A COLLABORATION BETWEEN THREE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Island to Island

09 MARCH 2007 - 01 APRIL 2007
Acknowledgements

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Significantly, the Island to Island project response from Tasmania could not have been accomplished without the ongoing enthusiasm and professional contribution of our sixteen participating artists.

Professor Vincent McGrath
Curator

Foreword

The University of Tasmania is proud to be part of Island to Island, a cultural and artistic exchange between the islands of Hawai‘i, Penang and Tasmania. Ten Days on the Island, Tasmania’s famous arts festival, is the perfect community event in which to showcase Island to Island, our part of the three-way international collaboration. Tasmania’s Island to Island exhibition interprets in artistic terms many of the cultural values and characteristics that make island life here so distinctive and special.

Importantly, the Island to Island exhibitions will strengthen the existing dynamic research, cultural and professional relationship between the arts disciplines at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia, University of Hawai‘i, Manoa, United States of America and the University of Tasmania, Australia.

I congratulate the participating artists from Hawai‘i, Penang and Tasmania for sharing with us their visions of island life in the twenty-first century.

Professor Daryl Le Grew
Vice-Chancellor
University of Tasmania
Amity Island, Destiny Islands, Corto Maltese, Isla Nublar, Lilliput, the Island of Dr Moreau, Skull Island and Pokopenesia, all islands of fantasy, were created to stir our imaginations and invite us to follow mysterious characters on exotic adventures. The art of literature can transport us to times and places far removed from the orderly systems of day-to-day living. Throughout history the concept of island has been an intriguing one. Who, as a child, was not mesmerised by Robert Lewis Stevenson’s 1881 story Treasure Island or Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel Robinson Crusoe? The journey of a young lad in search of pirate treasures hidden on a secret island and the tale of a sailor marooned for four years on an un-named desert island pull at our sense of adventure, endurance and ability to finally escape. Since Defoe’s castaway epic the island as a site for the shipwrecked traveller, the home of the last dinosaurs, dysfunctional communities, primitivism and the building of the utopian dream have held a prominent place in literature and popular culture. The Robert Zemeckis film from 2000, Cast Away and television shows including Gilligan’s Island, and Lost exploit the island space in terms of mystery, romance, and the instinct for survival in a contemporary context. Survivor, the television reality show, uses the exotic island theme – a faraway, little-known, isolated place to observe people’s social behaviour in unusual and testing circumstances.

Escaping to and or from and island seems to be very much part of our dreaming, our yearning for a restful holiday, our desire for a change of life’s circumstances and a shield against the ordinariness of our continuing existence. The irony, however, is that the opposite can also be true as the idea of island can conjure up the sense of enclosure, psychological isolation and a desire to break free into a larger, more open and satisfying world. In her novel, Judgement Rock, published in 2002, Melbourne writer Joanna Murray-Smith uses Deal Island in the Bass Strait as the wild, desolate setting to look at human relationships and the frailties of three people in search of their own version of the ideal. In a scene exploring loneliness and desire set on a dark winter night around the campfire near the lighthouse Joe asks Iris, “What do we need here”? In answer to his own question Joe’s reply is simply “You and me,” “We’re complete”. Following his train of thought, Iris explains, “When Tasmania became separate to the mainland of Australia, the culture simplified. As the society shrunk, so did its possessions.” She continues, “They say that the total number of items a culture can hold is related to the number of minds communicating in that culture.” Joe understands and agrees, “You and me and the island – we have all that we need.” In their freedom and separation from the culture of others they have found what they believe to be most important – each other. As for the characters, Iris and Joe, islands are often the settings for finding love, finding one’s self, and finding truth. The well-known musical play, South Pacific, with music by Richard Rodgers and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II revolves around several US military personal, who, during World War II experience the separation imposed on them by their island posting. The island magic is worked on the characters as they sing about missing the ones they love and finding love. They become caught up in the lure of the nearby mysterious island of Bali Ha’i as their lives intertwine with the island residents. This 1949 musical has become iconic for its candid and sensitive portrayal of racial prejudice, which is explored in the contrastingly beautiful island setting.

The island is also a recurring theme in modern popular music. The island mystique, the separation of lovers, and lovers in a world of their own is an eternal and often bittersweet idea. Music often describes love as an island where two people are separate from the rest of the world and isolated in a metaphorical paradise for two. In 1983, Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton recorded the Bee Gees song, Islands in the Stream, a ballad that says these lovers need no one else. The lyrics of the chorus are:

Islands in the stream, that is what we are, no one in between, how can we be wrong, sail away with me to another world, and we rely on each other uh huh, from one lover to another uh huh.…. 

Judith Durham and the Seekers recorded Island of Dreams in 1968, a song about the ‘last sweet embrace’ of two lovers ‘over the sea on the Island of Dreams.’ The words continue:

High in the sky is a bird on the wing; Please carry me with you. Far, far away from the mad, rushing crowd, Please carry me with

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1. Amity Island is from Jaws the 1974 novel by Robert Benchley, Destiny Island is part of the video game Kingdom Hearts. Corto Maltese is from Batman - the Dark Knight returns (comics). Isla Nublar is the island site for Jurassic Park. Lilliput comes from Jonathan Swift’s novel Gulliver’s Travels, the Island of Dr Moreau is a novel by HG Wells. Skull Island is the home of King Kong and Pokopenesia comes from the animated version of The Tick.

2. The television show Gilligan’s Island was a CBS network presentation. It commenced in 1964 and ran through to 1967 in the first run. It tells of the antics of seven castaways shipwrecked on an unchartered island somewhere off Oahu.

3. South Pacific opened on Broadway on 7 April, 1949 and ran for more than five years.
In 1957 Tony Bennett made famous his rendition of In the Middle of an Island, a simple song using the island as a metaphor for an earthly paradise full of love. Like most of the lyrics for island dreaming they are based on wish and hope and rarely, if at all, contemplate the departure. In the context of island dreaming paradise is always forever. Some of the phrases of In the Middle of an Island are:

*In the middle of an island, In the middle of the ocean, You and I beneath the moonlight, With just the monkeys and palm trees.*

*Though there's no island at all, Just a picture on my wall, My darlin', how I wish we could be.*

In thinking about these catchy song lyrics with their evocative words and seductive rhythms that build mental pictures of the island as a paradise for two, I am drawn to a more contemplative expression of the idea of here and there in Margaret Scott's poem Castaway. This insightful work is set on an island in the space of the mind, it is full of metaphorical detail, time is inconsequential and the experience of being alone, away from the mundane, offer inner refreshment and necessary physical contrast.

*S sometimes a neighbour's look, a post-card, a telephone call will carry you up the shore of another life and leave you gaping amazed at sudden jungle a world away from the dolorous desk the spruce back-yard, the brick and tile in Rosebud … The canopy's alive with flitting shapes unknown beyond the confines of this island. Here is the castaway's camp, his palisade, contrivances he's fashioned year by year, stores saved from the wreck of his old ship before it sank from sight beyond the reef … A saw, pannikin hang by the bed where every day he wakes alone at dawn to a view of mountains. Those peeks rise over the trees in a blue scrawl whose message you seem to have read from a different angle on the wall of sky to the east of your own island.*

The popular idea of ‘paradise’ as an island, usually one that is tropical, in the Pacific Ocean, beyond the reach of stifling metropolitan influence and ripe for the making of a utopia is, in this day and age, an unlikely reality. Imbedded in the idea of island paradise are timelessness, innocence and freedom. These qualities may also be elusive in contemporary island life. For example, the community of Norfolk Island, comprising some of the descendants of Fletcher Christian’s followers from the HMS Bounty mutiny of 1789 amplify this reality. Norfolk Island is remote and, to some extent, the community is insular. The Island has been given self-government by the Commonwealth of Australia but is administered as an external territory. Ultimate power rests with mainland Australia and the Norfolk Island community rely on and are influenced by the dynamics of tourism. Perhaps Paul Gauguin’s work created in the French Colony of Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands during the 1890s best describes us the nature of a genuine island paradise before the hegemony of a colonising power. Gauguin’s paintings are subjective, allegorical expressions that utilise the incredible beauty of a unique place to describe the artist’s delight in nature and the felicity of the Polynesian people. These lucid, richly decorative works tell of the interdependence between people and place and, in symbolic terms, through the perception of a gifted European, reveal a sense of mystery, timelessness and calm. Gauguin’s pictures captured the purity and innocence of Tahitian life in a time when travel to and from such exotic places was difficult enough to be uncommon. When he returned home with his paintings the Parisian clientele rejected them. As works of art they were considered confronting and primitive compared to the sophisticated cosmopolitan subjects of the day.

Since British settlement in 1803 the island state of Tasmania and its avatar Van Dieman’s Land has been variously described as gothic, remote and a treasure island. Its people have been portrayed as backward, insular and as possessing a strong Anglo tradition. Humanising the natural environment into a Euro-centric cultural space became the main project of our forefathers. Altering the natural environment gave them the capacity to build confidence, certainty and a sense of being at home in a foreign place. In the twenty-first century we have inherited a place that reveals traces of colonial history through customs, literature and monuments and one that continues to evolve through the deeds, outlook and aspirations of our community. Unlike the idyllic Polynesian setting recorded by Paul Gauguin, Tasmania is continually influenced by opinion and trade from the mainland. It cannot afford to be on the political margin, perceived either as an economic basket case or a cultural backwater. Tasmania needs to confidently take its place of responsibility in the Commonwealth States of Australia and yet remain distinctive, self-sufficient and true to its natural assets.

Modern-day Tasmania is profoundly significant to many of its people— it is home, the centre of the world to many of its inhabitants and an abstract extension of each individual. For me, describing myself as a modern-day

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4. Written by Nick Acquaviva and Ted Vernick
5. Scott, Margaret, Collected Poems, Montepelier Press, Hobart, 2000
Tasmanian means possessing a sense of ‘knowing’, that is combining the visceral, the instinctive and the habitual, with familiar social mores and physical locale. These two characteristics meld and mature in a setting of time and place and, as Yi-Fu Yuan in his book Space and Place remarks, the ‘feel’ of a place is registered in our bones and muscles and is made up of experiences, repeated day after day and over a span of years. It is a long-held Tasmanian view that unless a person has lived here for a generation he is not generally thought of as local.

I am struck by the local idea that being accepted as a Tasmanian means I am no longer a mainlander and yet, neither am I regarded as an islander. Instead, I am a Tasmanian. The nature of this place, an island, has significantly contributed to how fellow Tasmanians see me. This also influences how, in their minds, people from the mainland construct the idea of Tasmania and its people. While I am not firstly described as an islander, the qualities of islandness do shape my identity here. To begin with, Tasmania is sea-locked and separated from the Mainland by the 200 nautical mile wide Bass Strait, which is universally regarded as one of the most unforgiving expanses of water in the world. In thinking about the particularities of geographical separation I am reminded of Australia’s anthem where the ocean is contemplated as a boundary around our home. For example:

Australians all let us rejoice. For we are young and free; We’ve golden soil and wealth for toil; Our home is girt by sea; …

The coast is an outline that encircles the island; it marks out the ever-changing space of land and sea and provides Tasmanians with potent symbols for independence, and arrival and departure. Therefore the surrounding coastline is a threshold, a point that when reached in an interstate journey prepares a local for the homecoming and the return to the comfort of the familiar. Alternatively, the same point reached on an outbound journey marks in one’s mind the moment of physical separation from home and homeland.

Unlike many other islands, Tasmania is physically separated from the mainland as there are no connecting tunnels, sea bridges or causeways to facilitate inbound and outbound movement. From the air the island of Tasmania is a discrete entity and the lyrics sung by Tony Bennett ‘in the middle of the ocean’ have strong resonance. It seems to me that the locality and smallness of Tasmania in comparison to the mainland, or the ‘big island’ as locals affectionately call it, continue to be a powerful force in shaping our identity. The reliance on sea and air travel to places outside Tasmania means that our island community is potentially less mobile than those of other Australian states where there is no physical impediment to crossing borders. Tasmanian islandness can be found in the rich local tradition of developing active and life-long networks of family and friends. Furthermore, islandness is associated with loyalties to local institutions, the participation in island events and the fierce protection of Tasmania’s ancient and unique environment. Islandness is no more evident than in the forceful way Tasmanians gather together to exploit the nature of place as a political weapon to win Federal concessions and favoured treatment, as well as deal with internal threats of insensitive development and unwanted change. Personal identity and attachment to homeland go hand in hand in Tasmania. With a landmass of 6.8 million hectares and 488,948 people, the island is of a human scale in its accessibility. Nature is pervasive in all its forms whether one lives in the cities or the countryside and the sea is never more than an hour’s drive away. It is almost possible to know of or have heard of just about everyone, or at least of their family. In a recent interview on the qualities of islandness Tasmanian author Richard Flanagan said ‘people here have as many vices as anywhere, but there is a culture of understatement, compared with the increasingly Americanised mainland – hyping – because it is a professional necessity for people over there. But you couldn’t do that here because you’d be caught out immediately. People know the ordinary truth about you.’ Becoming known, as in being accepted, starts one on the long path to belonging in Tasmania.

Professor Vincent McGrath

6. Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1977, p.184-185
7. Australia Fair, the Australian national anthem was written by Peter Dodds McCormack in 1879. It was adopted as the national anthem in 1984 (with minor alterations to the original score)
Christl Berg

Cataract Gorge Walks: response 1
Pigment print on archival paper
42 x 30 cm
2006

Cataract Gorge Walks: response 2
Pigment print on archival paper
42 x 30 cm
2006

Cataract Gorge Walks: response 3
Pigment print on archival paper
42 x 30 cm
2006

University of Tasmania

Helene Weeding

Facing East
Oil on canvas
30 x 90 cm
2007

University of Tasmania
Simon Bourke

Bird of the Islands
Optically manipulated analogue photography, pigment ink on canvas, mounted on nine panels
84 x 126 cm
2007
University of Tasmania

John Bissland

Shipbuilding Plates 1
Silver gelatin print
15 x 22 cm
2006

Shipbuilding Plates 2
Silver gelatin print
15 x 22 cm
2006

Shipbuilding Plates 3
Silver gelatin print
15 x 22 cm
2006

University of Tasmania
Edna Broad

**Time and Tide**

Porcelain, raku, paperclay, handmade paper, triptych acrylic on canvas

Dimensions variable

2006

University of Tasmania

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Catherine Di Murro

**Antarctic Season:**

*Science, Adventure, Exploration and a Gimp*

Mixed media

171.5 x 15 cm

2007

University of Tasmania
Zsolt Faludi

Island One
Ceramic glass, steel and resin
31.8 x 9.8 x 3 cm  2007

Island Two
Ceramic glass, steel and resin
31.8 x 9.8 x 3 cm  2007

Island Three
Ceramic glass, steel and resin
31.8 x 9.8 x 3 cm  2007

University of Tasmania

David Hamilton

Air Awl
Brass, chrome steel, lights and electronics
30 x 30 x 15 cm  2007

University of Tasmania
Stephen Hudson

**Ocean Jewels 1**
Ceramic
22 x 22 x 12 cm
2006

**Ocean Jewels 2**
Ceramic
22 x 22 x 12 cm
2006

**Ocean Jewels 3**
Ceramic
22 x 22 x 12 cm
2006

University of Tasmania

David Hawley

**Random Input (detail)**
Acrylic screen-print on plywood
135 x 29.5 cm
2006

David Hawley is represented by Criterion Gallery, Tasmania and Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Victoria
Sachiko Mardon

**Dimensions Variable**
Cardboard, clay
14 x 44 x 32 cm
2007
University of Tasmania

Dr Wayne Z Hudson

**How Do I Look?**
Kangaroo hide, silicon breast implant, fibre optic lighting, mdf wood, sheep hide
20 x 15 x 42 cm
2007

**Travelling Light**  Kangaroo hide
18 x 4 x 12 cm  2007

**Swelling Visa**  Textured pink hide
20 x 6 x 10 cm  2007
University of Tasmania
Adrian Stabb

**Pacific Pie**
Bronze, huonpine
46 x 25 x 3 cm
2007
University of Tasmania

Carly Peters

**Place**
Handmade paper
Dimensions variable
2007
University of Tasmania
Jo Thorold

Autumn Picnic

Watercolour and mixed media

44 x 32 x 14 cm

2007

University of Tasmania

Judith-Rose Thomas

Hand Series

Modelling compound & gouache on canvas

Dimensions variable

2006

University of Tasmania
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