

## Contemplating the terrain vague

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**COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS**

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

**CONTEMPLATING THE *TERRAIN VAGUE***



MASTER OF FINE ARTS

2012

RESEARCH PAPER

By

**Anne Starling**

**Printmaking**

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## Abstract

This research paper, *Contemplating the Terrain Vague*, is an examination of the post-industrial landscapes of Rhodes and Port Kembla in New South Wales and Fremantle in Western Australia. Through direct observation of these areas, I have developed a series of images, which explore degradation, pollution and waste of the surrounding foreshores and waterways.

My art practice is informed by scientific documentation of this landscape and environs by organisations such as *Greenpeace*, *The Environmental Protection Agency*, *Rhodes Remediation* and *The National Toxic Network*. These documents examine the effect of pollutants on the foreshores, waterways and inhabitants. Specific artworks by the Dutch photographer Hans Scholten along with South African artists John Muafangejo and Jo Ratcliffe are referenced for their social and political subject matter. The notion of the print as an important social document is discussed, as alluded to by Dr Elizabeth Rankin, writer and curator of South African history.

My work examines the legacy of manufacturing by chemical companies for those who reside on contaminated land. In this context, the principle of the *Terrain Vague* is presented, highlighting the contradictions of those abandoned spaces that can be crucial or harmful to cities. Similarly, the *Urbanist* theoretical writing of Dr Helen Armstrong in her paper *Time, Dereliction and Beauty: an argument for 'Landscapes of Contempt'* and Professor Ignasi de Solà-Morales, author of *The Terrain Vague* have informed my practice. The exploration and recording of these abandoned spaces is addressed in the photographic imagery of *Urbexer* art - a movement that comments on the legacy of waste. This resonates with my own investigation of industrial degradation and decay. Similarly, the artistic manifestations of Romantic, English born, American

artist Thomas Cole and American, Frederic Edwin Church are referenced in terms of their aesthetic appreciation of the ruin and the picturesque.

I have created a series of images, sited in chapters: *Hidden Agenda*, *The Modern Ruin* and *Living on the Edge*, that feature recurring symbolic motifs, including images of swallows, mangroves, deformed mullet and the prefabricated and affordable post - World War 2 Australian domestic dwelling. Each are used as symbols of the changing face of a post-industrial landscape. Within this body of work some images deal with satirical references and present an ironic view of the comfortable suburban home, albeit, surrounded by smelters and pollution.

*Contemplating the Terrain Vague* refers to actual places and events. It highlights past mistakes, caused through inadequate knowledge and monitoring and sounds a timely warning for future industrial development.

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## FOREWORD

Port Kembla, New South Wales, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2004.

While driving to visit a friend in Port Kembla I turned down a typical suburban street. What I saw compelled me to stop, I pulled over, transfixed, for the scene was decidedly unfamiliar and somewhat unsettling. Before me clouds of smoke billowed from a series of industrial chimneys, engulfing the streets and houses below. The urban surrounds of the city of Port Kembla seemed insignificant against the backdrop of immense steel structures and the emissions of industry. The sprawling urban landscape was dwarfed and overpowered by a large copper smelter relentlessly spewing out a toxic plume, yet life around me seemed to be proceeding as usual. No one seemed perturbed. The implications of living with a toxic neighbour resonated with me. I was confronted by a vista of incompatible and incongruous structures. A series of complex questions, including how such environs had been allowed to develop within a residential area, were just waiting to be answered. My journey of discovering the history and repercussions of industry with man had begun.

## INTRODUCTION

### Contemplating the *Terrain Vague*

*The year's at the spring  
And day's at the morn;  
Morning's at seven;  
The hill-side's dew-pearled;  
The lark's on the wing;  
The snail's on the thorn:  
God's in his heaven –  
All's right with the world!*<sup>1</sup>

My research paper, *Contemplating the Terrain Vague* and associated studio work explores human interaction with the urban and industrial landscape. It focuses on the neglect that has occurred due to the misuse and exploitation of foreshores and waterways by industrial manufacturers and the cumulative effect on ecology and the animal, plant and human inhabitants of the area. This body of work explores changes that occur in the environment, presenting a commentary on degradation and pollution of land by industry - through specific observations of the post-industrial landscapes in the Sydney suburb of Rhodes, Port Kembla in New South Wales and Fremantle in Western Australia.

My work explores *Terrain Vague*<sup>2</sup>, by investigating the legacy of empty and uncertain landscapes through the documentation of fragments of industry and the by-products of manufacturing. *Terrain Vague*, the term coined by Spanish writer and architecture

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<sup>1</sup> The Works of Robert Browning, Dr Tim Cook, Wordsworth Poetry Library, 2007, pg 257.

<sup>2</sup> *Terrain Vague* is a French term which translates to mean: no-man's land, vacant land, wasteland.

Professor Ignasi de Solà-Morales<sup>3</sup>, describes the abandoned, obsolete spaces found in or on the edge of cities. *Terrain Vagues* were first observed and documented in the 1960s and 1970s by photographers. They consequently created images to convey the unsettling beauty of ravaged, abandoned spaces. Those empty spaces, a direct result of industrial degradation, and known as *Terrain Vagues* do, however, allow for artistic interpretation. In that context, and to redefine those spaces, I have made images which record ambiguous, incongruous combinations of architecture and environment.

There are three sources informing this research paper. The first is personal observations of specific landscapes. Through photographs, sketches and the collection of data I have constructed narratives that explore the suburban fringe: locations where the physical environment is being continually transformed amid remnants of a post-industrial past. The second source is scientific research that documents the environmental impact of pollution and waste on the landscape surrounding the Rhodes Peninsula, NSW. Studies of Rhodes by organisations such as *Greenpeace*, *The Environmental Protection Agency*, *Rhodes Remediation* and the *National Toxic Network Inc.*, examine the effects of contaminants on the environment and the health of individuals who live or work near industry. Studies compiled from these groups have provided me with source material, in particular, data listing the chemicals manufactured at Rhodes between 1928 and the early 1990s, and the subsequent effects on the delicate ecosystem.

The third source is the formal study and planning of cities known as *Urbanism*. Urbanists examine the impact of the built environment on the landscape by focussing on geography, politics and the social characteristics of urban areas. My art practice is similarly informed by an examination of cities after the decline of heavy industry. In so

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<sup>3</sup> Professor Ignasi Sola-Morales, Professor of Architectural Composition, Higher Technical School of Architecture, Barcelona, Spain.

far as my research project explores industrialised zones, many of which are now filled with derelict or underused buildings, there are analogies with the writing of Sola Morales. Facets of urban cities, in particular redundant wastelands created by industry, are explored in this paper. Direct reference is made to former sites of heavy industry – Rhodes, Fremantle and Port Kembla. These sites have become empty, uncertain landscapes, epitomising the romanticised wastelands of *Terrain Vague*.

In this correlation of derelict, Australian industrial landscapes and the legacy of waste there are similarities with the work of *Urbexers*,<sup>4</sup> a name given to photographers who use networking sites to display images of abandoned buildings such as power stations, foundries and subways. *Urbexers* see themselves as urban explorers. They enter marginal, abandoned and neglected sites of the *Terrain Vague* to photograph and create images that emphasise the Romantic notion of history and decay by referencing the grotesque, creating a sense of terror or fear. My works, however, explore Romanticism<sup>5</sup> in terms of environmental aesthetics.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence they are aesthetic, emotive responses to the landscape, both natural and man-made.

My images examine the modern ruin and create a contemporary equivalent of decaying Roman orders of architecture, like those found in the picturesque paintings of English born American, Thomas Cole<sup>7</sup> and American, Frederic Edwin Church<sup>8</sup>. The spaces I

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4 Urbexers; the collective name for people who explore abandoned properties and photograph locations typically restricted to the general public, also known as UE or Urbex. First named after the Chernobyl disaster.

5 Romanticism came about in the middle of the 18th century as a reaction to classical thoughts and ideas. Classicism was orderly, logical, and step-by-step, while Romanticism took a different approach by emphasizing emotion and imagination.

<sup>6</sup> Environmental aesthetics – a relatively new sub-field of philosophical aesthetics. A reaction to aesthetics within the analytical tradition, largely concerned with the philosophy of art. Environmental aesthetics investigates the aesthetic appreciation of natural environments, including human and human-influenced ones. Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Environmental Aesthetics, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2010, Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2011

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Cole (1801-1848), English born American, 19th century artist, founder of Hudson River School of landscape painting.

<sup>8</sup> Frederic Edwin Church (1826 - 1900) American 19<sup>th</sup> century artist, key figure in Hudson River School of landscape painting.

research and create are historical, evocative, aesthetically charged studies that evidence our recent industrial past. Like Cole and Church, I have visited depleted areas and physically explored the structures allowing for a direct personal interpretation.

Within the scope of this paper, I reference three artists whose work shares a similarity with my concepts, notably, the documenting of social and political events, thereby creating historical narratives. One of those artists is Hans Scholten, a Dutch photographer who records urban landscapes in Asia and the Middle East. His work inhabits the conceptual framework of Terrain Vague by capturing scenes of rapidly growing and inadequately planned neighbourhoods in which chaos and anarchy are evident. Parallels can also be seen in the linoblock and intaglio prints of the South African printmaker, John Muafangejo. His work comments on spatial displacement and the dislocation of society. They are visual narratives of social and political events. In particular, Muafangejo's bold, graphic interpretations depict unsettled social times and changing urban environments in South African history. Through a range of bold printmaking techniques, my work similarly creates narratives of specific socio/environmental events due to industrial activity from our recent past.

Equally influential is the work of South African contemporary artist, Jo Ratcliffe. In her images Ratcliffe layers and reconstitutes photographs of squatters' camps and refuse dumps in Johannesburg. I am drawn to Ratcliffe's use of layering within an image, an integral part of my own working process, which incorporates layers to address a range of issues. To achieve this I integrate a range of print mediums, including collagraph, linoblock, chin colle and intaglio in each of my prints.

A subtext is incorporated beneath the banality or everyday familiarity in some of my motifs. These include a comfortable, post - World War 2 suburban home or a family

engaged in recreation. The use of collage facilitates a combination of the unnatural with the natural urban landscape. Ratcliffe's photolithographic images similarly represent wastelands and provide a strong political message of a world set on destructive progress.

This paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter One, *Hidden Agenda*, examines the cohabitation of nature and industry, focussing on the reclamation of a post-industrial wasteland. This is supported by imagery, based on the waterways surrounding the Parramatta River and the subsequent effects of pollution on existing ecosystems. Exploitation of the foreshores and estuaries surrounding the Rhodes Peninsula in Sydney, NSW has led to decades of industrial misuse. A further issue explored in this chapter is the toxic legacy left by the chemical companies, *Union Carbide*, *Orica* and *ICI* through an absence of chemical waste control. The bio-accumulative effect of carcinogens on animals and humans is examined, together with the impact on wetlands and mangroves after the introduction of toxins and land contaminants such as 2,4,5 - T (agent orange).

Chapter Two, *The Modern Ruin* is concerned with the industrialisation of contemporary Australian and European cities and the problem of ruined utilitarian buildings that once generated energy for an expanding population. Through observations of dominant, industrial foreshore structures in Fremantle, Western Australia, I make reference to the photographic work of Urbexers. I draw comparisons between these post-industrial Australian landscapes and international sites such as the Ukranian city of Pripjat, Eastern Europe, where the explosion at the Chernobyl power plant devastated the city, its surrounds, the long term health of its inhabitants and the viability of safe food production. Although similarities can be drawn with such post-industrial sites, there are of course distinct differences between Eastern Europe and Australia. Derelict buildings now litter the landscape in Pripjat as a result of the nuclear accident, previous

industrial expansion and problems of waste and pollution. Though such extremes are not the case in Australian cities, disasters such as Chernobyl exemplify the problems of waste, pollution and raise awareness of the consequence of human behaviour and unmonitored industrial processes.

The encroachment of heavy industry and its effects on everyday life are examined in Chapter Three, *Living on the Edge*. The images provide a personal insight into the awkward, symbiotic relationship that exists between industry and society. Imposition of industrial sites on selected population centres has variously resulted in uneasy adaptation through to total acceptance by its inhabitants. My print-derived artworks are intended to pose questions relating to the cost of progress on people and place, while acknowledging the capacity for adaptation in an ever-changing environment.

Within this research document and associated studio work I analyse issues of pollution, remediation, waste and decay. Exploration through personal examination of the aforementioned industrial sites creates an individual response to the post-industrial landscape. *Contemplating the Terrain Vague* is presented in the tradition of social narrative. I have looked toward the past to summarise and evaluate past industrial indiscretions that continue to affect our future. It could be said that *Contemplating the Terrain Vague* is a political, fine art, historic, scientific, social document that addresses aspects of mankind's environmental future.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Hidden Agenda

*Dioxins – poisons without passports.*<sup>9</sup>

*Hidden Agenda* addresses six decades<sup>10</sup> of misuse in and around the foreshore and waterways of the Parramatta River. Among ‘the inhabitants’ of this locality are residual chemicals including Coal Tar<sup>11</sup>, Xanthates<sup>12</sup>, Chlorobenzenes<sup>13</sup>, insecticides such as DDT (agent orange)<sup>14</sup> and DDD (a compound created by the natural breakdown of DDT)<sup>15</sup>. Since 1928, the sixteen hectare site at Rhodes Peninsula has been used by chemical companies such as Union Carbide/Lednez, Timbrol Ltd, CSR Chemicals/Orica, Berger Paints, Allied Feeds and ICI. (Fig1, pg 8) The invasiveness of chemical disposal by these companies has resulted in destruction of habitat and alteration of the delicate ecosystem.



Fig.1 Anne Starling, View of Union Carbide from the edge of the Parramatta River, 2008

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<sup>9</sup> Dr Mariann Lloyd-Smith PhD (Law) Senior Adviser, National Toxics Network Inc. 2011, accessed 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2011

<sup>10</sup> Rhodes Site was actively dumping waste into Homebush Bay from 1928 - 1986

<sup>11</sup> Coal Tar produced from 1928-1986 by the manufacturer Timbrol. A black, thick, opaque liquid obtained by the destructive distillation of bituminous coal, used in making dyes, medicines, plastics, paints, etc..

<sup>12</sup> Xanthates are used in the production of fungicides. Deposited in the Parramatta River from 1933-1986. Toxic to aquatic environments.

<sup>13</sup> Chlorobenzenes are used in the manufacture of certain pesticides, most notably DDT and are a by-product of chemical manufacturing and were used at Rhodes from 1948-1983

<sup>14</sup> Agent Orange is the code name used by the US military for the synthetic insecticide DDT

<sup>15</sup> DDD is also used as an insecticide, by product of DDT.

(Footnotes 2-6, <http://www.rhodesremediation.nsw.gov.au/images/hbush.jpg> Rhodes Remediation, *History of the Homebush Bay Site*, 2006, Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2008)

Despite recent attempts to remediate<sup>16</sup> the area, the insidious nature of residual chemicals has left a lasting impact. Reclamation<sup>17</sup> of a degraded site comes at a price. In this instance, Rhodes and its foreshores and waterways have been in-filled with contaminated waste from nearby areas, perpetuating serious and ongoing levels of toxicity. Chapter One, *Hidden Agenda* explores how local flora/fauna are adapting to the presence of this refuse and, to illustrate this, relevant issues are factored into the artworks. These issues include loss of habitat for wild life and soil toxicity. The images, created through the process of printmaking, use a procedural methodology that incorporates relief and intaglio mediums. Preparatory prints such as, *Dawn* (fig 2, pg 9) and *Dusk* (fig 3, pg 9) depict an environment where animals and plants co-exist on the edge of industry.



Fig. 2 Anne Starling, *Dawn*, 2008,  
Linoblock, woodblock, intaglio, 30x20cm



Fig. 3 Anne Starling, *Dusk*, 2008,  
Linoblock, woodblock, intaglio, 30 x 20cm

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<sup>16</sup> Remediation is the act of 'cleaning up' and/or containing contaminants so as to minimise their impact on human health and the environment. (<http://www.remediationaustralasia.com.au/?q=remediation>) Remediation Australasia, 2009, Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2010

<sup>17</sup> Reclamation: the conversion of waste land into land suitable for use of habitation or cultivation (<http://dictionary.die.net/reclamation>) Online Dictionary: Definitions by WordNet, Webster's Revised, unabridged Dictionary 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2011, accessed 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2011

The works incorporate motifs that directly reference the foreshore of the Parramatta River. The first of these is the swallow. An important symbol of the delicate ecosystem, swallows are endangered by loss of habitat and threatened by the post-industrial legacy of contamination (Fig 4, pg 10, - Fig 5, pg 11 - Fig 6, pg 12). Invasive industrial processes have decimated the swallow's food source and natural environment. Swallow colonies have shifted and declined in numbers. It is ironic, however, that even though their habitat is under threat swallows show ability to adapt to the changing landscape. These tenacious birds nest in factory facilities in colonies, often damaging internal operations. In contrast to their fragility, swallows are commonly referred to as 'the industrial menace'<sup>18</sup>. As a consequence, the motif of the swallow, despite being a victim of the post-industrial world is an emphatic declaration of survival. Their delicate and intricate forms symbolise survival in a landscape undergoing constant change, where one side of the Parramatta River is home to industry and the other to mangroves.



Fig. 4 Anne Starling, *Industrial Menace (detail)*, 2008, Linoblock, intaglio

Mangroves feature in my works as an integral part of the complex structure of the Rhodes foreshore environment. Known for their function as natural filters of the ecosystem, mangroves provide breeding grounds and some protection for animals. Water quality is greatly improved as mangroves filter pollutants, stabilise the soil and protect the shoreline from erosion. Land clearing and industrial development, whereby soil and various nutrients are washed into the river, have created an ideal environment for mangroves to colonise. Mangroves are able to flourish despite the toxic environment, and to some extent, signify rejuvenation and remediation of the site.



Fig. 5 Anne Starling, *Swallows*, 2008, woodblock, Linoblock, intaglio on Hahnemuhle, 99 x 99 cm

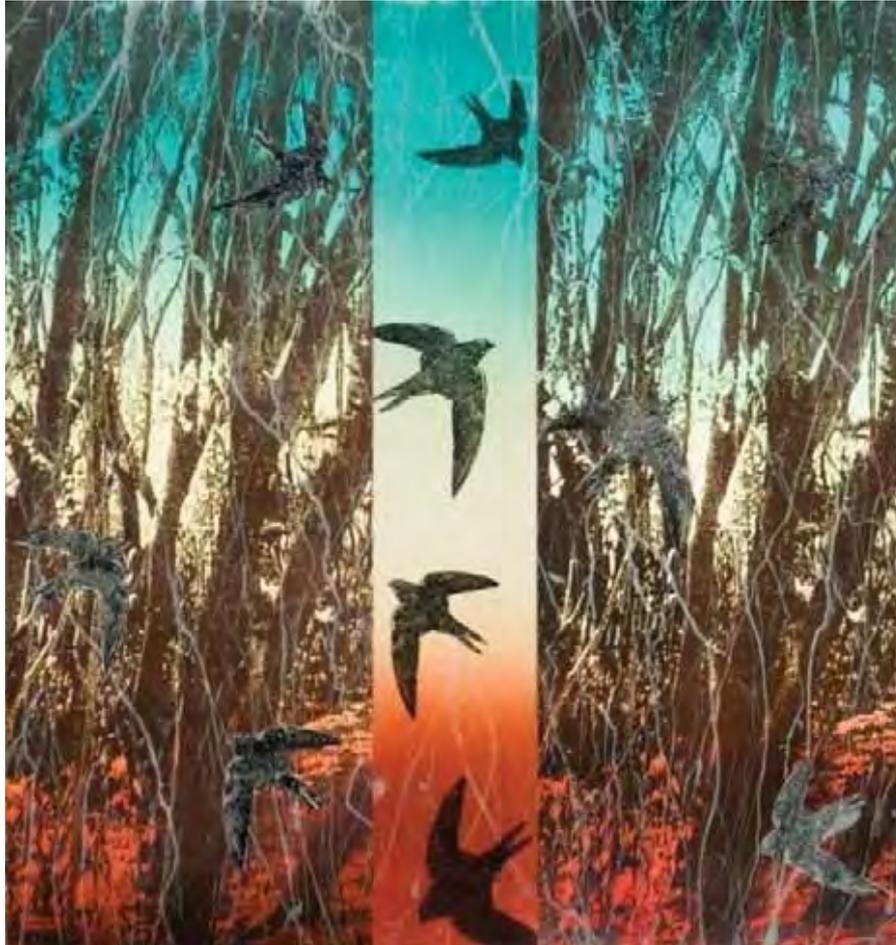


Fig. 6 Anne Starling, *Ascension 2008*, Linoblock, woodblock, intaglio on Hahnemuhle, 99 x 78cm

An equally important visual component in my analysis of the Rhodes locality is man-made, industrial structures that dominate the natural landscape. Industrial manufacturers were initially attracted to the Parramatta River site because of reliable water transportation and the ease by which refuse could be dumped without safety monitoring. The site was originally designated 'for industrial use' and not desirable for residential development. The relief prints *Industrial Legacy I and II* are based on the Union Carbide and ICI sites at Rhodes and reference the legacy of the manufacturing era. (Fig 7, 8, pg 13)



Fig. 7 Anne Starling, *Industrial Legacy I*, 2008  
Woodblock, linoblock on Hahnemuhle, 99 x 58cm



Fig. 8 Anne Starling, *Industrial Legacy II*, 2008  
Woodblock, linoblock on Hahnemuhle, 99 x 58cm

These industrial structures inhabit opposing foreshores at Rhodes, dominating the skyline and the prints are interpretations of that landscape. They portray buildings and other structures for which the sole purpose is the manufacture of industrial chemicals. The sites are devoid of natural vegetation and engulf the foreshore. In *Industrial Legacy* series *III and IV* (Figs 9,10, pg 14), I have used the intaglio medium of carborundum<sup>19</sup> to create another layer on the print matrix. This inadvertently connects my print matrix with its source. Carborundum (silicon carbide)<sup>20</sup> occurs naturally only in minute quantities. Synthetic carborundum is a by-product of industrial manufacturing processes such as those undertaken by ICI (currently Orica). In the prints,

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<sup>19</sup>Carborundum, silicon carbide finely ground stone. A collagraphic printing method. In this instance PVA glue is painted onto a sealed shellaced board and then dusted carborundum before the glue dries. The plate is inked up as an intaglio, the areas containing the carborundum attract the ink.

<sup>20</sup>Carborundum, Dissolved in a basic oxygen furnace used for making steel, as it can be heated to very high temperatures. About.com.inventors,2012, Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2012  
<http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blacheson.htm>

Carborundum is shown to spill over buildings in a literal enactment of its corrosive properties. In that context, the works are studies of a tarnished, corroded landscape.



Fig 9. Anne Starling, *Industrial Legacy III*, 2008, Linoblock, carborundum on Hahnemuhle, 99 x 58cm

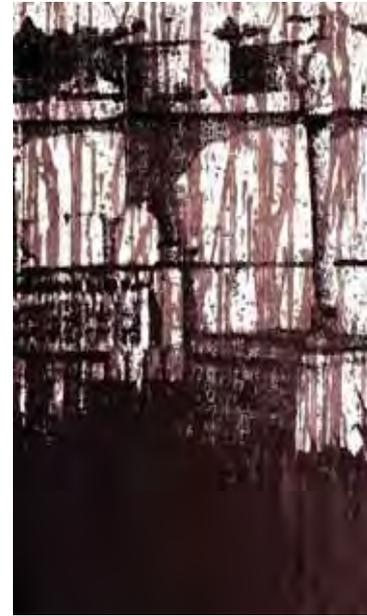


Fig. 10 Anne Starling, *Industrial Legacy IV*, 2008, Linoblock, carborundum on Hahnemuhle, 99 x 58cm

The multi-panelled frieze, *Industrial Menace* (Fig 12, pg 15) merges the previously mentioned mangrove and industry inhabited shores of the Parramatta River. Each of the images in this chapter references symbolic Japanese Ukiyo-e woodblock prints.<sup>21</sup>(Fig 11, pg 15) The Ukiyo-e print is a pictorial convention within Japanese culture that searches for beauty. I am inspired by this Japanese interpretation of beautiful landscapes and have used its traditions and extended it with the introduction of animals in the landscape, asymmetrical compositions, vertical formats and tonal, colour graduation.

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<sup>21</sup> In the 1750s, the Japanese style of Ukiyo-E printed art emerged. "Ukiyo-E" means "pictures of the floating world." Engraving Review, Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2011 <http://www.engraving-review.com/ukiyo-e-engraving-japan.html>



Fig. 11 Ando Hiroshige, *Flying Swallows under Peach Blossoms in the Moonlight*, 1832 – 34, Woodcut, 580 x 274 cm



Fig. 12 Anne Starling, *Industrial Menace*, 2008, Linoblock, woodblock, intaglio on Hahnemühle, 99 x 190cm

*Toxic Diversity* (Fig 13, pg 16) and *Hidden Agenda* (Fig 14, pg 17 - Fig 15, pg 19) examine the effect of chemical exposure on marine life in the waterways of the Parramatta River.



Fig. 13 Anne Starling, 2009, *Toxic Diversity*, Linoblock, intaglio on Hahnemuhle, 80 x 99cm

Based on the ICI petrochemical factory at Silverwater NSW, the work addresses use of dioxins, such as 2,4,5-T<sup>22</sup>, also known as *Persistent Organic Pollutants* or POP's.<sup>23</sup> POP's persist in the environment for decades, possibly centuries, before breaking down. POP's travel great distances through atmospheric and aquatic means and are linked to a range of severe health and environmental problems affecting living creatures.<sup>24</sup> Among known changes are genetic malformations in fish, which are severe enough to warrant blanket bans on fishing and the consumption of fish by humans in the Homebush and Silverwater locality.

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<sup>22</sup> 2,4,5-T (2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid) is the chemical which received notoriety after it was extensively used as a defoliant in the Vietnam war. It is closely related to a number of other herbicides, 2010, PAN, Pesticide Database-Chemical, Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2012, [http://www.pesticideinfo.org/Detail\\_Chemical.jsp?Rec\\_Id=PC34514](http://www.pesticideinfo.org/Detail_Chemical.jsp?Rec_Id=PC34514)

<sup>23</sup> Persistent Organic Pollutants, POP's, toxic dioxins, even in very low concentrations they have been linked to a range of severe health impacts, including heart disease, respiratory problems, immune system defects, birth defects and learning disorders. They accumulate in human and animal tissue and their effects on organisms magnify as they move up the food chain. (Footnotes 18 – 21, [www.greenpeace.org/australia](http://www.greenpeace.org/australia), Greenpeace Australia, Briefing article, *Incineration threat in Homebush*, November, 2004, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2010)

<sup>24</sup> (<http://hsecrereport.bluescopesteel.com/environment/air-case-studies.html>), National Toxics Network Inc. *Australian POPs Hotspots*, Lee Bell, March 2009, Accessed, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2010

A total ban was placed on fishing in Homebush Bay in 1989.<sup>25</sup> This ban will stay in force for decades due to the persistently high levels of dioxins. In January 2011, commercial and recreational fishing was further suspended by the NSW Government with all fish and crustaceans from that locality removed from sale. The levels of dioxin contamination in the Parramatta River and Sydney Harbour are now so high that even eating one mullet a year is enough to put a human over a safe limit.<sup>26</sup> Contamination has infiltrated the water in Homebush Bay since the 1920's and still has damaging consequences. Comments from a former employee of the ICI site highlight the degree of environmental impact.



Fig. 14 Anne Starling, *Hidden Agenda (panel 2)*, 2009, Linoblock, intaglio on Hahnemuhle, 80 x 99cm

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<sup>25</sup> NSW Food Authority, 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2011, Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2011 <http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/>

<sup>26</sup> NSW Food Authority, 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2011, Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2011 <http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/>

*As a young biologist in the early 1970's I would dive in all those locations around Homebush Bay and further upstream and my employers, they were government environmental agencies, they would give us a new wetsuit EVERY dive we did. Our wetsuits would dissolve off us each dive.<sup>27</sup>*

In *Hidden Agenda*, I have used the image of mutated two-headed mullet. In a further progression of chemical contamination affecting wildlife in the Homebush locality, two-headed mullet have been found in Homebush Bay. These fish are genetic mutations, which survive despite their environment. Mullet, therefore, are an important motif in my research, as they are a species directly affected by toxic waste in algae and microscopic invertebrates, sourced from contaminated mud and sand. That is, mullet are significantly affected because they are bottom feeders. Reports by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)<sup>28</sup> and the NSW Food Authority<sup>29</sup> regarding sea mullet in the Homebush locality reveal they contain the most toxic dioxin - 2,3,7,8-TCDD<sup>30</sup> at levels over 85% higher than accepted by the EPA regulatory body, making them unsafe for human consumption.

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<sup>27</sup> Geoff McPherson, Catalyst posted comments: Toxic Sediments – ABC Science, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2010, accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2011 (<http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/2917562.htm>)

<sup>28</sup> The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is the primary NSW public sector organisation responsible for protecting the environment.

<sup>29</sup> The NSW Food Authority is the government organisation that helps ensure food in NSW. NSW Food Authority, 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2011, Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2011. <http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/>

<sup>30</sup> Dioxin –2,3,7,8-TCDD Classified as carcinogens, potent endocrine (hormone) disrupters and affect the immune and reproductive systems. [www.greenpeace.org/australia](http://www.greenpeace.org/australia), Greenpeace Australia, Briefing article, *Incineration threat in Homebush*, November, 2004, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2010)

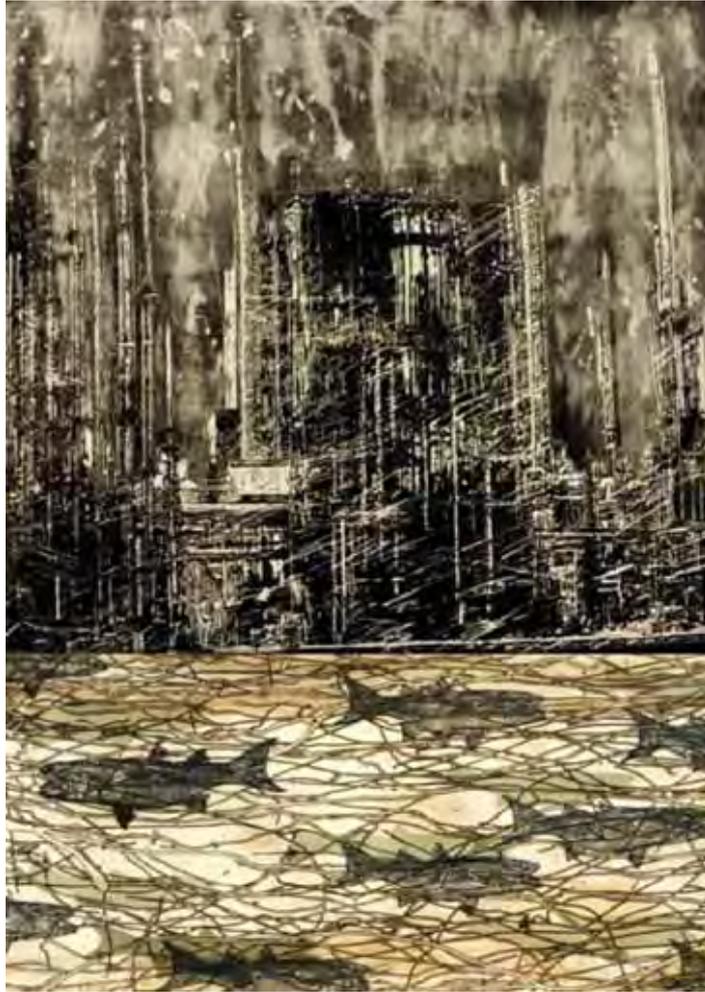


Fig. 15 Anne Starling, *Hidden Agenda*, 2009, Linoblock, intaglio on Hahnemuhle (2 panels), 140 x 99cm

In this print, mullet are depicted below an industrial structure (Fig 15, pg 19). The sky above is tainted with pollution and explodes with acid rain (depicted with caustic soda etching<sup>31</sup> on a linoblock). The image depicts toxic run-off in the water, consumed by the mullet, resulting in genetic deformities.

Imagery representing mutation caused by invasive chemicals has filtered into the mass media. Awareness of pollutants in the environment is explored satirically in the long running *Simpsons* series. In the episode, *Two cars in every garage and three eyes on*

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<sup>31</sup> A reductive process that uses caustic soda to dissolve(etch) the linoleum, can create unpredictable results

every fish<sup>32</sup>(Fig 16, pg 20), Bart and Lisa Simpson find a fish in the river near the nuclear power plant of industrial mogul, Mr Burns. The press nickname the fish *Blinky* and through an official investigation, debunked by Mr Burn's, find the power plant responsible for the mutation. Mr Burns defensively, but somewhat ironically, observes that *Blinky* is the next step in the evolutionary chain through natural selection.<sup>33</sup>

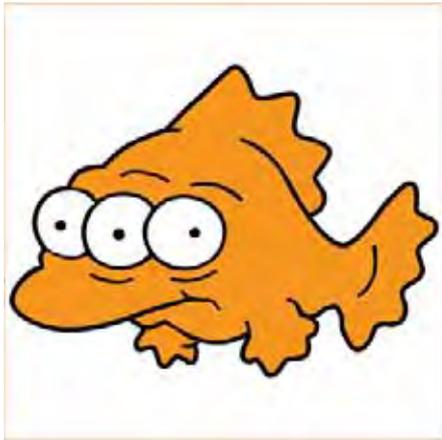


Fig. 16 *Blinky*, 1990, The Simpsons, [www.worldstopbrands.com/brand/simpsons](http://www.worldstopbrands.com/brand/simpsons)



Fig.17 Two headed trout, <http://arstechnica.com/author/rian-stockbower/>

Through the medium of print, I have recorded the landscape surrounding Homebush Bay to examine the effects of pollution on the environment, 25 years after the closure of industrial operations. My work depicts industrial savvy swallows and mutant mullet that survive and adapt in a radically altered habitat. It is a conundrum that fish and birdlife live on despite the odds. The ultimate fate of genetically mutated mullet and other living creatures that live in or eat food sourced from contaminated soil or water, is yet to be fully evaluated. Industrial effect on the environment is often subtle and difficult to assess in the short term. In that many of the contaminants currently found in the

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<sup>32</sup> The Simpsons Episode, 204, November 1990. (<http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Blinky>)

<sup>33</sup> Natural selection produces changes in the genetic composition of a population from one generation to the next. As a result, organisms become better adapted to their environment.

Homebush Bay and Rhodes locality were undeniably present long before the availability of adequate testing methods, or the need to register their presence was perceived necessary, it is timely to address this issue through a combination of visual art and scientifically-based research. Such information should be accessible, understandable and open to discussion by a wide audience.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Modern Ruin

The Modern Ruin examines redundant architectural structures, which is the predominant post-industrial content of Terrain Vague. In this instance the debris litters the foreshore of coastal areas, considered important as a location for an import/export terminus or as a source of water to operate machinery in a manufacturing process.

Evidence of such history is seen in the foreshore of Fremantle, Western Australia. Old, inactive factories, power stations and industrial yards stand in a state of partial decay. Similarities can be drawn with the foreshore of Homebush Bay, New South Wales, where much of the land contains the detritus of industrial activity. These sites contain fragments of Australia's industrial history but blur the boundaries between rural and urban, past and present. The aesthetic of modern industrial ruins has similarities with pictographic depictions of ancient ruins, such as *Syria by the Sea* (Fig 18, pg 22) by Romantic artist, Fredric Edwin Church. The nineteenth century Romantic ideal of the sublime, beautiful landscape often included ruins of past civilisations.



Fig. 18 Frederic Edwin Church, *Syria by the Sea*, 1873, Oil on Canvas, 142.24 x 259.8cm, Detroit Institute of the Arts, US

My images, as subjective responses to a changing landscape, allude to the Romantic aesthetic that accentuates certain natural elements like the sky and sea. However, environmental factors, caused and further accentuated by human activity, are the core ingredients in my works. The concept of the ruin doesn't just form part of the scene - it is the landscape.



Fig. 19 Anne Starling, View of derelict South Fremantle Power Station, Cockburn Sound, Fremantle Western Australia, 2009

The Old South Fremantle Power Station in Western Australia (Fig19, pg 23) epitomises the modern ruin. It is a monument to the aspirations of industry. Much of this area of Fremantle contains post-industrial refuse, where the natural landscape has been compromised to accommodate progress and industry. As a utilitarian building, built in the brutalist<sup>34</sup> style, it was specifically designed to accommodate the process of electrical power generation. Situated on the coastal dunes of Cockburn Sound on the edge of the Indian Ocean, the site was initially selected due to the ease by which

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<sup>34</sup> Brutalism was a style that flourished from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, evolving from the modernist architectural movement. The term is derived from the French *béton brut*, or 'raw concrete'. The twentieth century Heritage Society of NSW, 2011, accessed 5th Dec, 2011, <http://www.twentieth.org.au/brutalism.html>

seawater could be utilised for the cooling system. Its abandonment and decay are the result of a decline in heavy industry and shift to high technology. Shattered windows, decaying walls and blackened interiors are all that remain of a past industrial edifice. The building has not been demolished or the land reclaimed, even though it occupies a prime position on the ocean shore.

The print *Edge of Industry* (Fig 20, pg 24) explores the South Fremantle Power Station site and is a reminder of the power of industry, shaping the modern world. It captures a scene that is an individual and subjective response to site. The work alludes to the notion of the picturesque ancient ruin, as referenced in the previously mentioned Romantic paintings of Thomas Cole and Frederic Edwin Church.



Fig. 20 Anne Starling, *Edge of Industry*, 2009, Linoblock, etching, collagraph on Hahnemuhle, 69 x 99cm

The South Fremantle Power Station ruin, however, is not purely a nostalgic remnant of the past, it alludes to recent failures and is an unsettling image of the future. In this

work, the power station sits under a veil of razor wire and pollution. Areas of the linoblock image have been scratched away, indicating an obliteration of the past. The structure stands as a monument to its former glory.

An observation by Dr Helen Armstrong who researches landscapes in post-urban cities is relevant to my analysis of this industrial site.

*Voids and wastelands are latent with such possibilities, but their prevailing qualities are of recent time, containing uncomfortable memories of ultimately flawed dreams and visions. Vast derelict industrial landscapes resonate with messages of failure. That such huge landscapes, the visions of merely fifty years ago, should now be in ruins is frightening, possibly explaining why they are being erased so quickly in growing cities.<sup>35</sup>*

The city of Pripjat in the Ukraine also stands as an isolated monument. It was the home of Chernobyl nuclear power station when on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1986 it exploded, dispersing one hundred times more radiation than Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the final stages of WWII.<sup>36</sup> The Chernobyl disaster in Pripjat is an extreme example of the risk imposed by industrial development and mismanagement of a site. The city of Pripjat, once a centre of heavy industry, is now a worthless and empty shell that is degraded, with high concentrations of contaminated waste forcing the relocation of approximately 50,000 people. While there is no parallel of this magnitude in Australia, it is an example of the consequences of unbridled industrial process and insufficient human accountability.

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<sup>35</sup> Armstrong, Dr H, Director of the Cultural Landscape Unit at the University of Queensland and Emeritus Professor *Time, Dereliction and Beauty: an argument for 'Landscapes of Contempt'*, The landscape Architect, ILFA Conference Paper,pg 117, May, 2006, accessed 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2008

<sup>36</sup> About 60 kilograms of highly-enriched uranium was used in the bomb which was released over Hiroshima, Japan's seventh largest city, on 6 August 1945. (<http://world-nuclear.org/info/inf52.html>) World Nuclear Association, January 2011, accessed 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2011.

Reference to the use and misuse of the post-industrial landscape and the notion of the ruin are a universal recurrent theme used by artists and writers and include the photographic representations of the Terrain Vague. As mentioned in the introduction, Terrain Vague is the name given to the documentation of abandoned urban spaces. These wastelands are explored in the expanding photographic archive of Dutch artist Hans Scholten.<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 21 Hans Scholten, *Urban Future, Shaghai nr 1*, 2005 – 2007, Pigmented inkjet Print  
Dimensions vary, Courtesy Huis Marseille, Amsterdam<sup>38</sup>

Scholten investigates the rapid, chaotic development of large cities in Asia and the Middle East. In his large format photographs like the work, *Urban Future*, (Fig 21, Pg 26) Scholten examines the future of global urbanization by referencing modern industrial development. Scholten's writing refers to his artistic and social position regarding environmental sanctuary and non-alignment. It is not his intention to make a judgment, rather to instigate a written and visual dialogue - a stimulus for debate on the

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<sup>37</sup> Born: Amsterdam in 1952

<sup>38</sup> Lumen Travo Gallery, Hans Scholten, 2010, accessed 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2011

issues surrounding the fast, urban metamorphosis of these expanding cities and the impact this has on the environment.<sup>39</sup>

The Terrain Vague is examined in my images through personal interpretation of post-industrial environments and they provide a stimulus for discussion on the repercussions of industry on the built environment. My preliminary sketch of the Fremantle foreshore (Fig 22, pg 27) and resulting drypoint/collagraph, *Urban Monoliths* (Fig 23, pg 28) are closely allied with the work of Scholten. These prints are observations of changing environments. Cranes inhabit the landscape like industrial creatures. It is my intention to create images that are worn and weathered. Drawn from life, they represent a half derelict, half functioning urban wilderness, dominated by bleak structures that engulf the natural environment.



Fig. 22 Anne Starling, Preliminary ink sketch on marine ply, Fremantle foreshore, 2009, 85 x 145cm

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<sup>39</sup> Lumen Travo Gallery, Hans Scholten, 2010, accessed 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2011



Fig. 23 Anne Starling, *Urban Monoliths*, (3 panels), 2012, Drypoint, collagraph on Hahnemuhle, 100 x 228cm

My working methodology is analogous with an outsider art movement known as *Urbexers* (Urban Explorers). Urbexers compile visual history through photographic representation. They liken themselves to contemporary urban archaeologists (Fig 24, pg 29). As my images are historical documents of a time and place, they too record the urban ruin. Urbexers emphasise the Romantic<sup>40</sup> notion of history and decay, where the ruin becomes a symbol of apocalyptic destruction, or a mysterious encounter with a past world. My studio-based images, however, are emotive responses to natural and man-made landscapes. They address environmental and aesthetic issues. That is, the works reference visually and environmentally degraded environs imposed on succeeding generations as a result of (debatable) industrial visions. Works such as *Edge of Industry* and *Urban Monoliths* are intentionally graphic and confronting with dark tones, dominant industrial structures and the lingering haze of pollution.

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<sup>40</sup> Romanticism, artistic, literary and intellectual movement of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Emphasised aesthetic experience on emotions the subjective, imaginative, irrational and transcendental.



Fig. 24 Robert Mercogliano, *Gates rubber plant abandoned*, 2009, digital photograph,<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mercogliano, R. Photos from Bob Merco, Urbexer photographer, March, 2009, accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2011.  
<http://www.myspace.com/lonesomelizardfilms/photos/10459749#%7B%22ImageId%22%3A10459749%7D>

## CHAPTER THREE

### Living on the Edge

*The urban and suburban environments are full of ambiguous spaces- where architecture and the environment don't mesh, where the space is in some way strange, unresolved, or unsettling.*<sup>42</sup>

*Living on the Edge* explores the impact or legacy of the industrial process on the people who reside on the edge of these wastelands. The relationship between man and industry and the altered visual landscape are explored through prints that make direct reference to the *Terrain Vague*; the *strange, unresolved, or unsettling* spaces that exist as a result of industrialisation. As urban environments expand many suburbs are located on the borders of existing and pre-existing industrial sites. *Living on the Edge* examines the landscape of the urban fringe, reflecting on the conundrum of balancing the negative challenges of progress with meaningful quality of life and human wellbeing. The images I have created are ironic, in so much as the subjects often show an indifference of or disregard for their predicament, with lives seemingly unaffected by a dark foreboding presence. Nevertheless, it is apparent that their existence is markedly altered by the continual progression of industry.

Each print in this chapter includes the vernacular motif of the post - World War 2 home, built as utilitarian accommodation that became a symbol of success and prosperity. These homes were often prefabricated, characterised by affordable materials like concrete, fibro and corrugated iron roofing and were used to accommodate the returning serviceman and family after the war. They could be said to have fulfilled the ideal of the 'Great Australian Dream' while offering the promise of peace, security and

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<sup>42</sup> Flom, L, *Terrain Vague: Photography, Architecture and the Post-Industrial Landscape*, Carnegie Museum of Art, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2004, Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2010

space in the fast developing suburbs. Many of the houses possibly contain the lethal by-products of industry. Constructed using asbestos,<sup>43</sup> many harbor the highly toxic material as part of its structure. In that context, this familial ideal is a veneer, presenting only a façade of security. I offer a glimpse over the back fence, past the *Hills Hoist*, into a lifestyle surrounded by white picket fences and the aroma of baking scones. This is a form of domesticity that is far from perfection.

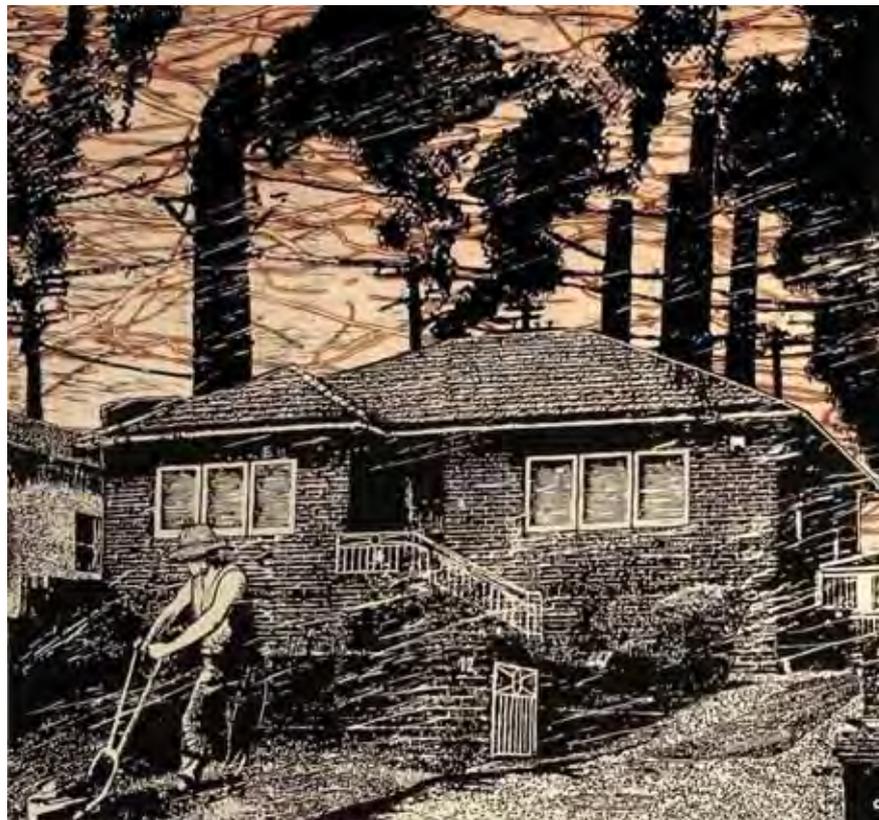


Fig. 25 Anne Starling, *Home Beautiful*, 2009, Linoblock, etching, chine-collé on Velin Arches, 56 x 60cm

*Home Beautiful* (Fig 25, pg 31) is a print that can be seen as a social and ecological satire of the Rhodes and Silverwater environs. *Home Beautiful* is also the name of an iconic Australian home magazine, regarded for many years as the arbiter of domestic style and taste. Referencing human and industrial co-habitation, the print depicts a

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<sup>43</sup> Asbestos cement wall sheeting was an economical and practical material during the period of post – war shortages Asbestos exposure can lead to asbestosis, lung cancer and the deadly cancer mesothelioma.

home owner tending the garden but in the background this idyllic scene is tainted by the ominous presence of billowing smoke stacks. Industry is a part of this subject's everyday existence.

The choice of home owner/gardener, mowing the lawn is a deliberate and personal choice. It is reminiscent of my own childhood, albeit without industrial presence, in the outer Southern suburbs of Sydney in the 1960s. Industry was, however, aligned with progress in that it provided jobs and financial security. Environmental impact due to industrial residue was little known at that time and it is only now that the legacy of such short-sighted planning is being exposed. Further to this, much of Australia's burgeoning population now resides on the periphery of industry. What was once regarded as a safe suburban environment has altered markedly

In my work, *Perfect Pitch* (Fig. 26, pg 33), a father and two children play street cricket beneath the (acid rain) sky while mother is presumably indoors. The family and their home are precariously positioned on the verge of a polluted wasteland and seem to be unaware of the unsafe environment in which they live. Their focus is on the carefree ritual of a game of cricket. This image is a play on words, 'pitch' referring to both to black industrial waste and a term for a part of the playing arena.



Fig. 26 Anne Starling, *Perfect Pitch*, 2010, Linoblock, carborundum, collagraph, chine-collé on Hahnemuhle, 90 x 125 cm

I have sought inspiration in the depiction of threatened suburban environments from the work of contemporary South African artist Jo Ratcliffe<sup>44</sup> who creates photolithographic/screenprint<sup>45</sup> compositions by manipulating and reconstituting photographs. The environments she creates, however, are socially rather than environmentally challenged. In her work, *'Nadir'*<sup>46</sup>(Fig. 27pg 34), Ratcliffe integrates photographs of aggressive dogs (indicative of violence and savage police control in South Africa), squatter camps, forced removals, relocation settlements, and rubbish dumps. Ratcliffe projects a strong political and humanitarian message in a world set on socially destructive progress. Whereas Ratcliffe's *Nadir* references social inequity through confronting imagery, I have used a tongue in cheek approach to impart a message regarding at risk environments in Australian suburbia and the inequity that presents its residents compared to the majority of suburbs.

<sup>44</sup> Born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1961. BA, MA, University of Cape Town. Photographer; works in photo-based printmaking.

<sup>45</sup> Photo emulsion is thick liquid substance which reacts to light.

<sup>46</sup> Hecker, Judith B, *Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now*, *Prints from the Museum of Modern Art, New York*, *'Nadir 15'*, one from a series of sixteen photolithograph and screenprints, pg 16, 50.



Fig. 27 Jo Ratcliffe, *Nadir 15*, 1987-88, one from a series of sixteen photo-lithograph and screenprints, 69.3 x 99.2cm

The print matrix is an effective tool to disseminate information and has long been implemented as a propaganda vehicle. Contemporary prints by Jo Ratcliffe and South African, John Muafangejo are among those that convey contemporary messages of political protest to a wide audience and influence my practice.

In her paper, *Signs of Subversion – Print in the Social Sphere*,<sup>47</sup> Dr Elizabeth Rankin, writer and curator (South African history and printmaking, The University of Auckland) states that the print is able to project powerful messages. Rankin references the prints of John Muafangejo (Fig, 28, pg. 35) who interprets events and specific sites with a strong, individual technique and motifs. Comparisons can be made with my images, in so far as they depict a time and place, record history and offer social comment in a graphic medium. Muafangejo's traditional approach to relief printmaking is a significant influence on my own practice as I am interested in a bold approach to cutting and balanced, compact compositions. The use of narrative is evidenced in my images to

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<sup>47</sup> Rankin, E, Dr, University of Auckland, Impact 6, interdisciplinary Print Conference held in Bristol in 2009, pg 58 Impact conference booklet.

recount recent industrial events and their impact on society. Each print has evolved as a result of extensive research into industrial intervention in specific sites in Australia. Through a process of direct engagement with the sites of Rhodes, Port Kembla and Fremantle, I construct visual narratives that are a combination of historical fact and some artistic licence. In order to impart an important message the images must be visually engaging and not overly didactic. I use tropes of familial figures, recreational activity and identifiable popular culture motifs.



Fig. 28 John Muafangejo, *Zulu Land*, 1974, Linoblock, 460 x 683cm

The print, *Nuclear Family* (Fig 29, pg 36) relies on a play on words - the dual meaning of nuclear allows a disquieting image to masquerade as family intimacy. Nuclear is an emotive word, invoking fission of a heavy nucleus into two parts with the release of large amounts of energy (as an atomic bomb<sup>48</sup>) or alternately a cohesive group. The nuclear family of my print is cohesive but precariously placed. The family unit poses proudly in the front of their home. I have emphasised the feeling of comfort and security

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<sup>48</sup> Nuclear, nuclear fission Merriam Webster, Encyclopaedia Britannica Group  
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nuclear>

in their home through the use of chine collé<sup>49</sup> with a soft, reddish-pink, wall-paper design for the exterior walls. Such superficiality is further indication of the precariousness of their existence. *Nuclear Family* is a snap shot. It references the type of photo album image familiar to everyone.



Fig. 29 Anne Starling *Nuclear Family*, 2010, Linoblock, solar plate etching, chine-collé on Velin Arches, 28 x 38cm

*Child's Play* (Fig. 30 pg 37) is another play on words. It is a colloquial expression in which obstacles are downplayed and is used to describe the complete ease by which a task may be undertaken. It could be said that each industrial element in this scene has been added in something of a children's meccano set fashion, one piece added to another until a complete structure is achieved – child's play. Children are part of the structure, and in my composition, they utilise the Hills Hoist as a swing. One is left to wonder if any of the other metal man-made structures, such as the power lines, could

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<sup>49</sup> Chine-collé is a special technique in printmaking in which the image is transferred to a surface that is bonded to a heavier support in the printing process.

be similarly used as play things in that they occupy the space similarly to the clothes line. *Child's Play* is an ominous warning. It references the ease by which seemingly innocuous structures infiltrate our environment because they are deemed necessary for a comfortable life regardless of any negative repercussions.



Fig. 30 Anne Starling, *Child's Play*, 2011, Linoblock , woodblock, carborundum collagraph on BFK Rives, 50 x 56cm

*All's Right with the World* (Fig 31, pg 38) is inspired by the industrial cityscape of Port Kembla. Reminiscent of William Blake's *Dark Satanic Mills of Albion*,<sup>50</sup> heavy black plumes billow from a suburban manufacturing complex to dominate the skyline. Blake's mills are referred to in his early Nineteenth century poem, *Jerusalem*, which along with other work alluded to developments that would fundamentally change lives of Britons. As the world's first industrialised nation, Great Britain would pay a heavy cost in human health, quality of life and pollution. Blake's words seem to foreshadow both the power

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<sup>50</sup> Blake. W. 'Dark Satanic Mills' exert from the poem Jerusalem.

of new technology and its destructive effects. In much the same way, *All's Right with the World* depicts a future destined to self-destruct under its own progress and development. The ironic title, based on an extract from the poem, *Pippa's Song* by the English poet Robert Browning<sup>51</sup> in essence suggests that people make a conscious choice to not acknowledge obvious and negative forces around them. This is analogous with society's ambivalence to the invasive pollutants effecting suburbia. In *All's Right with the World*, the figure meanders along the street, power lines hover above and thick black smoke fills the sky. The suburban landscape exists beneath power lines, wires and cables. Life continues, yet all is not well.



Fig. 31 Anne Starling, *All's Right with the World*, 2010, Linoblock, woodblock on BFK Rives, 87 x 107.5cm

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<sup>51</sup> Browning, R, 1812 -1889, English Poet, best known for his dramatic monologues.

The notion of suburbia residing on the periphery of industry, then reclaiming its precedence, is explored in my print *Harvest*, (Fig 32, pg 39) suggestive of abundance, fertility and hope. The motif of the post war house now dominates industrial structures. It could be said the family home has, despite all the odds, survived and flourished. The background silhouettes of industry look diminutive and fragile. There is a certain comfort and familiarity in the image of the house but all is not perfect in this vision of suburbia. The house itself possibly carries the legacy of industry with the likelihood of asbestos in both internal and external structures. Asbestos - fibrous cement sheeting was heavily promoted in Australia from early in the twentieth century and was the only cladding material advertised in *Australian Home Beautiful* during the years of maximum wartime restrictions. Cost and availability of product greatly outweighed any consideration of health impact.

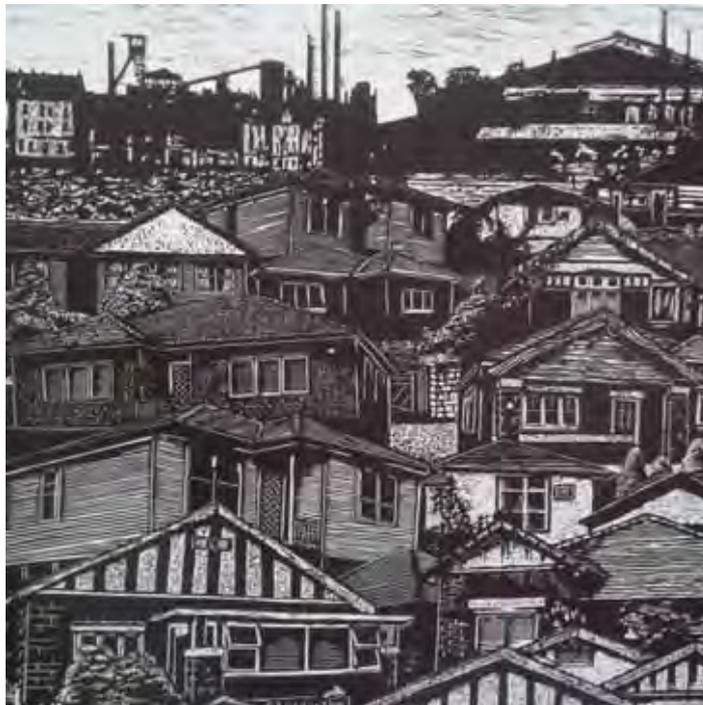


Fig. 32 Anne Starling, *Harvest* (detail), 2012, Linoblock on BFK Rives

*Asbestos, the 'magic mineral', was a material so versatile that it was widely used in industrial settings as insulation to contain heat and prevent erosion.*

*It also became a wonder product during Australia's post-war housing boom, giving us the iconic fibro house and fencing for most of our suburbs. Whether it was being mined, manufactured, or used in homes and workplaces, asbestos was always lethal. What benefitted us in the last century goes on killing us in this one.*<sup>52</sup>

My intention with this print is to convey a sense of hope that common sense will prevail and each risk to safe human habitation will be investigated before, not after, environmental or other damage. Each of the prints I have analysed in this chapter carries a message, carefully integrated within an easily accessible composition. I am aware that much of the publicity surrounding the destruction wrought by unbridled industrial growth or similar bad news stories consists of depressing, dark images which may be easier to ignore than engage with. Accordingly, I have sought to address this by incorporating fact with recognisable motifs. Though I am inspired by artists whose work is socially and politically confronting, I have made environmentally focused images to engage the audience and inspire questions.

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<sup>52</sup> The Australian Asbestos Network, 2008  
<http://www.australianasbestosnetwork.org.au/Asbestos+History/Asbestos+at+Home/default.aspx>  
x accessed 18th Aug 2011

## CONCLUSION

*'I am interested in political art, that is to say an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncomplicated gestures and uncertain ending'.<sup>53</sup>*

In essence, it is the idea of contradiction and the drawing of an uncertain ending that allies closely with this studio-based work and paper, *Contemplating the Terrain Vague*. My research, although focused on the theme of degradation and the legacy of chemical waste, is part of an ongoing exploration of figurative, urban and suburban scenes that have been impacted by industrial presence. In so far as the work engages with public affairs and examines the impact certain events have on the populace, my research can be seen in the context of political art. The examination of marginal spaces known as the *Terrain Vague* is also discussed and directly referenced in several landscape prints.

As I explored the post-industrial landscapes of Rhodes, Port Kembla and Fremantle, many questions arose regarding the implications of industry on the landscape. It is, however, not easy to draw absolute conclusions. There will always be uncertainty in a future compelled to progress regardless of the consequences due to socio-economic pressures. Progress is essential and inevitable and with it comes the necessity to adapt to the changing landscape.

The three sources that inform this research paper: personal observation; scientific research and Urbanist theories explore the impact of the built environment and have enabled me to address the long term effect of waste and decay on the post-industrial landscape. My choice of subjective representation of an image has been informed by

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<sup>53</sup> Kentridge. W, *Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now, Prints from the Museum of Modern Art, New York*, pg 19. From William Kentridge: *Drawings for projection, Four Animated Films (Johannesburg: Goodman Gallery, 1992)*, n.p.

recording specific instances in each of the above mentioned sites. This personal observation began with the catalyst of a visit made to Port Kembla in 2004. Subsequently, I visited and documented other industrially degraded locations and have collated and developed a series of photographic images and sketches to create narrative documents.

Scientific research has informed each of the images. The sourcing of scientific records has provided me with the systematic cause and effect of toxic pollutants and the long term impact on the environment. In particular, the scientific agencies whose data is researched are: *Greenpeace*, *The Environmental Protection Agency*, *Rhodes Remediation* and the *National Toxic Network Inc*. It is notable that all the research in this paper is verifiable and in that instance, offers an easily accessible vehicle for the viewer when presented as visual art.

Urbanist theories study the land and the populace. The images in my body of work examine the toll taken by manufacturing on the environment but the message inherent in each is directed at society as a whole. I draw similarities with Urbanist artist Hans Scholten and his perspective of sanctuary and non-alignment. Scholten stresses the necessity that his art influence debate and provide new insights. The environments to which I refer in this paper have been permanently altered as a result of industrial misuse, creating empty, underused zones - *Terrain Vague*.

Another reference source in a similar vein is *Urbexer* art, a contemporary movement that explores the repercussions of industry and environmental misuse. *Urbexer Art* is blatantly graphic with a clear message. My prints, however, are visual social messages -carefully considered combinations of deliberately satirical, subtly ironic and comfortably suburban. These prints impart a message to the viewer that may not be immediately apparent, unlike *Urbexer Art*. Beneath the facade of beauty and familiarity

in my prints lurks an insidious presence. Never the less, the message about responsibility to the environment and the need to avoid repetition of past mistakes is clear.

The three chapters outlined in this paper; *Hidden Agenda*; *The Modern Ruin* and *Living on the Edge* explore and disseminate political messages through graphic, narrative images. I have utilised the strong historical past of the print as a vehicle for imparting a message or propaganda. The prints, however, are not didactic. They invite response and intrigue from the viewer through considered use of familiar, comforting motifs: Australian post - World War 2 houses, an idealised vision of the traditional family unit<sup>54</sup> enjoying leisure time. In the prints, *Home Beautiful*, *Perfect Pitch* and *Nuclear Family* seemingly common place activity is markedly flawed by its tainted surrounds.

Documentation of social and political events by international artists John Mufuangejo and Jo Ratcliffe has informed and consolidated my research. These artists comment on post-industrial landscapes and provide insights into global concerns regarding destruction of urban environments. Their imagery addresses social inequality due to race whereas I document the effect of the post-industrial landscape and abandoned urban spaces on the lives of all living things (humans, animals, vegetation).

In conclusion, there is a developing understanding and social conscience as information regarding the effects of toxic pollutants and industrialisation is revealed. My images address a difficult and challenging humanitarian issue, as the problems of waste persist in our environment. In that regard the intention of this body of work is to impart a message about the inadequacies in urban planning and unmonitored industrial development, and through acknowledgement, create an awareness of such issues that cannot be ignored.

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<sup>54</sup> A wife, husband and children - often referred to as a nuclear family

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