

Ways to Water

Workshop

18th December 2021

Acknowledgement of Country:

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which the South Coast Writers Centre is situated. We pay our respects to Aboriginal Elders past and present, who are the knowledge holders and teachers, and acknowledge their continued spiritual and cultural connection to Country. We also pay respect to the knowledge embedded forever within the Aboriginal Custodianship of Country.

Poetry Prize 2022 and the Exhibition:

Many of us have living connections to the places where the land meets the sea. We live and breathe the salt air; we swim and surf; we snorkel and fish; we walk and think and dream. We are part of Sea Country, a place of deep time, stories and memories.

Ways to Water is an exhibition that asks us to look at the coastal places we belong to: our past, present and our imagined future. We'd like you to tell us about your experiences on the coast, on the beach, in the ocean.

50 Lines

\$1000 First Place Prize

\$100 Second Place Prize

\$100 Wollongong Art Gallery Prize for poem that best responds to exhibition (see images below)

Publication in the 2022 SCWC Anthology





6 November - 6 February 2022, Mann-Tatlow Gallery
Curated by Agnieszka Golda & Jo Stirling at Wollongong Art Gallery

<http://www.wollongongartgallery.com/exhibitions/Documents/Ways%20to%20Water%20Catalogue.pdf>

Ways to Water traces stories of coastal changes across the Illawarra, South Coast, and New South Wales. The exhibition brings together fifty key historical and contemporary works from Wollongong Art Gallery and University of Wollongong collections – as well as original artworks and interactive augmented reality – to highlight the complex shifts through physical and imagined encounters between Land Country and Sea Country.

The series of thematic displays connects diverse perspectives from creative, cultural, educational and scientific disciplines to respond to the question: how can ocean-based sustainable development be achieved in the context of coastal change?

What happens when we write:

The Self escaping onto the page:

Barry Lopez wrote, “To inquire into the intricacies of a distant landscape, then, is to provoke thoughts about one’s own interior landscape, and the familiar landscapes of memory. The land (or water in this case) urges us to come around to an understanding of ourselves.”

He's tired; his arms licked with salt
And heavier from the spray,
His body incised by three hernias—last year's Jewfish
That hooked him to a bed for weeks.
Now, the fish boxes are half full

And leave pockets of air between each stack
In the chest freezer. I visited that evening;
His arms in electric hum—bottlebrushes of fibreglass
Sanding an upturned hull.
He'd murmur old stories like photographs

Of my grandfather; beach fires, jacket potatoes,
Al' foil wrapped fish and the town
Before the servo re-dressed as a bed and breakfast.
Tar had brought Sydney-siders
Down for summer and he'd ask how father

Took the loss — how lung cancer trawls the body.
I'd mumble a nod, fixed on the roll of hands
Over ribbed body, drawn to the fountain fall of fibres
And the closeness of the fibro hut.
The wind drew in the night

Like the turn of venetian dowel;
Old nets bundled in the outhouse,
The smell of morning—a memory soaked in the
grass,
Two gulls skittered along a galvanised gutter
And I caught glints in the tidemarks of his eyes.

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Inlet

The lighthouse beam swings round again lighting
the sea up all the way to the horizon.
Nothing is broken yet by rain, by birds collapsing
their wings as they fall. Already
the sun has tired, losing stroke. I dangle a line,

feel a few bites shuttle up and down the nylon.

Soon, I'll see the moon over
the bluff, a spike wound with pale gauze, stars
spawning in the breaking swells
that leak over the oars. Now, a heron, air-built,

takes off on silent hinges, and little currents swirl
around my prow as I work my arms
backwards, forwards, my oars like whispering
shuttles lifting the water into
fine-spun thread. Everything will change I know:

a heavy curtain of rain come, the moon slip away
as I draw harder on the oars.

I know my stroke will lose rhythm in the brown
waters of the cove, but now I make
round music across the bay, where even Grennan

or Davey, on the far-off jetty, their reels spinning
like a sudden volley of insects
cued by the dusk, might, just possibly—when
they come into the presence
of still waters—find something beautiful to say.

Reading and Research:

I have as many reference books as books of poetry. The more you read, the greater the body of knowledge and inspiration you can draw on. I have a few 'go tos' though, Mary Oliver, Jane Hirshfield, and Mark Treddinick. Interviews with poets are always wonderful as well, try Westword's Poets Corner or The Blue Nib's interviews. Podcasts can be great too; The New Yorker Poetry, Poetry off the Shelf, Poem Talk, Poetry on the Move (Canberra Festival)... others?

For research, books on history, myth, birds, the Australian landscape, local walking guides. (See books on table)

Picking a Form:

Odd or even stanza length. How do you want it to appear on the page?

Line Length: (There are many essays on this! The poetic line) Attention to rhythm or no? How many metrical feet? Even or odd? Even tends to give a sense of closure, 7, 9, 11, tend to lend themselves to enjambment and a pulling through the lines. Iambic pentameter is the goldilocks meter, but it's pays to play outside of this space from time to time. Why not 14 or 16 syllables? What's the effect of 15? Longer lines tend to create more of a sense of reflection and a slower pace, shorter length, a sense of tension and urgency. A shorter line length lends itself to a close attention to the economy of language needed in poetry.

Rhyming or not?

Mark Tredinnick's *Five Soft Nets: A Coledale Sonnet Cycle*

A sonnet cycle, written in iambic pentameter, but not divided into the usual line length structure on the page—first line 6 syllables, fifth line has 18.

Five Soft Nets: *A Coledale Sonnet Cycle*

1.

AT THE BACK of the beach,

We hunt among the painted
Stones for Coledale. With our toes among pools
And losing our feet, we try to divine, as if one could,
A place. Come always into country humbly, knowing it has meant the world—
And means it still—to someone. Across this tessellated shelf
Two continents at least of syllables and time, of bloodshed
And dance steps, have stranded and are
Reassembled daily, by violence and grace,
Into this high estate, this sooty-oyster-captured place, along
This whalebone shore. I know too little
To say too much, so I speak
Only to bribe the kids to open
Their eyes to rarer birds than gulls,

2.

To petition the shallows
To sing. The first time I came
The summer was high; the second, the sky was low—
As if the heavens the holiness came down from
Were keen to take a little of it back. Beginning with the scarp, where
Clouds, those turps-soaked *rags of time*, have reclaimed
Ten millennia and whited out the turpentine and coachwood
Halfway down to Cokeworks Road.
Merrigong crowds the beaches here
All year; its feet are made of shale and coal and potter's clay
And spelling mistakes, and in among the cliffs
Behind the shore, where we fossick
The shelf like shorebirds, my children find
A niche and in that small crypt

