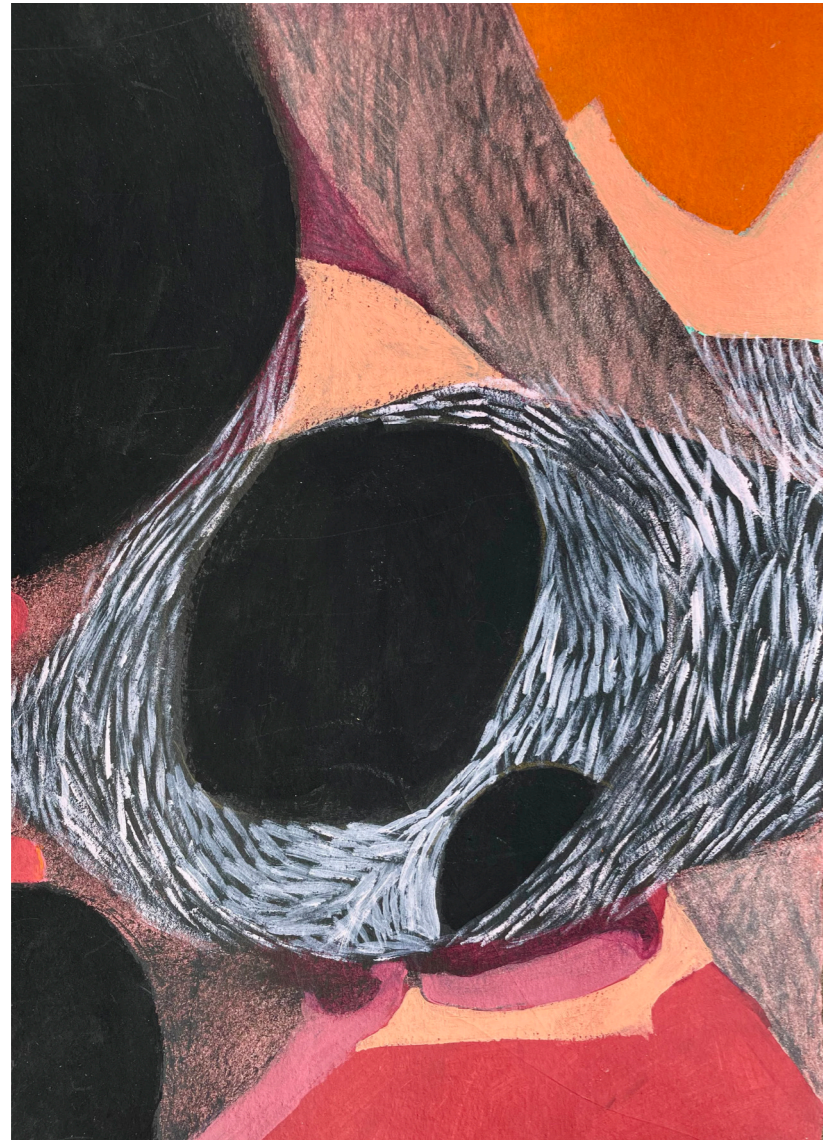


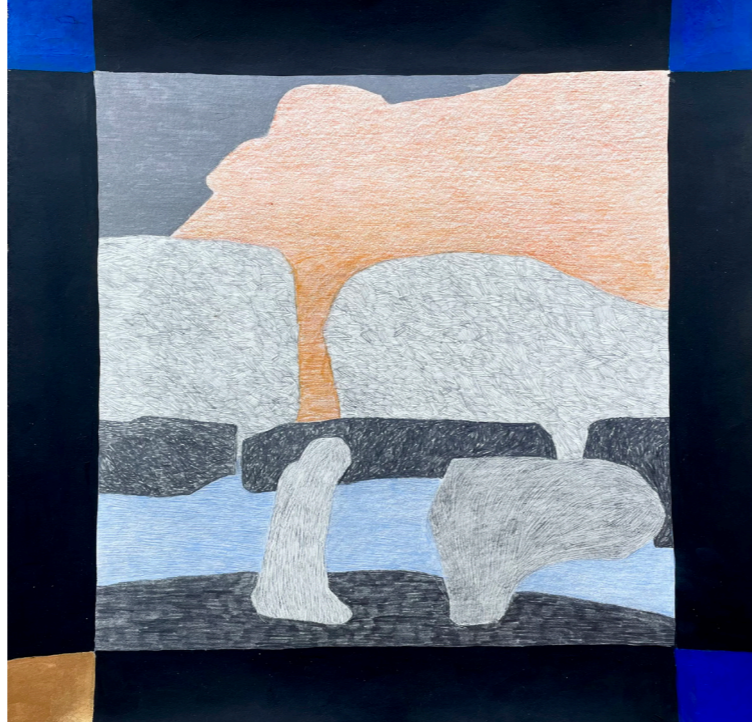
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A



C



A

Grays Lodge. The long and winding Road 'Ampiti on Stonechange paper. 18 cm x 18 cm. 2023

B



B

Grays Lodge. 'Sea Landscape', 2022 Acrylic and ink on canvas. 40 cm x 40 cm.



C

Grays Lodge. Journey I. Pencil on Stonechange Acrylic border 51 cm x 51 cm. 2010 - 2023.

"The sea constantly calls"



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THE GREAT SEA IS NEVER FAR AWAY

GAME GOVINE

28<sup>TH</sup> APRIL

UNTIL  
MAY 28<sup>TH</sup>

# THE GREAT SEA

**Gaye Coyne is an artist specialising in abstraction. From an early age, nature has been Gaye's muse, having grown up on Tasmania's North West Coast, along the Bass Strait, across from the beach. At age eleven, an article about John Olsen in The Australian Women's Weekly, describing his philosophy of capturing the essence of the landscape rather than copying nature, inspired her to become a painter. In 1972, Gaye moved to Larrakia Country, Darwin. For some time, her art practice was put on hold while she raised her four sons. Eventually, Gaye took the opportunity to move to Sydney to complete a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the National Art School. She considers her children, her grandchildren and the love she puts into her family, her greatest creative work. Having returned to Darwin in 2003, Gaye continues to paint, observing and responding to nature, looking out across the road, toward the Timor Sea. The tropical monsoon, the seasonal winds and all of nature's moods are the subject of her paintings.**

Gaye has exhibited in many solo and group shows in Darwin and interstate and was a finalist in the Glover Prize in 2019. Her works belong to a number of private collections across the country. Gaye regularly exhibits with Paul Johnstone Gallery based in Darwin.



*"The ocean is a vast realm of mystery, a shift with the seasons, with the depths, with variable nutrient loads, with the tidal fetch of the inshore and the currents of the silent deep."*

The call of the sea. Almost a cliché of romantic maritime fiction. Except that it is also a fact. The sea constantly calls – and in Gaye Coyne's Tasmanian childhood it called with exceptional persistence. Living in near proximity to the choppy waters of Bass Strait, it entered her soul. She became a veritable fish, untouchable in school swimming carnivals. I know this, for I was there. Living now on a shore adjacent to the Timor Sea – literally just 'over the road' – the persistence of that call remains as strong as ever. In a vital way, she has become the Timor Sea, as once she became Bass Strait. She processes this elemental internality through her art.

An artist answering to the call of the sea has a virtual infinity of subject matter at their disposal. The ocean is a vast realm of mystery, a-shift with the seasons, with the depths, with variable nutrient loads, with the tidal fetch of the inshore and the currents of the silent deep. Science continues to peel back layers of oceanic mystery, but the more it does so the more we become aware of the fathomless complexity of mysteries awaiting resolution. 'I must down to the seas again/to the lonely sea and the sky' wrote John Masefield. He was a poet, but how many visual artists have tumbled out of bed in the morning and experienced just such an urge.

Gaye Coyne is emblematic of the sea-drawn artist. She seeks for surface effects, but she also probes the depths, and the rich mysteries at the sea's edge. Her praxis fits her purpose. Proceeding from a central idea, she gives the accepted senses and startling visceral reactions free expressive play. There may be a horizon line, there may be an opaque cloud evoking a looming menace, there may be a chaos of unsettled water, there may be sinuous lines of weed and worm and mangrove knee (say), there may be a tumble of rock at the base of a seacliff. Let's stay with these rocks. They may be sea-washed; they may not. They may be integral to a seascape, or they may, rather, be redolent of sun-battered desert. What is encoded within their ancient chemistry? What do they know; what might they tell us?

We are back with mystery. The sea harbours infinite mystery, yes, but mystery is a principle that transcends the sea. As a central principle in Gaye Coyne's artistic practice, it informs her engagement with the sea and more besides. One of the four organising themes of this exhibition is the mystery inherent in that most prosaic human creation, the road. What lies beyond the next bend? And the bend after that? It might be that every year we know more and still more about the world and its manifold ways, but every year we realise how much mystery still lies beyond the fringe of our knowing. Stephen Hawking's unifying principle of everything is nowhere in sight. It is, rather, the essential

unknowingness of, say, what lies around the next turn of the road, that most informs the shape of the world, and humankind's modes of experiencing that world. What remains beyond the knowing of what we know is, well, mystery. And Gaye Coyne is a supreme artist of mystery. In the many discussions we have had Gaye has never identified the dark mode of mystery as an informing element of her art practice. Nevertheless, this is what strikes me when I view the works. Those black, cavernous holes within otherwise joyous abstractions. Storms (or worse?) at sea. There is foreboding here.

This is, nonetheless, ultimately a minor note. Gaye can't be pinned down as an artist. Over here the palette is monotonal. But over here there is a vivid riot of bright colour, warm pinks and oranges, the cobalt that is such a signature of Gaye's work, and deep, tropical greens. 'Blue and green must never be seen without a colour in between'? Not if you're Gaye Coyne. Colour is important to her, but not at the expense of form. Both are in full evidence here, though it is the virtuoso deployment of colour that first takes the viewer's attention. She is primarily an artist of joy and of life rather than gloom and threat; of tonal vibrancy rather than monotonicity.

So it is that we return to the sea. About 3/4ths of the earth's surface is covered by sea, and about half the surface is covered by a vastness of black water, devoid of light, devoid of plants. But the water of the inshore – the shallow water of the continental shelf – is extraordinarily fecund, and the ecotone at the oceanic edge is the most biologically vivid on the planet. The contrast between the waters of the continental shelf and the continental slope (and abyss) is Planet Earth's most arresting contrast. And it is from the rich waters of the continental shelves that all life emerged. It is not for nothing that the familiar metaphor, 'mother sea', was coined. Except that it is not a metaphor.

No-one has described all this more evocatively than Rachel Carson, back in the 1950s, in one of the great books of the twentieth century, *The Sea Around Us*. 'In its mysterious past it encompassed all the dim origins of life', she wrote (of the sea). Furthermore, 'all at last return to the sea – to Oceanus, the ocean river, like the ever-flowing stream of time, the beginning and the end.' Carson was a scientist-poet (not actually such a rare creature). The sea has also demanded poetry from me, and I have obliged. It has made similar demands of Gaye, a poet of colour and form, and she has brilliantly responded. The fruit of her response is here before you"

– Pete Hay

*Credits: Pete Hay – writer. Stephanie Martin – gallery director and curator. Madeleine Thomas – designer.*

*Pete Hay is a Tasmanian writer. His most recent books are *Physick: Catharsis*; and *The Natural Things and Forgotten Corners: Essays in Search of an Island's Soul**

# IS NEVER FAR AWAY.