



SEVEN TRUMPETS

OCTOBER 10 - NOVEMBER 1

PETER BOOTH

DOMINIC KAVANAGH

DAVID MUTCH

IZABELA PLUTA

MICHAEL SCHLITZ

SAM SHMITH

ANNE SCOTT WILSON

STRANGE NEIGHBOUR

395 / GORE ST / FITZROY
VICTORIA / AUSTRALIA

Seven Trumpets brings together seven artists whose work for this exhibition circles around ideas of mortality, finitude, death and impending catastrophe. The artists explore ideas and themes such as landscapes in ruin, prophesised retribution and a reduction of the world into visceral signs of civilisation in decline, woven through with a sense of the rise of the natural, but ultimately the failure of humanity itself.

In the Christian theology – from which the title of this exhibition departs – Seven angels blowing seven trumpets are said to cue Apocalyptic events. The Apocalypse and the Second Coming are siren calls to worship or face the wrath of God, as judgment comes to the wicked from a messianic figure who descends from somewhere on high.

It is possible to be an atheist, yet remain devoutly romantic, revelling in visions of the sublime, the unpredictable (i.e. chaos) and the peaceful yet threatening forces of nature. Being a Gen Y with 90's dystopic literature such as John Marsden's *Tomorrow when the War began* in my formative mind, I am alarmed yet excited by the sheer amount of contemporary film, art and literature that is unabashedly dystopic and post-Apocalyptic. This should come at no surprise when global media depicts a world that promises to oppress and destroy on a 24-hour news cycle. In 2014 we face war, disease, mass slavery, climatic hardship and political upheaval. These events are not new, having occurred throughout documented history, although it is only in modern history that we experience these on a truly global level. Catastrophic events, disaster, atrocity and persecution permeate through the minds of the global citizen, now more than ever.

End-of-the-world scenarios take sustenance from the frailty of a humanity which retains an innate desire to have structure and peace. The consequences of not abiding by this structure often manifest through artistic images of the decline of civilisation, a descent into ruin and darkness. These portrayals are important in presenting views of the world as potential dystopic narratives through which we bring about our own demise, our own Apocalypse. For *Seven Trumpets*, these seven artists present propositions for dystopic scenarios, apocalyptic events and impending calamities we face, both man-made and natural.

Most artists work around these ideas in a distinctly universal way. An exception in this case is **Dominic Kavanagh**. His site specific work *Monument to the last drop* is an installation which resonates with Australian iconography, namely, the Aussie windmill. This classic symbol of white Australian perseverance and ingenuity in the face of the harsh Australian climate now lies in ruin. Such wrecks are a common motif for Kavanagh, and here it is given distinctly metaphorical alludings toward the conflict over fresh water and its likely factor in future dystopian conflicts. More broadly, this also references the world decline in natural resources, especially in Australia. *Monument to the last drop* is part Mad Max set dress, part Zen garden. Bullet casings, raised concrete, bones and rubble lie in beautiful ruin within a cyclical fountain, with plants that persist in growing while only destruction surrounds it.

This perpetuation of nature amongst harsh human intervention can similarly be viewed in the work of **Izabela Pluta**. In *Lifted Bitumen* a bed of raised concrete ripples through the picturesque landscape, in what is an ambiguous representation of an unknown threat, intervention or disaster. This image appears situated somewhere between construction site, earthquake ripple and war zone, akin to scenes of aftermath in the East Ukrainian countryside this year. Lush nature is contrasted with pale concrete in a disturbed landscape halfway between inhabited space and natural wilderness, questioning both our connection to nature and our manipulation of it. As it could be argued, we may be on a path to creating Hell on Earth through our forced disarray of natural processes. Pluta's stark juxtaposition becomes a fitting example of our imposed principles on the natural, and its dual potential for destruction.

Like Pluta, **David Mutch** uses concrete as a symbol of the man-made, built environment. With *Shelter II* we are confronted by cast objects that are rough yet well finished, their materiality suggesting both fragility and fortification. This duality is poignantly reminiscent of the idea of a doomsday bunker. Recalling the essentials for 'Preppers' or 'Survivalists', as popularised through recent reality TV shows, Mutch's shelves are well stocked with canned food and drink in preparation for some external conflict. Here however, these items lie in decay - in wait for the next prophesised Apocalypse. Again, like Pluta, there is an intangible, ambiguous sense of causality. Does the threat stem from the natural? Or from ourselves?

While commonly associated with ideas of the sublime and the transience of the individual via technology, **Sam Shmith's** *Untitled (In Spates #1)* offers a quietly brooding work that, in the context of this exhibition, may allow a reading through ideas of the Apocalyptic Sublime. This movement arose through the political upheaval of 19th Century French revolution and led to depictions of the volatility of nature and its associated catastrophes, driven by religious Apocalyptic narrative. This movement came to demonstrate that fear and the sublime are inextricably linked. In Shmith's photograph, a vessel flies into the unknown, a psychological vacuum strangely akin to one where we similarly dwell, a space of fear, denial and disquiet around the consequences of human-induced climate change. Poignantly reminiscent of the recent disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, this airplane trails into the void, a heavenly threshold of clouds that are both beautiful and threatening. This work may remind us that, despite forward advances in technology to which, in this case, we risk our lives to on a daily basis, there are forces that remain uncontrollable and are at times beyond all rationality.

Our mortality is thrust into our consciousness daily in the face of the unknown and unexplained, and **Peter Booth's** *Vivesected Man* is the only figurative interpretation of this in *Seven Trumpets*. No stranger to the depiction of dark narratives and dream-like apocalyptic landscapes, Booth's imagery often combines strange symbols with man, beast and desolate environments. There is a noticeable descent into chaos and a breakdown of civility in his work that invokes both fantasy and plausible reality.

Atrocity, torture, obscure male ritual all occur today, and Booth's work recalls for us the capacity for violence the human race has for all other living things. *Vivesected Man*, though unassuming in scale, is a charged, visceral representation of a corpse, an apt representation of the physical result of Apocalyptic events. War, disease and catastrophe typically lead to death. Our mortality is made tangible through Booth's thickly rendered corpse, its blank gaze a reminder of our inevitable return to the earth, to dust.

A departure from this physical body occurs in the work of **Anne Scott Wilson**. Primarily concerned with ideas surrounding fear of death, Wilson's *there will be no more night* is a video work exploring a yearning for something beyond the physical. Here, disembodied, evangelical voices in various languages give their account of experiences and manifestations of light, both spiritual and physical. Shot in real-time, we view a magnificent gumtree sway in the wind in the last 12 minutes of light. As a full moon radiates above, the voices speak to its permeating presence as a metaphor for the pinpoint of light described in near-death experiences. The voices become more abstract and overlapping as the dusk noticeably transitions to night, a descent into darkness on this earth, but not for those who follow the Light, leaving their physical vessel behind.

Religion often warns of the wrath of God, yet it is the wrath of man unto himself in the name of God which continues to reverberate through a dark history. Tasmanian artist **Michael Schlitz** is best known for his intricate printmaking skills, particularly his woodcuts which often serve as a double metaphor for our fraught relationship with the natural world. His *Saints of the Apocalypse* brings forth the Christian symbology laden in the title of this exhibition. These sirens of death are painted crudely yet possess a magical presence of both fear and intrigue, that same morbid combination which draws people to horror, the site of an accident or to the beach before a tidal wave.

Far from announcing Holy Retribution for this earth, the seven artists in *Seven Trumpets* reveal alternatives, the varying shapes and forms of the breakdown of our environment infused with the ominous beauty manifest in such self-destruction. Amidst chaos, fear and beautiful Apocalypse, a sublime silence pervades over everything.

David-Ashley Kerr, Curator, 2014

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Image credit: (detail) Izabela Pluta, *Lifted bitumen* 2011, C-type print, 100 x 123cm. Courtesy the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne