

ILLUSTRATING THE NAURU FILES

NAURU

YELLOW HOUSE GALLERY 2-10 FEBRUARY 2018 In August 2016 The Guardian published The Nauru Files, leaked incident reports written by staff in Australia's detention centre on Nauru between 2013 and 2015.

These files detail 2,116 separate incidents, including many cases of assault, sexual abuse, self-harm, child abuse and abhorrent living conditions endured by asylum seekers and refugees in the care of the Australian Government. Despite the harrowing nature of the files, the situation remains and the abuse is ongoing.

In the total absence of media access to the island, our objective is to illustrate these stories through creative expression, using art to shed light on all we can't see.



www.allwecantsee.com

Abdul Abdullah

View from Manus II (2016) Oil and tile on board 600 x 900 mm

03 February 2015

Risk rating: Minor | Type of incident: Threatened self-harm | Downgraded? Yes

On the 3rd of February during an informal engagement with [REDACTED] and his brother [REDACTED], [REDACTED] disclosed that he had thought about causing harm to himself. [REDACTED] stated that he has had feeling of self-harm over the past several months however, has been reluctant to disclose due to wanting to safe guard his other family members. [REDACTED] stated that last night he was unable to sleep. [REDACTED] stated that he stared at the ceiling of his living area and begun to have thoughts of ending his life. [REDACTED] stated that he has feeling of hopelessness. [REDACTED] stated that he left [REDACTED], his home country to flee from physical torture and by coming to Australia believed he would be safe. [REDACTED] stated he believes that Australia is utilising psychological means (i.e. Separating him from his immediate family) to cause harm to him and his family. [REDACTED] stated that there is no difference between him dying in [REDACTED] than in Australia or Nauru. Nb: Risk rating and incident type changed by Wilsons.

Artist statement

View from Manus II is a part of a series of paintings that were motivated by the release of the Nauru files in 2016. These works were reflections on conversations I had been having with people seeking asylum in Australia in my hometown Perth, here in Sydney and also a group that were still in Indonesia. As harrowing as their stories were, something that stayed with me was their longing for home. Even though they were all quick to acknowledge the horror they fled, these young people described the mountainous region where they'd come from with an aching melancholy: it was where they were born, it was where their friends and family were, and if the world was fair they would be able to go back. Instead these brave young people had travelled thousands of kilometers to forge a path for them and their families to find safety, and in doing so had made that return trip an impossibility. Fleeing their homeland was not driven by a choice – it was driven by a need, and after a long, life-threatening journey Australia imprisons them, humiliates them, and as the Nauru file reveal: torture them. In this painting I have depicted a mountain in the Hindu Kush as it was described to me. Alongside the image is a panel of bare tiles. These images are both reflections of memories: of home and of imprisonment.



Abbas Alaboudi

What would you do, Peter Dutton? (2016) Acrylic on paper Work currently on Nauru

Abbas Alaboudi is an Iraqi asylum seeker, visual artist and plasterer by trade who has been detained on Nauru for over four years.

Abbas' work powerfully conveys a sense of the limbo, loneliness and difficulties of indefinite internment in Australia's punitive offshore island camps.

As Abbas remains trapped on Nauru, below is a message to the Australian people he has asked us to share on his behalf:

When I arrived to Australia and I thought all my suffering in my country would end, but unfortunately I started suffering under the Australian government, and after 4 years of suffering I still dont know when this suffering will end ... If they could kill us they do and you have to know we are dead already, many people sick mentally and physically, children, familes, single girls, they are suffering.

If someone is guilty they will go to prison and will charge him for how long will be in prison, but here on this dirty policy we don't know what is our guilt and we don't know why they don't say to us when this will end and why our friends on same boats some of them they living in Australia free. I can't understand that...

I can't forget this suffering. I can't forget when I see the children how they suffering here, no future for them here. Our life is stopped, no moving, no developed. I want to understand why Australian government enjoys torturing us like this. We are powerless, we can't do anything, we can't talk about our rights.

Please Australian people, don't stand by, protest. Please do something, do something to help us now. Almost all people don't like to go Australia, I am one of them. I don't like Australia any more, this country still torturing me.

Help us.



Angela Brennan

Redacted then said (2018) Oil on canvas 1830 x 1280 mm

02 March 2015

Risk rating: Major | Type of incident: Threatened self-harm | Downgraded? Yes

At 13:35 [REDACTED] asked to speak with me. She said that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] became upset during maths because they believe a recently medivac'd family will now get a visa in Australia, while they stay there. [REDACTED] saw them crying and told [REDACTED] he was worried about them. He then said, "Do I have to kill myself to go to Australia", "What place makes a [REDACTED] yr old try to kill themselves". We believe he is referring to [REDACTED]'s self harm attempt as he has been distressed and anxious to see [REDACTED] all day. [REDACTED] has withdrawn from classes and was sobbing for twenty minutes after attempting to go to IHMS earlier in the afternoon.





Penny Byrne

l Heart Nauru (2017)

Photographic print of sculpture (original in NY), repurposed porcelain figurine, enamel paints 841 x 1189 mm

13 October 2015 Risk rating: Critical | Type of incident: Actual self-harm

On the 13/10/2015 at approximately 1345 SCA Case Worker [REDACTED] was approached by asylum seeker [REDACTED] her daughter [REDACTED] ([REDACTED], age [REDACTED]) was also present. [REDACTED] disclosed the following: three days ago [REDACTED] had self-harmed and had used something sharp to cut her wrist with. [REDACTED] explained she did not inform anyone what had happened because [REDACTED] was frightened of getting in trouble. [REDACTED] explained she was very worried about her daughter and needed support. [REDACTED] disclosed the following: she had cut her wrist because she "was sad", she explained that she was sad because all her friends had received positive RSDs and was worried she would be left in the RPC3 all alone. She expressed she had no friends at school and didn't enjoy attending. CW observed the cut on [REDACTED] wrist. It was approximately 1cm long and had some dried blood on the cut. CW advised [REDACTED] that she should take [REDACTED] to IHMS to ensure the cut did not get infected. CW also requested that [REDACTED] also take [REDACTED] to be assessed by IHMS mental health. [REDACTED] agreed to take her to see IHMS.





Penny Byrne

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas (Island, or Nauru, or PNG) (2010) Leaking like a SIEV (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel) (2011) Photographic prints (original sculptures in collection of Museum of Australian Democracy, Canberra)

Paul Davies

Nauru File 8th December 2014 (2017) Archival pigment print on paper Edition of 3 + 2 artist proofs 750 x 600 mm

08 December 2014 Risk rating: Unclassified | Type of incident: Unclassified

[REDACTED] was visibly upset in SAF area. CM was informed by [REDACTED] the chef had been verbally aggressive toward her after reporting the food looked old and asked for a clean spoon. The chef began to shout at her in an aggressive manner in front of everyone in the mess. [REDACTED] left the mess without eating and was upset. [REDACTED] reported she fell down and banged her head, grazing and bruising her knees. [REDACTED] was examined by IHMS. [REDACTED] reported the incident caused her to have an anxiety attack and made her feel like an animal. [REDACTED] informed CW she will not be eating in the mess until the chef appologises.

Artist statement

"[REDACTED] left the mess without eating and was upset... [REDACTED] informed CW she will not be eating in the mess until the chef appologises." For me, this illustrates the way food represents an imbalance of power between the staff and asylum seekers on Nauru.

This imbalance is referred to by the painted bowl which appears like a weighing scale suspended by tropical island palm trees. The bowl is filled with what could be read as rotten fruit or precious bounty, surrounded by negative space and cast shadows it echoes the geographical isolation of Nauru and the unheard stories of its inhabitants.

The picture is made up of subjects I painted and photographed. These are collaged and held together by masking tape then re-photographed to produce the final print. Rather than editing the tape from the final print, to make a seamless picture, the tape remains visible reflecting the perpetual limbo of asylum seekers and the temporary nature of Nauru.





Belinda Fox Sound by George Palmer

6 letters (2017/18) Blown Glass, engraving, sound 700 x 300 x 260 mm Sound by George Palmer with recordings by people on Nauru during 2013-2015

26 March 2015 Risk rating: Major | Type of incident: Actual Self-harm

On 26/03/2015 at 4.25pm Case Worker (CW) [REDACTED] was having a conversation with asylum seeker [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] in the mess in RPC3. CW [REDACTED] was also present. [REDACTED] then disclosed that [REDACTED] did something 'stupid'. [REDACTED] then disclosed the following: about 4 days ago (Monday 22/03/2015) she stated that she was "Feeling upset and worried as I miss my husband who lives in the community in Australia". She stated that she "wanted a tattoo of his name but can't get that here so I cut his name on my chest". In a discussion about what she was feeling when she did this, [REDACTED] stated that when she feels worried or sad she cuts herself, then has a shower and the pain she experiences when the cut gets wet "releases the feelings in my heart and I feel better". [REDACTED] then pulled down her tshirt and her husband's name was observed cut into her skin on the top of her left breast. It appears to be approximately 8-10cm in length and 2cm high with 6 letters. (CW is unable to recall the exact name). [REDACTED] advised that she did not wish to tell CW what she cut herself with as we would take it away or place her on watch. [REDACTED] then showed CW's her left inner fore arm where there were approximately 5-6 scars approximately 2-4cm in length horizontally across her arm. [REDACTED] was crying during this conversation however she advised that she just becomes upset when she speaks about her husband. She advised that she was feeling calm and did not have any plans to harm herself again today. She advised that she would stay with her friends ([REDACTED] and [REDACTED]) this afternoon and if she felt worried or like she was going to harm herself she would contact Whiskey 3 and request to see CW's.

Artist statements

Belinda: Glass has this amazing quality; it is quiet and still. It is transparent, delicate, precious. It's making however is dangerous and harnessing this medium requires strength and great confidence. To engrave/incise into glass also conjures up connotations of scarring, harm, defacing, hiding a secret. To shine a light on an engraved line creates a shadow – words or images can be revealed. From the shadows the truth is revealed.

As an artist my biggest goal is to create work that is meaningful and creates a dialogue about our times. For this very special work it was clear the message I needed to convey. The challenge was to make it subtle enough to make the audience delve deeper, to engage on a human level. To feel... to feel the pain within this piece. This is a real story... read the file. No one should have this story to tell.

My second goal for this piece as an artist was to create an object that will pay homage to this woman and her story. Despite the political malaise that prevails at present, and despite how hard I protest and speak out and get ignored, this sculpture will hopefully last well beyond my years and over time will testify and honour this file, this person, and show the truth of our destructive and cruel policies that have brought great shame to our country. I see this sculpture as a historical document.

Mostly, I just hope this show brings some much-needed momentum, helping the remaining detained refugees in Manus and Nauru to be evacuated.

George: The soundscape for Belinda Fox's blown glass sculpture, "6 Letters", uses text taken from one of the Nauru Incident Report files released by the Australian Government in heavily redacted form. Despite the deletion of all personal information from the files, they speak eloquently and movingly of the desperate plight of the refugees imprisoned on Nauru.

The words in this soundscape are spoken by people who were on Nauru at the time of these incidents. Talking to these two young people gave me a deeper insight into the trauma suffered not only by the refugees but also by those charged with taking care of them.

Australia's response to the refugee crisis is one for which history will rightly condemn us.





Adrienne Gaha

MALAISE (2018) Oil on linen 950 x 650 mm

28 September 2014 Risk rating: Major | Type of incident: Threatened self-harm

Client advised that "All the single females met to discuss mass suicide".

Artist statement

I made the painting in reaction to the report of 28th September 2014.

"All the single females met to discuss mass suicide."

The absolute despair of this sentence is both epic and tragic. My immediate thought was how operatic or mythological in scale the action was – a kind of horrible predestined female role in response to a degrading, dangerous world. Not to trivialise the plight of these people but in an attempt to express an inexpressible universal aching for them.

I have painted a vaguely symbolic / classical, spectral, female form disappearing into a 'high key' landscape . A beautiful but dissolving light. A melancholy memory of what was or could be lost.

I don't expect or want that this painting will be read in the same way twice. I was honoured to be part of telling their complex story.



Peter Gardiner

Burning house II (Devil's Island) 2017 Oil on canvas 1500 x 1300 mm

30 September 2014 Risk rating: Minor | Type of incident: Threatened Self-harm

[REDACTED] told SCA staff that her along with many other youths were considering a mass self harm with razor blades, detergent and cigarette buds.

Artist statement

When you watch your house and country burn down, your family ripped apart, the life you once had destroyed irrevocably, you get out, because that is all you can do. You seek a new life, to start again, have another crack, because that is what you do. Rebuild out of the ruins. You can only seek asylum, relying on the compassion and understanding of your fellow man. The country you seek is supposedly built on the ideals of a western liberal democracy but they shunt you off to a tropical jail, where you spend the best years of your life as a prisoner of a political doctrine that serves power, not humanity. What's left of your home – your security – is burning again.

We as a nation are not who we think we are. We have trashed our reputation with policy that demonises and punishes the innocent. Our house is on fire and the leaders, if not actively feeding the flames, are standing around paralysed with indecision, letting it burn, because it seems this is what you do.



Mark Gerada

Untitled I + III (2017) Pencil on paper 75 x 75 mm + 75 x 75 mm

29 November 2013

Risk rating: Minor | Incident: Accident or injury

[REDACTED] hit by a rock thrown by [REDACTED]. Witnessed by SCA staff who stated that rock thrown was intended to hit another child [REDACTED] – the two children were fighting over paper.



Untitled II (2017) Pencil on paper 115 x 80 mm

28 September 2014

Risk rating: Information | Incident: Complaint

[REDACTED] was speaking to CPSW about his protesting (IR dated 27.09.2014) and the reasons why he has chosen to sew his lips together. [REDACTED] explained that he feels discriminated against and security at OPC3 aggravate/antagonise himself and others to make them feel angry and react. [REDACTED] said last night during the protesting, the guards turned off their camera and antagonised asylum seekers. [REDACTED] described the guards jumping up and down and laughing at them; while the cameras were off. [REDACTED] said once the asylum seekers started to react and feel angry they turned the cameras on again.



Sam Harrison

Untitled (2017) Woodcut on fabriano edition 1/7 1000 x 700 mm

28 May 2015

Risk rating: Major | Type of incident: Voluntary starvation

[REDACTED] had informed the staff that he will not eat or drink anything until he gets to Australia.

Artist statement

Sam Harrison has always been drawn to the human figure. For Sam, the figure contains and holds all of the passions and anxieties, the allure and the fragility that humans embody. There is often a gentle melancholia in his figures or, at the very least, an introversion that we bear witness to and cannot absolve. Their deportment is such that we immediately sense that psychological and emotional conditions impact hugely on the stature of the figure. However ultimately, Sam reminds us of the fragility yet strength of the human form, of its enduring ability to remain fundamental and confronting when stripped bare of its armour.



Rebecca Jensen

This is How Tired We Are (2016) Reinforced concrete, donated clothing 240 x 290 mm

3 April 2015

Risk rating: Minor | Type of Incident: Abusive or aggressive behaviour

On Thursday 03/04/2015 approx 12:00am, I was leaving [REDACTED] with SCA and Transfield staff including [REDACTED] (Transfield), [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] all SCA staff. As we were walking through the carpark there was a refugee on the ground and people around him. Some people were being dragged away from the situation. As we continued walking away toward the bus stop a Wilson's lady was next to me and said "There better not be any refugees on our bus." I said, "Why can't refugees catch the bus?" She replied "She didn't want them on there." It was clear she was intoxicated. Then a Wilson's male put his arm around me and I asked him to not touch me about two or three times and tried to remove his arm. His friends then pulled him away towards the bus and he yelled out, "I'll get you in camp tomorrow." I am worried about the repercussions from the evening and felt it important to state what happened on the night. I am aware from talking with [REDACTED] (SCA) there had been some sort of altercation on the balcony. [REDACTED] stated to me a refugee had been annoying her that evening. She said she had told a Wilson's officer, and then when her back was turned the refugee was over the balcony on the ground. She states she did not see or know what happened. This statement is true and represents the facts of the evening as I recall.

Artist statement

I produced these works to address the Australian government's hypocrisy towards asylum seekers. Despite championing ourselves as a nation that has 'boundless plains to share' our refugee policies hold people arbitrarily, for years at a time, at great detriment to their mental and physical health. My research has focused on what is publicly available information and what we actively choose to overlook. Through the media's constant dehumanization of asylum seekers it has become increasingly acceptable to choose to not engage with the horrors of offshore detention. If you choose to look, the reality is harrowing. The use of clothing reinstates the human presence absent throughout the reports. In 2016 following the death of a Pakistani refugee, the refugee community on Manus Island sold their clothes in order to afford to repatriate his remains. The literal act of giving the shirt off one's own back shows the true generosity and humanity of these individuals. In the face of such humanity, how do we respond?

This particular work was initially created in response to an incident report from Villawood detention centre on 19th April 2010. A similar story echoed 5 years later on Nauru shows us that the system has not changed, and the heavy human toll of indefinite detention remains.



Pia Johnson

Untitled I (File date, 28 Sept 2014), 2017 Archival inkjet print 210 x 297 mm Limited edition of 5 + AP

Untitled II (File date, 28 Sept 2014), 2017 Archival inkjet print 594 x 840 mm Limited edition of 5 + AP

Untitled III (File date, 28 Sept 2014), 2017 Archival inkjet print 297 x 420 mm Limited edition of 5 + AP

28 September 2014

Risk rating: Information | Type of incident: Complaint

I was asked on Friday (26-9-2014) by a fellow teacher [REDACTED 1] if I would sit with an asylum seeker [REDACTED 2] who was sobbing. She is a classroom helper for the children. A secondary teacher assistant [REDACTED 3] was present. She talked about several situations, some from Christmas Island, some from RPC3. She reported that she has been asking for a 4 minute shower as opposed to 2 minutes. Her request has been accepted on condition of sexual favours. It is a male security person. She did not state if this has or hasn't occured. The security officer wants to view a boy or girl having a shower.









Laura Jones

Up and Away (2018) Oil on linen 1830 x 1520 mm

27 January 2015 Risk rating: Minor | Type of incident: Threatened self-harm | Downgraded? Yes

I attended the tent of [REDACTED] with Persian interpreter [REDACTED]. I spoke to [REDACTED] around taking her medication. She has stated this was out of protest and that she feels like she is unable to go on and is tired. She used the metaphor that "they" were cutting off her head with a plastic sword and killing her slowly. She stated that she would take "this" into her own hands. That she would not do anything like take shampoo to end her life but would stop taking her medication. [REDACTED] stated that her son [REDACTED] would be better off on his own. I asked [REDACTED] if she would like IHMS mental health, she declined as she did not want to attend IHMS, I asked would she see them if they attended her tent and she stated that would be better. Nb: risk rating and incident type changed by Wilsons.

Artist statement

For Laura, the chance to respond to human fragility is of great importance. Her intention in researching a particular refugee, and her shocking predicament in detention on Nauru is an opportunity to express the collective disappointment in the current political response to the refugee crisis. Rather than offering a literal reconstruction of events or circumstance, Laura has chosen to offer hope, in the form of a painting. It should be viewed as a gesture of recognition of the human rights owed to the nameless woman. Above all, Laura wanted to paint a place of sanctuary for her unidentified storyteller.

Locust Jones

20 November 2014 (2018) Ink on paper 1100 x 570 mm

20 November 2014 Risk rating: Major | Type of incident: Actual self-harm

Senior child protection work witness client hitting himself over the head with a rock and chair, than banging head into walls.

Artist statement

Political News events including the plight of refugees have been the subject matter of my drawing practice for the last twenty years. The stories contained in the Nauru Files are important to tell and I hope that this exhibition can highlight the need for political change.



Janet Laurence

Flotsam

/ˈflɒts(ə)m/

noun

People or things that have been rejected or discarded as worthless. (2017)
Duraclear on acrylic, mirror
600 x 600mm

06 October 2014

Risk rating: Information | Type of incident: Information

Whilst discussing the health of [REDACTED] on the impact the last few weeks have had on her, she revealed that one a/s is trying to organise a mass suicide. She stated that at last count there are at least 30 people who are willing to take part. She stated she would not reveal the name of the main organiser and will not repeat this to anybody.



Tim Maguire

Untitled 20180101 (2018) Oil in canvas 1020 x 1020 mm

2 March 2015

Risk rating: Critical | Type of incident: Actual self-harm

[REDACTED] was walking out of IHMS toward the bus stop. SCA CM [REDACTED] witnessed [REDACTED] pick up two or three rocks and swallowed them. Whiskey 1 and another officer restrained [REDACTED] to prevent him picking up any more rocks: [REDACTED] calmed once restrained.

Artist statement

Beyond these documented instances of abuse and the pervasive uncertainty and misery, is the terrible injustice of children born and raised in indefinite detention in Nauru.

Freedoms denied, education neglected, potential squandered, hopes swamped, lives wasted.





Angus Mcdonald

Set Me Free (2018) Oil on panel 1070 x 1210 cm

05 May 2015 Risk rating: Critical | Type of incident: Actual self-harm

On morning bus run [REDACTED] showed me a heart he had sewn into his hand using a needle and thread. I asked why and he said "I don't know". I notified [REDACTED] as soon as I got off the bus at OPC1 and she proceeded to take [REDACTED] to IHMS. [REDACTED] is [REDACTED] yrs of age.

Artist statement

In the file I chose to interpret, a child, a boy whose name we do not know, sewed a heart into his hand with a needle and thread on the morning bus. I have three children of my own. The idea that any of our kids would engage in such a violent, self-destructive act of their own volition is terrifying. It's extreme, also painful. It's a clear cry for help and love from someone traumatised by their situation. He is too young to have childhood experiences like this. The incident initiated by this boy occurred while under the direct care of Australia. His welfare is our responsibility.

Every person who arrived here seeking safety and ended up on Nauru is innocent. But children are always innocent in every situation. Although children represent less than a fifth of the population of refugees and asylum seekers on Nauru, they feature in more than half of the 2000 files released.

Hundreds of men, women and children have now been detained in this remote location offshore for 4 and a half years but the Nauru files themselves span a time period of just two and a half. Collectively, these incidents document a systematic culture of hostility, and speak to an environment reeking of despair and hopelessness that was created by our Federal Government.

My file was shocking but each is equally tragic. To read them is to see the darkest side of a country that claims that values and human rights are important. Cruelty never solved a single problem or built anything of value. It has only ever resulted in the creation of further suffering. Australians are decent, compassionate people but we have tacitly allowed this policy to continue through our silence. One reason for this is that it has been made invisible to us. I hope that people who attend this exhibition might learn more about the tragedy on Nauru, and find a voice to speak out and end it.

Abdullah M. I. Syed

Hex Constellation, 2018 (upstairs) Shaving blades, Installation dimensions variable

Flesh & Blood, 2017 (downstairs) Photographic prints of live performance, Asia Society Museum, NYC Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery, Photograph Charlene Wanja (Lenny).

18 November 2013 (Blade) Risk rating: Unclassified | Type of incident: Concern for Minor

CSO's guarding the SAA were doing a routing check on UAM [REDACTED] at approx. 1am. CSO noticed UAM was attempting to conceal her right wrist. When CSO's entered the room and investigated more closely, they noticed blood on UAM's right wrist. She then surrendered a small razor blade. UAM agreed to go to IHMS.

22 May 2014 (Blade)

Risk rating: Unclassified | Type of incident: Actual self-harm

22:43 [REDACTED] approached staff and asked for his razor. As he presented in a calm and reasonable manner, he was provided with his razor. 22:53 SCA staff checked the showers for [REDACTED] and were unable to locate him. SCA staff continued to look until 23:12 they located him in his bedroom with blood on his arms, legs and on the bed. [REDACTED] taken to IHMS.

02 September 2014 (Blade) Information Type of incident: Complaint

[REDACTED] advised C/M that asylum seekers are keeping their old blunt razors rather than exchanging them for new ones as the new ones have bendy handles and will not shave. HE advised he has had his razor for over 3 months and will not exchange because of that reason. He also advised a 'black market' is operating in OPC3. He alleges that people who have been to Darwin for medical treatment and such are bringing 'proper' razors back with them and exchanging them with other Asylum Seekers for clothes. He also alleges some of the local staff are bringing razors in for certain Asylum Seekers whom he did not want to name and they are then selling them for clothing and other items within the OPC. He has asked he not be named or spoken to any further about this as he fears repercussions.





Artist statement

Beneath our radiant Southern Cross We'll toil with hearts and hands; To make this Commonwealth of ours Renowned of all the lands; For those who've come across the seas We've boundless plains to share.

Constellations, stars and roses are symbols of physical and emotional distance, magic, wonderment and hope. Constellations have always been used as reference points in navigation and astronomy. Historically, stars such as Polaris (the North Star) also served as guides and shining hope for slaves, captives and persecuted minorities who fled northward to find freedom. For the 2,000 men, women, and children who charted the sea to reach the 'boundless' plains of Australia, the journey was hexed from the beginning. They had no guiding star in the Southern hemisphere. Instead of finding freedom, these new boat arrivals were forcibly transferred to offshore processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island, where suffering, madness and death awaited them.

Hex Constellation (2018) and Flesh & Blood (2017) are poetic responses to the incident reports leaked to the Guardian from the Nauru detention centre that reveal acts of self-harm, such as hunger strikes and the swallowing of razor blades. Stripped of any control over their own lives, the asylum seeker's bodies have become their sole means of expression and protest. Astra shaving blades, which are commonly used in Australia and are named after the Latin term for star, are used in Hex Constellation to create a constellation on a circle of blue, bringing attention to the fact that the lives and deaths of these asylum seekers have been transformed into living and bleeding protests against the decline of empathy and unchecked political power.

Their protest is further amplified in photographic documentation of an endurance performance Flesh & Blood in which the artist transformed the rose—a desirable cultural and spiritual material symbolizing love, purity, soul, and melancholia in South Asia and the Middle East—into a bloody pulp. The exposed, cutting edges of the blades and the dematerialization of the rose into an abject and unstable substance of political mess further disrupts social norms and one's senses. It acts as a reminder that all humans are made of flesh and blood, and equally susceptible to and affected by greed, hatred and violence. These two works question what one's beliefs and responsibilities are and how are they shared and represented in the media, popular culture and social networks.











Tomislav Nikolic

For all we can't see, I am sorry (2015-2017) Acrylic, marble dust, 24ct gold leaf, glass on linen and wood 414 x 475 x 70 mm

Tomislav has chosen to respond to the files as a whole.

Artist statement

I read most of the files looking for one that I thought I could reference in my work for the project. I feel overwhelmed when I think about the Nauru Files, I can't help but think about not just these files that are accessible to us but the ones after these, that we know little about which speak of the ongoing current situations and circumstance of these vulnerable individuals and families that we are not only failing to provide assistance to but through the proxy of our government are willfully abusing. My work for the project is an emotional response to the entire cache and beyond.



Louis Pratt

Screw code (2018) Acrylic on canvas 510 x 610 mm

21 June 2015 Risk rating: Major | Type of incident: Actual Self-harm

Code Blue called at 1028 after [REDACTED] had stated to his wife that he has swallowed some screws. X-ray confimed at least 1 screw at 1128hrs.

Artist statement

'Screw code' is about when, in the depths of despair, we tell ourselves that self harm is a better way out of the pain we are in.



Jamie Preisz

'Blind': Self-Portrait as the blind Captain (2017) Oil on canvas 910 x 910 mm

28 September 2014

Risk rating: Information | Type of incident: Threatened self-harm

CW [REDACTED 1] and CW Manager [REDACTED 2] were having an extended conversation with various men who had stitched their lips together, with the assistance of TIS interpreter [REDACTED 3]. During the conversation a small crowd gathered and at approximately 1400 hours [REDACTED 4] entered the conversation and stated that people in the camp are very desperate. [REDACTED 4] explained that he is aware of a plan for at least 15 people to complete mass suicide by using fence posts (star pickets) as skeweres to stab themselves in the heart. [REDACTED 4] stated that he is not aware of the date for this plan. [REDACTED 4] stated that definitely more people will stitch their lips.

Artist statement

The situation on Nauru, where vulnerable refugees are so disconnected and unheard they felt their only option was to stitch their lips together and plan a mass suicide, is a reflection on Australia's refugee policies and our attitudes. Society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members.

This self-portrait portrays the wilful blindness that pervades society, and that I myself was subject to, regarding the refugee crisis and the maltreatment occurring on Manus and Nauru.

Australian society is turning a 'blind eye' to the human rights issues confronting us, and obfuscating the facts before us. These refugees are rendered as 'other' or more animal than human. The 'other' allows us to disassociate and omit. This omission is part of the reason this neglect has occurred.

Suicide is a tragedy, these words ring true for me now more than ever. If we see our fellow Australians, our friends and our family with value, then all of these men women and children have value too. We cannot be blind.



Marisa Purcell

Cage (2017) Mixed media on linen 1680 x 1980 mm

24 July 2015

Risk rating: Major | Type of incident: Threatened self-harm

CW [REDACTED 2] visited Asylum Seeker (A/S) [REDACTED 2] at SAA. [REDACTED 2] asked [REDACTED 1] if it was true that A/S will be transferred to Manus for medical treatment. [REDACTED 1] confirmed that that she had heard today that A/S may be sent to another island for medical treatment but it was not confirmed. [REDACTED 2] then stated that he is going to kill himself. He said 'this is not a system, this is fucking corruption. If they don't kill us here first, I am going to kill myself'.

Artist statement

The grim reality of the Nauru files cannot be fathomed by reading them. The incidents are reported as such – no emotion, no outrage, just the pure, dire facts. Upon encountering them I could only respond with horror, and then a feeling of powerlessness. Why doesn't everyone feel horrified? How can this be happening in our time, on our watch?

The file I chose illustrates the asylum seeker's utter hopelessness. I responded to this file in a purely emotional way, at first painting a ground in dark tones. The hours went by as I tried to let materialise something for which I had no words. I felt trapped within this process – it felt never ending ... I triggered the alarm when I left the studio as I hadn't realised it was so late. Leaving that layer to dry for days and staring at it, not knowing at all where it would go, I started drawing all over the surface and eventually I realised I was drawing a cage – both literal and metaphoric.

The cage is emblematic of how I imagine this asylum seeker must feel in his or her helplessness and also of my own inability to affect change. When life is taken away – when hope is taken away – is there any surprise that the will to live disappears?



Ben Quilty

23 August 2014 (2017) Watercolour pencil on paper 450 x 550 mm

23 August 2014 Risk rating: Critical | Type of incident: Actual self-harm

[REDACTED 1] was verbally aggressive to writer when informed he would have to wait for the phone while other used it. He physically threw a chair. [REDACTED 1] was observed to removed what appeared to be a rope from tent [REDACTED]. Writer alerted Wilsons CSO [REDACTED 2] and both followed [REDACTED 1] to his tent, where they observed [REDACTED 1] tying the rope to the beam above his room. He had also tied the rope around his neck and attempted to weigh down the rope. Writer and CSO ASON supported his weight and called a Code Blue over the radio. IHMS attended and assessed health. Writer remained in sight but was not engaging with [REDACTED 1].

Artist statement

Post-Colonial Australia is built on violent foundations. From the beginning, convict chain gangs labored to construct a society bent on the murderous eviction of Indigenous Australians. So, in some ways the Nauru files and the politics that have enabled it should not come as a surprise. I hope that this show can add another voice to those emboldened by compassion.



Ravi (S. Nagaveeran)

Extract of poem 'From Hell to Hell' (2016) Available from Writing Through Fences

After travelling to Australia from Sri Lanka by boat, Ravi was detained in the Nauru Regional Processing Centre and Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation for over three years.

Due to the harsh regime of secrecy surrounding Australia's immigration detention centres, it is rare to hear first-hand accounts from people who have survived years behind the fences. It is particularly rare to hear stories from within the Australian-run offshore detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island. What we do hear often comes from whistleblowers breaching contracts and deeds of confidentiality to speak out, rarely do we have the opportunity to hear from the people detained inside our centres. Despite this, it is clear that there are countless voices longing to escape the fences that confine them.

Ravi is one man who is willing to speak out about what happened to him. He is now living in the community and has published a collection of his poems written from within our detention centre system. Ravi's poetry and drawings can be seen as forms of art - literature in and of themselves - however his work can also be perceived as an action of resistance.

Ravi has launched his book in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. He has travelled across the country sharing his experiences and shedding some light on his journey 'from hell to hell'.

He stated, "I am a person who was forced to face the inhuman and unjust policies for such a long time... My heart was crushed by these all things and each night my tears makes letters, then the letters gave me my beautiful book 'From Hell To Hell'. I used the tools I have to express my feelings so I can reach the real Australians." I was on the boat now I am on the road . . .

There wasn't safety in my land and nothing free was in my hand I couldn't walk freely and I couldn't talk fairly so I search the place where is the peace on earth I found the place and I landed the boat . . .

No place to hide, even if we hide sun or rain will find us, someone had white skin that's now gone black . . . Mine's gone more black . . . Yes, 22 days . . . beautiful that mix with dangerous road on the boat journey,

there is each one have different experience . . . But we are all still offered life in the deep water to see freedom in life.

I thought I am going to plant my dream seeds in this land and make a beautiful garden . . . Suddenly I was stripped inside-out and my name was changed to a number, and saw inhuman treatment once again . . . In the humanity land where I thought . . . to be planted my life trees . . .

I never thought that dream seeds would be taken and thrown so far from $me - yes \dots$ It's all gone and I am super tired, more than in my land \dots

Quickly . . . in deep ditch

I am surrounded with some kind of sickness . . .

It's a suffering called mental illness . . .

Yes . . . held in the mental cage . . . and I do war . . . like a bird singing and crying for flying with free wings . . . and biting the cage steals . . .

Yes finally my mental cage was open . . . but my legs are still tight with mental laws I call your unfair policy

but they say it's asylum seekers policy . . .

But I am still mentally sick . . .

Still I am trying to get out from that mental war without give up

I wish and hope seeing ending with peace . . .

5 years ago I was on the boat to seek peace – now I am on the road to find . . . peace that I missed . . .

Mark Rodda

June 26 2015 (2018) Synthetic polymer on wood panel 430 x 440 mm

26 June 2015 Risk rating: Critical | Type of incident: Actual self-harm

[REDACTED 1] (SCA teacher) was supervising three students in room [REDACTED] of the RPC1 school, and was sitting on the floor playing cards with [REDACTED 2]. [REDACTED 3] walked into the classroom and reached up and took down a bottle of cleaning fluid from the top of a cupboard where it had been stored. [REDACTED 1] stood up and asked [REDACTED 3] to give her the bottle, but he took the top off and ran out of the classroom. As he ran he attempted to drink the liquid. [REDACTED 1] ran after him and knocked the bottle from his hands. Most of the cleaning fluid ended up on the ground and the front of [REDACTED 3]'s shirt, however he did ingest up to a cupful of the liquid. [REDACTED] (Education Manager) immediately took [REDACTED 3] aside to attend to his immediate needs, and CSO [REDACTED] who was present contacted ihms. [REDACTED 1] went into the classroom and did a sweep for any other potentially harmful items including chemicals and sharp objects.

Artist statement

In my painting for this exhibition I did not endeavour to depict the specific events of the text. Instead my aim was to attempt to convey, in an abstract form, the psychological state of an individual contemplating these actions. I have lived in relatively comfortable surrounding for my whole life so I can only guess at the emotions situations like this bring forth.



Caroline Rothwell

Information Report (2018) Ink on copper leaf on primed belgium linen 830 x 530 mm

Information Report 2 (2018) Ink on primed polyester canvas 1130 x 630 mm

30 October 2014

Risk rating: Information | Type of incident: Sexual assault

[REDACTED] reported that during a bus journey to OPC1 for a visit on 23.10.14, she was the only asylum seeker on the bus. [REDACTED] reported the bus driver tried to take a photo of [REDACTED] in order to masturbate. [REDACTED] reported that this is not an isolated incident and that this has happened to her on previous occasions, in addition to other single females.

[REDACTED] reported that CSO [REDACTED] had approached herself and other single females, on numerous occasions following self-harm incidents. [REDACTED] reported that [REDACTED] asked why the single females cut horizontally when self harming, stating if they cut horizontally they would be successful in suiciding.

[REDACTED] reported that single female - [REDACTED] (ID unknown) was approached by a local security staff member when she was experiencing distress. [REDACTED] reports that the security officer offered her marijuana to decrease her stress, which was accepted by [REDACTED]. Following this, [REDACTED] reports that [REDACTED] requested marijuana from the same security guard and he agrees to provide this in exchange for sex. [REDACTED] informed CW that this exchange continues to occur on a regular basis.

[REDACTED] reported that approximately five weeks ago she was in medical following a self-harm incident in which she ingested washing powder. [REDACTED] reported that Wilson security staff member [REDACTED] (female) attended her bed side at which time another security officer left the room, leaving them alone. [REDACTED] reports that [REDACTED] began stroking her leg and face. [REDACTED] reported that [REDACTED] said to [REDACTED] 'I like you', 'your problem is that you haven't had sex for two years', 'why don't you try having sex with me'.

[REDACTED] reported that on a Sunday she attended RAA to have a meeting with a friend. At this time three single females who were previously residing in RAA had left for church. [REDACTED] reported that she was left alone with security guard [REDACTED] who made further sexual advances towards her. [REDACTED] reported that [REDACTED] said 'now is a good time for us to have sex' we are alone' come on try me', 'we'll have a good time'. [REDACTED] reported that she informed Whiskey 1– [REDACTED] of this, and [REDACTED] 'laughed at her'.



Luke Scibberas

Untitled (2018) Ink on paper 750 x 760 mm

18 January 2015 Risk rating: Critical | Type of incident: Assault | Downgraded? Yes

When exiting the volleyball court area I observed [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] speaking rapidly with slightly raised voices. [REDACTED] continued to run around ignoring the adults, at this point [REDACTED] ran after him striking [REDACTED] on the back of the head. This was done with a half closed fist using his knuckles. This physical discipline was done with enough force to make [REDACTED] hold the back of his head and cry. The three of them continued to walk to the security check point next to the cricket net. I immediately notified a case worker [REDACTED] as I was unable to leave my work station. CW [REDACTED] followed the child, mother and uncle to the security checkpoint where she acquired their ID numbers. Note: Rating changed by Wilsons.





Megan Seres

Untitled #01 (2018) Oil on linen 1524 x 1016 mm

16 May 2015 Risk rating: Major | Type of incident: Sexual assault

At about 0750hrs on 17 May 2015, information was received in the control room to upgrade an information report to a Major reporting incident of sexual assault. The incident relates to an allegation of sexual assault made by [REDACTED] who departed RPC3 on 16 may 2015 on Open Centre leave. At approx 1800hrs on 16 may 2015 [REDACTED] had failed to return to RPC3 while on open centre leave. The NPF were informed and provided with details of her description and clothing. At approx. 2107hrs information was received that [REDACTED] was located by the police, walking naked in the community and then conveyed by police to the police station. An allegation of sexual assault has been made.

Artist statement

Many of my paintings to date have had a Gothic sensibility and are drawn from 18 th and 19th century themes and images found in art, poetry, texts and films. The violation and isolation of women is common to that theme.

The unique power that certain narratives can hold, especially ambiguous ones, are a great influence in my practice. Exploring the boundaries between what is observed, what is imagined and what is hidden or forgotten is central to my work. In this painting, I have explored the notion of erasure and the emptiness of both the landscape and ourselves when we are forsaken or forsake.

Luke Storrier

All Stitched Up, 01 October 2014 (2018) 840 x 600 x 500mm

01 October 2014 Risk rating: Minor | Type of incident: Complaint

[REDACTED] informed case worker that his son [REDACTED] was walking through Area 9, felt dizzy (he had sewn his lips together at the time) and sat on the chair near the guard station. Guard stated "Do not sit in front of me I don't want to see you" and kicked the chair.





Aida Tomescu

In a carpet made of water, in a carpet made of earth 1 (2017) Oil, silver and gold pigment on Belgian linen 1830 x 915 mm

15 August 2014 Risk rating: Unclassified | Type of incident: Unclassified

Writer walks/runs on crushed coral. Knee ligaments are deteriorating due to surface. Has been given various supports which do not help. Experiencing back pain.

Artist statement

In reality and certainly celebrated as paradise in popular mythology the coral reef is more than an idyllic natural barrier working to keep predators at bay. Engineering an inner halo of calm against the turbulence of the ocean, the coral reef delineates a sense of safety against the tumult and multiple risks that lie beyond.

Beautiful when alive, fragile and wondrously chromatic, its defences don't rate a mention until they are growing inside your foot. Far worse than the proverbial stone in one's shoe, these seemingly benign plants are in fact sensitive clustering animals that when broken treat the attacker as host – the embedded slivers and shards, an invasive and punitive reminder of our trespass in their world.

Thus to run over them is asking for trouble, a despairing and wilful act of defiance perhaps... Aida Tomescu's painting can be viewed as an act of defiance, a powerful resistance to the confines and restraints of orthodoxy. Shards of colour and gestures cut through the accumulation of layers of pigment and like coral one would swear that this alternative plastic reality is alive. There is calm and turbulence, sensitivity and force, freedom and restraint.

Alex Seton

Oilstone 01_Transluscent (2015) Bianco Carrara Marble, engine oil, acrylic tank 470 x 980 x 240 mm

06 July 2015

Risk rating: Minor | Type of incident: Non-compliance

On 6/7/2015 at 07:30am STC CW [REDACTED 1] and STC CW [REDACTED 2] met with asylum seekers [REDACTED 3] and [REDACTED 4] outside Tent 7 in Area 1. Also present were Wilson's security officers, Whiskey 3 [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. CW's met with [REDACTED 3] and [REDACTED 4] to discuss their RSD status appointment that was scheduled to take place today at 9am. [REDACTED 4] and [REDACTED 3] advised that their family, [REDACTED] age [REDACTED] yrs, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] would not attend their appointment for their RSD today for the following reasons: they do not feel safe in the community, [REDACTED 3] is very unwell and receives daily medical treatment now and she will not receive adequate medical treatment in the community. CW's discussed the possible repercussions of them not attending this appointment, [REDACTED 4] and [REDACTED 3] advised the following: they have suffered for 1 year and 10 months here already, they can't make it any worse. In relation to the possibility of being returned home, [REDACTED 4] advised that they are already refugees in 3 countries, if they are not believed now they can be returned to where they found them, in the ocean. The living conditions in Nauru are the same as the country they fled and they did not choose to come to Nauru. [REDACTED 3] stated if they are forced to live in nauru they will jump into the ocean, indicating they will commit suicide. CW explored if [REDACTED 3] had any plans or intentions to self harm and she advised that whilst she was living in the RPC she was safe. CW's have obtained a [REDACTED] interpreter to speak with the remainder of the family this morning.

Artist statement

Oilstone Ol_Transluscent (2015) is the first of four works in a series of sculptures by Alex Seton. In each work, a carving of a common Yamaha motor boat engine in classic statuary white Bianco Carrara marble subjected to a process of transformation.

Oilstone 01_Translucent (2015) is the engine soaking in a shallow tray of engine oil, slowly drinking in the oil and making the stone more transparent.

Seton has adapted the classical narrative of the hero's journey for a contemporary context in his Oilstone series, to discuss the plight of the refugee. This 6 July 2015 case note from the Nauru Files makes reference to the journey undertaken by this family, capturing their determination and the desperation of the circumstances that brought them to Nauru, to which the Australian policy is ambivalent.

Making reference to Australia's participation in wars in the Middle East, and subsequent inability to address the consequences of these wars by refusing to accept refugees arriving by boat, Seton acknowledges his position of privilege as an Australian citizen. The blood-red engine oil soaks indelibly into the marble, reminding the viewer of the hypocrisy in which Australia is complicit.

As the writer Linda Jaivin has contemplated: "The longer the motor lies in the oil, the more it will absorb, the more it will be stained. How many of these heroes' journeys began with the stain of oil – wars of greed that we have helped to prosecute and that have torn apart whole regions of the world? How many of us understand the stain of our own complicity?" (1)

Footnotes: (1) Linda Jaivin, Alex Seton - The Island, exhibition catalogue essay, 2017



Mark Whalen

Step Repeat II (2017) Acrylic, ink and gouache on board 330 x 430 mm

27 September 2014 Risk rating: Information | Type of incident: Complaint

I was informed by [REDACTED] that during the protests last night, he witnessed Wilsons guards being inappropriate towards other asylum seekers. He revealed that when an asylum seeker slashed his neck, other rushed to his aid. They were stopped by Wilsons guards who stood in a circle around the hurt asylum seeker. They then started to tease the asylum seekers about their desire to go to Australia, and told them "you will never be let out of here".



Judith Wright

Untitled (2017) Acrylic on Japanese paper 995 x 1000 mm

23 December 2014 Risk rating: Information | Type of incident: Actual self-harm

On 23/12/2014 at 1700 young person [REDACTED 1] spoke with case manager, [REDACTED 2]. [REDACTED 2] noticed on [REDACTED 1]'s arm a small cut in the shape of the letter 'i' on her arm (about 8mm): from reviewing the case, [REDACTED 2] knew that [REDACTED 1] has self harmed before and has been in a high Whiskey watch as a result. He also submitted an IR last week about [REDACTED 1] scratching a heart into her arm. [REDACTED 2] asked her about the cut [REDACTED 1] said it was nothing - she stated she did it because she was sad and angry and missing her grandmother but also out of boredom. She said she used a rock. She said she had the intention of writing 'I lover my grandmother' but found it too difficult. [REDACTED 1] talked with [REDACTED 2] openly about what was happening for her mentally and emotionally when she decided to scratch into her arm. [REDACTED 1] is incredibly tired, frustrated, exhausted and worn down down by the environment of OPC3. [REDACTED 1] shared the trauma of why she fled from her country; and how incredibly difficult it is for her to process her current environment without the presence of her grandmother - citing its now been eight months since she was medivac'd [REDACTED 1]'s stongly expressed that she did not want security to follow her. [REDACTED 1] has agreed to a safety plan with SCA CW and SCA have plans to meet with her Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. [REDACTED 1]'s family is also currently supporting another child in the camp which [REDACTED 1] is taking seriously.

Artist statement

Judith Wright's work has always dealt with loss. Her sensitive narratives form the backdrop to a practice that involves both painting and sculpture – the latter often "repurposes" the discarded, offering a new fictional life to her cast of forgotten characters.

The file that Judith responded to tells of a young girl who marks herself in an expression of mourning for the loss of her grandmother. This partially completed, self inflicted scaring certainly suggests a deeper wound - a mourning that stretches across time and generations. This narrative dovetails with Judith's own though she chooses to make and repeat her symbolic marks on soft "vellum-like" papers, papers that feel all the world like skin.



Joshua Yeldham

SEA OF SORROW / PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

Acrylic on carved Board, drystone, cedar and card, with wooden boat and resin figure with cane

950 x 650 x 1200 mm

20 August 2014 Risk rating: Minor | Type of incident: Sexual assault

Client approached writer, and had been crying. Another beneficiary had been telling stories of sexual assault on Christmas Island. He has also been acting inappropriately, asking to look at other transferees breasts. She felt like self harm but did not discuss this further.

Artist statement

On reading the Nauru files I saw a sea of sorrow, my brush dropped like an anchor in deep water.



All We Can't See website

Visual responses to individual Nauru Files, submitted to www.allwecantsee.com (2018) Featuring works by:

Holly Greenwood

Hugo Muecke

Anna Mould

Kiara Mucci

Arielle Gamble

W H Chong

George Gittoes

Jessica Page

Deborah Wood

Annabella Hale

Tina Stefanou

Lâle Teoman

John Douglas

Abdul Abdullah

Jessica Meier

Tracy Dickason

Vittoria Oriana

Nidhi Bolar

Cathy Speed

Adi Fink

Tanushri Saha

Alison Peters

Inga Hanover

Craig Loxley

Kiata Mason

Monique Lovering















Thank you to our supporters

This project was initiated by two book designers, Arielle Gamble and Daniel New, who saw an opportunity to use art to engage a broader Australian audience in reading the Nauru Files.

We would like to acknowledge the individuals behind each redacted name in each file, illustrated in both the exhibition and the Nauru Files as a whole. We hope that by sharing these stories a broader Australian public will be encouraged to become informed, and to demand immediate change and safe futures for all of those on Manus and Nauru.

The All We Can't See exhibition and website was only made possible through the efforts of a small and incredibly dedicated team who donated countless hours of their time, energy, expertise and resources to this project over this last year: Georgie Bright, Morna Seres and Heidi Forbes – thank you so much.

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Front cover 'I Heart Nauru' by Penny Byrne, image courtesy Matthew Stanton Back cover 'Untitled III' by Pia Johnson Image opposite: Installation by Saskia Havekes





