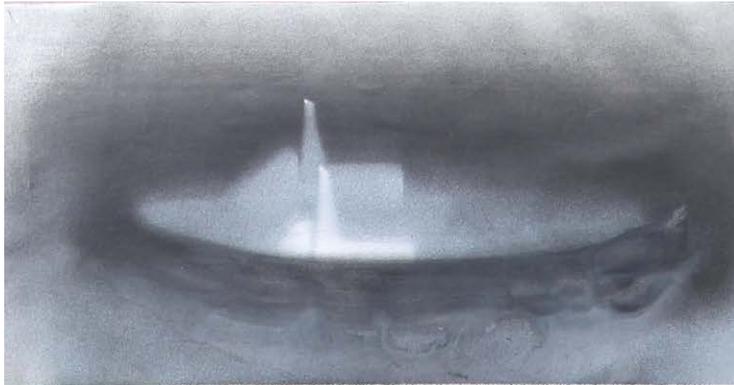
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

All hope and expectation at sea is loaded upon the solidity of the shore. Everything that floats eventually finds a shoreline that will accept it or push it back to the water where its journey will surely end.



**#17 Into the Dark Night**  
3 panel triptych 1.8M x 1.0M  
Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

The contrast of being on a boat at sea with life at home is likely as great as any. Everything is unimaginably different, even the blackness which is defined by light (or lack off) of different sorts. One, iridescent from the moon and water, the other candescent from a switch, turned to off.

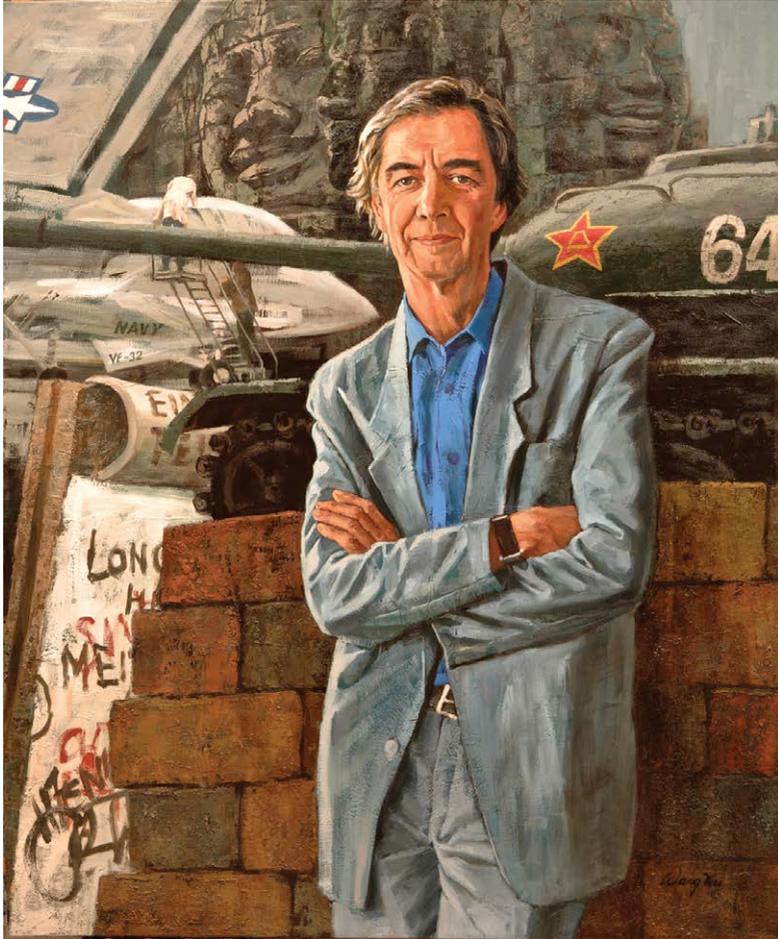


**#18 Ferry Cargo**

3 panel triptych 1.9M x 1.0M

Mixed media on canvas and vinyl

Cultures of scale have numerous qualities, some would say advantages. They have resources, power, identity and ideals. Cultures of scale have a propensity to grow in size and complexity through absorption. As a characteristic of the Anthropocene, the movement of people around the world will continue, chartered or not.



portrait by Wang Xu

Ian Howard is an artist and professor at UNSW Sydney, Faculty of Art & Design. He was Dean of COFA from 1998 till 2013 and prior to that was Provost and Director of the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. He trained in Sydney (Art/Artist Education), London (Advanced Studies, Film and Television) and Montreal (Master of Fine Arts). His artwork progresses a cultural relationship between civilians and military institutions with a concentration on sovereign border issues- walls, barriers and containment including enforcing vehicles- aircraft, tanks and ships. He works and exhibits internationally and is represented by Watters Gallery, Sydney and Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne. His last exhibition in Brisbane, titled *one World* was held at the Queensland Art Gallery in 1992.



Established in 2004, the Woolloongabba Art Gallery is one of Queensland, Australia's leading galleries, dedicated to the exhibition and sale of quality contemporary art. Representing a stylistically varied selection of local and Australasian art by established and emerging artists, the gallery boasts a number of exhibition spaces and operates in direct response to the need for continued dialogue in Australia's multicultural future. As well as offering professional services to artists and clients through its consultancy, in-house design and production studio, the gallery is proactive in the development of health and education material for remote Indigenous communities.

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