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FOREWORD

Newcastle Art Gallery is proud to present the exhibition, *A DIRTY BUSINESS: Devine, Styan and Tilley* from 20 February – 15 May 2016.

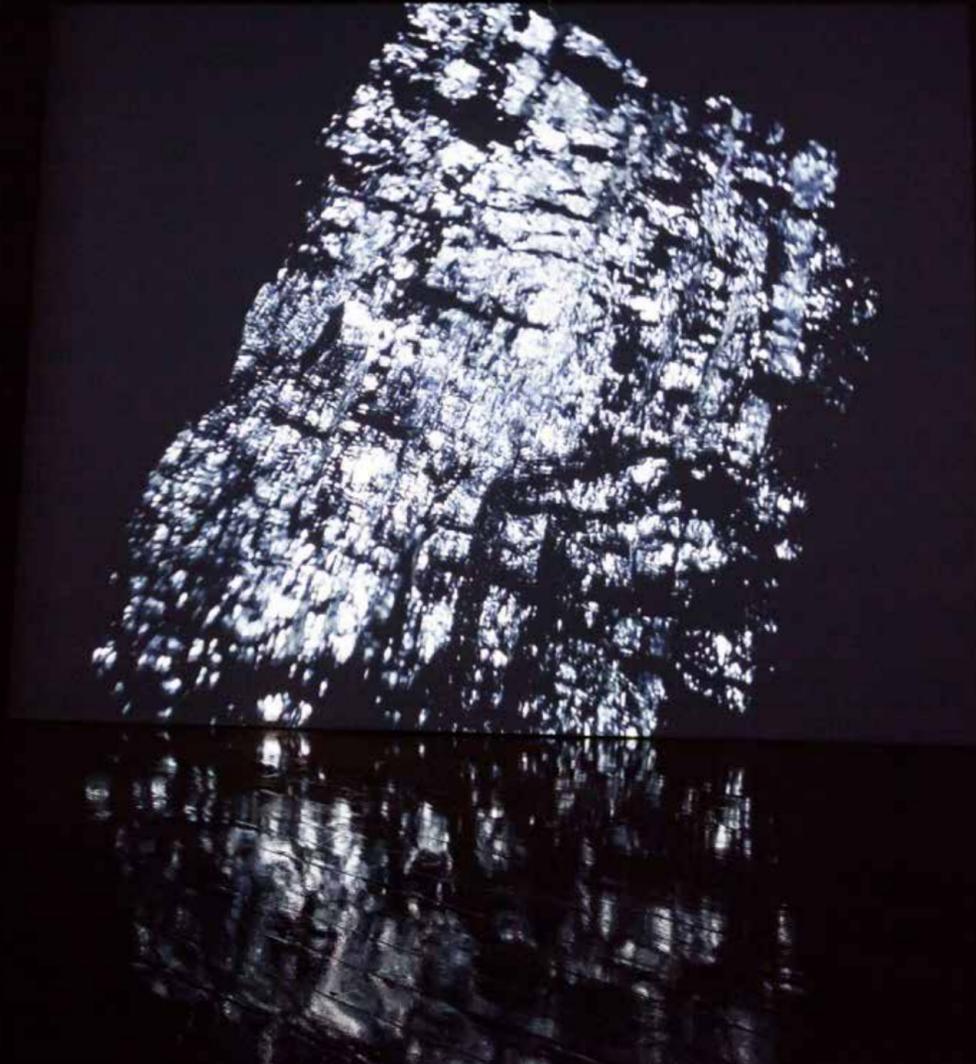
Featuring works from three Newcastle based artists Andy Devine, Andrew Styan and Peter Tilley, *A DIRTY BUSINESS* questions the role of coal and the mining industry in Newcastle and a broader global context.

Through a diversity of works incorporating painting, sculpture and digital media, the artists interrogate the dichotomous relationship Newcastle and the Hunter Valley has with the coal sector. Contemporary Newcastle is a city openly questioning its future as an industrial hub; these issues are further conflated in a period of downturn in the mining sector and the ongoing debates surrounding climate change and renewable energies in Australia.

Newcastle Art Gallery has collected the works of artists Andy Devine and Peter Tilley over recent years and a responsive space has been created in the Gallery as dialogue with the works exhibited in *A DIRTY BUSINESS*. Andrew Styan has also gained significant traction as an artist in the region. A recent graduate of the University of Newcastle, he exhibited in the Hatched: National Student Graduate Show at PICA, Perth in 2015 and he was awarded the prestigious Dr Harold Schenberg Art Prize.

The Gallery commends the artists for their works that encourage discussion, debate and reinvestigation of the role of the mining sector both locally and globally. We also thank guest writers Sharyn Munro and Jill Stowell for their incisive essays responding to these themes.

Sarah Johnson
Curator



5.

image captions

4 and 5. Andrew Styan
The Bell Buoy 2014 (installation view)
dual channel video projection, video camera, wood, electronics, coal
Artist collection



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A DIRTY BUSINESS: Devine, Styan & Tilley
20 February - 15 May 2016

NEWCASTLE ART GALLERY

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HERALD



A DIRTY BUSINESS

DEVINE
STYAN
&
TILLEY

20 February – 15 May 2016

NEWCASTLE
ART GALLERY



1.

LAYERS OF MEANING JILL STOWELL

A *DIRTY BUSINESS* is an elaborately thematic exhibition, the latest in an ongoing artistic collaboration. Its subject is coal; how what was once our servant has now become our master, fuelled by greed.

The binary contradictions implied in this ambitious subject find visual form in the paired works of Peter Tilley and Andy Devine that have already been widely exhibited.

For this latest exhibition at Newcastle Art Gallery they are joined by a third artist, Andrew Styan, whose dramatic installations contribute a new perspective and urgency.

Peter Tilley and Andy Devine have been producing joint works since 2013, immaculately framed double images, matching spontaneous painting with assemblages of curious miniature objects. The contrast in materials creates a powerful double vision, unified by the dark containing frame.

Their meditative exhibition, *Black Harvest*, has been shown to acclaim in regional galleries in Moree, Port Macquarie and Cessnock as well as at Cooks Hill Galleries in Newcastle. It will be at Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre from April 2016.

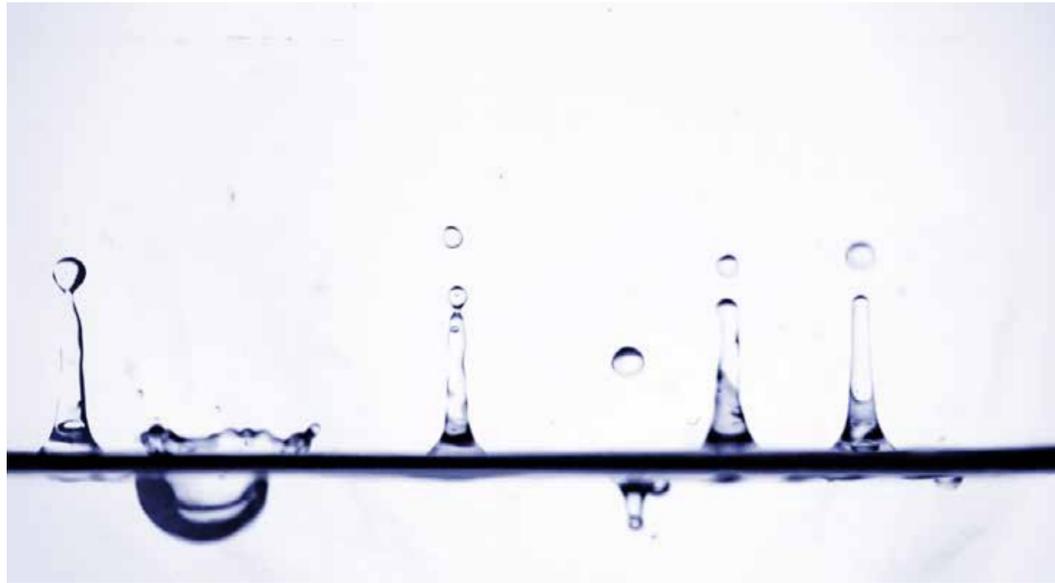
For this present timely exhibition at Newcastle Art Gallery the work is newly created, still in the same studiously contained small format, but with a darker vision. The gold leaf used to transform lumps of coal into precious objects has disappeared.

There is now an ominous red appearing in Andy Devine's monotone paintings, an apocalyptic sky.

He is predominantly a landscape artist bringing the romantic atmospherics of the nineteenth century painting of his native Britain to Australian subjects. The moody mountain ranges in the present exhibition are actually the stockpiled coal on Kooragang Island, transient landforms ironically hinting at the immutability of pyramid tombs in the ancient world. A polluted sky deepens the intensity of threat, while more abstracted works suggest a swirling inferno.

The contrast with Peter Tilley's calm assemblages is increasingly dramatic. Small vanitas works have been a major component of his earlier career, appearing in many exhibitions. Shards of old dinner services, tiny bottles, watch faces and fragments of funeral trappings, all created by coal-fired industrial processes, make multi-layered allegories on mortality.

He continues to use coal in arrangements of pebbles carved into small black eggs. Will they hatch into monsters? Or are they infertile? Art has the power to make instant connections, laborious when turned into words; we understand immediately that the beach-found bird bones represent the millennia-old migrations of shearwaters, that the unbridled coal trade and consequent climate events impact on the natural world as well as on humankind. These apparently simple assemblages invoke an archaic past as they call the countdown to an unknown future.



2.

A DIRTY BUSINESS SHARYN MUNRO

The inclusion of Andrew Styan's work takes the exhibition focus beyond historicist reference and the irony of the finely crafted object. It widens the context and sharpens the rhetoric, siting it even more cogently in our local area, but also, in a theatrical tour de force, equating coal's destructive force with a nightmare asteroid.

Unlike Peter Tilley and Andy Devine, who both have well-established careers distinct from the didactic coal project, he is a relative newcomer to art, coming from a technical background in metallurgy, a recent graduate of the art school at the University of Newcastle. His installation, *The Bell Buoy* 2014, an electromechanical device plus projections, which relates directly to the coal traffic in Newcastle's busy harbour, recently won the principal award for 2015 at *Hatched: National Student Graduate Show* at PICA in Perth.

Passion can be infectious. Art can be transformative. It generates emotion, but it can also inspire thought. This exhibition may well do both.

Jill Stowell writes about the visual arts.

1. Andy Devine and Peter Tilley
Response No. 20 2015
acrylic on canvas on board and bird bone on lead
Artist collection

2. Andrew Styan
Melting Point 2016 (video still)
data-driven HD video and audio software
Artist collection

'Oh, the Hunter's always been a coalmining area.' So say politicians and the industry, in dismissing concerns about coal's impacts on our people and communities, destroying lives and livelihoods, health and hopes, polluting their air and water. No matter that runaway short term coal is also displacing longterm agricultural, wine, equine and tourism industries, and removing native vegetation, wildlife habitats.

Our mines used to be small, mostly underground. Only the miners got 'dusted' and died. Coal was a dangerous, dirty business for them, but not their families living in the nearby village. Or the whole region. Or the planet.

Now it is – and we know it. Yet, led by our state Planning Department, the push to expand the digging and the damage continues, via an approval Gateway that has no Gate. Instead they impose 'stringent' or 'rigorous' conditions, often breached, with a feather slap on the wrist if caught, if convicted; the system is designed with loopholes. Our export coal's CO₂ contribution is ignored.

Now giant longwall machines burrow underground between pillars of coal, causing the earth above to dip and fall, tree roots to scramble in nothingness for water, and creeks to dry up overnight.

Their monster cousins scalp the landscape above, blast it apart and disembowel it, their spewed-out discards forming overburden mountains higher than the original hills.



3.

They will leave enormous final voids filling with contaminated water.

Fly over Singleton and Muswellbrook to see this wound on the earth so big it is visible from space. Raw except where publicly 'rehabilitated', its coal and overburden dust – particulate matter full of nasties meant to stay safely buried – blows over the countryside, onto roofs, into tanks... and people's lungs and bloodstreams. As do the noxious gases from blasting, diesel machinery and power generation.

There is no safe limit for this particulate pollution or that from our five coal fired power stations, alone estimated to cost our Hunter health system \$600 million each year. We have above average incidences of and early deaths from respiratory and heart disease, strokes and certain cancers.

The uncovered coal trains rumble through the Valley, minutes apart, from the Western, Gunnedah and Hunter coalfields, sharing the pollution en route to the uncovered coal stockpiles at Newcastle, world's largest coal port, with three loaders and a fourth recommended for approval.

Everything about modern mining is oversized, inhuman, including its impacts. Here it has been allowed to overwhelm land, jobs and society. 'Solastalgia' – the homesickness you feel when still at home – is rife in King Coal's Hunter realm. Now any nearby mining village will have disappeared, emptied because unliveable from the 24 hour air and noise pollution, or bought by the mines to silence complaints, or

for expansion. Ravensworth and Warkworth are gone, Camberwell is barely there, Bylong is battling, and Bulga being pushed to the brink.

Communities of Davids fight court case after case against the coal Goliaths; if they win, the rules can be changed, as at Bulga, so the company can re-apply and win. A dirty business indeed, adding to the despair and depression of people already breaking under the prolonged stress.

In the rare instances where a project is rejected, outcries about jobs are loud. Yet the thermal coal industry is dying; post-Paris, it is globally acknowledged that coal power must be phased out. No coal jobs are secure as companies react to coal prices and share prices plummeting.

Coal has been allowed to do far too much harm in the Hunter. We now need to foster sustainable present and future industries that value people and planet as much as profit.

Sharyn Munro is a writer, literary activist and author, most relevantly 'Rich Land, Wasteland – how coal is killing Australia' (Pan Macmillan/ Exisle, 2012).

3. Andy Devine and Peter Tilley
Response No. 28 2015
acrylic on canvas on board and found objects
Artist collection