Border Protection [1]

Stephen Copland

Abstract: This paper investigates an installation of paintings exhibited at Macquarie University Gallery in 2009 in the exhibition called *Raft – The Drifting Border (2002-2004)*. The installation comprises of 147 miniature paintings depicting ever lighthouse in Australia. The title of the work, *Border Protection* is assembled to form the map of Australia. Borders like maps are a form of communication and information about places at different times and different situations. The installation identifies how the function of a lighthouse has changed as well as attitudes to the Australian coast with the division surrounding the asylum seeker debate.

Introduction

> Copland has an eye on history and our habits of forgetfulness about the past. He is also shaping a response to one of the formative debates of our present moment. From the horizon of the past to the horizon of the future, this is a large gesture of making meaning in the complex and murky waters of present day events. In particular, Copland is concerned to address, in visual terms, how Australians fixate their hopes and fears on the watery border of the ocean, this wavering line that defines our cultural identity as an island surrounded by the teeming difference of Asia. (Curator of *Raft-the Drifting Border*, Dr Rod Pattenden 2009)

The exhibition *Raft-The drifting border*, curated by Dr Rod Pattenden, was exhibited at Macquarie University Art Gallery in 2009. In this exhibition, I used a variety of mediums including bronze sculpture, digital film, wood, wax, painting, animation and drawing to explore how our ideas of borders affect our notion of ourselves as Australians and influence our views of others. The concept of migration and the Australian idea of the coast changed forever when the MV Tampa rescued 433 asylum seekers. During an election year in 2001, the Australian Immigration Minister made a statement that asylum seekers had thrown children overboard in an attempt to force their way into Australia.

---

[1] This paper is a contribution to the *Placescape, placemaking, placemarking, placedness … geography and cultural production* Special Issue of *Coolabah*, edited by Bill Boyd & Ray Norman. The Special Issue is supported by two websites: http://coolabahplacedness.blogspot.com.au and http://coolabahplacedness-images.blogspot.com.au/

It was a vicious ploy to demonise refugees, and to glorify the Government's handling of "intruders" for an election based on "border protection". (Tello. 3: 2008)

Raft – The drifting border developed as a protest, a letter, a plea and a visual reminder.

Installation view Macquarie University Art Gallery (photograph by Stephen Copland)

Borders

In our globalised world of shifting borders, the physical and cultural map of nations open up new debates and transcultural dialogues. The border is an unseen geography and academic Dr Susan Ball suggests the following:

> In terms of the landscape, seascape or air, borders are often not very visible, except in small areas around official [border]-crossing points. Yet people know they are there: sometimes, they make themselves more present in cities and the places where undocumented workers congregate than they do at the geographical areas where borders exist. (Ball 2012)
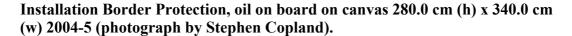
Debates about borders are important in describing how a place can change and our idea of place is measured in feelings and how these feelings are expressed. Borders like maps are a form of communication and information about places at different times and different situations.

As an artist and a coastal dweller, my sense of place is closely tied to the ocean. Artistically, I identify with the imagery of the Australian coast with its changing skies and tides and the great sense of space that is Australia as a continent suggests.

In the 1998 ABC Boyer lecture, *A Spirit of Play The Making of Australian Consciousness,* novelist and poet David Malouf describes this spatial relationship with the country we inhabit and share with others as a "spirit of play". The idea of play Malouf argues is related to climate and the coast. His essay investigates a society living in one hemisphere while our heritage is far away in the other. As a second generation Australian of Scottish, Cuban and Lebanese background, I understand this concept physically and mentally, playing in this island surrounded by water, a continent of open space, open skies and spatial freedom to play and dream. Malouf suggests:

> Looking down the long line of coast this morning as I begin these lectures. I see the first rays of the sun strike Mount Warning and am aware, as the light floods west, what a distance it is to the far side of our country-two time zones and more than three thousand kilometers away, yet how easily the whole landmass sits in my head-as an island.

The original idea behind the installation *Border Protection* came from a series of sketches of lighthouses. The nearest lighthouse to my home is Norah Head, north of Sydney, and after a visit to the site I considered how lighthouses frame and shape the Australian coast. In 2009 I created a painting titled *Border Protection* that included an installation of 147 miniature paintings – every lighthouse in Australia. The miniature images formed an abstract map that assisted to suggest a map of Australia and on close inspection reveal what is constructed on its coastline.

Installation Border Protection, oil on board on canvas 280.0 cm (h) x 340.0 cm (w) 2004-5 (photograph by Stephen Copland).

Installation Border Protection, New South Wales, detail (photograph by Stephen Copland).

Installation Border Protection, South Australia, detail (photograph by Stephen Copland).

Installation Border Protection, Victoria, detail (photograph by Stephen Copland).

Installation Border Protection, detail: Currie lighthouse Tasmania (left), and Cape du Covedic South Australia (right) (photograph by Stephen Copland).

Installation Border Protection, detail: Western Australia (left), and Queenscliff White, Port Phillip Bay Melbourne (right) (photograph by Stephen Copland).

Historically, lighthouses have operated as a symbol of hope and salvation positioned along coasts defining the offer of protection. The construction of 147 lighthouses on the coast around Australia verify to the danger posed by boats as vessels navigate the seas in attempts to land safely. The lighthouses have always interested me as a coastal dweller and surfer too for a variety of reasons. Firstly the iconic nature as well as the stories attached to them, and secondly how their function has changed as they have lost their original purpose becoming hotels, abandoned icons and museums.

The miniature paintings form a suggested map of Australia as the lighthouses offer a metaphor for a coast that is in a state of flux and change and a destabilising and blurring what the notion of our relationship and sense of place to an island continent.

German artist Thomas Kilpper's work investigates borders and the exploding migration of thousands of refugees from Africa to the small island of Lampedusa in Italy. His installation of video, large linocuts and drawings document his reactions to living on Lampedusa in 2008, where he attempts to develop a social dialogue with people. In the video work *A Lighthouse for Lampedusa* Kilpper creates a lighthouse out of fragments of the boats that could send out light signals, a form of navigational structure to collaborate with the community. Kilpper lived on the island, interviewed the migrants and citizens of Lampedusa attempting to humanise the "new" migration and concepts of integration.

Kippler's use of the lighthouse has a double function, firstly to assist with navigation of refugee boats and secondly he wants the lighthouse to function as a cultural centre and host a variety of communicative and interactive events. The artist acknowledges the refugee dilemma cannot be solved with military intervention or other forms of border protection. *A Lighthouse for Lampedusa* asks that integration and immigration policy consider refugee human rights.

The installation *Border Protection* reflects Kippler's use of the lighthouse as a metaphor to ask the audience to consider human rights. *Raft-The Drifting Border* was opened by journalist and author David Marr to emphasis the political nature of the work.

Thomas Kilpper – *A Lighthouse for Lampedusa!* **– on-going project since 2007, Naples – Lanificio, 2010 – (photograph by Thomas Kilpper).**

Thomas Kilpper – *A Lighthouse for Lampedusa!* **– ongoing project since 2007, dispari&dispari project, Regio Emilia, 2008 (photograph by dispari&dispari).**

David Marr and Marian Wilkinson, two of Australia's most accomplished investigative journalists wrote *Dark Victory* in 2004. The authors reveal the secret history of the campaign by Government against boat people coming to Australia

seeking asylum and making our border protection an issue that distorted humanitarian issues.

Author David Marr opening the Border Protection exhibition, 2009 (photograph by Effy Alexakis)

Curator of the exhibition, Dr Rod Pattenden, wrote of the work *Border Protection*:

> Such architectural forms on the edge of the continent are strong reminders of safety and physical haven. But in this context they also echo aspects of surveillance and the fluid anxiety that needs to fix a clear line of demarcation when faced with issues of difference. In this case questions arise about who is in and who is out, and in turn how this very fluid border will be negotiated for those wanting to pass through to safety. (Pattenden. 2009, p.12)

References

Ball. S. 2012, http://www.eastbordnet.org/photography/

Pattenden. R, 2009, *Raft-the Drifting Border* Catalogue 12.

Malouf, D 1998, *A Spirit of Play The Making of the Australian Consciousness* Boyer lectures ABC Books.

Tello. V, 2009 *Monument to Memory: Woomera in Australian contemporary art,* Art Monthly, issue April, 2008.

Image: Thomas Kilpper - *A Lighthouse for Lampedusa!*- ongoing project since 2007 Naples - Lanificio 2010 –photo: the artist. Image courtesy of the artist

Acknowledgements

Stephen Copland studied at the National Art School, Sydney (ASTC, 1969-1972) in 1988 he was awarded a Graduate Diploma in Education (University of Technology Sydney) and a Masters of Fine Art, University of New South Wales (1995). He is currently Doctor of Creative Arts candidate at University of Wollongong. He has been visiting lecturer at Darwin University, Northern Territory and Assistant Professor University of Sharjah, College of Fine Art and Design, United Arab Emirates and has conducted workshops/lectures at Vermont State College, USA, Universite Saint Espirt de Kaslik, Lebanon and Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey. His research as an artist is interdisciplinary using painting, drawing, sculpture and film to interpret themes migration, heritage and human rights. Since 1986 he has had 30 solo exhibitions including exhibitions in Cuba, New Zealand, Slovakia, Austria, Lebanon and Turkey. *The Migration Series 1992-2002*, a project of international exhibitions earned him a Commendation Award from the Consulate General of Lebanon (1999). He is the recipient of a number of awards and cultural grants including a Migration Heritage Grant, an International Programs Grant - NSW Ministry for the Arts and in 2011 the Moya Dyring Studio, Cite Internationale, Paris from the Art Gallery of New South Wales. www.stephencopland.com.au. (25 Newell Rd, Macmasters Beach, New South Wales 2251, Australia. Email: three-7-50@hotmail.com)