

# Visual arts

Andrew Harper



## Uncharted waters

**REIMAGINING THE OCEAN**  
 Christl Berg, Janine Combes,  
 Chantale Delrue, Jan Dineen,  
 Linda Erceg, Janelle  
 Mendham, Denise Rathbone,  
 Jane Slade and  
 Frances Watson  
 Curated by Dr Llewlyn Negrin  
 Maritime Museum Tasmania  
 Until December 2

**R**eimagining the Ocean is a surprise for the Maritime Museum, but it's also a logical build on recent shows that have been more and more embracing of strong and thoughtful contemporary art. It's a big show with a very respected curator – Dr Llewlyn Negrin. Negrin has impeccable credentials, so her presence as the hand steering the ship is very welcome, and she's pulled together a fascinating show that attempts to present a differing view of how we understand the sea.

The big drawcard here is the work done to interrogate and interact with the Maritime Museum itself. The 10 artists featured are not confined to the exhibition room; instead, a huge effort has been made to integrate art with the various exhibitions, so new and surprising work is to be found all through both floors of the museum, and spectacularly, the outside of the building.

Linda Erceg – who is well known locally for her spectacular and arresting artworks that utilise throwaway plastic material and recontextualising objects as weird, sinister alien fungal intrusions – has grafted one of her signature growths to the exterior of the museum's home, The Carnegie. I've seen Erceg's work develop again and again – she is clever at revitalising her premise and finding new ways to present it that keep it fresh and vital, and this is no exception.

The inside of the Maritime museum is also temporarily changed. Some alterations are obvious, while others are subtle and well integrated. Much fun can be had working out what's new and what has changed for this exhibition.

Some are obvious, such as the Mermaid's Toolbag by Chantale Delrue; inspired by the fisherman's toolbag elsewhere in the



museum which reveals a fisherman's toils for catching fish. This wryly funny object shares the tools the mythical sea denizen used to ensnare hapless sailors.

This contrasts beautifully with Denise Rathbone's rejigging of the Captain's Cabin exhibit to a space that reveals a history of the involvement of women with seafaring. This work, Uncharted Waters, sets to challenge preconceived notions of the sea being space that was dominated by men by sharing lesser-known history.

This is a strong theme throughout the exhibition – revealing the reality of women who were active on the waters and Janine Combe's, Garland of Maritime Women, shares a growing list of women in Tasmania who were involved.

There's a lot more here, and much to



**Clockwise from left: Sound of Water, by Janelle Mendham; Shipwrecked, by Frances Watson; and Garland of Maritime Women by Janine Combes.**

explore and read about – Reimagining The Ocean is thick with ideas and beautiful work.

The act of really engaging with the museum works well to create pleasing friction and provoke engagement – if you're wondering why something looks the way it does, have another look; there's all kinds of useful questions and suggestions present. If you thought you were familiar with the Maritime Museum – now is the moment to go along again, as you'll see work that excitingly opens the museum up and changes what you thought you knew.

### GETTING IT STRAIGHT

In last week's column which featured a review on the exhibition Difficult Terrain, we neglected to mention all of the artists which are featured in this show. The artist we omitted was Sarah Stubbs. We apologise for the error.

**THE ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT**  
 Gabrielle Rish and  
 Richard Langley  
 Moonah Arts Centre  
 Until October 14

Richard Langley's experiments and interventions with a wide range of found material are a bit like elaborate three dimensional abstract collages. He finds stuff, literal stuff, fiddles around with it, attaches it to other stuff he's fiddled with and then, almost by chance, he creates something with an astonishing, balanced, visual integrity: there is probably no logic other than the one internal to each object Langley creates. Here he's sort of been inspired by investigations into the University of Tasmania's venerable engineering department, so each sculpture here does seem to have a kind of practical impracticality. Langley's objects appear as if they could work, if only we knew where the on switch was.

Gabrielle Rish expertly complements Langley with a selection of non-standard images of signs, lists on graph paper, and riffs on signs one might find in an engineering department – but all a touch lateral, askew and weird. Rish's art creeps up on you, finding a slight surreal edge that hints at the bureaucratic and pedantic.

This is an excellent show that creates a terrific dialogue between all the works, and is a real success. Rish and Langley sit together incredibly well – the show is fun, even comedic, yet sitting in traditions of Dada from the beginnings of the era of new that started over a century ago.



**The Engineering Department, by Richard Langley**