

Vanishing Point

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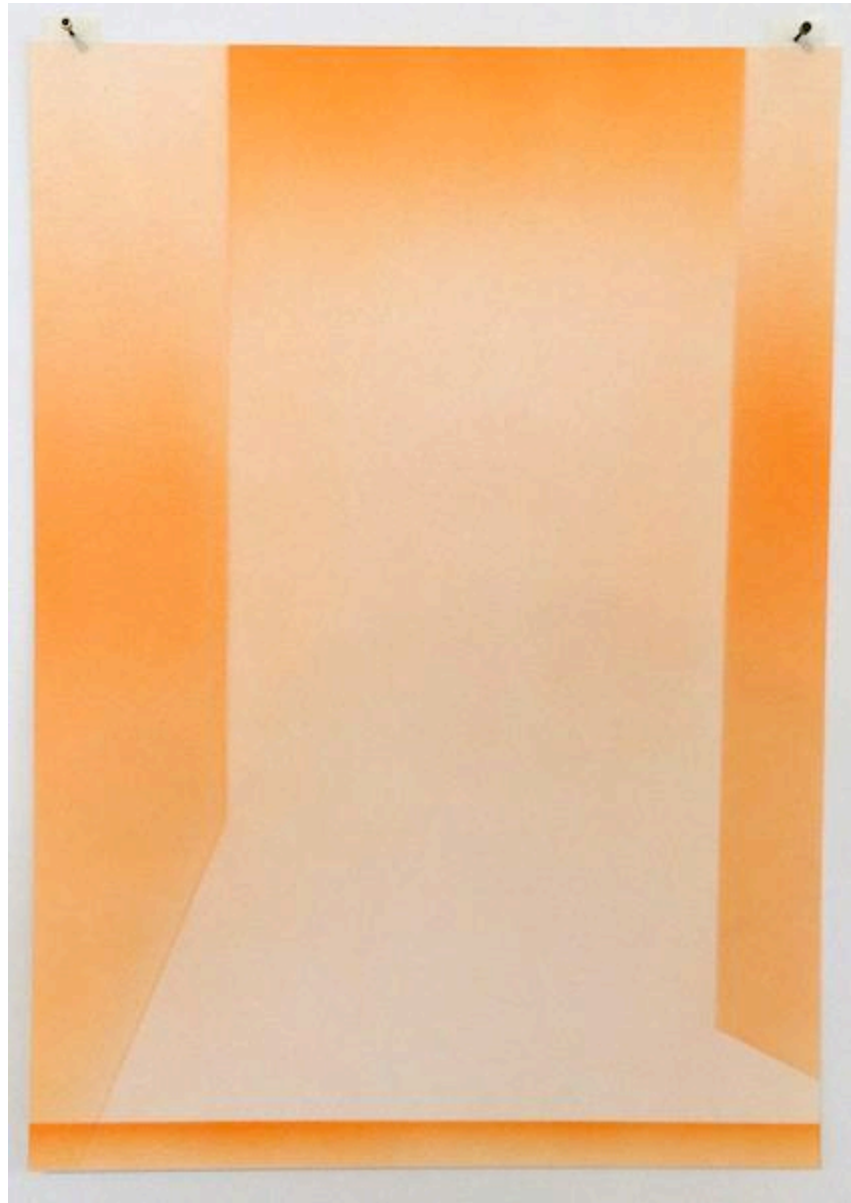
April 27, 2018

The island is a fascinating trope. On the one hand, it's fraught with dark colonial histories – think Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* violently subjugating Caliban on his native isle; a microcosm that applies, of course, to our own 'island home'. It's also a site of wilderness, where Freud's concept of the id flourishes, liberating the primal urges that are repressed in 'civilised' society. 'Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood' chant the shipwrecked little boys in *Lord of the Flies* as they succumb to their primitive under-selves. This is a far cry from European representations of fictionalised Pacific paradises and the phenomenon of 'islomania', which imagines an Edenic escape from the woes of life.



Yvette Hamilton, *Phantom Island*, 2017, install, Animated lightboxes – backlit transparency, mirrored acrylic, LED lights, microprocessor, 42 x 32 x 4cm. Courtesy the artist and Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Sydney

The paradoxical ubiquity of island landscapes within the popular imagination is unpacked by five female artists in 'Vanishing Point', an exhibition that conceptualises the isolated landmass as a place where opposing ideas meet. Featuring works by Consuelo Cavaniglia, Ellen Dahl, Yvette Hamilton, Taloi Havini and Salote Tawale, the artist-led presentation filters personal narratives, socio-political considerations and commentary on cultural histories through the photographic apparatus of the lens.



Consuelo Cavaniglia, *Atmosphere Study 1,11,111*, 2017, airbrushed pigment ink on archival paper, 42cm x 29.7cm. Courtesy the artist and Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Sydney

A haven from the mainland, the island is a construct of time and space that exists outside the 'real world'. Two untitled works by Consuelo Cavaniglia map this entity as a site of illusion. Her large airbrushed work references infinity walls – screens used in photography that locate the subject in non-spaces – projecting the island as an invented place where definitions blur. Drawing on the notion of a vanishing point, where lines converge to oblivion, the diptych *Untitled* (2018) uses reflected colour and subtle geometric twists to question the flimsy divide between perception and reality.

This focus on the middle ground between oppositional positions is also explored by Yvette Hamilton, whose new works investigate the 'phantom island' – a mapped landform proven to not exist. In the large light-based installation, *I Just Have This Feeling* (2018), semaphoric symbology act as quasi-navigational markings that attempt to chart a course through an unknown sea. In another work, *Dead Reckoning I–III* (2018), the artist attempts to draw, from memory, the outline of personally significant isles, exploring the

role of error within both navigation and memory. 'I have an endless fascination with the photographic moment where the shutter clicks – that split second between blindness and vision' reflects Hamilton, 'I'm interested in the way that islands can operate as mirages, where there is an active turning away from the 'real world' in order to embrace an (often) unrealistic narrative. This wilful adoption of fantasy is a way of blinding out reality; literally burying the head in sandy shores.'

The definitive edge of the island, with its geographical boundaries and contained cultures, prompts questions of definition of borders. This is imaged in the photography of Ellen Dahl, who focuses her camera on these landscapes as an entry point into considerations on identity, and a physical, political or psychological sense of place. Her large black and white photographs *Lost I and Lost II* (2018) depict unidentified rock formations that appear as positive and negative versions of each other. These works explore the dualities inherent to such fixed limits: me and you, us and them – a metaphor for the nation state.

Meanwhile, Taloi Havini uses film and photography to explore the history of the disappearing island. On a recent trip back to her native Bougainville, the artist discovered a collection of deteriorated Kodachrome slides from her parent's archive, which evoked ideas of tropical archipelago life during the 60s and 70s. She reflects, 'I wanted to question how well we really know a place. I was interested to see how these images of islands in my parents' archive maintained their position over time. To me they looked like an oasis in a desert.' In *Imaginary line I* (2018), Havini digitally scanned and transferred the slides to wallpaper. One of these large-scale



Ellen Dahl, *Lost I*, 2017, archival pigment print 130 x 81cm. Courtesy the artist and Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Sydney

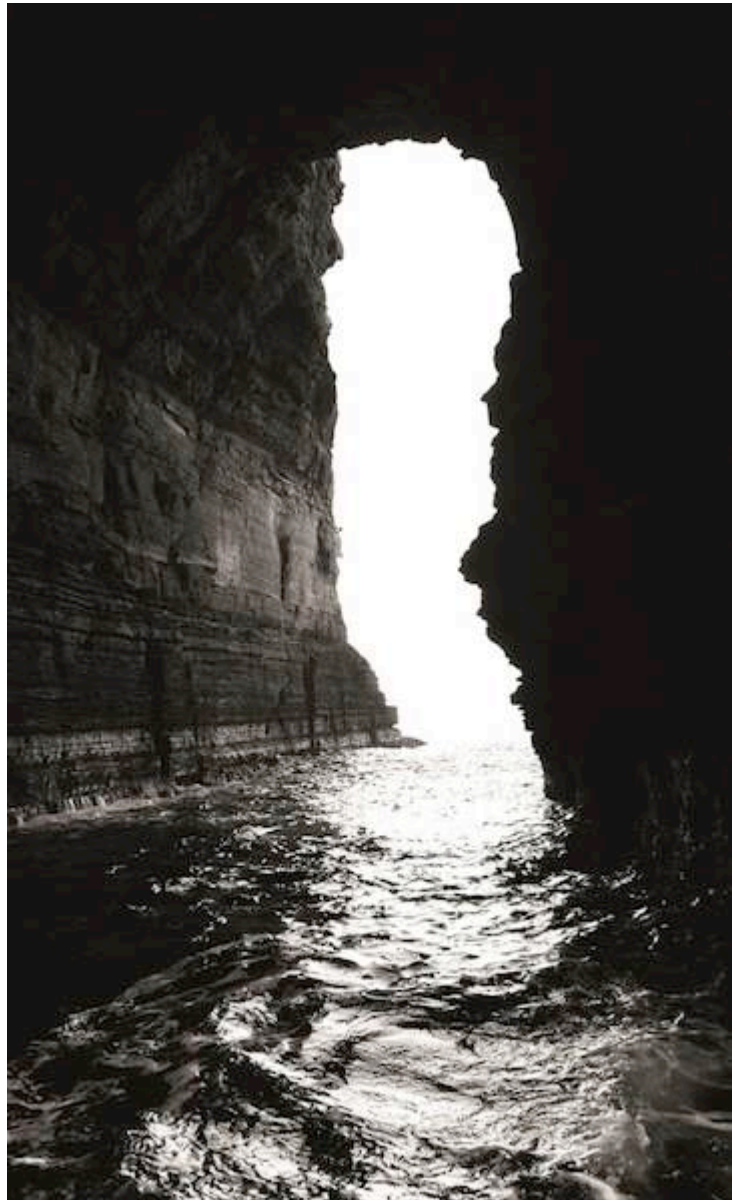
photographic images serves as a backdrop to a silent underwater video, *over and over* (2018), which represents the artist's desire to 'go below the surface of the same places my parents recorded.'

Contrasts between real lived experience and the fantasy of colonial stories are canvased in the work of Salote Tawale. 'Paradise is a construct that is furthered through the colonial project', states the artist, who is informed by a translocated Indigeneity from her mixed Fijian/Australian heritage. Tawale employs performance, photomedia and drawing to incarnate faded memories and examine diaspora identity. Her work *Constant interruption, always changing* (2018) considers cultural exchanges devolved through the disappearance of customs and the passing of older generations via the force of colonialism. It confronts us with vanishing people and disappearing landscapes of the present day.

From these varied viewpoints, the artists cleverly employ the island as a vanishing point of ideas; a prop for conversations about identity, vision and space. It is an elusive place forever on the horizon – always visible yet just beyond reach.

Elli Walsh is a Sydney-based arts writer.

Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre
Until 10 June, 2018
 Sydney



Ellen Dahl, *Lost II*, 2017, archival pigment print 120 x 81cm. Courtesy the artist and Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Sydney