

SMOKE

SMOKE and the Port

This exhibition celebrates the product of combustion, the vaporous gasses and particles, the aromatic, the cure, the pale to greyish blue to thick black, the elemental nature of smoke. The artists have played with the properties of smoke, the smoke of fleeting illusion, of mirrors, the unreal and transitory, of concealment and screening.

The presence of smoke has a long history in the Port. Long before the Europeans first sailed up the river, you would have seen the smoke rising from the numerous fires of the Kaurna people who occupied and made use of this land and water. Among their customs was the practice of fire-stick farming as part of a scrub clearing process for hunting and to encourage grass growth for emu and kangaroo.

The Industrial Revolution ushered in an 'age of smoke', skies filled with the by-product of the industrialisation and transportation needs of a growing colony. The tallest smoke stacks were in and around the Port, steam trains provided a regular service between the Port and Adelaide from 1856 and coal powered ships eventually replaced sail. All this would have created an all-pervading atmosphere of dense smoke, ever-present in the daily lives of those living and working here.

Unwanted fire also brought smoke. In 1857, the Great Fire of Port Adelaide destroyed a large area of the built Port. In 1924, fire took hold of the ship *The City of Singapore* which, at the time, was carrying a highly flammable cargo of cased benzine, petrol and kerosene and other goods. The cargo exploded killing four firefighters and injuring many more. Dock Two was renamed Tragedy Dock.

And then there's the smoko, the ritual that broke the working day into manageable blocks. The smoko is emblematic of the working class Port, it might have started quietly with the carved albatross bone pipes made by seafarers in their idle time, but it soon became an integral part of the employment conditions of every man and woman who worked these wharves.

Once every year or so, we get together to put on an exhibition based on a single elemental theme, this year the theme is 'SMOKE'. It all began five years ago with RUST, then we had SALT, then TAR. The exhibitions are based on some of the gritty and quintessential elements found in our Port. The artists are given freedom to explore and interpret each theme as they like with the result that each of the exhibitions has contained work that has been diverse but cohesive, surprising, thought-provoking, beautiful, humorous and challenging.

Jaqueline Barmantloo
Tom Borgas
CHEB [Deb Jones +
Christine Cholewa]
Sandra Elms
Danica Gacesa McLean
Rosie Hannam
Emma Johnson
Peter Johnson
Tony Kearney
Hailey Lane
Sue Lorraine
Tom Moore
Bruce Nuske
Amanda Sefton-Hogg
Trevor Wren

Curated by
Tony Kearney