FLOATING BODIES

Reconciling Image and Object through Drawing

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This exegesis plots the course of the *Floating Bodies* project and its ambition to examine climate change iconography through a reconciliation of Image and Object.

From an initial polarity, in both concept and outcome, between pictorial and sculptural elements of a single work of art, the project pivoted to consider non-physical ways of combining or converging the two- and three-dimensional.

Interrogations of the work and praxes of Vilja Celmins and Anton Henning sparked a broader apprehension of the reconciliation, corroborated by reading of curators Sabine Eckmann and Gertrud Koch on poststructural space, its representation and framing. A synthesis of Image and Object could be found in Image OF Object beyond the conventions and limitations of still life.

The project consequently turned to drawing to re-present and re-frame repaired objects montaged with weather and sea imagery. A pendant interrogation of the Sublime and European Romantic land- and sea-scape in parallel with a preference for the contemplative and the visionary led to the making of large obsessively crafted images of repaired *domestica* threatened by colossal seas. Drawing has long been a part of this practice, but had become devalued through overuse; the rediscovery of the power of the massed mark and the satisfactions of the protracted deliberate accretion of an image are the two signal revelations of the *Floating Bodies* project.

An early political and aesthetic commitment to a humble materiality means that the *Floating Bodies* suite of drawings that concludes the project are rendered in ballpoint pen on paper, transient media that reflect the environmental preoccupations of the project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

And we spectators, always, everywhere,
Looking at everything and never *from*!
It floods us. We arrange it. It decays.
We arrange it again, and we decay.[1]

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies: the Eighth Elegy*

[1] Rainer Maria Rilke, Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus, trans. A. Poulin Jr. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), 59.

PART ONE

CONCEPTION / INCEPTION

This Master of Design project had two points of origin, one emotional and instinctive the other rational and intellectual, from which it proceeded on parallel paths until they inevitably and necessarily converged.

The first path is the project's content: Climate Change. The second is its quest to reconcile Image and Object.

It was through drawing that a synthesis was found.

Climate Change is arguably the greatest threat facing humanity and planet Earth today. Although scientific evidence for a warming planet and rising seas has been accumulating for decades, a single media event could be said to have brought Climate Change the focus of popular attention. Some of the urgency and impetus generated by Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* feature documentary[2] has dissipated, but the threat of catastrophic climate change remains. Arguments over the science, whether the predicted and observed changes to climate are anthropogenic and whether climate change denial should be given equal media attention do not detract from the vulnerability the First World feels to the anticipated impact of rising temperatures and rising sea levels. Desertification, crop failure, ocean current collapse and extinctions are all predicted within a few decades. Climate Change has been characterized as this generation's anxiety, just as Population Growth and Nuclear War troubled previous generations, and like them the social and cultural impact of the anxiety are enormous. The imagery and arguments of Climate Change loom large in the zeitgeist.

This ubiquity, and the visibility of climate change images make it an obvious subject for artistic inquiry. There is a shocking and unforgettable series of images from the devastation of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina in 2005; human bodies floating in suburban streets. It is still difficult to understand how citizens of a wealthy First World city could die in numbers in their summer clothes, in their homes and in the streets of their neighbourhoods. The 2010-2011 Queensland floods generated another library of images, especially of buildings (notably dwellings) and other manmade structures inundated and truncated by a vast plane of muddy water, and many images of smaller buildings and cars simply floating away. The initial fascination with inundation imagery was purely aesthetic. Inundation offers dramatic revisions of the familiar – where there were fields there is now a lake, where there was a city, isolated pinnacles now protrude from a plane of water. The familiar is rendered alarmingly alien. Like the iceberg that

Fig. 1. *Untitled,* 1996, oil and acrylic on pine, 1996, 265 x 165 x 165 mm.

has become emblematic of climate change, only a fraction of the known is visible, and the viewer is left to conjecture or surmise what is hidden, damaged or lost below water level. This is true of any object partially submerged in opaque liquid, but is shockingly and poignantly true of the floating human body, edited by the plane of water, bound by a distinct contour, rendered anonymous; objectified.

These images also prompted speculation about the Floating Body of physics, which displaces its own volume when immersed in water, and further, the displacement of individuals, populations, societies, even species, by apocalyptic climate change.

The second path stems from a small painted object made in 1996 *(Fig. 1)*.

Fig. 2. Colin McCahon, *Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury,* 1959, oil on canvas, 890 x 1170 mm, Auckland Art Gallery /Toi o Tamaki.

The (untitled) object refers to Colin McCahon's 1959 painting *Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury (Fig. 2),* but whereas McCahon's oil on board implies a signpost, the 'trig' manifests the pointing, directional object in three dimensions. Although the landscape imagery was only crudely applied to the surface of the object it seemed to offer a third order of perception, beyond (or despite) plane and mass. The combination, even interpenetration, of image and object led to speculation about the hierarchy of perception: which was perceived first, Image or Object, and did the perception of one affect perception of the other? In what ways might Image and Object be combined to exploit or reconcile these perceptions?

'Hierarchy of perception' is taken to mean the privileging of Image or Object in the apprehension of works of art that combine the two. Does the viewer privilege one over the other; does the maker?

Rising Tide: Climate Change

'Climate Change' has become the accepted term for the range of predicted and observed changes in weather, ocean levels and global temperatures. It has also become the focus of social concern and media attention in the First World.

> "Global climate change has already had observable effects on the environment. Glaciers have shrunk, ice on rivers and lakes is breaking up earlier, plant and animal ranges have shifted and trees are flowering sooner. Effects that scientists had predicted in the past would result from global climate change are now occurring: loss of sea ice, accelerated sea level rise and longer, more intense heat waves. Scientists have high confidence that global temperatures will continue to rise for

decades to come, largely due to greenhouse gasses [sic] produced by human activities."[3]

This project has chosen Sea Level Rise as a symptom of climate change and a rich source of storm and inundation iconography; an island nation like New Zealand is particularly vulnerable to increasingly violent storms and sea level rise, and as the inheritors of two of the world's great maritime traditions (the penetration and colonisation of the Pacific by Polynesian and European explorers and settlers), the sea figures largely in this country's conscious and unconscious minds.

Even conservative institutions are now acknowledging sea level rise as fact.

> "Data from NASA's Grace satellites show that the land ice sheets in both Antarctica and Greenland are losing mass. The continent of Antarctica has been losing more than 100 cubic Kilometers of ice per year since 2002."

> "As global temperatures rise, we can expect increasing extremes in our weather. Recent experience in the UK and the rest of Europe… shows that extreme weather related events have significant human and economic costs. Higher temperatures will have knock on effects for climate across the globe, influenced strongly by regional factors, including more intense precipitation events; increased droughts and floods in tropical regions, and increased hurricane and typhoon wind intensity. The worst fallout from global warming will be experienced in the world's poorest countries, which are both the most vulnerable and also the least able to adapt… Climate change will intensify the effects of poverty in the world's developing regions through losses of biodiversity and agriculture, with adverse impacts on health affecting almost every sector of society"[4]

There is a growing sense of alarm at the predicted effects of a warming planet and a rising tide of protest, especially in the vulnerable Third World, at the lack of action by First World governments to limit the burning of fossil fuels. Despite its climate awareness, *Floating Bodies* is not a climate art or eco art project. Curators have brought diverse genres together under a climate theme[5], but that very diversity suggests that climate art may never achieve the status of a fixed category. While art stars like Olafur Eliasson and Ai Weiwei have addressed climate as part of much broader praxes, lesser mortals have spread climate art across a

> "…variety of modes, ranging from critique to practical demonstrations and shading into other current tendencies like social practice, relational aesthetics, environmental activism and systems theory [to] point the way to a more ecologically sustainable future."[6]

The ambition of the *Floating Bodies* project is: To scrutinize Climate Apocalypse iconography through drawn images of found and made objects, reconciling Image and Object.

3 NASA, "Global Climate Change: Effects," accessed March 17, 2014. http://climate.nasa.gov/effects

4 David Buckland, Ali McGilp and Sion Parkinson, eds. Burning Ice: Art & Climate Change (London: Cape Farewell, 2006), 129.

5 Eleanor Heartney, "Art for the Anthropecene Era," Art in America February (2014): 76-81.

6 Ibid., 76.

Kissing the Wall: The Image and the Object

"Installation has become naturalised, as has a self-conscious contextualising of art work, while post-modern fashion has largely rendered redundant the categorical distinctions between different forms of art that previously made sculpture seem problematic… The troublesome facticity of the sculptural object has largely disappeared from view, and in the process lost much of its potential for portentous inertness, as well as its intermittent resistance to image-based consumerism."[7]

There has been a crisis of categorisation in art since Post Modernism, and an impulse to find spaces for investigation and practice between the old orders and genres. This willful ignorance or suspension of the old Orders of Art has become a fertile area of investigation by art makers; we live and produce in an age of mash-ups and genre-busting. Sculpture, or the third dimension generally, has especially become the site of much investigation and experimentation. Recently there has been such

"… an exponential expansion of what might come under the rubric of 'sculpture'… that the term can seem a baggy monster, a catchall for everything that cannot be termed 'painting'."[8]

There are many examples of practitioners working in what has been called 'expanded field painting'[9,10]. One of the most prominent and accessible is Jessica Stockholder. Her work is usually described as 'paintings in space'[11] and Stockholder herself says of her work that it

"'…isn't sculpture or painting, but a combination of both, resting heavily on the conventions of painting' and that she is 'interested in picture making and the surface of things, and the wall and other kinds of surface as evocative space'. She has also noted that although her work 'may be more related to sculpture than to painting, because it takes up space in a room' it is conceptually closer to painting because it 'relies on viewers having some sense in their head of what painting is'."[12]

In the 1988-2003 series *Kissing the Wall,* Stockholder's objects preserved only the most tentative of links to the wall, in a gesture of greeting or farewell. Sometimes the touch is a power cord, once merely the glow of a lamp *(Fig. 3)*.

"Kwon proposes that Stockholder's work is so effective because [it] merges three distinct notions of space – fictive, abstract and real, or literal space – or what she terms 'the space of lived experience'[13]. She contends that this results in her installations being positioned between the pictorial, two-dimensional flatness of painting and the scale, spatiality and three-dimensionality of architecture by embracing 'painting and architecture equally'[14]. The consequence of this is that the viewer experiences her installations simultaneously as a picture, an object and an architectural construction."[15]

It was anticipated that the *Floating Bodies* project would occupy this interstice between the fixed categories, but unlike Stockholder, using the repertoire and vocabulary of figuration.
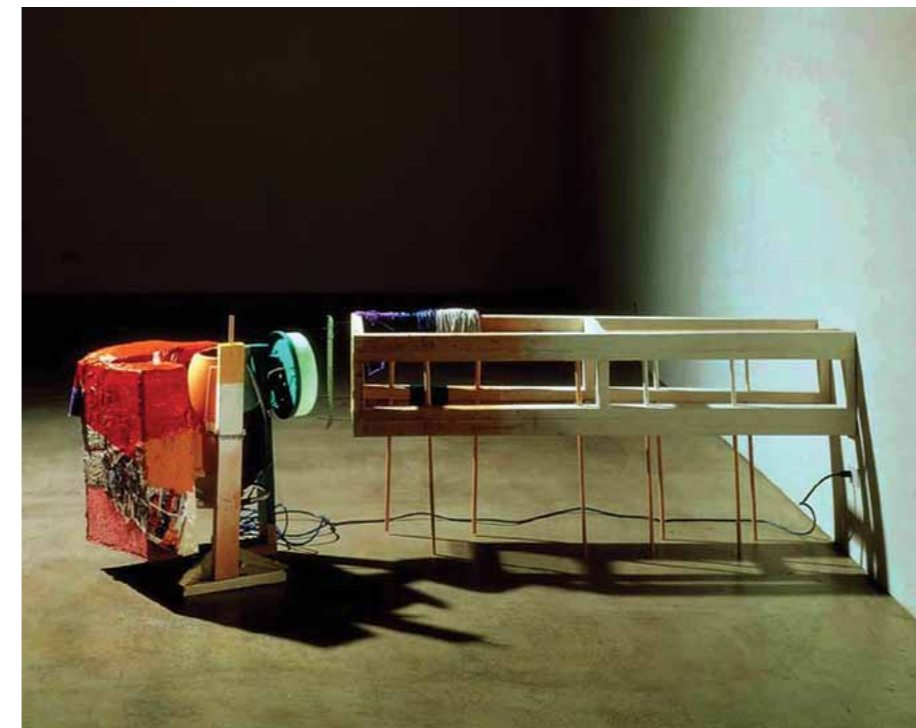

Fig. 3. Jessica Stockholder *Made of Two Elements,* 1990, wood, cloth, clothes line, wire lath, oil and acrylic paint two: 3 green light bulbs, light fixture, oil, enamel and acrylic paint, styrofoam, carpet, newspaper, magazines, glue, metal, street lamp shade, cloth and hardware, 965 x 787 x 2845 mm.

7 Alex Potts, The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 4.

8 Karen Wilkin, introduction to A Sculpture Reader: Contemporary Sculpture Since 1980, eds. Glenn Harper and Twylene Moyer (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006), 11.

9 Francesca Mataraga, Colour, Space, Composition: Painting in the Expanded Field, (PhD diss., College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 2012).

10 Gustavo Fares, "Painting in the Expanded Field," Janus Head 7, no.2 (2004):477-487.

11 Lisa Liebmann, "Junk Cultured," Frieze no. 9 (1993), accessed March 18, 2014, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/junk_cultured/

12 Jessica Stockholder quoted in Susan Gonzalez, "Color, 'Stuff' and 'Moving through the World' Inspire Artist," Yale Bulletin & Calendar 36, no. 7 (2007), accessed February 27, 2014 http://www.yale.edu/opa/arc-ybc/v36.n7/story9.html

13 Miwon Kwon, "Promiscuity of Space: Some Thoughts on Jessica Stockholder's Scenographic Compositions," Grey Room 18, (2005): 57-58.

14 Ibid., 59.

15 Miwon Kwon, quoted in Francesca Mataraga, Colour, Space, Composition, 118-120

FRAMING THE PROJECT

Before the current project was framed, attempts at combination or reconciliation of Image and Object were made, all rudimentary and all tending either to relief sculpture or object with backdrop, such as the untitled Mount Taranaki piece (2008) *(Fig. 4)* in which the image and object are analogous, or *Iwi/Kiwi* (2008) *(Fig. 5)* in which the image acts solely as a backdrop to the objects. These choices may have been informed by the brief currency for backdrops in the 1980s in New Zealand, when Maria Olsen, Bruce Jesson and Derrick Cherrie all produced paired painted and modeled forms.

Fig. 4. *Untitled,* 2008, kauri and oil pastel on paper, object 145 x 195 x 190 mm, image 500 x 500 mm.

This new interest in objects in what had hitherto been a painterly practice can be seen in a series of notebooks of drawings compiled between 2001 and 2006 *(Fig. 6)*. These notebooks contain scores of drawings of museum objects, gleaned from museum collections in New Zealand and Sweden, from books and from magazines. The carefully rendered monochrome ballpoint pen drawings were intended as *aides memoire;* the collection of a library of powerful yet simple forms. These notebooks were also of considerable therapeutic value; the intensely realised drawings were a distraction in difficult times, and the meditative process of drawing was calming and curative. It will be seen that the lessons of these exercises were only slowly learnt.

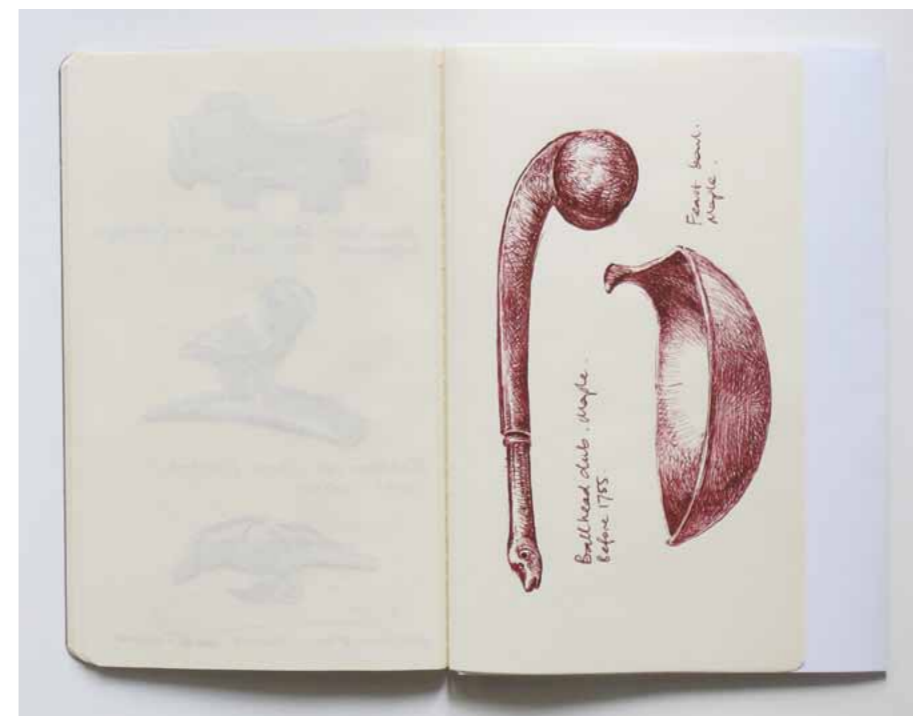Fig. 5. *Iwi/Kiwi,* 2008, totara, pine and oil pastel on paper, 505 x 695 x 90 mm.

Fig. 6. *Notebook, 2006, ballpoint pen on paper, 210 x 260 mm (opened).*

Fig. 7. *Portrait,* 2006, acrylic epoxy and pencil on pine, 285 x 290 x 225 mm.

Fig. 8. *Untitled,* 2006, oil and acrylic on pine, 280 x 300 x 235 mm.

Two portrait heads from this period show the first rudimentary attempts to reconcile the Image and the Object. The first is fully three-dimensional *(Fig. 7);* the second suggests dimensionality through a simple intersection of planes *(Fig. 8).* Imagery was applied to these planes in the same way it had been added to the Trig piece, not as decoration but to add information that might tempt the viewer to prioritize the Image over the Object.

At the outset it was expected that the project would continue to explore the combination of Image and Object and that an initial period of experimentation would be necessary, in which unconventional materials would be auditioned to reflect, project, and transmit images onto and through objects. It was envisaged that mirrors, gauzes and glass could be used to suggest the inundation of commonplace objects (namely furniture) and edit them in ways that might interrupt perception of them, as floodwaters and rising seas might. As well as reflection and inversion, the intention was to explore false perspective, distortion of scale, duplication and stratification to test the boundaries of Image and Object. The ambition of the project was to look beyond the historically vindicated genres of combined painting and sculpture, namely; Polychrome Sculpture, Trompe L'oeil Painting, Grisaille Painting, Diorama, and Relief Sculpture. At the very outset of the project a commitment was made to eschew relief and backdrop as solutions to the reconciliation of Image and Object. These were seen as easy (even lazy) options.

With no end in mind, a period of experimentation followed, in which a number of reconciliations was found. The first experiment was to try to find the point at which the image, specifically a drawn image, lifted off the plane – how much dimensionality could be achieved by drawing or, conversely, how little physical dimension was required to achieve a convincing corporeality. A pair of underpants was chosen as subject, later regretted due to the readings viewers put on it; an abandoned garment was all that was intended and the choice was motivated by scale and manageability. The first piece was a conventional drawing; all image. The second, a cutout, achieved most of what was sought; a convincing corporeality where none existed *(Fig. 9).* The effect is achieved by crosshatching, which seems to confound the perception of surface. The eye cannot settle, and is deceived into reading the illusion, not the object. The third piece is a carved relief; even before drawing was applied to the surface, it could be seen that the dimensionality was redundant *(Fig. 10).* These pieces were intended for floor display, to reinforce the abandonment idea, and the trompe l'oeil is enhanced by a greater viewing distance.

Fig. 9. *Untitled,* 2011, acrylic and ballpoint pen on MDF board, 190 x 230 x 5 mm.

Fig. 10. *Untitled,* 2011, pine, 190 x 240 x 8 mm.

Although drawing on the Object could be characterised as surface embellishment, taking the work towards polychrome relief, it was found that it did disrupt perception. Marks on the object can appear to float beyond it.

"[Georg] Baselitz's...comment about the surface marking of a skin tattoo and the shape of the body beneath encapsulates this well: 'One... deforms the body by an opposing articulation.' [His] dabs of colour do not model the surface either, but stand out as independent splashes of paint, the forms they suggest almost floating free of the roughly hewn wooden block. The result is to foreground a disjunction already implicit in the viewing of earlier sculpture, that between the apprehension of overall shape and the varying sensations produced by looking closely at its more intensely activated aspects."[16]

Jessica Stockholder has observed the same phenomenon:

"I love color because it is localized and fixed to a physical thing, on the one hand, but can appear to jump and move in the air, on the other."[17]

[16] Potts, The Sculptural Imagination, 4.

[17] Elspeth Carruthers et al., Jessica Stockholder: Kissing the Wall: Works 1988-2003. (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2004), 19.

Fig. 11. Untitled, 2011, masking tape and ballpoint pen on paper, both 125 x 135 x 210 mm.

Fig. 12. *Untitled,* 2011, found chair, cardboard, matchsticks and marking pen on plastic, dimensions variable.

In the next iteration "three-dimensional drawings" were made with linear elements like matchsticks. These were abandoned because the results were obviously more sculptures than drawing. Some attempts at reconciliation were literal. A Mobius Strip can be said to be two-dimensional although it occupies space, and the looping palindrome and whakatauki can be read endlessly *(Fig. 11).* Again the result is obviously sculptural, and the wordiness and literality did not satisfy.

An image drawn on a transparent support was draped over a furniture object to suggest weather *(Fig. 12).* This was a qualified success. It was not anticipated that the dark crosshatched drawing plus the dark shadows it generated would almost completely obscure the little stick house that sits on a plane under the seat of the chair. Although the piece satisfied many of the ambitions of the project, it failed as a work of art – unattractive and uncommunicative and largely inert.

Fig. 13. *Commandments,* 2011, pine and ballpoint pen on paper, object 535 × 375 × 35 mm, image 705 x 500 mm.

An object was paired with an image of the same object in a nod to Joseph Kosuth, but in which two-letter words that reference both Buddhist and Judeo-Christian philosophies spell out the manifesto of the project *(Fig. 13).* The Image was not strictly used as a backdrop, and there was no drawing on the Object. This piece, too, satisfied many of the aims of the project, but as a work of art was lifeless.

Both these pieces show the same conscious and insincere attempt to avoid the constraints of the project's intent. They remain literal to the point of cleverness. Neither yet shows control over the effects of materials and techniques, especially when combined. *Commandments* simply separates them, while the chair piece shows a failure to predict how the drawing and chair would interact when lit.

Fig. 14. *Ark,* 2011, acrylic and ballpoint pen on pine and MDF board, 980 x 910 x 600 mm.

Fig. 15. *40 Days,* 2011, masking tape, ballpoint pen and matchsticks on cardboard, 690 x 250 x 315 mm.

Attempts were made to advance the project in both scale and content towards finished work. *Ark (Fig. 14)* used accumulated ballpoint pen drawing on the surface of a table made of offcuts to suggest the depth of water inundating a dwelling, and *Forty Days* used the collected cardboard packaging of forty days' consumption as support for weather imagery and matchstick windows in a thought-balloon configuration *(Fig. 15)*.

Ark can reasonably be categorized as a relief sculpture, of which the tabletop presentation is incidental. Despite the thorough activation of the surface with ballpoint pen crosshatching the surface remains stubbornly two-dimensional., perhaps because of the minimal displacement depicted. No reconciliation of 2D and 3D is manifest; it does not work as relief sculpture, nor as a drawing. Sculpturally, the third dimension is only briefly perturbed by the house object. As a drawing, *Ark* does not rise above a monotone, and the solitary 3D irruption serves only to point out the monotony. *Ark* persists in the self-conscious materiality of this phase of the project: there was much internal debate about the newness of the wooden offcuts and the carbon heaviness of the acrylic paint and ballpoint pens. Perhaps the abiding lesson learnt from *Ark* was the "wow factor" of the intensely crosshatched drawing – this attracted much attention and comment, and endorsed the medium and the technique.

40 Days is equally burdened by materiality, but can be seen to advance the project incrementally. The way in which the pen work activated the surface of the cardboard objects, and opened a profound space, was revelatory. *40 Days* also shows the first use of Romantic weather imagery in ballpoint pen.

Although the objects lack grace, and the project remains earthbound, it is beginning to find its feet; the Romantics have been identified as a source of compatible and evocative imagery, and a humble yet powerful drawing tool has been identified. The project still clings to the third dimension though, in the belief that therein lies the reconciliation of Image and Object.

If these attempts at reconciliation can be characterized as coming from the Object end of the continuum, work was concurrently being done at the Image end. Romantic weather imagery was rendered in pastel on inverted packaging. This imagery was sourced from portraits by Thomas Lawrence, Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough and others, and the portrait figures removed *(Figs. 16, 17)*. The initial attraction was solely to the weather imagery in these paintings, although excision of the portraits defuses the class politics of the original works and leaves the theatrical portentous weather. Read from our post-industrial, post-colonial and post-imperial standpoint these backdrops are all bluff and bluster, yet they can be given new framing and reading; as storm warnings of profound social, political and climate change.

This introduction to the weather imagery of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to an investigation of the Sublime, and the inevitable corollary with Climate Change imagery. This will be expanded below in *The Sublime and Climate Change*. At this early stage in the project the attraction of these images was largely aesthetic, and the importance of the Sublime and Romantic traditions to the content and context of the work had yet to be considered. Although the titles *Commandments, Ark, and Forty Days* all appear to be Biblical references, this was not intentional. It may be that an unconscious association was being made between raging climate change and the retributive God of the Old Testament or, more likely, the association was with Romantic eighteenth and nineteenth century models that use weather metaphors for divine wrath.

Fig. 16. *Untitled,* 2011, oil pastel on cardboard, both 305 x 445 mm.

Fig. 17. *Untitled,* 2011, oil pastel on cardboard, left 415 x 285 mm, right 450 x 305 mm.

PART TWO

CLIMATE CONSCIENCE
AND MATERIALITY

A creative project addressing climate change that is not conscious of its use of materials, or that uses only high-art carbon-heavy materials, could be accused of hypocrisy. In the early stages of the project much consideration was given to the choice of materials; recycling and repurposing wherever possible. But it was not possible or appropriate within the scope of the project to, for instance, trace the carbon footprint of the ballpoint pens chosen. The final stance adopted was a preference for humble everyday materials.

As Stephanie Smith noted in Weather Report: Art & Climate Change, 2007

> "…if we are going to show art that addresses climate change or other topics related to sustainability, we should consider ourselves ethically bound to thoughtfully assess how we make use of resources (including money, time and good will as well as materials)."[18]

Humble materials have an honourable pedigree all the way from the Cubists, through Duchamp and Dada to Arte Povera, Rauschenberg and many current practitioners. These materials may sometimes be toxic, unrecyclable, even made by child labour – it is not part of this process or practice to examine the origins of all the materials employed; the choices are primarily aesthetic. Political choices cannot trump aesthetic ones.

> "If handled bluntly by artists or institutions, [noble intentions] could flatten work or leach out criticality, paradox, mess, play and poetry. We need to be careful that worthy aims do not diminish the possibility of profound aesthetic experiences in whatever media, processes or sites artists choose to activate."[19]

The use of recycled, found and humble materials suggest contingency and the provisional nature of human endeavour in the face of colossal forces. They also speak of compulsion, as if the work was motivated by need, not desire, as if by an obsessive office worker with access to the stationery cupboard. The art of prisoners of war, concentration camp inmates and the American outsider artist James Castle all has the same compulsive quality. Castle's materials were limited to found paper, soot and saliva; he made his own drawing tools from sharpened sticks. It is hard to think of an art practice with a smaller ecological impact. In these cases of artistic extremity the work is always lucid and powerfully communicative, transforming base materials in a way that is almost alchemical.

[18] Stephanie Smith, "Weather Systems: Questions About Art and Climate Change", in Weather Report: Art & Climate Change, Lucy R. Lippard et al. (Boulder, CO: Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), p. 15.
[19] Ibid.

Conversely, the use of recycled and repurposed materials can be used in a quest for novelty, and the present project has not been immune to that impulse.

> "Rather, [the] use of unusual art materials sourced in unwonted ways…is more significantly motivated by a desire to achieve visual freshness, and the work shown here says more about the exhaustion of the more traditional methods of making than it does about environmental concerns. If environmentalism with its anxieties about the depletion of resources and the scarcity of materials hadn't come along, art writers would probably have had to invent it to justify surveys of this sort."[20]

Attempts to revive a flagging practice may resort to the novel, the fashionable and the outrageous. *Floating Bodies* was seen as an opportunity to examine the third dimension and new materials, but perversely, or perhaps inevitably, (and as will be seen) the fate of the project was "to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time."[21]

By this stage of the project considerations of materials, imagery, politics and meaning were weighing heavily on the work, the preference for Image or Object was unresolved and the reconciliation of the two no further advanced. The work had become burdened and overthought, it was literal and wordy. Rather than approaching reconciliation, an avoidance strategy of oscillating between work at the poles of Image and Object ensued, and a metaphor by which to refer to climate change and relieve the burden of depiction had yet to be found.

Scale is a problem in environmental discourse – the problems are vast, the solutions very long term. This is equally true in climate art, where the need for metaphor, analogy and reference is the only way to avoid making polemical, wordy and worthy work dogged by visual puns.

Shored Up: The Repair Metaphor

The Repair metaphor that gave the project a new impetus was found through this oscillation between Image and Object. A cracked coffee cup was "shored up" on the inside using matchsticks, inverting the cup's function by alluding to the exclusion of liquid rather than containment *(Fig. 18)*. Similar repairs were made to other domestic objects, on an ascending scale. At different times these repairs have been characterized as poignant, futile and preposterous. Although they have their foundation in the folk tradition of repairing domestic objects to extend their lives, the absurdity and impracticality of these repairs speak more about the futility of human attempts to mend a planet catastrophically damaged by climate change.

Fig. 18. *Shored Up,* 2012, found mug and matchsticks, 100 x 100 x 80 mm.

[20] Robert Shore, review of Raw+Material=Art: Found Scavenged and Upcycled, by Tristan Manco, Elephant no. 11 (2012): 205.
[21] T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," in Four Quartets (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace, 1943), canto v, lines 28-29.

This small insight had the force of epiphany and lifted some of the burden of concept from the work that followed. The pendant group of repairs, all titled *Shored Up* gave the project a fresh focus and momentum *(Figs. 19, 20).*

There's an obvious resonance between these objects and the damaged and repaired objects from Andrew Baseman's *Past Imperfect: The Art of Inventive Repair* collection *(Fig. 21).*
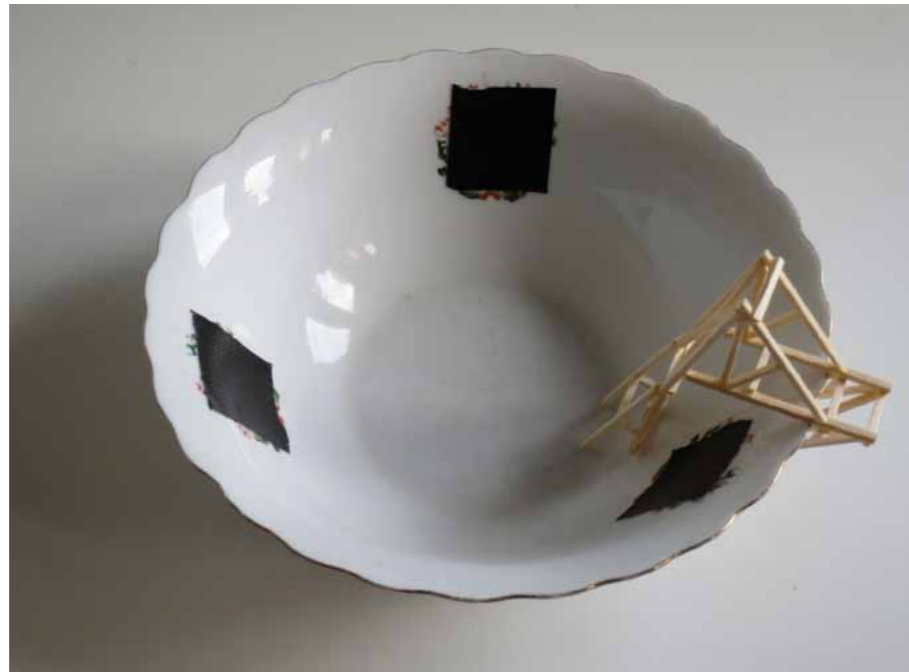

Fig. 19. *Shored Up,* 2012, found bowl, packing tape and matchsticks, 70 x 205 x 240 mm

Fig. 20. *Shored Up,* found plate and matchsticks, 30 x 290 x 290 mm.

Fig. 21. *Chinese porcelain charger with 35 staples,* c.1730, from Andrew Bateman collection: *Past Imperfect, the Art of Inventive Repair.*

[22] Andrew Baseman, "Past Imperfect: The Art of Inventive Repair," last modified May 22, 2012. http://andrewbaseman.com/blog/

[23] Marilynn Gelfman Karp, In Flagrante Collecto: Caught in the Act of Collecting (New York, NY: Abrams, 2006), 37.

"Antiques with inventive repairs…are unique examples of necessity and thrift, made during a time before Krazy Glue was invented. Unlike today where we discard anything chipped or cracked, broken household items were repaired at home or taken to a metalsmith to be brought back to life, often with whimsical results."[22]

Another American collector, Marilynn Gelfman Karp, uses the term "Poignant Repair" to describe the patching and crutching of objects to extend their useful lives, and talks about

"…objects transmuted by their repair. A repair of some transfiguring artistry uniquely distinguishes each object".[23]

Functional objects have always been mended by owners and craftspeople in a culture of thrift and make-do-and-mend that our consumer economy has only recently abandoned. The culture and skills of repair persist in developing economies and in times and places of hardship. The Russian Vladimir Arkhipov collects folk and craft repair in his *People's Museum of Handmade Objects*[24]. He also keeps an oral historical archive of the sometimes-heartbreaking stories behind each repair and invention. Most of these repairs are motivated by necessity, even desperation *(Fig. 22).*

Fig. 22. Anatoly Yamanov, *Wooden stool, chair back, wood, nails, screws,* 1993, Russian region of Ryazansk.

[24] Vladimir Arkhipov, Home-Made: Contemporary Russian Folk Artifacts (London: FUEL Publishing, 2006).

That is Lea Vergine in When Trash Becomes Art: Trash Rubbish Mongo, 2007. We can usefully include climate catastrophe in her "etc."

Ultimately, the recovery of mundane objects is a

"…desire to leave a trace, a sign, a hint for posterity, (it) involves a psychological dimension that is also political."[26]

"Like collage in art or quotation in literature, the recycled object carries a kind of 'memory' of its prior existence. Recycling always implies a stance towards time…"[27]

"Each recycled object contains within it a reference to two or more distinct times, technologies, and meaning systems of which the former … has been artfully subverted by its incorporation into the latter."[28]

The subsequent attempts to grow the metaphor and the technique were a chair and table. *(Figs 23, 24)* Both were borer-damaged, so legs and a rail were removed and replaced with matchstick structures, and other borer holes were plugged. Again, this is not "repair". Although the intervention consists of structural as well as aesthetic decisions it is not intended to bear more than its own weight. The flimsiness of the materials chosen patently makes them inadequate as a functional repair and even suggests that the repair is intentionally makeshift and temporary. And inevitably they refer to a long, mind-boggling, folk tradition of matchstick modelmaking *(Fig. 25)*.

Fig. 23. *Shored Up,* 2012, found chair and matchsticks, 1915 x 410 x 470 mm.

Fig. 24. *Shored Up,* 2012, found table and matchsticks, 760 x 995 x 730 mm.

The *Shored Up* objects are not "repaired" in the same way. The interventions don't restore the objects to function, which defies any definition of 'repair'. The futility of the intervention is highlighted, and the *Shored Up* analogy refers equally to the interim and ad hoc nature of the interventions as well as sea level rise and the changing shoreline.

"We … know that art is a welter of symbols: it is risk and fascination, foretold catastrophe and seduction, the beauty of the ugly and the memory of the human…a sentimental irony that, when it is present, serves as a sort of exorcism of the End, of the great collective fear: fear of death, of a destruction that involves not only the individual but society as a whole (fear of the atomic bomb, of high technology, etc.)"[25]

Fig. 25. Plamen Ignatov, *Rila Monastery,* 2012, matchsticks, dimensions unknown.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ira Jacknis quoted in Charlene Cerny and Suzanne Seriff, Recycled, Re-Seen: Folk Art from the Global Scrap Heap (New York, NY: Harry N Abrams, 1996), 10.

[28] Charlene Cerny and Suzanne Seriff, Recycled, Re-Seen, 21.

[25] Lea Vergine, When Trash Becomes Art: Trash Rubbish Mongo. (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A.,2007), 16.
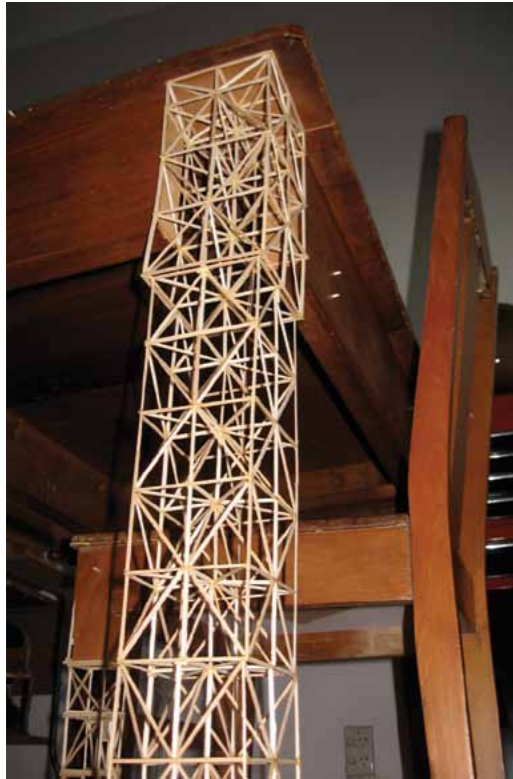
CADRAGE – RECONCILING IMAGE AND OBJECT

Fig. 26. *Shored Up (detail),* 2012, found table and matchsticks, 760 x 995 x 730 mm.

It was at this point that the project pivoted away from polar and material considerations of Image versus Object, and turned towards concepts of framing and representation that were to resolve the dispute and carry the project to its conclusion.

> "Traditionally in the fine arts space is treated differently in sculpture than in easel painting. While sculpture sets the viewer in kinetic motion, such that one directs one's own body and gaze to move around the object, the traditional easel painting fixes the beholder in a spatial position that it has determined.
> Of course the challenge always was to both baffle and transfix the viewer's gaze."[29]

According to David Batchelor this is

> "...a fundamental question of the world [that art] inhabits"[30],

occupying the ambiguous space between painting and sculpture.

> "Ambiguous because within it [is] the paradoxical possibility of being tantalizingly immaterial and emphatically material at the same time...At the time this was not merely an absorbing technical question for advanced painting; on the contrary, it was a fundamental question of art's relationship with the world it inhabits. It seemed that, for many, the optical and the literal were mutually exclusive alternatives...[i]t also seems that, for some, what might have been mutually exclusive alternatives in theory, could in practice become the basis for a vivid creative tension."[31]

The choice that the project faced, ultimately seemed to be between Image AND Object, and Image ON Object. Image AND Object tends towards backdrop, Image ON Object tends towards relief.

As part of the recording of work made, all these objects were photographed. The photograph renders the object flat, "imagises" it. One image of the repaired table leg from a low angle colossally distorted its scale –the humble table leg loomed over the viewer like a skyscraper under construction or an oilrig *(Fig. 26).* It was this visualization that led to the Photoshop rendering of the table leg with sea and stormy sky, the hinge on which the rest of the project turned. A Romantic

[29] Gertrud Koch, "The Plasticity of the Real: Spatial Concepts and Reality Effects," Reality Bites: Making Avant-garde Art in Post-Wall Germany, ed. Sabine Eckmann (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2007), 153.

[30] David Batchelor, "The 'In' in Sculpture in Painting (c.1960)," in Sculpture in Painting: The Representation of Sculpture in Painting from Titian to the Present, Penelope Curtis, Fabio Barry and David Batchelor (Leeds: The Henry Moore Foundation, 2009), 34.
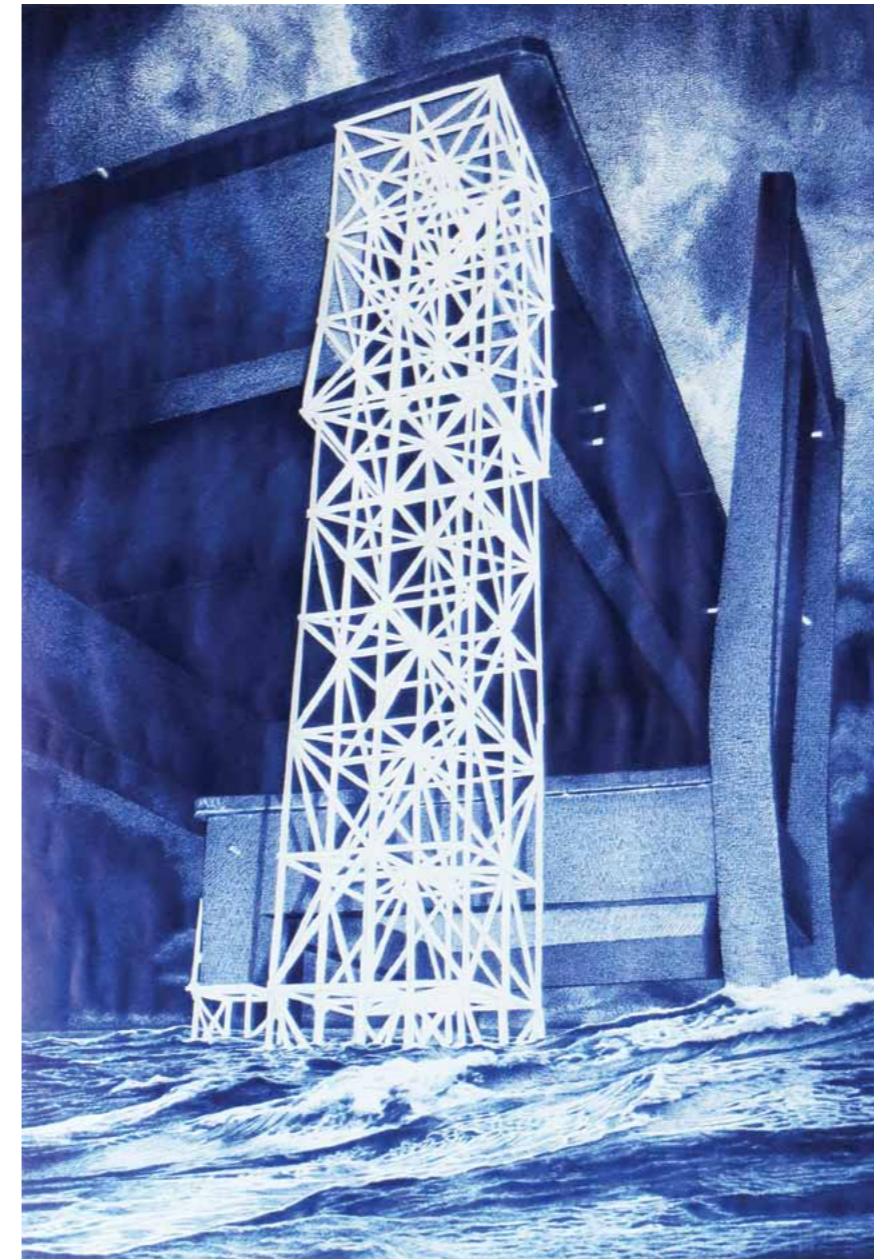
[31] Ibid.

Fig. 27. *Untitled,* 2012, ballpoint pen on paper, 835 x 595 mm.

impulse was discernable in the image, hints of audacious Victorian engineering and stupendous natural forces.

Gratifying though the image was, it was inevitable that it would be translated into drawing, and drawing on as large a scale as possible *(Fig. 27).* It was only the imagising force of the photograph that made this step feasible. No previous link had been made between the Romantic weather imagery and the repaired objects –no conceptual synthesis had been found, and as has been noted, no physical reconciliation. The framing and flattening of the object, its export to the screen, its reduction to monochrome, all brought a cascade of epiphany and recognition. A commitment was being made to the primacy of the Image, a commitment that seemed inevitable in retrospect.

Beyond the apparent choices of Image-AND-Object, and Image-ON-Object lay this other territory of Image-OF-Object.

This now seems almost embarrassingly self-evident. The pursuit of a physical reconciliation of Image and Object may have been misguided. It now seemed that the reconciliation was probably a conceptual rather than a physical one, and that this is a popular and fertile area of practice. Whatever the satisfactions found in the making, there persists an anticipation towards the representation, and although the practice has acquired these further iterations between the object and the image, it maintains a painterly desire to dictate the viewpoint; the objects are an evolutionary step towards images. As has been noted, drawing has always been at the core of this practice. The surfaces of the objects early in the project were activated by drawing, not by paint, and a late realization was made that the notebooks full of drawings of museum objects were not about the objects – they were about the drawings. So it was inevitable that a commitment to the Image would mean drawing. Long use of drawing in a commercial practice had lowered its value for the practitioner; some of the force of the revelation that Image OF Object was the solution to the Image/Object paradox was due to the pendant realization that that image would be drawn.

It could be observed that the project has simply delivered Still Life. That the *Floating Bodies* drawings do not differ from any other figuration that stages, frames and represents objects in two dimensions, and that this "rendering flat" is just realism.

Firstly, the *Floating Bodies* drawings could not have been achieved by any conventional still life process; photography is a necessary step in their making. The photograph frames and extracts the image from its *cadrage*, flattens it and delivers it to the page. It is here in the photograph that the Image meets the Object.

Secondly, the collage reframes and rescales the objects into a new *cadrage*,[32] they are reassigned and re-sited into a new setting and climate where they acquire new meanings and readings.

And thirdly, the exhaustively thorough rendering of the image in minute marks creates a new object of venerable complexity with its own set of signifiers beyond both Photography and Collage. Any resemblance to still life is circumstantial.

These observations are neither new nor unique – the use of photography as an interval between object and image is a particularly rich mode of recent practice.

"'Reference', Barthes writes, 'is the founding order of Photography'. And the reference itself always points in two directions, claiming simultaneously its own sudden presence as well as an unavoidable displacement…'It has been here', as Barthes reads the photographic image, 'and yet immediately separated; it has

[31] "Cadrage" from French photography and cinema. collinsdictionary.com: masculine noun meaning "framing (*of shot*)". It is used here to avoid the ambiguous and overused English "framing".

been absolutely irrefutably present, and already deferred'. It could be argued that what [Vija] Celmins' drawings and paintings depict, what they refer to, is even further split and displaced."[33] *(Fig. 28).*

The spectator knows from the hyperrealism of the *Floating Bodies* images that the object exists or has existed, and even that the drawn image is taken from a photograph – but it is at least twice removed from his or her gaze, once by the photograph and again by the drawing.

"Photography is employed in part as proof of authenticity: by accepting the manifest content – the reality of what is depicted – the viewer is led inevitably to accept the latent content – the fantasy generated by these contingent or adventitious props. It is in this paradoxical coupling of overt falsity or absurdity with unqualified, naïve verisimilitude that renders these… visions so compelling."[34]

Fig. 28. Vija Celmins, *Ocean Surface,* 1983, drypoint on paper, 186 x 239 mm.

In a fragment of a conversation between Vilja Celmins and the realist painter Chuck Close, published in 2004, is the following exchange:

Celmins: "…The photo is an alternative subject, another layer that creates distance. And distance creates an opportunity to view the work more slowly and to explore your relationship to it."
Close: "So you approach these photographs as an object in the same way as the lamp had been an object?
Celmins: "Right, I did at first. I think you can see that the whole idea at first was that it might be possible to put something in a two-dimensional plane, or on it, or somehow solve that problem. You can see that the photographs had the same kind of single object imagery, like the objects that I had been painting earlier In a way, the photograph helps unite the object with the two-dimensional plane."[35]

Gertrud Koch traces the use of photography as a mediator and moderator of space:

"The transitions between media; painting, photograph, architecture and sculpture behave differently on the photographic plane than they would have in a classical easel painting. Intriguingly, however, these pictures can already be described as reflexive responses to and reflections on the performative shift from picture to space that has been under way since the 1960s."[36]

[33] Lane Relyea, Robert Grober and Briony Fer, Vija Celmins (London: Phaidon Press, 2004), 87.

[34] Lynne Cooke, "True Griffins," in Boyd Webb, Jenny Harper (Auckland, NZ: Auckland Art Gallery/Toi o Tamaki, 1997), 45.

[35] Relyea, Grober and Fer, Vija Celmins, 125-126.

[36] Koch, "The Plasticity of the Real," 154.

Fig. 29. Anton Henning, *Stilfragen/Questions of Style,* 2011, installation view, ARNDT Gallery, Berlin.

"Without this performative shift, which turns the space into a space for action in which the beholder's subjectivity is both established and experienced, the spatiality of the new art would have been a non-starter. The visual artist who no longer hides in the painting, but steps out of the picture and enters real space, is a creation of the romantic avant-garde that wanted to draw art and life into a homogenous realm of the Here and Now. The sometimes skeptical spaces where new art makes its presence felt have their origin in our experience of another amalgamation, however - the coming together of architectural and filmic space (and above all in a precarious relationship to 'the real' as an inscribed index and as a construct)."[37]

So, is the making of the object even necessary? Or the making of the final drawn image, if the questions are all answered by the photographic interim?

"For most of these works plasticity and three-dimensionality are at least relevant as a transitional stage. They follow those aesthetic processes that are given to narratives of all kinds (from the historical to the biographical) and in a special way home in on the viewer's somatic fixations and sensomotoric senses. Whether they do this by resorting directly to animated media such as film and video, or in a scenographic architecture either as the camera is running or without a camera, is no longer an issue. Yet it is interesting to see that at a time when the illusionistic processes of film and photography are under greatest attack, they have started to crop up again in so many other artistic media and praxes – not in order to affirm reality as a media-induced effect, but to show that illusionism and appearances are the only way to conjure up that morsel of reality that bites." [38]

The photograph chooses the viewpoint, or viewpoints. It also determines the framing, the *cadrage*, isolating and editing the image from a field; it is here that space is traded for view or aspect, although consciousness of the infinite field beyond the frame persists.

"Although the pictorial space always meets the viewer's perspective head on, it is also an intrinsically dynamic, animate space with interlocking perspectival angles and lines – a space that is fragmented in the *cadrage*, but which is nevertheless holistically extended beyond the edges of the picture frame and out into the depths beyond. In this second sense, the viewer's awareness of the plasticity of motionless bodies in photography and architectural structures has a common foundation: both are notions that arise from and in space."[39]

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 183.

[39] Ibid., 157.

Fig. 30. *Untitled,* 2012, found lamp, Meccano, nuts and bolts, 645 x 360 x 360 mm.

Fig. 31. *Untitled,* 2013, found bedside table, Meccano, nuts and bolts.

Before looking at the work of Vija Celmins, the practice, if not the work, of Anton Henning was influential. Henning works in many media, describing his practice as "an *autopoietic* system of self-reference"[40]. His sculptures appear in his paintings, his films include a character called Anton Henning; his installations include furniture, sculpture, paintings, paintings of furniture, paintings of sculptures *(Fig. 29)*. And so on, "...dismantling the conventions of art history and the hierarchies of genre."[41] Simultaneous reading of Sabine Eckmann's and Gertrud Koch's essays in *Reality Bites*[42] verbalised and defined these notions.

Repairs were subsequently made to other domestic objects, a table, a chair, a bedside table, lamps, axes. *Meccano* replaced matchsticks and icecream sticks as the structural element of repair. *Meccano's* nostalgic freight is not relevant to the project, although it inevitably contributes to readings of the finished drawings. It was chosen for its linearity, its strength and its availability. *Meccano* imposes a modular and structural thinking on the user, inevitably the repairs resembled exposed structures like bridges, pylons, scaffolding and fire escapes *(Figs. 30, 31)*. These in turn are freighted with associations for both maker and viewer. The nostalgic associations of *Meccano* with its hints of an industrial and imperial past, give these structures a whiff of the hubris of Victorian engineering and its blind belief in human dominion over Nature. And like the matchsticks and the icecream sticks, *Meccano* is an obviously inadequate and absurd technology with which to mend a civilization damaged by colossal natural forces.

[40] Penelope Curtis, ed. Sculpture in Painting: The Representation of Sculpture in Painting from Titian to the Present (Leeds: The Henry Moore Foundation, 2009), 90.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Eckmann, ed. Reality Bites, 2007.

There are clear parallels to Boyd Webb's carefully staged and photographed tableaux; the photograph is the artifact, not the tableau (Fig 32).

> "[Boyd] Webb's method typically consists of according an elaborate staging, which is patently fictive and generally makeshift in character."[43]
> "…he let(s) ordinary items serve multiple and unusual purposes from the prosaic to the grandiose…An air of catastrophe hangs over Boyd's work. He shows us…frailty and isolation, the transience of things, a world beleaguered by forces beyond control – natural cataclysm, acts of war, the machinations of a retributive god"[44]

The repaired *Floating Bodies* objects were photographed, and again the photographed image was collaged with Romantic weather imagery. Initially photographic reference was found online and modified, subsequently painted antecedents were chosen, from the work of Joshua Reynolds and Theodore Gericault. The first of the large *Floating Bodies* drawings uses photographic sources for the sea and sky *(Fig. 33)*. At the collage stage the photographs were cropped, graded and manipulated to suggest the corner of a room and to heighten drama. But this drawing now seems the weakest of the suite; it lacks the chiaroscuro and melodrama of the later drawings, and the sea and sky lack the apocalyptic force of Sublime weather. So it was to the Romantics that the

Fig. 32. Boyd Webb, *Renounce,* 1984, unique Cibachrome photograph, image size 151 x 121 cm, Art Gallery NSW, Sydney.
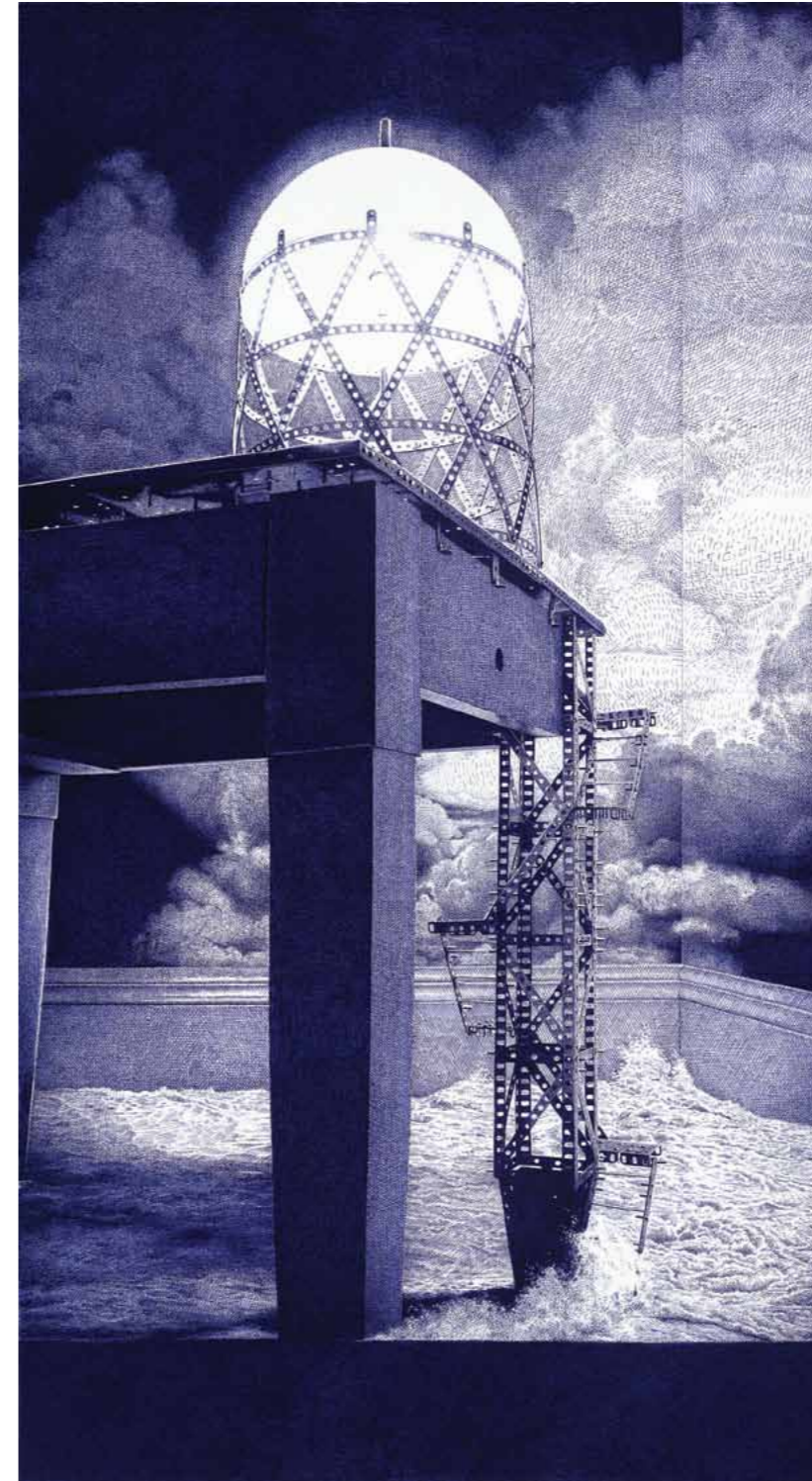

Fig. 33. *Untitled,* 2013, ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1120 x 615 mm, Wallace Collection, Auckland.

[43] Cooke, "True Griffins," 45.
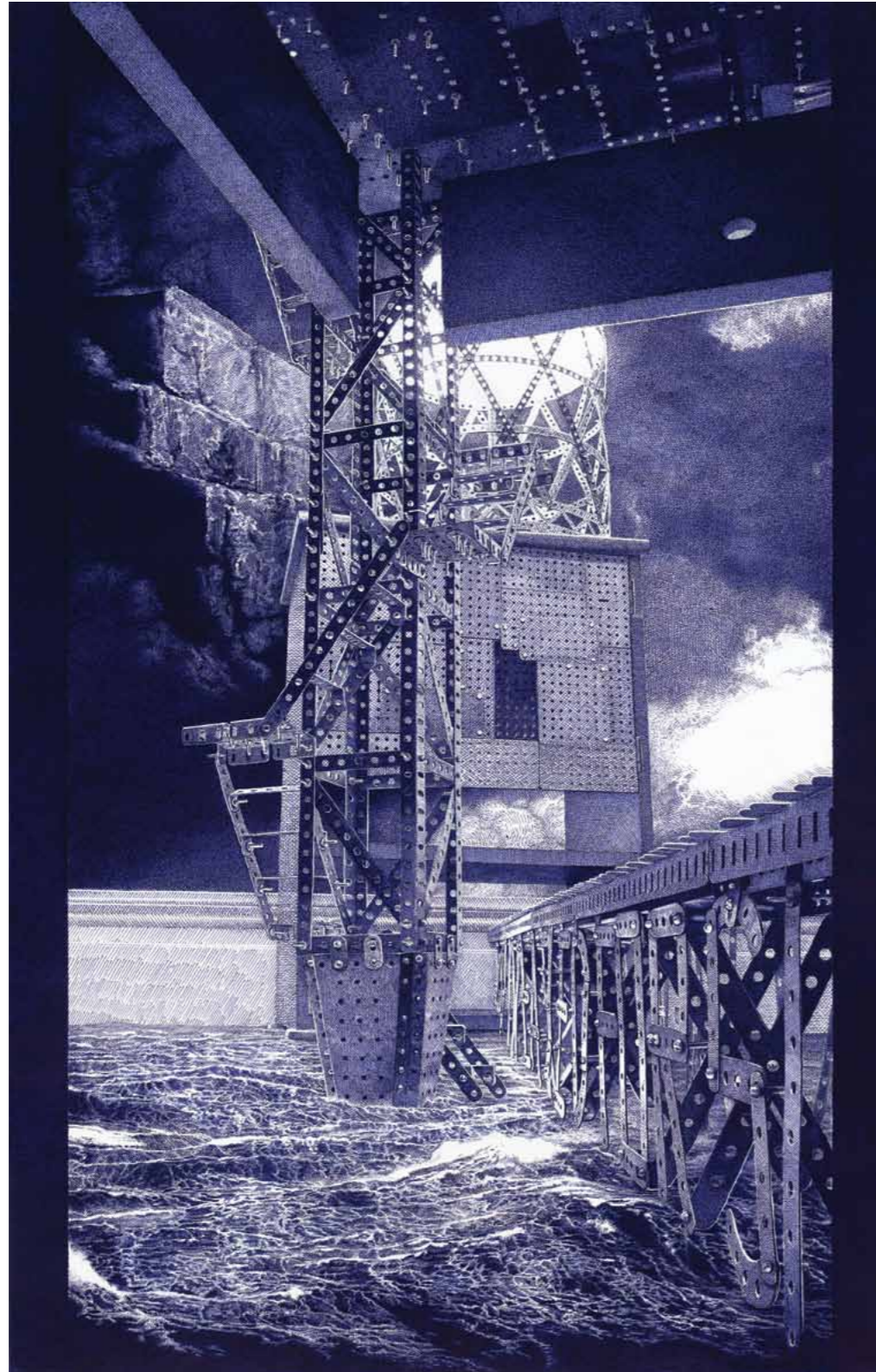
[44] Harper, Boyd Webb, 21-22.

Fig. 34. *Untitled (Ultramarine),* 2013,
ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper,
1120 x 615 mm, private collection.

Fig. 35. Joshua Reynolds, *Augustus,*
1st Viscount Keppel, 1752-3, oil on canvas,
239 x 147 cm, National Maritime Museum,
London.

Fig. 36. Theodore Gericault, *Le Radeau*
de la Méduse /The Raft of the Medusa
1818-19, oil on canvas, 491 × 716 cm,
Louvre Museum, Paris

project now turned. The second of the suite *(Untitled (Ultramarine)) (Fig. 34)* uses a sky
and landscape quoted directly from Reynolds' *Augustus, 1st Viscount Keppel (1752-53)*
(Fig. 35), and the subsequent, larger, drawing borrows from Gericault's *Le Radeau de
la Meduse/The Raft of the Medusa (1818-19) (Fig. 36)*. The collaged images were then
drawn as large as possible on Hahnemühle paper.

> "The second-hand reused images bring meanings and effects along into the
> new depiction, but as montage elements they emphasise the manner and means
> of their production."[45]

At a purely practical level, the *Floating Bodies* drawings would not have been achievable
without having first made and photographed the object. The drawing is a necessary
conclusion to the separation from the object, and an opportunity to reinvest the image
with its cargo of hints and associations. The drawn image, with its suggestions of
fantasy and invention may have lost most of the semiotic baggage of the recycled
and humble objects, but a new layer of signs and indicators has been introduced.
There is the ludicrous repair with obviously inadequate technologies, the scale shifts
between furniture and buildings, *Meccano* and pylons, the crosshatch technique
reminiscent of eighteenth and nineteenth century industrial revolution imagery,
and the climate imagery that refers to the Sublime, all now reinterpretable in the
light of catastrophic climate change. Drawing democratizes the variety of sources
and unifies them. The gradual accumulation of image out of tiny marks speaks
to the colossal futility of attempting to repair a damaged planet.

[45] Beata Sontgen, "Behind the Figure's
Back: The Afterlife of Romanticism in
Contemporary Art," Ideal Worlds: New
Romanticism in Contemporary Art, eds. Max
Hollein and Martina Weinhart. (Ostfildern-
Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag & Schirn Kunsthalle
Frankfurt, 2005), 80.

THE SUBLIME
AND CLIMATE

Throughout the course of the project climate events have filled the headlines and could be argued to have escalated, from the Queensland floods (2010-2011) to Superstorm Sandy (2012) to Hurricane Haiyan (2013) in the Philippines – each adding memorable, indeed unforgettable, images to climate change iconography. Perhaps the most potent of these is the image of the rampant sea, driven inland by storm surge, hurricane force winds or tsunami, wreaking destruction on the familiar and the comfortable. This chimes with the content and the intent of much Sublime imagery – the colossal forces of nature, the delicious horror of humanity's puniness in the face of such forces, and the relief of the viewer at cataclysm escaped.

> "For many commentators, the sublime was premised on the contemplation of powerful scenes or objects that aroused strong feelings of awe and terror in the spectator, primarily but not exclusively of natural phenomena…Thus the writer Joseph Addison, in his influential essay 'On the Pleasures of the Imagination' (1712), after listing the examples of 'high rocks and precipices', 'a wide expanse of water' and 'huge heaps of mountains', states that: 'Our imagination loves to be filled with an object, or to grasp at anything that is too big for its capacity. We are flung into a pleasing astonishment at such unbounded views, and feel a delightful stillness and amazement in the soul at the apprehension of them.'"[46]

The Sublime has fallen into disrepute, even ridicule, since a brief renaissance associated with Abstract Expressionism. The American critic and aesthetician James Elkins goes as far as to call it

> "Poor anemic sublime. Poor elitist sublime…Poor irrelevant sublime… a minor tradition following along after beauty is exhausted."[47]

> "The sublime has been roundly critiqued…" he says "for its direct appeal to pure presence, and its obliviousness to poststructural doubts. It has also been criticized because it leads scholars… to focus on images of things that are incomprehensibly vast, or unimaginably small, or frighteningly blank, dark, blurred, smeared pixelated or otherwise illegible. The sublime, so it is said, takes people away from the real world of politics and society, of meaning and narrative, of culture and value." [48]

But Elkins also admits that

> "There is another, possibly deeper reason why the sublime matters to a contemporary sense of pictures, and why it is important – and so vexed, and often so opaque in literary theory. Talking about the sublime is a way of addressing something that can no longer be called by any of its traditional names, something so important that words like "art" would be crippled without it: the possibly of truth beyond the world of experience. (And not merely beyond the world of articulation and representation)."[49]

In our climate-vulnerable times, plagued by doubts and insecurities, an argument can be made for an aesthetic that accommodates vastness, smallness, blankness, blurring and smearing. In the apocalypses and shipwrecks of the Romantics can be found metaphors for destruction and decay, decline and fall. By using imagery from specific works the *Floating Bodies* drawings hope to hint at jeopardy on the scale of civilisations.

The Sea

The sea, and the inevitability of its rise, has all the power of an archetype[50]. Especially in an island nation beset by oceans and founded on two nautical traditions. This is the stuff of nightmares, in which our collective vanishing point sinks inexorably below the horizon. The arduous sea migrations of our ancestors to distant landfalls are matched today by the perilous journeys undertaken by refugees; people are once again taking to the sea in small craft to avoid war, famine, persecution and yes, the effects of climate change.

According to the philosopher Hans Blumenberg we have always measured our lives in relationship to the sea.

> "Humans live their lives and build their institutions on dry land. Nevertheless, they seek to grasp the movement of their existence above all through a metaphorics of the perilous sea voyage. The repertory of this nautical metaphorics of existence is very rich."[51]

The relationship is not fixed; as historian of the sea Lincoln Paine notes

> "…we live in an age deeply influenced by maritime enterprise, but our perceptions of its importance have shifted almost 180 degrees in only two or three generations. Today we see pleasure where our forebears saw peril, and we can savor the fruits of maritime commerce without being remotely aware of its existence, even when we live in cities that originally grew rich from sea trade. In considering the course of maritime history, we must account for this change and remember that our collective relationship with maritime enterprise has undergone a profound metamorphosis in only half a century."[52]

[46] Christine Riding, "Shipwreck, Self-preservation and the Sublime," in The Art of the Sublime, eds. Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding, last modified January 2013, accessed August 19, 2013. http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-riding-shipwreck-self-preservation-and-the-sublime-r1133015

[47] James Elkins, "Against the Sublime," in Beyond the Finite: The Sublime in Art and Science, eds. Roald Hoffmann and Iain Boyd Whyte (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20–42.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] In the Jungian sense of a collectively-inherited unconscious idea or image that is universally present in individual psyches.

[51] Hans Blumenberg, Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1997), 7.

[52] Lincoln Paine, The Sea and Civilization: A Maritime History of the World (New York, NY : Alfred A Knopf, 2013), 10.

But the power of the sea in our conscious and unconscious minds remains. It figures largely in the Collective Unconscious as a bringer of pain and suffering as much as of pleasure. For all its beneficence as a provider of sustenance, entertainment and cargo, the sea also has a reputation for cruelty, violence and a kind of dumb vindictiveness. As a maritime and island nation, there has always been a popular fascination in New Zealand with the risks and challenges of seafaring, and with maritime disaster, from the *Orpheus* to the *Wahine* and most recently the *Rena*. Shipwreck and drowning were common features of New Zealand's early colonial history, and our close modern association with the sea means that they are still statistically far too common today[53].

"…the sea held no promise for slaves, coolies, indentured servants, or the dispossessed, and across cultures people have reviled maritime commerce for its noxious cargoes of alien people and ideas, deadly plagues, and ruthless enemies from beyond the sea. At the same time, we have come to know that while the sea is fickle and unforgiving, it is a fragile environment susceptible to human depredation on a scale as unimaginable to our ancestors as the ships and other technologies we have created to make it so."[54]

"The 1700s saw an unprecedented rise in the number of people who put to sea – merchant crews, naval sailors, voluntary and involuntary migrants, and explorers – as a result of European initiative. Large-scale migration by both free people and slaves began in the sixteenth century, and more people migrated in the nineteenth; but the 1700s are significant because this is when the commercial acumen that had been perfected in the carriage of cargo was adapted to that of people, who proved ill-suited to such treatment… The results of late-eighteenth-century explorations were widely disseminated and resulted in an ever-expanding body of written and visual representation that transformed people's awareness of the physical world and each other."[55]

Edmund Burke, godfather of The Sublime, wrote of the sea in 1757:

"A level plain of a vast land, is certainly no mean idea, the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean, but can it ever fill the mind with any thing so great as the ocean itself? This is…owing to none more than this, that the ocean is an object of no small terror. Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever… the ruling principle of the sublime."[56]

"The passions which belong to self-preservation, turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances; this delight I have not called pleasure, because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure. Whatever excites this delight, I call *sublime*. The passions belonging to self-preservation are the strongest of all the passions."[57] [His italics]

This frisson of calamity narrowly avoided is not unlike the "There but for the grace of God" reaction many of us have to news images of current climate catastrophes. Many Sublime works of art were intended to stimulate feelings of empathy in the reader or viewer, which would in turn engender social cohesion and communality. Conversely, such narratives could also play to a *schadenfreude* and prurient pleasure in the misfortunes of others.[58]

Shipwreck Sublime

Shipwrecks represent an ideal of the Sublime,

"…by their very nature about survival, often under the most traumatic of circumstances, where, as the disaster unfolds, the social ties that unite the crews and passengers can begin to break down, even to the extent that unthinkable acts like cannibalism and the transgression of social taboos can become a reality. Thus, even as the reader derives a delightful terror (in a Burkean sense) from a shipwreck narrative, he or she is also confronted with the more awkward and unsettling reality of human behaviour in extremis.[59]

In the visual arts the shipwreck is a catalogue of sublime effects:

"…sharp contrasts in light and dark, battering winds, turbulent seas, buffeted ships, and struggling human beings."[60]

The masterpiece of 'shipwreck sublime' is Theodore Gericault's *Le radeau de la Meduse/ Raft of the Medusa*. Painted in 1818-19, it evinces all the primary characteristics of the Burkean Sublime and set a fashion for ship-borne horrors in paint, verse and prose in Europe and North America for decades to come. The story of the wreck and Gericault's grueling process are well known and need not be repeated here, but the painting was intended as an indictment of a political system that gave preferment and command on the basis of class and connection rather than ability.

[53] Kate Shuttleworth, "Drownings in NZ Third Worst in Developed World," New Zealand Herald, January 12, 2013, accessed March 3, 2014, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10858598

[54] Paine, The Sea and Civilization, 599.

[55] Ibid., 473.

[56] David Womersley, ed. Edmund Burke: Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings (London: Penguin Classics, 1998), 102.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Riding, "Shipwreck, Self-preservation and the Sublime."
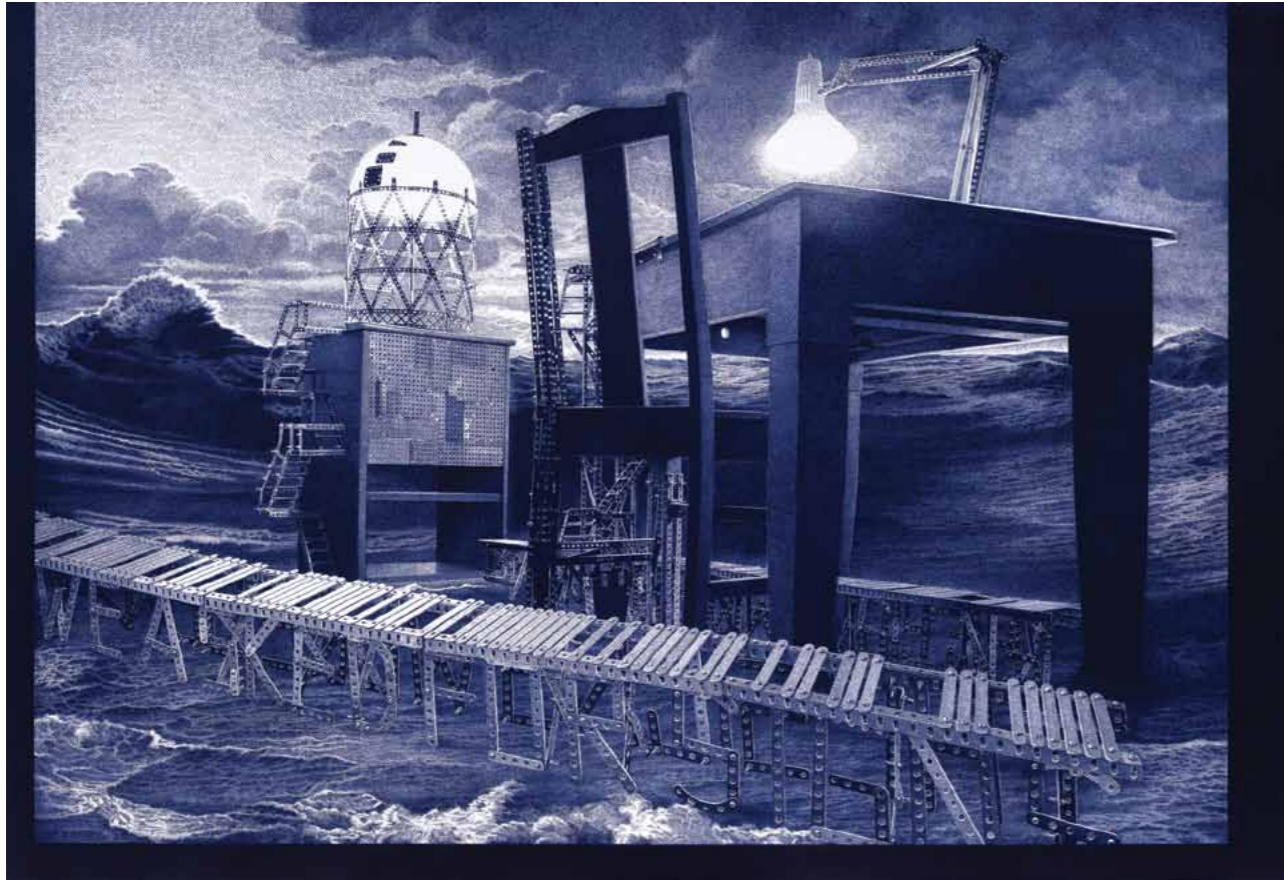
[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

Fig. 37. *We Asked for Signs*, 2013,
ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper,
1050 x 1500 mm, Vela Collection, Hamilton.

We Asked for Signs is a conscious borrowing of Gericault's composition and
atmospherics *(Fig. 37)*. Although other *Floating Body* works use his device of extending
objects out of the picture plane, offering the viewer a path to a "mainland" of dry
security, *We Asked for Signs* does not. The objects are isolated in the engulfing sea,
and the "pier" in the foreground leads to and from nowhere, offering no route to safety.

> "Géricault...was conscious of the spectacle-spectator dynamic, and sought to
> confuse, even problematise, this divide by 'extending' the edge of the raft out
> of the confines of the framed canvas and into the viewer's plane."[61]

Where some Sublime seascapes and shipwrecks now look histrionic and overblown,
The Raft of the Medusa has lost none of its power. Although the background sea and
sky of *We Asked for Signs* is quoted verbatim from Gericault, it remains inevitable that
any image that places a fragile manmade object in a turbulent sea at dusk will conjure
up that association. The many folk and pop references to *The Raft* are evidence of
that, although the modern viewer's apprehension of Sublime imagery is most likely
to come from Hollywood and the cinematic Sublime: *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004),

[61] Ibid.

The Perfect Storm (2000), 2012 (2009) *(Fig. 38)*, and most recently *Noah* (2014), in which
stupendous exaggerations of natural forces are achieved by computer generation to
thrill and titillate audiences. These productions may be the inheritors of John Martin's
excessive doom-laden canvasses *(Fig. 39)*, but there is obviously still mileage (and
footage) in the Sublime.

Fig. 38. Film still, *The Day After Tomorrow*,
2004, R Emmerich (dir.), 20th Century Fox.

Fig. 39. John Martin, *The Great Day
of His Wrath*, 1851-53, oil on canvas,
1970 × 3030 mm, Tate Britain, London.

Fig. 40. Thomas Lawrence, *Master Charles William Lambton*, 1825, (known as *The Red Boy*), oil on canvas, 1370 x 1116 mm, Lord Lambton Collection.

This durability of the Sublime is a factor in a personal affection for Romantic imagery that dates back to a childhood familiarity with Thomas Lawrence's portrait of *Master Charles William Lambton*, 1825, better known as *The Red Boy (Fig. 40)*. Lawrence's isolation of the boy from the cold, tumultuous night in a warm lit bubble has influenced tone and colour choice in nearly all the adult work of this praxis, and remains a readily reclaimable sensation from childhood. The lowering clouds, the strip of dusk (never dawn) on the horizon, the wind-tossed sea are common tropes of Sublime painting, and often appear in the backgrounds of Romantic portraiture, as already noted. Thanks to that early imprinting of *The Red Boy,* this iconography has all the familiarity of an heirloom, while retaining its suggestion of lonely isolation and impending doom. And of course the proto-artist identified with the lost Boy.

Romantic imagery is quoted verbatim in the *Floating Bodies* drawings; it is collaged and montaged in ways that have already been discussed. The Romantic and Sublime are reservoirs of tropes, archetypes and symbols that the arts have drawn from ever since. The *Floating Bodies* quotations, detached by media, scale and process, remain parenthetic.

Fig. 41. Marcelo Mosceta, *Friedrich,* 2008, graphite on PVC, 120 x 240 cm.

> "...the characteristic quality of Romantic painting lies precisely...in the rescinding of the immediate perception that the structure of the perception promises as an event. In recent painting this rescinding is made manifest by exhibiting the media of the depiction, of images and apparatuses, and in the use of pre-existing images. This introduces a residue into the self-aware depiction, a residue of the wish for immediate perception of nature that now only occurs in a historical mode, as a Romantic tradition in modern painting."[62]

The Brazilian Marcelo Moscheta also draws from the Sublime well in his obsessively crafted foreboding land- and cloudscapes. Moscheta admits to an admiration for Caspar David Friedrich[63], whose *Das Eismeer/The Sea of Ice,* also called *The Wreck of Hope* (1823-24) he has rendered in monochrome graphite on black PVC *(Fig. 41)*. Moscheta's practice was influential early in the *Floating Bodies* project when his pairing of rocks with their drawn "portraits" were of interest. It cannot be coincidental that Moscheta has also rendered Romantic quotations in blue, although his technique is carbon paper monoprint, and the obvious Sublime parallels were only observed later.

Symbolism: Scale Shifts and Hypnogogic Visions

The *Floating Body* images can bear a number of possible readings. The objects suggest both room and city (specifically: port) threatened by rising seas. There is an implied loss of shelter, of comfort, and on the larger scale, of civilization. Other viewers see nostalgia; playthings cast adrift, the loss of innocence. The threat is deliberate, and if there is dread then the work has successfully communicated. These images are about inundation, the threat to domesticity, which is why a skirting board appears in *Untitled*, and the objects all sit on a single plane. This is a familiar space invaded by an unstoppable sea, not an ocean in which domestic objects are cast adrift. They are not flotsam. (The congregation of our civilization's detritus in two gigantic gyres in the Pacific Ocean is not part of this project, but may be addressed after its completion).

The repaired objects refer to buildings; one lamp is a lighthouse, the other a crane, a table leg is a staircase, another is a fire escape. These scale shifts are intended to imply both room and city on a hypnogogic scale, on the edge of sleep.

[62] Beata Sontgen, "Behind the Figure's Back," 80.

[63] Scott Indrisek, "Marcelo Moscheta," Modern Painters 22, no. 9 (2011): 53.

"Hypnagogia is the experience of the transitional state from wakefulness to sleep: the *hypnagogic* state of consciousness...Mental phenomena that occur during this 'threshold consciousness' phase include lucid dreaming, hallucinations, and sleep paralysis...Other terms for hypnagogia...include 'presomnal' or 'anthypnic sensations', 'visions of half-sleep'... 'phantasmata', 'the borderland of sleep', ...the 'borderland state', 'half-dream state', 'pre-dream condition', 'sleep onset dreams' [and] dreamlets... Transition to and from sleep may be attended by a wide variety of sensory experiences. These can occur in any modality, individually or combined, and range from the vague and barely perceptible to vivid hallucinations."[64]

Many of these terms are highly evocative of a semi-conscious state of visualisation; *phantasmata* especially evokes a pre-modern apprehension of the other worlds and forms of consciousness that we now, in our pharmaceutical age, take for granted. The scale shifts in the *Floating Bodies* drawings have been informed by naturally occurring *phantasmata*.

In his use of dreamlike (or nightmarish) imagery, massive distortions of scale and emotive chiaroscuro, Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) predates Romanticism by half a century. In his hallucinatory imagery the Romantics found precedents and parallels for their own imaginative explorations in disturbing subconscious worlds *(Fig 42)*.
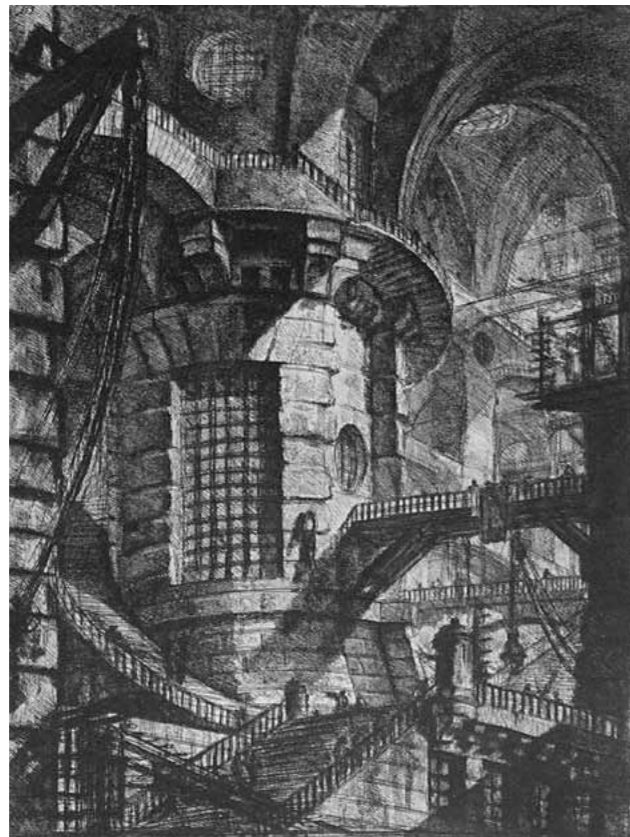

Fig. 42. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Carceri d'invenzione,* 1749-1750, *III – The Round Tower,* etching, engraving, sulphur tint or open bite, burnishing, image size 545 x 415 mm.

[64] Wikipedia, s.v. "hypnagogia." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypnagogia

" [Samuel Taylor] Coleridge and Thomas de Quincey, author of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), suspected that Piranesi's series of prints of fantasy prisons, *Carceri d'invenzione* (c 1745-61), showed a mind under the early effects of the drug – or 'in the delirium of a fever' as de Quincey euphemistically put it, concluding, 'With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams.'"[65]

"Wherever they came from, Piranesi's hallucinatory images – which Coleridge called 'dreams' – presaged the Romantics own disturbing imaginative experiences, and opened a subconscious world that they recognized as their own."[66]

" [With t]heir imagery of architectural contortion externalizing the torments of enchained prisoners, the *Carceri d'invenzione* (Prisons of the imagination) demonstrate that the most fantastical capricci are also the most chilling. The etcher chose the theme of the prison as a vehicle for the capacities of the unfettered imagination – an irony that sets in relief the dark side of play. To advocate the extremes of imaginative rule-breaking was to invoke a reign of inconstancy and idiosyncrasy – the law of lawlessness."[67]

"To look at Piranesi's labyrinthine vaults, with their pointless, perverse ramps and steps leading nowhere, and fiendish machines of torture, is to be glad that they exist only on paper. It is also to wonder whether he was mapping the confines of his own diseased mind. Yet only a transcendent imagination could have invented them. In a treatise on architecture written in 1765, Piranesi pitted a free spirit against a classicist who ridicules his 'crazy freedom to work on caprice'. Perhaps it is really the constant doubts and frustrations of an artist susceptible to both points of view that are represented in the prisons and explain their enduring appeal. They reveal a complex psyche, and are not merely designed to titillate or surprise. Although it was in the new language of Burke's 'Sublime' that they were first described, they speak of what are perhaps universal fears and conflicts."[68]

"Piranesi's staging ground for the liberated imagination plunges the viewer into a mode of apprehension that is necessarily partial, halting, and, in the end violently curtailed. In effect, the work issues a straightforward statement about the brutality of the precarious order it conjures."[69]

Piranesi's compositions have obviously been influential on the *Floating Bodies* drawings, particularly the pronounced use of chiaroscuro, massy dark foreground forms and pooling of light on chosen forms and features. There was an opportunity to see original Piranesi engravings in the *Temples for the Gods* exhibit at Auckland Art Gallery/Toi o Tamaki from September 2011-February 2012 and to make special note of the subtleties of masterful crosshatching. A feature of Piranesi's hatching is the use of curved and directional marks to model form. Straight, even ruled, lines are used for rendering flat planes and architectural forms, but curved, undulating and stippled

[65] David Blayney Brown, Romanticism (London: Phaidon Press, 2001), 312.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Nina L. Dubin, Futures and Ruins: Eighteenth Century Paris and the Art of Hubert Robert (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2010), 38.

[68] Blayney Brown, Romanticism, 312-314.

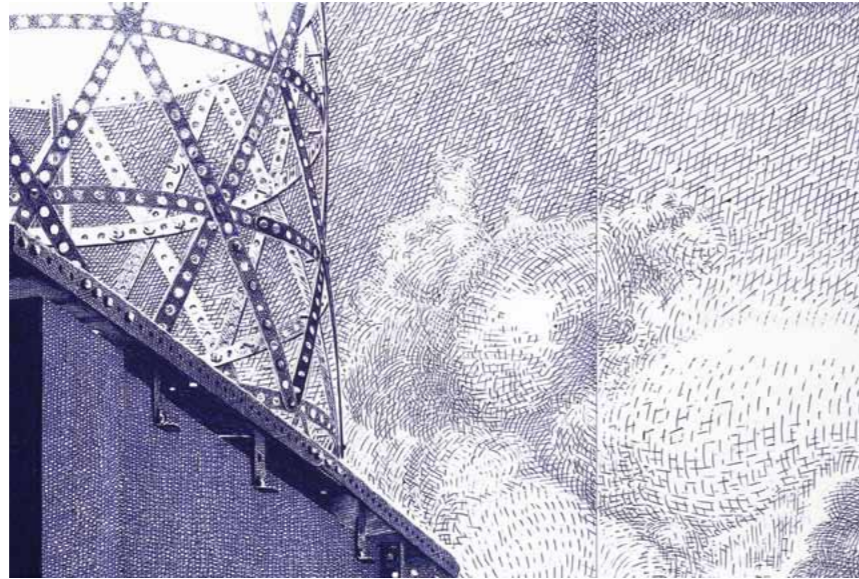[69] Dubin, Futures and Ruins, 41-42.

Fig. 43. *Untitled* (Detail), 2013, ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1120 x 615 mm, Wallace Collection Auckland.

marks are used to render natural forms like clouds, water and foliage. These techniques have been adopted for the ballpoint rendering of the *Floating Bodies* drawings, but it is humbling to remember that Piranesi's images were printed from a metal plate into which he had scored the marks with a burin – a far more arduous process than drawing with a ballpoint pen *(Fig. 43)*.

Unlike Piranesi's, the spaces in the *Floating Bodies* drawings are uninhabited. Firstly, because figures would dictate scale and the intention is that scale remain ambiguous; and secondly, because the absence of the figure renders them mute.

> "Representations of, imaginations of, ...interiors are often powerful statements about the absence of those who inhabit them, such spaces seem to exist without acknowledging their own demand to be looked at from outside, or afar. [This gives] a sense of human absence, the sense that the world is not made for us or by us, but is given to us by forces beyond our spheres of habitation."[70]

Piranesi defended his use of fabrication and caprice in the making of images of ancient Rome, adopting for his etchings the derisive name given by his detractors: caprices.

> "To Piranesi, the capriccio's remoteness from the order of necessity, its lack of transparency to 'evidence' and 'rules', made it the marker of a radical honesty."[71]

Capricci in Italian, *Caprichos* in Spanish; Goya inherited the genre from Piranesi, and like him smuggled disturbing truths into ostensibly playful imagery. There are many psychological and aesthetic links between Romanticism, Symbolism and Surrealism and their compatible interest in dream, nightmare and apocalypse imagery. Symbolism was at the time referred to as "Neo-Romanticism"[72]. The *Floating Bodies* drawings, too, bow to that tradition.

[70] Susan Stewart, "Reading a Drawer," in Ethics in Place: Architecture, Memory, and Environmental Poetics, ed. Gregory Caico (Dartmouth, NH: University Press of New England, 2007), 113.

[71] Dubin, Futures and Ruins, 36.

[72] Hubertus Kohle, "Nightmare – Anxiety – Apocalypse: The Uncanny and Catastrophic in the Art of Modernism," in Dark Romanticism, from Goya to Max Ernst, ed. Felix Kramer (Frankfurt am Main: Hatje Cantz and Stadel Museum, 2012), 42.

DRAWING AND DRAWINGNESS

Although 'pure' drawing is not part of this project, drawing on the scale of the *Floating Bodies* pieces goes beyond representation. The very act of drawing becomes a thing in itself.

The French critic Helene Cixous writes eloquently about the inception of a drawing,

> "There is no end to writing or drawing. Being born doesn't end. Drawing is a being born. Drawing is born."[73]

> "As soon as we draw (as soon as, following the pen, we advance into the unknown, hearts eating, mad with desire) we are little. We do not know, we start out avidly, we're going to lose ourselves. Drawing, writing, what expeditions, what wanderings, and at the end, no end, we won't finish, rather time will put an end to it."[74]

There is a deep significance in Cixous' bringing together of drawing, writing and infancy – we know drawing better, longer and more intimately than any other image-making; before colour, before tone, there is the line and the mark.

On the cumulative process of drawing, Cornelia Butler and Catherine de Zegher write:

> " ...mark becoming line, line becoming contour, contour becoming image – the first mark not only structures the blank page as an open field but also defines it temporally, as the drawing marks follow one another in time."[75]

It is possible to go further than Butler's and de Zegher's "field" and its implied two dimensions, the blank page is a void, a vacant "space" – with the first mark the page drops vertiginously away from the draughtsperson. It is at this nexus that Image and Object approach reconciliation.

(The English language is poor in words to describe the act of drawing and its agents. Drawer is patently inadequate; draughtsman/woman/person is clumsy and is associated more with the technical. *Limner* is the only word available that suggests both delineation and illumination and it has an agreeable association with the monastic tradition of scriptural illumination.)

Use of a linear, drawing, medium to cumulatively acquire an image is necessarily slow and intense. Many linear marks must be amassed to create tone and suggest form. Although hundreds, thousands, even millions of tiny decisions must be made in the

[73] Hélène Cixous, Stigmata: Escaping Texts (London: Routledge, 2005), 27 – 28.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Catherine de Zegher, ed. The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), 223-234.

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slow accumulation of large images like the *Floating Bodies*, beyond the "mediate materiality"[76] there is a meditative suspension of engagement when engrossed in the rhythmic repetition of drawing. This contemplative, almost meditative, state is a pleasurable byproduct of long-distance deep-sea drawing. Drawing is a solitary pursuit, and on this scale is almost monastic. This suspended state is not somnambulism or procrastination; decisions are still being made.

> "Instead of focusing on immediate specificity...when taking time in cross-hatching...the daydreaming mind is free to engage in abstract thought and imaginative ramblings."[77]

This detached contemplative state was calming at the time of the making of the notebooks, and remains so. It is a therapeutic consequence of the profoundly immersive process, curative rather than cathartic.

The process of drawing is curiously immaterial. It is almost the opposite of the corporeal objects represented. The white ground, the blank page, persists to the very end of the cumulative process – it is the void, the unmarked. Despite the chiaroscuro in the *Floating Bodies* images, the massy darks and the luminous lights, they are shadows: the light is undrawn.

Helene Cixous is an articulate observer of this negative materiality.

> "What are we trying to grasp between the lines, in between the strokes, in the net that we're weaving, that we throw, and the dagger blows?...It's not a question of drawing the contours, *but of what escapes the contours,* the secret movement, the breaking, the torment, the unexpected."[78] [Her italics]

Catherine de Zegher, too, talks of the drawn and the undrawn.

> "In the end, drawing is rooted in the dematerialized space of the image, privileging more the world of shadows than the world of appearances, confirming the possibility and use of language that, albeit in a fragile way, leaves open an interstitial passage through which the imaginary may realize itself as an image. The metaphoric page has inevitably the terror of beginning with nothing new that is the inaugural point of constituting a communication. Drawing always seems to register the endless repetition of remaking."[79]

This reaffirmed the value and relevance to this practice of drawing as a medium. It had become devalued through overuse and misuse, and had been misjudged as incapable of bearing heavy subject matter. But a new sensitivity and sanctity were found in the patience and humility of the labour of drawing and through the work of others a new relevance and currency were found, commensurate to drawing's venerable past. It became apparent that despite its low art materiality a practice could be grown interrogating high art principles and priorities.

[76] Susan Hedges, "Interference: The Restless Drawing,"(paper presented at Interior: A State of Becoming symposium, Curtin University, September 2012), 1. http://idea-edu.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/P23.pdf

[77] Marco Frascari, The Virtue of Architecture: A 2009 Strenna, (Ottawa: Auctoris Expensis, 2009) quoted in Susan Hedges, "Interference: The Restless Drawing," (paper presented at Interior: A State of Becoming symposium, Curtin University, September 2012), 3. http://idea-edu.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/P23.pdf

[78] Cixous, Stigmata, 27 – 28.

[79] de Zegher ed., The Stage of Drawing , 223-234.

PART THREE

THE MATERIALITY
OF DRAWING

The materiality of the objects chosen for depiction has been examined above, and it has also been noted that that depiction is subject to other processes before being drawn. And despite the quality of Immateriality just discussed, the drawing too is an object, fully material.

Ink on paper is an august tradition. Not only in art-making but in the making of documents and publications. The *Floating Bodies* seek to occupy this space between the fictive and the factual just as they sidle into the space between Image and Object. Monochrome, too, is freighted with significance, both on page and screen, and monochrome blue is redolent of blueprints, classrooms and offices, and mark-making of the most mundane kinds. Monochrome has gravitas and a degree of melancholy, and at the same time evokes the document and the fact and older technologies before colour screens and colour printing. Crosshatching brings its own cargo of allusions and associations; to etching and engraving, book illustration and scientific illustration of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The *Floating Bodies* seek to capitalize on all these traditions and trades – the crosshatched blue ballpoint pen drawings are, they claim, proxy for a sombre humble pre-electronic tradition of documentary visual communication.

After auditioning a number of pens and ink colours, the Zebra Sarasa was chosen, primarily for the limpid ultramarine, but also for the even flow, of its gel ink. It uses a water-based pigment gel ink which the manufacturer describes as acid-free and archival[80]. Used at its densest, with much overdrawing, the ink dries to an oil-slick oxidation with a sumptuousness that also refers obliquely to fossil fuels.

The ballpoint pen was patented in Paris in 1931 by a Hungarian journalist, Laszlo Biro. It was not until Biro fled World War 2 to Argentina in 1941 that the pen went into production. Argentinian Lucio Fontana, founder of Spatialism, and one of the original Arte Povera practitioners, was one of the first to use the ballpoint for drawing in 1946.

> "Those early ballpoint sketches reflect Fontana's interest in merging art, science, and technology through his Spatialist movement. In one drawing, Fontana doodled a spiraling funnel filled with swirling orbs, as if he were testing the continuous-flow quality of the new pen."[81]

In Europe and North America, it was favoured as a drawing tool because of the uniformity of the line it produced, which suited both Modernists and Pop artists.

80 Zebra Pen Corporation, "J-Roller," accessed February 16, 2014 http://www.zebrapen.com/product/j-roller-rx-2/

81 Trent Morse, "Ballpoint is on a Roll," ARTnews 113, no. 1 (2014), 66.

In the 1950s and 1960s Alberto Giacometti, Jean Dubuffet, Agnes Martin, Andy Warhol, Nam June Paik, Yayoi Kusama, John Cage, Sigmar Polke, Louise Bourgeois and Cy Twombly all used ballpoint as a drawing implement. The Fluxus artists employed a variety of office materials including the ballpoint. Some practitioners became disillusioned with ballpoint as a medium when it became clear that the inks were prone to fading.

> "Early ballpoint-pen ink, especially the blue, would fade if you exposed it to the light. It's not permanent."[82]

> "That's because most of the inks are dye-based colorants, which are susceptible to color-shift or fading,"[83]

Today many professional artists use pens that contain archival inks, but "really, the only reliable thing is to keep it out of the light."[84] As part of a praxis examining climate change, the fugitive nature of the inks can be embraced; the fading can be read as analogy[85].

Despite the unworldliness of drawing discussed above, the medium can also be very physical, especially when working on a large scale. The practitioner is prone to repetitive strain injuries of the neck, wrist and shoulder. Drawing with small marks on a large support can only be sustained for a few hours at a time. American ballpoint pen artist Marlene McCarty seems to take no joy from the process:

> "For the scale of my drawings, it's a horrible, tedious, painful medium. Ballpoint is unforgiving. It can't be corrected. I draw on the wall. Unless the pen is held at just the right angle, it stops working. The pressure required keeping the ink flowing causes shoulder injuries."[86]

Fellow American Dawn Clements also seems less than enamoured of the medium;

> "Ballpoint-pen drawing can be extremely labor-intensive and time-consuming because the mark it makes is linear. I make tonal drawings, so my drawings often take a very long time."[87]

Some 'ballpointists' use studio assistants to achieve large-scale drawings, like the Italian Alighiero Boetti who, in the 1970s, employed dozens of assistants to fill sheets of paper with solid fields of black, blue, or red ink. His 1973 piece *ONONIMO* consisted of eleven such panels. "Jan Fabre spent a decade working with the pens, which culminated in his covering an entire Belgian castle with blue ballpoint marks in 1990."[88]

Ballpoint ink is indelible, the limner must commit to the image right from the start because once drawn the drawing cannot be reworked. Problems of composition and tone must all be solved in the collage. Some revision is possible with correction fluid, but this is a relatively young technology and is yet to be perfected. Some fluids

82 Richard Klein, quoted in Trent Morse, "Ballpoint is on a Roll," 67.

83 Scott Gerson, quoted ibid.

84 Scott Gerson, quoted ibid.

85 Nevertheless, as a(n unscientific) test of the light-fastness of the Zebra Sarasa ink, a typical drawing was masked and hung in direct sunlight for six months from November 2012 to May 2013. At the end of that period no fading could be discerned.

86 Marlene McCarty, quoted in Trent Morse, "Ballpoint is on a Roll," 68.

87 Dawn Clements, quoted ibid.

88 Ibid., 67.

absorb pigment from the ink over time; others are brittle and flake off the drawing so can only be used sparingly. Correction pens are available which means that linear white marks can be made, obviating the ludicrously laborious reservation of small negative areas and lines. And correction fluid is another humble office product, found in the stationery cupboard.

The first of the ballpoint drawings, that ended the *Shored Up* matchstick imagery, was executed on low-end architectural rendering paper. This was judged to be in keeping with the project's ethos of humble materiality. But the paper distorted with the pressure of drawing, especially in the heavily worked passages, and loose fibres from the nap of the poor quality paper clogged the pens. So, for the *Floating Bodies* drawings a high end Hahnemühle rag paper was chosen, the surface of which kept its integrity despite concentrated redrawing over small areas of high contrast. The use of recycled rags in the paper's manufacture keeps the project's climate conscience clear, although there is a frisson of political unsafety in the Hahnemühle association with a Nazi plot to undermine enemy economies by flooding them with counterfeit banknotes.

The inking of the borders is left until late in the drawing process. The borders are a reserve left by the enlargement of the collage to the maximum that can be accommodated by the paper, and any difference in aspect ratio is left white. This creates an opportunity to crop and edit the image. Editing could be achieved by trimming off the excess paper, or by densely crosshatching it in either correction fluid or the densest tone of blue. The latter was chosen to establish a datum of tone by which to read the rest of the image and, having been established, the tones of the rest of the drawing must be readjusted. This editing also adds a frame, reinforces the *cadrage*, and adds another degree of separation between object and viewer.

With one exception *(We Asked for Signs),* the *Shored Up* and *Floating Bodies* drawings have been presented with equally humble hanging. Frameless, they have been pinned to the wall under acetate with display pins or mapping pins and bulldog clips. The largest of the drawings are the result of nearly three months' patient accumulation of tiny marks, so this low-end materiality enhances the climate consciousness of the project by putting the drawings themselves in jeopardy while at the same time reserving special status for the drawing object itself.

A print outcome has been suggested for *Floating Bodies*, a commercially attractive option considering the labour and time intensity of the making of the drawings. Same-size laser prints are almost indistinguishable from the originals, but the differences are telling: the print cannot reproduce the oil slick patina of the densest ink, nor the tiny indentation made by each pen stroke. And one of the outcomes of the intensity of the process is an affection for, and loyalty to, the unicum, however commercially inadvisable that might be. The *Floating Bodies* use an interim printed step between screen and paper. The Photoshop montage of sea, sky and objects is painstakingly outlined in blue on a white ground. The outline is then printed on the Hahnemühle paper as a guide for the ballpoint drawing. This digital enlargement replaces the grids, epidiascopes and projectors of the past and the printed blue line plays no part in the finished image, it is subsumed in the ballpoint marks.

NEW WORK

Not unexpectedly most comment and criticism of the *Floating Bodies* works has centred on technique, but comment was also made that the imagery remained burdened by heavy-handed content. A lighter and more ambiguous iconography was suggested.

To unburden the content and remove the more literal allusions, and to reduce the cumbersome process, the next iteration sought a sparer solution.

The Anchor Drags

Our possessions scattered on the face of the deep might be the only trace of our civilization and its passing; try as we might to shore up our security and self worth with acquisition and accumulation, our stuff will not be a bulwark against the rising waters. Indeed it will weigh us down.

"Accumulation deprives things of meaning; we come to a void, to nothing. In order to represent Everything, we choose to depict Nothing: nothingness, trash, waste, garbage…But what is this nothing? It is a desolate wasteland, a diffuse absence or, instead, a sticky tide of prints, a biblical multitude of shadows, an infinite quantity of ghosts that are outside of us, or that multiplicity of metaphors, that army of apparitions that rises up inside us?"[89]

"In the dark abyss, we find inconsumable and illusionistic epiphanies and itineraries of bold night-time journeys. But this is also a metaphysical and certainly allegorical survey, and it is a rigorous interpretation of the present day. Emblematic of the condition of contemporary man, tossed into the world, overwhelmed by consumer objects, often dragged along by a senseless fate.

"The years that we are looking back upon here waver between utopias and catastrophism, between the dream of a social catharsis and the sentiment of destruction, between the aspiration to progress and the pleased contemplation of decadence, between visions of salvation (and even technological redemption) and the apocalypse."[90]

Vergine's allegory chimes with Pablo Neruda's 1959 poem *Ode to Broken Things,* which was taken as a source of Sublimely cathartic imagery and the impetus for *The Anchor Drags.* The last stanza reads:

[89] Vergine, When Trash Becomes Art, 15.

[90] Ibid., 18.

Fig. 44. *The Anchor Drags,* 2014, ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1120 x 1560 mm.

Let us collect everything once and for all,
clocks,
plates, cups carved in cold,
into a poke and let's give
all our belongings to the sea:
let our possessions be undone
in one single alarming destruction,
allowing things to sound
like a river
and let the sea
with its arduous labor of tides
reconstruct the many useless things
that no hand ever breaks
but just keep breaking.[91]

The decision was made to jettison the finding and repair of objects. This was the only phase of the process that could be removed without affecting the drawn outcome. *The Anchor Drags* is a wholly collaged image pieced together from TradeMe objects and a sea and sky found online *(Fig. 44).* It is the largest drawing in the project to date, and took a little over three months to complete. And yet it fails to satisfy.

[91] Pablo Neruda, "Ode to Broken Things," in All the Odes, Pablo Neruda, trans. Ilan Stavans (New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2013), 116-117.

The Anchor Drags disappoints the aim of the project – to reconcile the Image and the Object – it is all Image. The objects depicted are not known in their full dimensionality having been delivered flat to the page. As a result there is a disappointing lack of dimensionality to the final image; it fails to convince. The viewer may not see this, but the process and the outcome are compromised for the maker whose affection for, and loyalty to, the piece is strained. The *Floating Bodies* are known objects with accumulated histories, that is their power. This was grasped early in the project, and is discussed at length above, but as has already been observed; some lessons are only slowly learned, and The Anchor Drags was a costly way to confirm that the *Floating Bodies* are not still life.

Necessary Protection

The project returned to the repaired objects for the final drawing in the *Floating Bodies* suite. New objects were added, and were again montaged with sea and sky imagery. The moonlit sky is quoted from JMW Turner's *Fishermen at Sea* (1796) and the sea is a complex collage of turbulent water found online. The sense that the deep blue wave is about to topple onto objects and viewer is reinforced by once again keeping the horizon above the vanishing points of the objects.

Necessary Protection summarises and concludes the *Floating Bodies* suite. All the elements are here: the repaired objects (familiar in all their three-dimensionality), staged, recorded, cut from their surroundings, plunged into a montaged sea, framed against a Sublime sky. Here is the Red Boy's warm lit bubble in a turbulent and threatening world. At 1095 x 1705 mm *Necessary Protection* is the largest of the suite and was the most complex in its assembly and rendering. The billboard form at top left is a new object and stands in wordlessly for the titular jetty in *We Asked for Signs*. The other objects have been rearranged and rescaled to increase pictorial depth without affecting the filmic space, and the use of three light sources further complicates the composition.

The working title for this piece was *The Harbour Becomes the Sea*,[92] chosen for its suggestion of emotional as well as physical exposure. In the process of amassing the chair and table forms that flank the image a resemblance was noted to Colin McCahon's *Necessary Protection* series, and the title was borrowed. McCahon's series too seems to refer to intrusion and loss of security; its suggestion of the rock stack and gannet colony at Muriwai also implies a nest-leaving, world-entering loss of innocence that is not irrelevant to the *Floating Bodies*.

[92] Leslie Feist and Brendan Canning, The Water (Santa Monica, CA: Universal Music Publishing Mgb Ltd., 2007), line 5.

Final examination was held at 4pm on 22 August 2014 in the Edmiston Gallery of the Voyager Maritime Museum, Auckland. The examiners were Ian Jervis (senior lecturer Visual Arts, AUT University), Linda Tyler (Associate Professor Elam School of Fine Arts Auckland University and Director Centre for Art Studies Auckland University) and John Pusateri (lecturer Architecture, Unitec).

A single drawing, *Necessary Protection*, and an installation of *Shored Up* and *Floating Bodies* objects were shown *(Figs. 45, 46)*.

Necessary Protection was hung using a magnetic display system consisting of small metal plates that can be pinned to the wall, and small but powerful magnets that hold the drawing in place. Some experimentation was required to calculate the number of plate and magnet pairs needed to support *Necessary Protection*. The magnets were chosen over bulldog and foldback clips because of their minimal intrusion on the face and edge of the drawing. This liberated the cadrage, and allowed the un-"framed" upper edge of the drawing to remain open to the wall, unencumbered by the mechanics of display. The side and lower edges of the work were not fixed in any way, allowing the paper to curl away from the wall in an assertion of the object-hood already noted.

Figs. 45, 46. Installation view, Edmiston Gallery, Voyager Maritime Museum, Auckland, 22 August 2014.

CONCLUSION

This exegesis has sought to illuminate the two paths along which the *Floating Bodies* project proceeded, and their synthesis in the suite of drawings that concludes the project and forms a threshold to an ongoing practice.

The first path had its origins in a fascination with climate change imagery and depictions of inundation and displacement.

The second path sprang from an interest in the tension between two and three dimensions in the visual arts and an impulse to exploit it.

After an initial phase of maquette-making and auditioning of materials and effects with which to physically interpose and interpenetrate the image and the object, and an investigation of materiality through notions of repurposing, reframing and humility, the project pivoted away from attempts at a physical reconciliation and sought a conceptual one. The epiphany came through photographing repaired objects and the timely reading of the curators Sabine Eckmann and Gertrud Koch on space and its representation and *cadrage*. The decisive realisation was that beyond Image AND Object, and Image ON Object lies another territory of Image OF Object.

Rather than a conventional figurative process delivering still life outcomes, the project established a series of filters: repair of object, photography of repair, montage of photograph, and drawing of montage. Rather than strip the objects of their meanings, new meanings are added through a reframing of scale and context.

Representation of climate change and sea level rise led inevitably to an interrogation of Sublime and Romantic weather imagery, especially Shipwreck Sublime, some of which was quoted verbatim in the *Floating Bodies* drawings, and reading on Gianbattista Piranesi and the German Romantics corroborated the use of visionary and hypnagogic displacement, disproportion and distortions of scale in the visualization of psychic as well as physical threat.

A lifelong practice of drawing, and decades of professional practice as an illustrator meant that it was inevitable that the final images would be drawn. Years of commercial use of drawing skills had devalued them, and facility was seen as an obstacle to discovery in the early experimental phase of the project. But drawing on a large scale revived interest in the medium and the prolonged repetitious process was found to have psychological, even spiritual, benefits. The painstaking accumulation of large images out of massed minute single marks in an isolative and contemplative practice effectuates the virtues of patience and labour, continuing a long and venerable craft tradition of virtuosity in drawing and printmaking, advantaged by modern materials.

The suite of large ballpoint pen drawings that complete the *Floating Bodies* project are windows into an inundated world; it is dusk, never dawn, and in the failing light the shapes and meanings of objects are not quite apprehensible. It is not a nightmare world, but between sleep and waking; what was safe is safe no longer, and what was familiar is now tainted by dread. The harbour becomes the sea. While we all see the world's weather changing and see the images of weather catastrophes with the same relief or *schadenfreude* as the tiny figures in a Romantic Deluge, there are still many who deny the existence of climate change, as the science continues to be contested. Real or not, the psychological weight of climate doom is as oppressive as the threat of nuclear war was to a previous generation.

It is envisaged that beyond the *Floating Bodies* project this practice will continue to examine the issues of climate change, sea level rise and the degradation of the planet through drawings of found, repaired and made objects that exploit the inherited Sublime impulse to overwhelm the viewer with content, scale and technique.

This project has revived a flagging practice, has reinforced old ways of working and has injected new conceptual and procedural rigour that will propel the practice forward for the foreseeable future.

Weather permitting.

APPENDIX

The *Floating Bodies* Suite 2013-2014

Untitled 2013
ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1120 x 615 mm,
Wallace Collection, Auckland

Untitled (Ultramarine) 2013
ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1120 x 615 mm, Private Collection
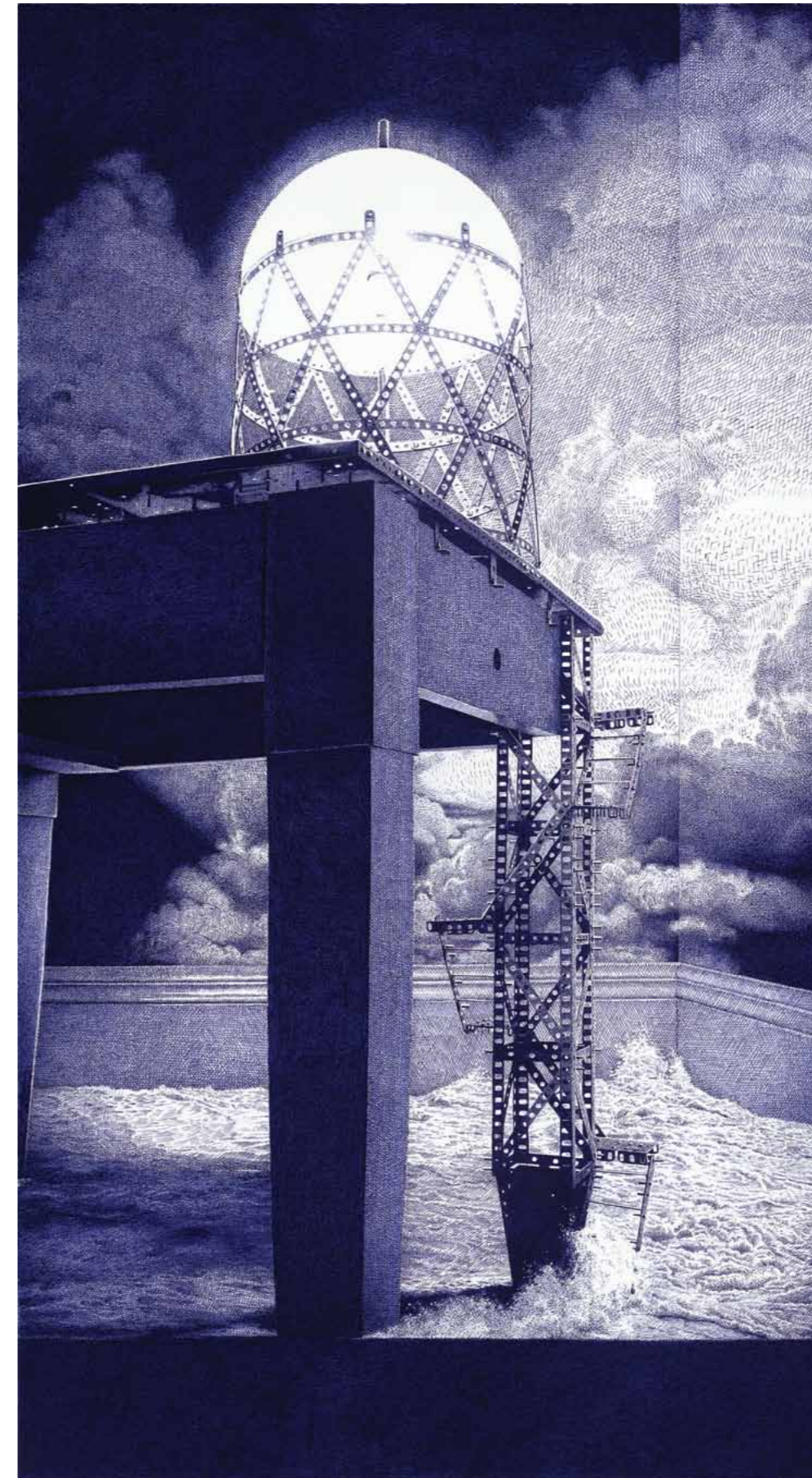
We Asked for Signs 2013
ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1050 x 1500 mm, Vela Collection, Hamilton

The Anchor Drags 2014
ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1120 x 1560 mm

Necessary Protection 2014
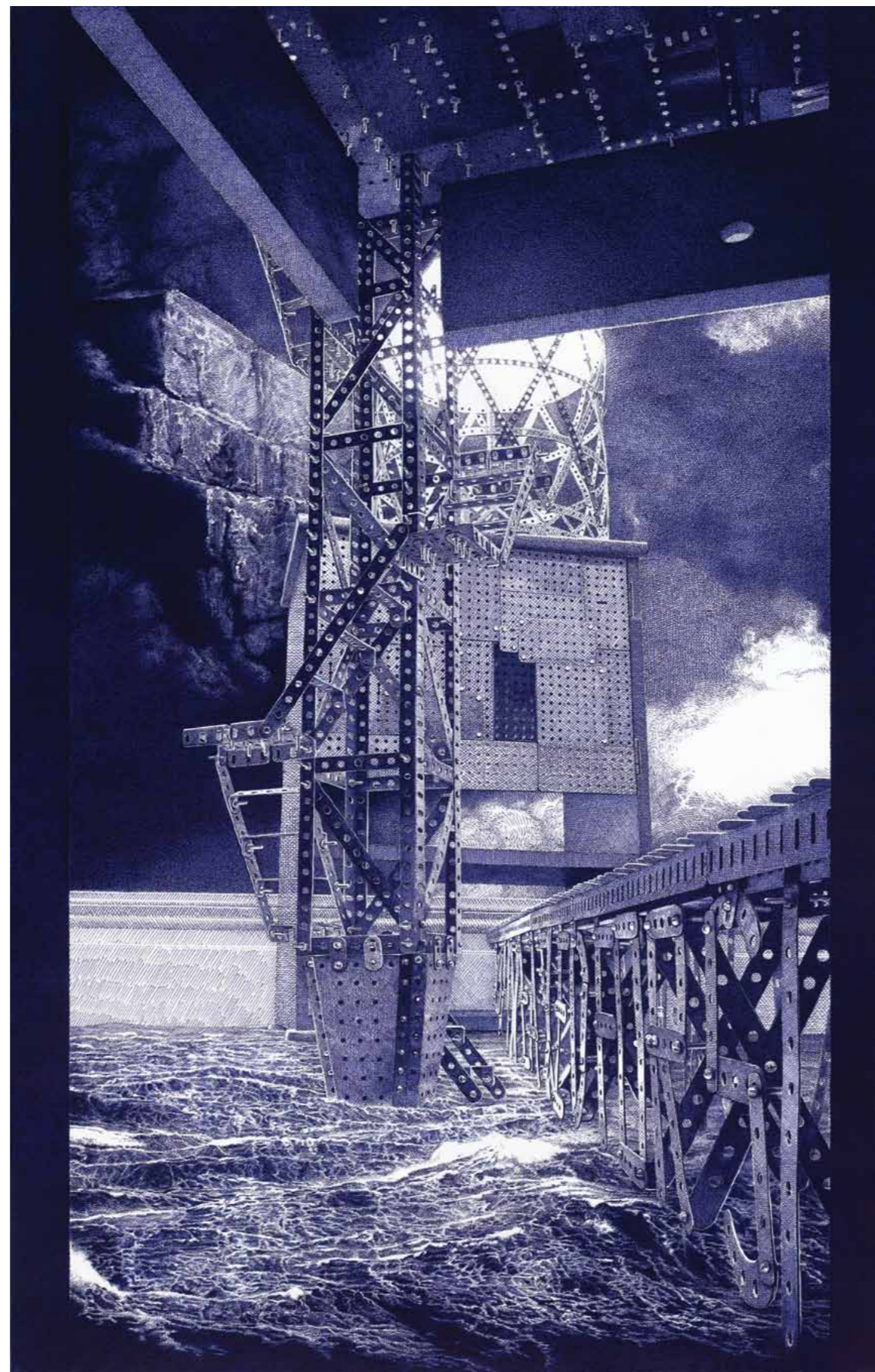ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1095 x 1705 mm

Untitled, 2013, ballpoint pen and correction
fluid on paper, 1120 x 615 mm.

We Asked for Signs, 2013, ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1050 x 1500 mm.

The Anchor Drags, 2014, ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1120 x 1560 mm.

Untitled (Ultramarine), 2013, ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1120 x 615 mm

Necessary Protection, 2014, ballpoint pen and correction fluid on paper, 1095 x 1705 mm

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