

# SIMRYN GILL

# SWEET

# CHARIOT

16 SEPTEMBER –  
12 NOVEMBER 2016

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY  
ART GALLERY



GRIFFITH CENTRE FOR  
CREATIVE ARTS RESEARCH

## EDUCATION RESOURCE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

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The exhibition is comprised of numerous thematic components. The 14 large black and white photographs comprising the 'Sweet Chariot' series recalls Chinese scroll paintings, and portray waves, skies, parts of land, and boats. They were taken on the Strait of Malacca from aboard a small fishing boat. One might imagine themselves in the photographer's place, and see a similarity to the perspectives of fishing workers or mariners on one of the busiest trade routes in the world. Or, given the recent attention given to asylum seekers around the world in our news media, one might think of those viewpoints as similar to those seeking safety on new shores.

The title of these photographs is also given to the exhibition. The phrase is derived from the African American spiritual song 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot', with its associations of being carried home – perhaps an earthly home, or a heavenly one. Connections to ideas of migration, displacement, and searching for a better place are taken up indirectly.

Another thematic comes via the series of relief prints of found materials, which are interspersed and sometimes grouped with the photographs. Installed around the gallery, the artist has deliberately created a horizon line with horizon in the photographs and the gaps in the prints all aligning.

The relief prints, titled *Pressing In* (2016), are made by applying etching inks to various wooden surfaces including machine-made planks or broken slivers of handwrought timbers. These were made to serve specific functions but have been weathered and transformed by the sea, brought from unknown sources, and in some cases, drawn over and into by borers and insects. The activity of collecting materials has been employed by the artist in numerous previous works, for example, *Garland* (1993-) and *Forking Tongues* (1992). In this work however, the objects are pressed onto various papers, including wage rolls, blank ledger books, catalogues of butterflies, design, the moral development of children and sheets listing the apparent locations of stars. These works were developed with Melbourne print-maker Trent Walter with Gill at her studio in Port Dickson, Malaysia.

The last work in the exhibition is titled *Four Atlases of the World and One of Stars* (2009). It is a sculptural arrangement of five spheres, each made from a pulped paper atlas. Atlases can be used to educate and navigate, but in a way, these maps and books might also limit what we can know or imagine.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTIST

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Simryn Gill (b.1959) was born in Singapore and lives in Port Dickson, Malaysia and Sydney, Australia. Her diversity of practice can be seen throughout drawings, photography, sculpture, assemblages and collections and writing.

Gill has held solo exhibitions around the world, including *The (Hemi)Cyclus of Leaves and Paper*, Museum of Fine Art, Gent, Belgium (2016), *Hugging the Shore*, Centre for Contemporary Art NTU, Singapore (2015), dOCUMENTA13, Germany (2012), and 55th Venice Biennale, Italy (2013), *Simryn Gill: Inland*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (2009); *Simryn Gill: Gathering*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2008); *Simryn Gill*, Tate Modern, London (2006);

*Simryn Gill: Power Station*, Shiseido Gallery, Tokyo (2004); and *Simryn Gill: Selected works*, Art Gallery of New South Wales (2002).

Recent group exhibitions have included *Sites of Reason: A Selection of Recent Acquisitions*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); *Lasting Images*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2013); *5th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art*, Moscow (2013); *dOCUMENTA 13*, Kassel, Germany (2012); *Untitled*, 12th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey (2011); *Animism*, Kunsthalle Bern, Bern, Switzerland (2010); *Plot for a Biennial*, Sharjah Biennial, United Arab Emirates (2010); *Transmission Interrupted*, Modern Art Oxford, Oxford, UK (2010); *Revolutions – forms that turn*, Biennale of Sydney (2008); *dOCUMENTA 12*, Kassel, Germany (2007); and *Living in the Material World*, National Arts Centre, Tokyo, Japan (2007).

## IN THE GALLERY – ACTIVITIES

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### 1) SUBJECT MATTER, CONCEPTS AND DISCUSSION POINTS

<i>Journeys</i>	<i>Distances</i>	<i>Memories</i>	<i>Isolation</i>
<i>Asylum</i>	<i>Refugees</i>	<i>Traces</i>	<i>Horizon</i>
<i>Escape</i>	<i>Fear</i>	<i>Home</i>	<i>Attachment</i>
<i>Anticipation</i>	<i>Determination</i>	<i>Searching</i>	<i>Personal Narratives</i>
<i>Time</i>	<i>Detritus</i>	<i>Longing</i>	<i>Vulnerability</i>
<i>Impermanence</i>	<i>Cycles</i>	<i>Transportation</i>	<i>Surfaces</i>
<i>Liberation</i>	<i>Safety</i>	<i>Trade</i>	<i>Survival</i>
<i>Navigation</i>			
<i>Ethics</i>			

After having a look at the artworks in *Sweet Chariot*, read through the words above. Select one of the words, and discuss why you think it best characterizes the subject matter and concepts inherent in the exhibition.

### 2) TITLES, NAMES AND PLACES

**Materials required: writing materials or personal electronic device**

Choose 3 of the large photographic works from *Sweet Chariot* and give them new titles that you believe represent each of the works.

Choose 3 of the large photographic works from *Sweet Chariot* and describe the person through whose eyes we are looking through to the horizon.

Choose 3 of the large photographic works from *Sweet Chariot* and describe what the boat is approaching on the horizon. This can be a physical or allegoric destination.

### 3) TIME CYCLES

**Materials required: writing materials or personal electronic device**

Look at the work from *Pressing In* (2016) where a piece of wood shows rings, almost like a fingerprint. What do the rings on the tree tell us? Do the rings mark time? What life did this piece of timber have before the artist found it washed up on a beach? What was its life cycle?

Consider how time is demarcated in other ways in this exhibition.

Look at the papers the artist has used as a surface for printing. There are pages from lots of different books that all explore how time changes and how those changes manifest. These range from the butterfly with its familiar lifecycle to wage rolls that document the exchange of time for payment. All these surfaces reflect the cycles of time.

Consider what other papers could have been used to convey the same theme?

#### **4) WORD GAME**

**Materials required: small blank cards or pieces of paper, writing materials**

The class is divided into two teams. Each student writes a word on a piece of paper that can be associated with the works in the exhibition. The teams compete to generate the greatest list of words. Share these words at the end of the game, and score the lists based on the following creativity attributes:

- Fluency (the production of a large number of ideas)
- Flexibility (the production of a large variety of ideas)
- Originality (the use of ideas that are not obvious or banal)

#### **IN THE CLASSROOM – ACTIVITIES TO EXTEND THE GALLERY EXPERIENCE**

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##### **WRITING REFLECTION:**

Write a diary entry that reflects what one asylum seeker is thinking as she gazes out upon the horizon from the boat. Describe what she might be escaping, where she hopes to be granted asylum and what her daily experience of the boat is.

##### **MAKE: Examining the surface**

1. Working with a defined concept (such as journeys) create a surface from papers that reinforce or explore that theme. You will need to be mindful of the strength of the paper, and how porous it is, so that your printing experiments will be successful.
2. Next you are to explore a variety of items, materials and surface textures that speak to your theme on a variety of papers using a variety of mediums (pencil, charcoal, conte, china graph, pastel, inks, paints etc.).
3. Identify the strongest singular print or composition.
4. Using your patchwork surface created in the first step, print the image (or images) to create a fully realized work that speaks to your theme and references the work of Simryn Gill.

##### **Credits**

Curator: Naomi Evans. Education Resource: Kat Vane Tempest, Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education (Visual Arts) student, with supervision of Dr Marta Kawka, School of Education and Professional Studies – in partnership with Griffith University Art Gallery.