

# ANNE MORRISON | THE CROSSINGS

27 JUNE - 22 JULY 2018

According to the dictionary, a crossing is a place at which one may safely traverse. However, while crossing safely is the aim it is not always the end point. The expanse of water that separates our island from elsewhere, and which in many ways defines Anne Morrison's locale is both safe and dangerous; nurturing and frightening.

In 1835 the *Neva* was dashed to pieces on a reef north of King Island in Bass Strait. Of the 241 people on board, 145 female convicts being transported to Van Diemen's Land and all 34 children perished in the fury of these notoriously inhospitable waters. But this stretch of water is also a bountiful place of rich fishing grounds, fertile coasts, verdant islands and abundant bird life; and has provided refuge and security to its many inhabitants since time immemorial. Expanding on a series of projects – *Felt Presence*, Devonport Regional Gallery, 2013; *Reimagined*, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston 2015; and *Beneath the Waterline*, Bass Strait Maritime Centre, Devonport 2017 – the artist has taken advantage of the opportunity to immerse herself in collections, archives and libraries and to bring our attention to our pelagic surrounds and the women who have known it so well.

As a consequence of the artist's intensive investigations, when I visited the wall of her studio had disappeared under a collage of paintings, sketches, photocopies and notes. Boats, knots, ropes, navigational tools, masts, oars, nets, craypots, baskets, nests, maps, bathymetric charts and plans, frames and locket were interspersed with textural silhouettes of women who have taken on this watery world in a multiplicity of ways – as Indigenous 'women of the sea' who have been here since long before; and as ship-owners, navigators, explorers, adventurers, rescuers, sailors, signalwomen, dockworkers, fishers, women as convicts, free settlers, immigrants and refugees in more recent times. From the actions of delving, rummaging and gleaning the artist has unearthed mementos, relics, readings and snippets that slowly swirl together into a quiet and enigmatic narrative of hopes, desires, losses, expectations and assorted whisperings, traces and remnants.

In the painstaking process of making the work is stitched together like a patchwork blanket, the artist bringing into being the timeless domestic space of women's handiwork. Evenings find her sitting by the fire with her daughter working one element at a time, and remembering the *Raja* quilt – that powerful coalescing of fragments made by convict women passing time together on their journey from northern to southern hemisphere in 1841, and marking their transition from the known to the unknown.

In her homage to the women of this maritime world, the artist weaves them into the paper surface, applying and removing pigment in equal measure, adding to and paring back, distilling and dissipating; allowing the pigment enriched watercolour to find its own level and leave its own trace – these fluid transient grounds are worked over with fine line drawings revealing subtle imprints hidden beneath and magically making history porous.

Through the creative processes of digital conversion the ebb and flow of the interrelated actions of painting, research, gathering, sorting and reflection are layered and transformed. From this ambiguous field, the voices of a host of forgotten women are reinserted and reasserted – stitched back into our history through the delicate yet resilient manifestation of their presence and absence.

*Jane Deeth, May 2018*