

certain journeys

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20 September to 8 October 2016

a major survey exhibition presenting works on paper by

Gary Shinfield

**After years spent investigating various forms of printmaking,
Gary's works reveal the subtle relationship between inner
and outer experience as new places in the environment
are encountered.**

**Each journey for creating new images has been represented
by one or a group of prints in this exhibition.**

Gary Shinfield is known for large printed works on paper that inhabit a gallery space like wandering explorers, not lost, just contemplating the terrain. This artist records topographical, archaeological and fleeting human forms with a unique gestural mark, but his overriding concern is connection to a site on a physical and spiritual level. He has traversed much of Australia and several overseas countries pursuing that goal. The artwork made from each of these expeditions intertwines to form an immersive visual diary.

Of Site and Connection – reflections on a personal journey

Catalogue essay for Two Rivers 2016

Karen Ball BVA (Hons 1), MVA

The tyranny of the sense of place, on one hand, is crucial ... but on the other hand, the actuality of location is almost incidental, the important thing is the resonance which it carries within itself. The place specific references are only clearly discernable to the artist and there are few or no literal transcriptions or highlighted landmarks and, where they exist, they are swallowed into the fabric of the work and incorporated into the process of the making of the image. As in so much of his earlier art, he discovers signs, emblems, traces and remnants which somehow serve as a catalyst for one of his artworks, but quite often there is a sense of the hidden or the encoded within the work.

The Metaphorical world of Gary Shinfield:

The Remnant Series, Imprint June 2010

Professor Sasha Grishin, AM, FAHA

Willoughby and Tokyo 1986/7

Face

Woodcut on black
Japanese paper
Image 39 x 29 cm
Edition of 15 1986

In 1986 I began classes with Ruth Burgess at the Workshop Arts Centre, Willoughby and made a series of woodcuts in the Japanese manner. *Face* is one of these images. I planned to develop this method further and in 1987 travelled to Tokyo to work with Toshi Yoshida at the Yoshida Academy practising traditional Japanese woodblock methods. The print *Tokyo* was made during this period of study and is exhibited for the first time in this exhibition. In hindsight, the prints made before travelling to Japan, without a thorough understanding of Japanese methods, express a more natural direction and seem more Japanese, even though made in Australia. The Japanese journey helped redirect my internal compass in pursuit of a more authentic Australian print – with reference to expansive space, subtle colour, and dry, gritty textural qualities.

The print *Face* was exhibited at the Workshop Arts Centre Gallery in 1986 in the exhibition *Four Woodcut Artists* organised by Ruth Burgess.

Eden and Broken Hill 1988/89

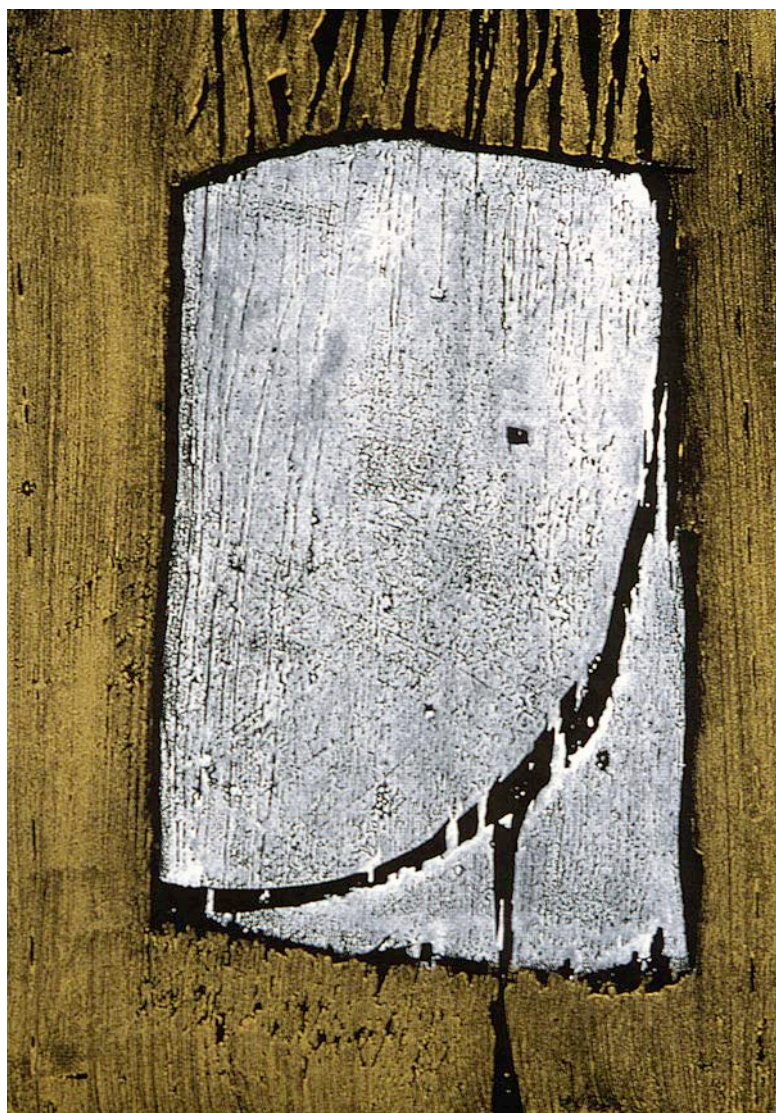
In 1988 I relocated to Canberra and studied printmaking at post-graduate level at Canberra School of Art, now the School of Visual Art at Australian National University. During this period, relief printmaker Gillian Mann was most influential on my development as an artist. As part of studies several working trips were organised.

The first trip was to a remote location near Eden on the NSW south coast. I took sheets of plywood for making woodcuts on site.

The Sea, Eden 1 is the first panel of a triptych made on this trip. The surface of the wood was built up with impasto medium and carved away with tools. In 1992 the Print Council of Australia commissioned a limited edition of thirty prints of this image.

Another trip was organised to Broken Hill and Sturt Meadows, a nearby sheep station. Again I worked on large sheets of plywood on location. Impasto medium was painted onto the surface of the wood and drawn into, in response to the surrounding features – structures from the mining industry and snakes encountered in the outback. These two subjects merge ambiguously in the four-panel work *Broken Hill series 1 to 4*.

Part of this series, *Broken Hill series 1 and 2*, was acquired by Broken Hill City Art Gallery in 1999.



Canberra, Goulburn and Lake George 1990/94

The Sea Eden 1

Woodcut with collagraph
Image 56 x 75 cm
Artist proof 1989 and
edition of 30 in 1992

Gates

Woodcut on Chinese paper
Image 28 x 65 cm
Artist proof 1994

I travelled the stretch of land between Canberra and Goulburn on a regular basis for several years and it became the subject matter for a large number of works.

In Canberra, post art school printmaking continued at Studio One, an open access studio with manager Basil Hall. Here artists could rent spaces, attend workshops and exhibit their work.

The Tower, a three plate etching based on the tower that overlooks the city of Goulburn, was made as part of an etching workshop with Basil Hall.

The limited edition book, *Passing Through*, was made for Raft Press set up by Les Petersen in 1992. This handmade book of lithographs and woodcuts was based on the journey between Goulburn and Canberra. The images and text map the signposts or markers on the route. This book, along with others made for the Raft Press Project, was exhibited at and collected by the Australian National Library.

The monotype, *The Church has a Hole in the Back Wall*, also relates to this journey, and is based on the site of a derelict church on the way.

In 1995 Jennifer Lamb, director of Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, organised an exhibition titled *Lake Isle* based on Lake George.

Similarly, Gary Shinfield's artistic response to the lake is a distillation of his physical experience of it. In preparing for the exhibition, he took three different approaches, each referencing the other: work made about the lake from memories and from a distant point in the city where he lives; work made in situ while camping by the lake; and work made in the studio based on more potent and informed experiences. It is in the last approach that the metaphorical interpretation emerges. The edge of the lake, the meeting place between land and water, represents the opposites of life: male and female: definite and indefinite; knowable and unknowable. The road along the lake's edge leads to the edge of possibilities, which one may or may not choose to pursue. The light sparkling on the water suggests the presence of the divine, something that one moves towards, but never quiet attains.

Jennifer Lamb, Director Goulburn Regional Art Gallery
From the catalogue essay for *Lake Isle*, an exhibition of relief prints about Lake George March 1995

The woodcut *Lake Memory 1* was exhibited in this exhibition.



Darwin: the first journey, 2000

In 2000 Basil Hall invited eight artists to Charles Darwin University to work on a collaborative woodcut.

My footprints were the imprint of a naked foot and that of a sandal – one foot on the ground in the Top End, and one surrounded by a shoe I had brought with me, forming a barrier from direct contact. The two imprints seemed to symbolise new life and old patterns of a sheltered existence. The path that meanders through the whole picture suggests the flowing of a river, an arabesque with a billabong, and reflections of strong light. Diary entry, on the making of the collaborative woodcut titled *Footprints*.

The woodcut *Darwin 1* was also made at this time, and printed as an edition of 20 prints. This image suggests a bridge crossing over from a constricted form to an area of tropical green surrounded by the blue of the sea. It also establishes an important theme – a place of arrival found through a creative response to a certain landscape or site in the environment.

Darwin: the second journey, 2002

The second journey took place over an extended period of six months, driving to and from Darwin through the east coast, the Centre and the Gulf Country. It also became a research trip for a course commenced in 2000, Masters of Fine Art by Research at COFA, UNSW. This project, *The Space Through which the Figure Moves*, investigated various spatial concepts.

I began research by drawing and observing boat forms in the Museum of the Northern Territory, and in other places offshore. A large mixed media work began to take shape in the studio at Charles Darwin University. It included pink Chinese envelopes from a Chinese Emporium, black and white cowhide wallpaper, and woodcuts of various boat forms based on vessels from Indonesia – disparate elements reflecting multicultural Darwin. This work titled *Boatpeople 1 and 2* also made reference to Darwin as a crossing over point between Asia and Australia, both historically and in recent times. It was shown in the Sulman Prize at the AGNSW in 2004.

The Crossing Over panels 1-4, printed in the studio at Darwin, was made after a trip to aboriginal lands in the Tiwi Islands.

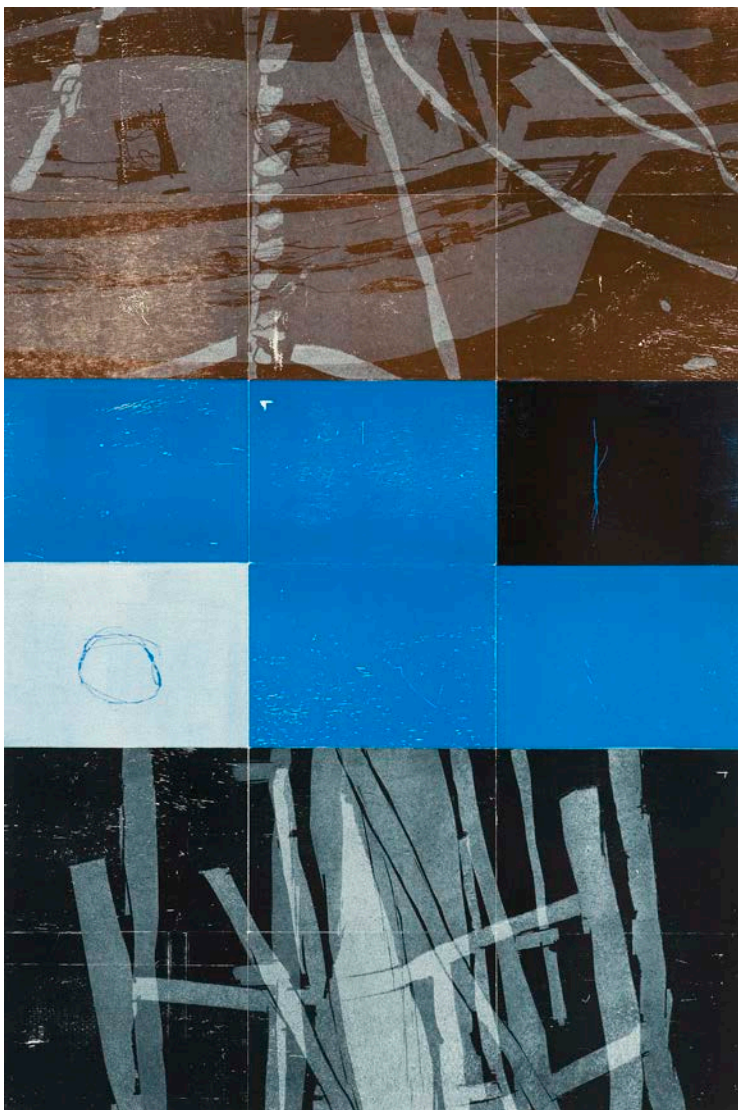
After returning to Sydney, memories of the second journey were able to distil and form into a series of works titled *Memories of Darwin 1-10*. *Memory 10* refers more explicitly to the plight of the boat people, a theme developed in later works. The boat form also becomes a metaphor for the human body, transience and displacement.

Memory of Darwin 10

Woodcut

Image 90 x 60 cm

Artist proof 2006



Abrolhos Islands

Raft

Etching on twelve sheets
of paper
Image 196 x 147 cm
Artist proof 2005

Sydney Printmakers organised an exhibition of collaborations between various members in 2005. Geraldine Berkemeier and I decided to make a work together and research on the Abrolhos Islands off the coast of Geraldton, WA. This site had been the first place of forced European settlement after the sinking of the *Batavia* in 1629, and remnants still can be found on the islands and in local museums.

Back in Sydney we stained large sheets of Chinese paper with the blue of the seas over which we flew. The work slowly built with references to the site of the sinking, coral reefs as seen from the air and other remnants observed.

This work, along with others made after travelling to Darwin and surrounding areas, formed part of the exhibition *Sink or swim*, which travelled extensively in Australia.

The collaborative etched lino print titled *Abrolhos* was collected by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

The collaborative works extend the scale of printed images on paper, explore new approaches such as staining and hanging works in space, and investigate historical and contextual aspects of research.

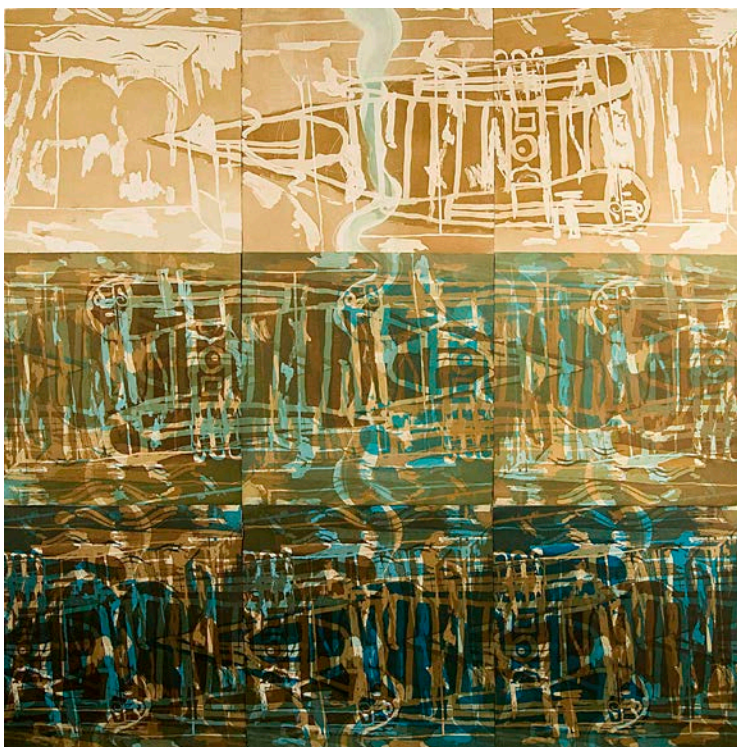
Darwin revisited 2004/5

After we received an Australia Council grant for new work and as part of the research for *Sink or swim*, Geraldine and I made more trips to Darwin, specifically to work with Basil Hall Editions on independent etching projects.

I became increasingly interested in material connected with the artist Ian Fairweather and his ill-fated journey on a raft from Darwin to Timor in 1952. In the Museum of the Northern Territory I found a diagram of his raft as found by a missionary, washed up on a beach on the island of Roti. I used this sketch for the basic configuration of a vessel in a new work, titled *Raft*. The plates were made in Darwin and printed in the studio in Sydney. This work was exhibited in the Fremantle Print Award and acquired for the Little Creatures collection in 2007.

Also from this period is the etching *Artifact 1 (Droptank)* based on an object seen in the Museum Collection – a fuel tank from WW2, similar to what Fairweather would have used to create his raft.

Raft extended boundaries with the making of a large scale, multi panel etching. As an image it worked on a number of levels making both historical and contemporary connections, and creating a metaphor for the fragility and impermanence of life.



The Kimberley 2009

Weather Pattern Triptych

Etching on three sheets

Image 150 x 100 cm

Edition of 3 2009

In 2008, on a short visit to the Bungle Bungles in Purnululu National Park, I observed and drew the shape and striation of rock forms. Back in Darwin a series of small etchings was made in response to the trip – *Kimberley 1 and 2*. Also around this time I became trapped in Darwin as a category five cyclone approached.

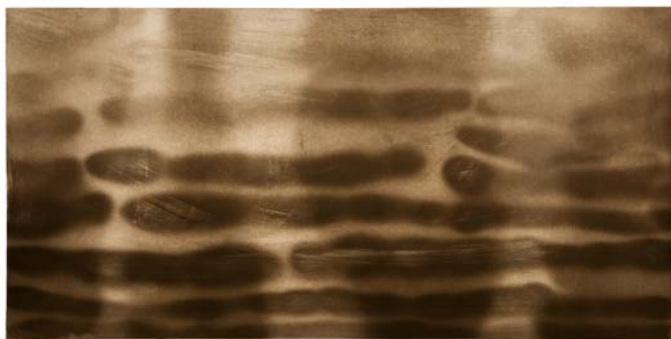
These experiences led to the making of *Weather Pattern series 1 and 2*. This large body of work was printed in Sydney from five etching plates – two small plates and three large. In these images the landscape is reduced to elements: stripe, dot and line.

Weather Pattern Triptych exhibited in the Blake Prize Exhibition for 2010 is also from this period.

The Hunter River NSW 2010

Maitland Regional Art Gallery offered Geraldine Berkemeier and myself an exhibition based on interpretations of the Hunter River. This came to fruition in 2010 with the exhibition *River Crossing*. Once again we collaborated on large scale works based on various stages of the river. We also worked independently and the unique state, woodcut print titled *River, Bridge and Coal Train* based on the intersection of three different forms, is an example of this. In this image, the river is overshadowed by structures and pollution from mining operations.

At Rose Point (Singleton) a railway bridge crosses the Hunter – a grand bridge on sandstone columns supporting an iron structure to carry trains. Its construction revealed several stages of engineering and the prosperity of the past. The bridge intersects with the river and this intersection of forms, movement, history and even politics fascinated me. The longer we stayed, more coal trains crossed the bridge on their way to the coalfields in the upper Hunter to collect coal, and transport it back to the port of Newcastle, and then to China and the world. We were unexpectedly standing beside an international, corporate artery – the river and the bystanders were insignificant by comparison. Diary entry.



Greece 2010

Enclosure 1D

Woodcut and monotype on
Chinese paper
Image 90 x 60 cm
Unique state print 2011

... a point of arrival was found unexpectedly in a tiny chapel, in an overgrown garden, in a neglected enclosure. The chapel provided a place for meditation, infusing the surrounding space with a subtle, positive force beyond the realm of the physical. Diary entry

On the island of Skopelos I participated in a workshop with Basil Hall and made a number of etchings, and *Enclosure 1* is one of these works.

The idea of 'enclosure' was further developed in a series of woodcuts with monotype, titled *Enclosure series 1-5*, made at Australia Print Workshop in Melbourne in 2011.

The five Enclosure series made at APW represent new possibilities – rebirth, spiralling, awakening, coupling and being part of a different family. They are based on the floor plans of imagined buildings.
Diary entry

Scuola di Grafica, Venice 2010

For this residency, the plan was to work on monotypes based on the Hunter River NSW for a forthcoming exhibition.

Travelling to Venice involved crossing the Alps by train, stopping at Verona and then Padua before arriving in Venice. On this journey, different stages of various waterways were observed – from mountain streams, to fast and then slow moving rivers, and finally to the quietness of the lagoon. There were similarities between the stages of rivers in both countries, including a history of flooding. *Submergence* is a series of monotypes made in response to these findings.

Thailand 2011, 2015, 2016

... steps were encountered in many temples leading to a threshold but never reaching an end. The journey was to ascend and descend endlessly, moving towards and away from a point of arrival.
Diary entry

Three large etching plates were made exploring this idea, and when overlaid formed the series *Steps 1-3*.

Subsequent journeys have been made to Thailand, including an artist residency at Compeung near Chiang Mai in 2016.



The Oxley River at Eungella, Northern NSW 2012-14

End Game

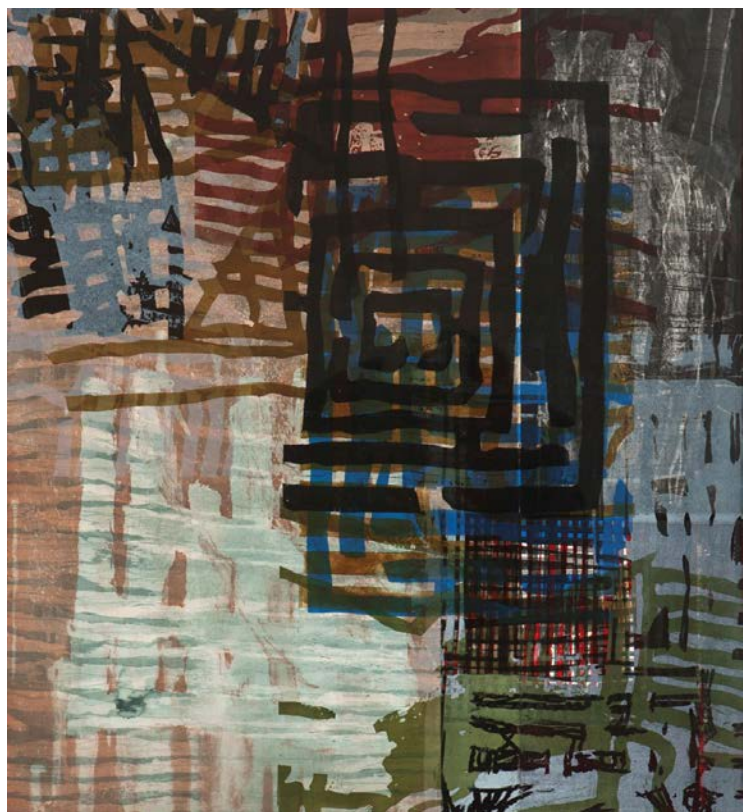
Woodcut, etching and linocut
Image 77 x 70 cm
Unique state print 2015

Many woodcuts including *Blue and Red River* were made at a family property beside the Oxley River. The theme of enclosure was taken up again and placed in relation to abstract responses to the movement and sound of the river. The meaning of enclosure changed, from sacred space as seen in earlier works, to place of confinement. The series of woodcuts made, *Enclosure and the River 1-15*, represent this period.

The Enclosure images represent moving into a private space. An empty space is sought but never completely found. The quiet space only serves to recharge and open back out. Its walls are not able to hold the world at bay for long. A trickle of light emerges and the stream builds to a river. I have spent much time beside the Oxley River in Northern NSW. It is a river that never stops flowing. Above the river on a veranda, a number of woodblocks were carved. Later in the studio when printed onto handmade sheets of Chinese paper, the Enclosure and the River series was formed.
Artist statement

Blue Mountains NSW 2015

Relocating to the upper Blue Mountains in 2015 resulted in new motifs appearing in works. Mapping bush trails and garden paths in abstract form was the method used to arrive at the images *End Game* and *Fun and Games*. Through the making of these mixed media (woodcut, etching, linocut) prints the enclosure changed shape and began to resemble a maze or labyrinth.



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Thank you to Ruth Burgess for opening the exhibition
and Mary Faith and staff at GCS Gallery for giving me the
opportunity to present this survey show.

