

CARMEL WALLACE

FULL FATHOM FIVE:
Works from the Life Jacket Project

Music by Michael Wallace
Film by Peter Corbett



Exhibition Catalogue
Images by Damian Goodman

FULL FATHOM FIVE

WORKS FROM THE LIFE-JACKET PROJECT

Local artist Carmel Wallace was commissioned by the Glenelg Shire Council to create a contemporary sculpture and art installation based on the 1859 SS Admella shipwreck and the role of the Council's most significant artefact, the Portland Lifeboat, in this tragedy. The universal human experiences of grief, suffering, loss and transformation are explored in the artworks.

Of the 113 people on board the SS Admella, 89 lives were lost, including 14 children. Survivors not only endured eight days and nights on the remains of the ship in wild and chilly seas with virtually no food or drinking water, but also experienced the horror of watching on as those 89 died of thirst, drowned, or were taken by sharks. Animals were also affected with only one of the six horses onboard surviving.

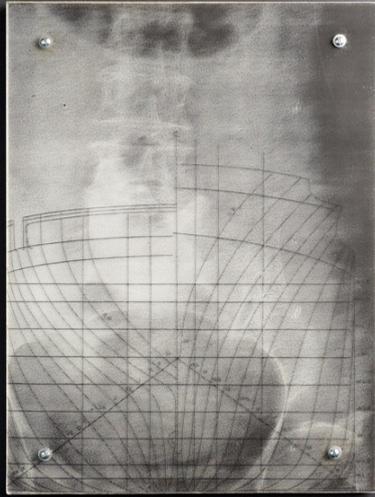
Both the power of the human spirit and of nature are part of the Admella story. The project examined the positive human values of courage, endurance and selflessness inherent in the challenging and protracted rescue undertaken by the crews of the Portland Lifeboat, whaleboat and the Ladybird.

The perspective of the survivors was similarly examined along with consideration of how rescue and survival might be thought of in both human and environmental terms.

There are many references to the local marine environment in the artworks, notably in the kelp inspired undulations of the bronze sculpture and its encrusted surface, and in the accompanying film by Peter Corbett of Powerhouse Productions with music by Michael Wallace.

The name of the exhibition was inspired by Ariel's Song from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

Full fathom five thy father lies; Of his bones are coral made; Those are pearls that were his eyes: Nothing of him that doth fade, But doth suffer a sea-change Into something rich and strange . .



Submariner 1997

layered images on acetate, perspex, painted masonite.

H 30.5cm x W23cm x D1cm

An earlier work, included for its uncanny relationship to the above two works and its inclusion of references to ship, pelvis and vertebrae



Cargo Totem

copper-coated fishing-floats, skeletal horse backbone,
gold-leaf, steel armature

H200cm x W 40cm x D40cm

This work was inspired by stories relating to Admella's cargo, in particular the 93 tons of copper and 6 horses, including 3 racehorses - Jupiter, Shamrock, and The Barber, owned by William Filgate and brothers Hurtle and George Fisher. Shamrock was killed. Jupiter reached the shore with a broken leg and was eventually put down. The Barber made it to the beach and was found fit enough to go to Melbourne, via Portland, where he stayed overnight at the Macs Hotel and ran soon after in the first Champion Sweepstakes, a forerunner to the Melbourne Cup, with 35,000 people in attendance!

The Barber was the only horse to survive the SS Admella shipwreck.



Rebirth

two skeletal horse pelvises [mare & foal], gold-leaf, beach detritus.

H27cm x W54cm x D50cm

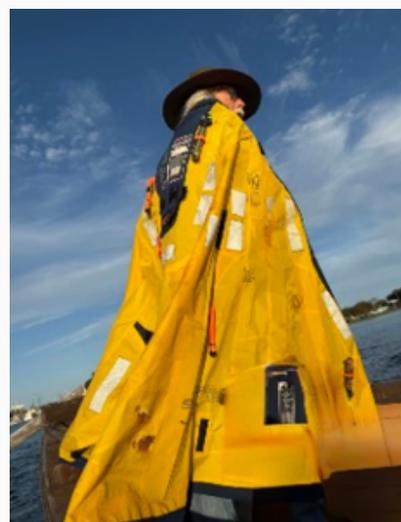
Rebirth considers cycles of life, birth, death and renewal; of loss, and transformation. As demonstrated by the Admella shipwreck, tragedy takes us to the depths of despair, but also inspires the nobler aspects of human nature: courage, bravery, endurance and selflessness - a willingness to put one's own life at risk to save others



Storm-Rider Cope

Recycled materials all from well-worn life-jackets once used by the crew of the William Dutton whaleboat, thread.
H152cm x W 215cm. [semi-circular]

Copes, as opposed to cloaks, are used for rituals, often spiritually-related, including occasions such as processions, blessings, and burials. They feature a decorative shield-shape on the back embellished with symbols denoting affiliation/purpose, and also a wide decorative band across the diameter of their semicircular form. I've created this Storm-Rider cope to pay homage to the rituals of life-saving and the protective actions that require courage, bravery, selflessness and heroism. It's pictured here worn by Gordon Stokes at the helm of the William Dutton whaleboat





Messages-in-a-Life-jacket

Recycled material from life-jackets once worn by the crew of the William Dutton whaleboat, thread, acrylic paint, safety-webbing, recycled plastic water-bottles containing ephemera relating to the Admella shipwreck, contemporary emergency services, and local marine environment.

H62cm x W52cm x D25cm [hanging as worn]

This Lifejacket is modelled on the 1854 cork life-jacket in style, but recycled materials from contemporary life-jackets replace canvas, and plastic bottles that once contained water now hold ephemera relating to the Admella shipwreck, contemporary emergency services, and local marine environment. It has become a vehicle for initiating stories relating to heroism, rescue, and environment.



Full Fathom Five

bronze sculpture, including local stone caste in bronze
steel plinth with revolving base

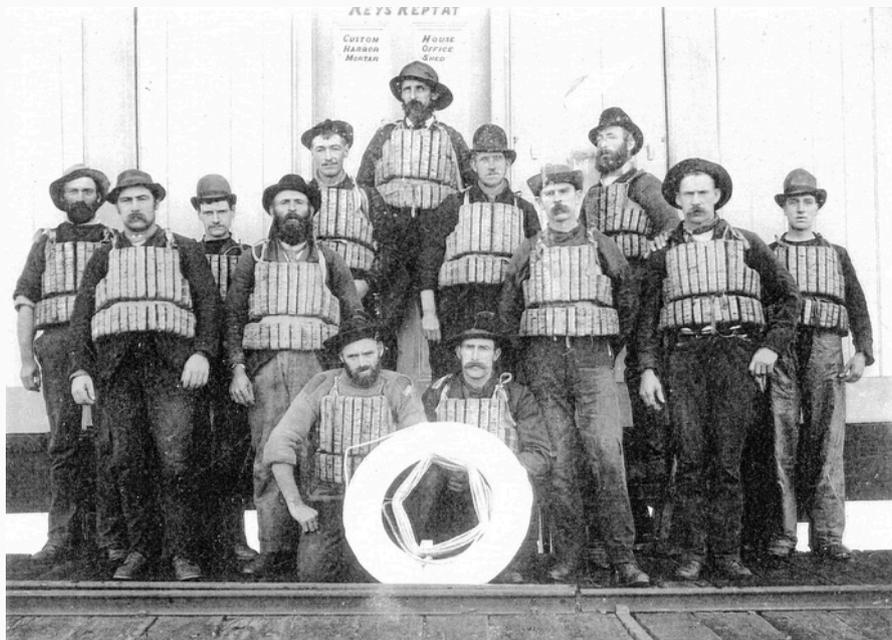
H cm x W cm x D cm

This 'life-jacket' was modelled on ones invented in 1854 by Captain Ward, an inspector for Britain's Royal National Lifeboat Institution. It specifically honours the rescue crew of the Portland Lifeboat who wore such jackets; their courage, bravery, endurance and selflessness in putting the lives of others before their own. Its meaning and implications go beyond literal interpretation to embrace ideas of what is lost, what we value, what we fight to save. I made the initial sculpture from canvas and vintage cork, adding kelp holdfasts and other marine detritus to give the effect of it having been underwater for a long time. Sitting on a piece of local stone and in the process of transformation, its form mimics a typical gesture of kelp as it moves with underwater currents. The sculpture was cast in bronze by Ewen Coates

Commissioned for the Glenelg Shire Council Cultural Collection

The Portland Lifeboat Crew, 1883

Courtesy of the Portland Family History Group



From left to right:

John Pill, Alex McDonald, Richard dusting, John Guy, Robert McWilliams, Thomas Ward (Harbour Pilot), Alfred Patterson, George Dusting, Alex Bachius, Charles Patterson, 'Buff' Thompson.

Front:

Johnnie dusting, James Pill



Tragedy series: Grief

recycled vintage woollen blanket, laces

H210cm x W140cm x D5cm

Somber colours, thick, dense, heavy material with falling forms that pool like water and grief. Acclaimed in 1859 as 'one of the most terrible maritime disasters on record, the wreck of the Admella became a benchmark for measuring tragedy at sea. It was not only that 89 people, including 14 children died, but also the terrible suffering they experienced in their struggle for survival over an extended period whilst they watched fellow travellers slowly die of thirst, exposure, drowning, or being taken by sharks. The 24 survivors spent 8 days on the wreck in wild weather and huge seas with waves constantly breaking over them. The suffering included animals as 5 of the 6 horses on board perished



Tragedy series: Pain & Healing

hand-embroidered recycled vintage woollen blanket, hair, surgeon's sutures

H180cm x W156cm. Presented folded on plinth H77cm [H120cm with perspex hood] x W45 x D34]

Blankets, especially those with satin borders, are associated with warmth and nurture. I imagine blankets like this on the beds of Macs Hotel, comforting the Admella survivors. Pink or 'flesh-colour' as it's often called, is evocative of skin. In this case the 'skin' has been embroidered with wound-like forms and anxiety-ridden stitches. Surgeon's sutures indicate that healing has begun



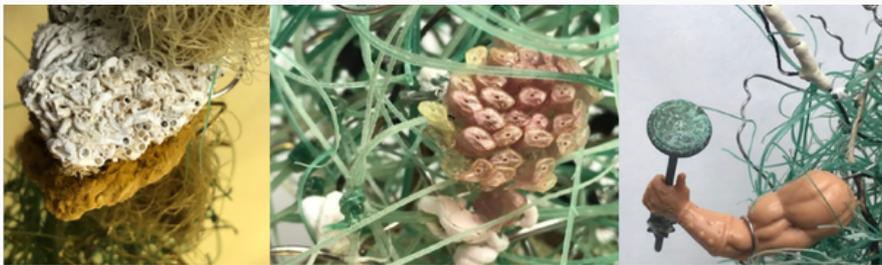
Refuge: Macs Hotel #1-5 and #6

collage on canvas wallpaper from the Macs Hotel, Portland VIC

#1-5 panels each H 26cm x W26cm x D3.5cm

#6 H76cm x W76cm x D3.5cm

These Refuge works directly reference Macs Hotel through use of wallpaper removed in 2025. Nineteen of the twenty-four survivors recuperated in Portland, many at Macs Hotel [including the only woman, Bridget Ledwith]. The sole surviving racehorse, The Barber, stayed in the Macs' stables overnight on his way to Melbourne where he ran in the Flying Buck's Champion Race. . The flocked velour wallpaper-remnants have a velvet-like softness that embrace older, distressed fragments, just as the hotel too embraced and nursed the distressed shipwreck victims. Tangible layers of the hotel history are evident in these fragments. Perhaps the creamy-yellow wallpaper layer was on the walls when the survivors were brought to Macs Hotel



Undercurrent series #1-5

objects collected from the tidelines of Discovery Bay, glass domes with reflective brass bases, plinth H75cm [H119cm with perspex hood] x W95cm x D34.5cm]

Transformation and loss in environmental terms.



Float Totem

vintage cork blocks as in some early life-jackets, [from a local collection]

H 26cm x W14.5cm x D10cm

I found it interesting to study these cork blocks and their cross-sections, and contemplate their journey from cork-tree to life-jacket. I learnt more about the properties of cork as I cut some of them up to make the life-jacket sculpture which was then cast as my final bronze piece. Were these blocks harvested from Portland's historic cork tree, *Quercus suber*, planted as an acorn in Percy Street in 1875? I found myself looking in a new light at this beautiful old tree and feeling thankful for all that trees provide.