



Country Arts SA established the Breaking Ground Visual Arts Professional Development Award to support South Australian regional artists to explore new boundaries and push their practice into new directions.

Launched in 2011 the award has since supported four regionally based artists to pursue their aspirations, work with a mentor of their choice and present their exhibitions in a city gallery, previously at the Adelaide Festival Centre's Artspace Gallery and this year at the Light Square Gallery.

Breaking Ground 2017 winner, Fleurieu artist Chris De Rosa, has used the award to propel her career, gain new skills and confidence that will take her practice to a new level. Through the award Chris has worked with her mentor, established artist Michelle Nikou.

Based in Port Elliot, Chris' work is influenced by the ocean and is predominantly print based including etching, digital, screen and relief painting, collage on paper, fabric and more recently 3D foam and ceramic lace.

Her exhibition *she collects the beautiful things – turbulent nature* embodies the beauty and coarseness of the Fleurieu. Her work is inspired by the unknown environment; what lies beneath the surface of the ocean. Her hyper-colourful images bring to the surface just how marvellous the hidden can be.

It is indeed my pleasure to welcome you to the 2017 Breaking Ground exhibition, *she collects the beautiful things – turbulent nature* by Chris De Rosa.

**Steve Saffell**  
Chief Executive Officer, Country Arts SA

thank  
you



**Country Arts SA:**

Michael Luchich, Chair of the Board  
Steve Saffell, Chief Executive Officer  
Anthony Peluso, Arts Programs Director  
Eleanor Scicchitano, Visual Arts Program Curator  
Brad Lay, Visual Arts Officer

**The artist would like to thank:**

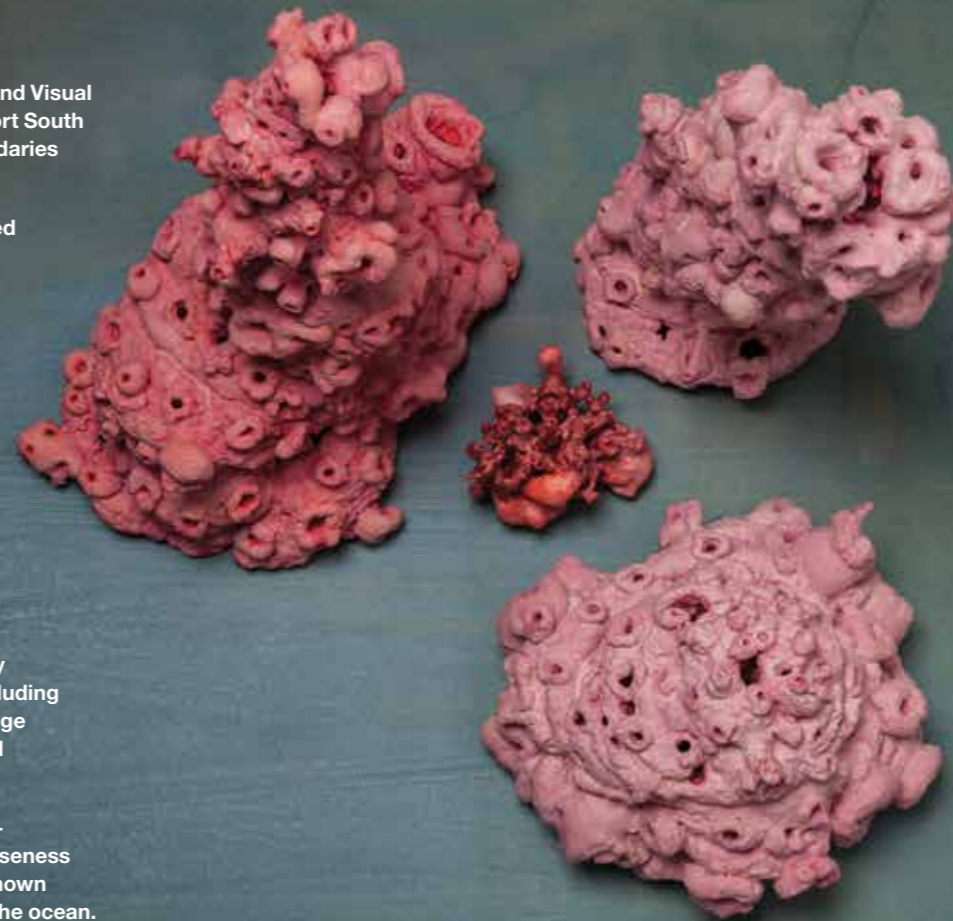
Michelle Nikou  
Gerry Wedd  
Nici Cumpston  
Nakita Dorward  
Pippy Mount  
Margaret Mayo

Artwork photography by Pippy Mount  
Graphic Design by Beth Wuttke

The Country Arts SA Visual Arts Professional Development Award provides a practicing contemporary visual artist from country South Australia the opportunity to develop a body of work for exhibition in a major gallery space in metropolitan Adelaide and receive a mentorship opportunity to further their career.

Cover: *Studio*, 2017. Photo: N. Dorward. Above: *she collects*, 2017, glazed ceramic, pu foam, mixed media. Dimensions variable. Inside cover: *turbulent nature*, 2017, digital inkjet print, pigment stain, fluorescence, dye, on perforated magnani paper. 76 x 120cm. Group of four: 1) *turbulent nature*, 2017, digital inkjet print, pigment stain, dye, on perforated magnani paper and glazed ceramic. 76 x 120cm. Photo: Pippy Mount. 2) *turbulent nature*, 2017, digital inkjet print, pigment stain, dye, on perforated magnani paper and glazed ceramic. 76 x 120cm. 3) *turbulent nature*, 2017, digital inkjet print, pigment stain, dye, on perforated magnani paper. 76 x 120cm. 4) *turbulent nature*, 2017, digital inkjet print, etching, pigment stain, dye, on perforated magnani paper. 76cm x 120cm. Left: *turbulent nature*, 2017, digital inkjet print, pigment stain, dye, on perforated magnani paper and glazed ceramic. 76 x 120cm.

ISBN: 978-0-9954008-3-2



she  
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Chris De Rosa



## she collects the beautiful things – turbulent nature

Light Square Gallery  
Adelaide College of the Arts  
4 – 31 August 2017

In Ragnarök, AS Byatt's tale based on Norse mythology, the goddess Rán "plays with a vast net which she loops about dead and dying creatures as they fall through the thick depths... collecting the beautiful things". In my practice I am also endeavouring to capture and preserve the wondrous things I observe as I dive into the ocean or when I collect sponges and sea weeds from the shoreline near my home.

There is a mission embedded in my practice that is both aesthetic and environmental. Our liminal landscape is riddled with wondrous objects that are largely hidden from the gaze of the casual comber. The hyper-coloured, hyper-real images are a way of bringing these organisms into clear view to remind us just how precious and wondrous this environment is and how strangely beautiful these forms are.

The work is informed by dystopian fictions of a future world covered in water where organisms may become even more "rich and strange" embodying the philosophical idea of the sublime as turbulent nature where pleasure is derived from observing objects that threaten to hurt or destroy.

**Elspeth Pitt**  
Curator and writer based in Canberra

The sea is ever-present in literature and art. Spectral, omnipotent, ferocious, serene, the sea is a shapeshifting phenomenon antithetical to human life, yet it has also come to symbolise that life's deepest consciousness. In manifold incarnations, the sea is, variously, a low-slung silver horizon whereupon sky and water meet, imperceptibly; the delicate smudge edging finely wrought topographies; the voluptuous blue that moves, languorously, throughout so many paintings; the meter of waves, both rhythmic and wild, mirrored in poetry and prose. Yet the great forests of coral and weed that inhabit the sea, some anchored, others itinerant, have remained almost invisible in these same documents of literature and art.

George Murray, former Keeper of the Department of Botany at the British Museum, observed this absence. In 1895 he wrote that 'the study of seaweeds is of very modern origin, and nothing beyond casual recognition of their existence is to be found in the literature and memorials of early times. The Greeks have left us engraved figures of Gorgons whose heads were decorated with seaweeds; there is but one mention of them in the Bible, when Jonah exclaims "The depths closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head"; and the references in Latin literature, even that of the poets... are merely contemptuous... The flora of the sea remained in its confines – a *hortus inclusus* within a barrier that still jealously hides much from our knowledge.'<sup>1</sup> That the sea regards its flora protectively, as though too precious and rare to give up, is a darkly romantic idea and one that sits surprisingly, although compellingly, within the context of Murray's scientific text.

A handful of artists, working primarily in the realm of natural history illustration, have endeavoured to capture the manifold forms of seaweeds. Irish botanist William Henry Harvey's limpid pink illustrations of the *Lenormandia spectabilis* (published 1862) are queerly Matisse-like, minimally drawn, their general characteristics incidentally poetic: 'Frond leaf-like, proliferous. *Phyllocladia* flat, membranaceous, undivided, midribbed, obliquely cross-striate, internally honeycombed.'<sup>2</sup> Australian phycologist and seaweed collector Florence Perrin's *Seaweed specimens collected in North-Eastern Tasmania*, held in the Allport Library and Museum, Hobart (compiled 1930 – 1950), are drained of colour but hold their shape, having been stretched

gingerly and tipped delicately into spacious album pages. Seaweeds gathered for Governor Lachlan Macquarie's collector's chest, (c.1818) acquired by the Mitchell Library, Sydney, in 2004, are arranged in spiralling designs beneath a panel of painted fish. Now age-bleached and fossil-esque the Macquarie specimens bring a strange tumble of resonances to mind, being delicate, lace-like, 'feminine', but dead and brittle like bones.

Chris De Rosa is another artist who has devoted her practice to collecting and portraying seaweeds. The feeling of her work, however, is very different to that of her nineteenth and twentieth century precursors. Vivid algae etched in bas-relief crescendos brightly on printed papers. Lurid casts of sea sponges hum from the impact of their jewel colours. Tubular weeds hold small, dark worlds of their own. Growing fervently from innumerable pots of fluorescent ink, paint brushes, a printing press, rolls of paper, reams of books, De Rosa's nautical realm is one characterised by rapid accumulation as opposed to the quiet stasis of preserved specimens held uneasily between life and death.

In the past, the artist has listed influences including the nineteenth century composer Edward Elgar's song-cycle *Sea pictures* and nautical folklore of the Italian Renaissance. In this new body of work, her attention has shifted to the dystopian, future-focussed novels of authors such as J.G. Ballard and Margaret Atwood whose writings provide a fictional basis for a likely reality. Rising seas may one day entail that De Rosa's rabidly blooming weeds will replace forests of eucalypt, pine and oak. As such, her work is neither clear illustration nor devotional mimicry but a future vision suspended queerly between her great love of sea flora and underlying environmental anxiety.

<sup>1</sup> George Murray, *An introduction to the study of seaweeds*. Macmillan and Co: London, 1895, p1.

<sup>2</sup> William Henry Harvey, *Phycologia Australica, or, a history of Australian seaweeds: Plates...*: L Reeve & Co: London, 1862, plate clxxxi.

