



***THE SEA IS ALL AROUND US***  
***MARGARET WOODWARD***

## **THE SEA IS ALL AROUND US**

Margaret Woodward  
Dome Gallery, The Mission to Seafarers Victoria  
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Caring for seafarers  
around the world



Part of Bendigo and Adelaide Bank

***“For their safe and efficient operations, ships depend on seafarers working far from their home and family for months, sometimes years – often in harsh and dangerous conditions.***

***As an island nation Australia relies on seafarers.***

***The work of the Mission to Seafarers is a way of acknowledging their work and hardships, by provision of support.”***

I have always lived on islands. Some surrounded by sea and others, urban and rural islands surrounded by vast tracts of land. My parents first met at sea, on the S.S. ORION which left from Melbourne for England on 19 May 1955. They, like other Australians drawn by the adventure and sophistication of life and art in Europe, were following a reverse migration. My siblings and I grew up on romantic stories of our parents' voyage 'abroad' and how later on their return journey, now married and expecting their first child, they were marooned for 7 weeks in the Indian Ocean due to engine trouble and the crew's unrest. As a girl, my bedroom overlooked the Port of Launceston and I grew up watching the comings and goings of dredges and barges in the River Tamar, merchant ships loading and offloading apples, wool, cars and machinery. It is now possible to 'virtually' overlook almost any port in the world. Global docks are viewed by taking remote control of a live video web camera. One can view thousands of shipping containers laid out like a tessellated carpet, with ships berthed alongside concrete docks, their names, destination and cargo data instantly available with the click of the mouse. Zoom in and suddenly the port comes to life. You can see cables fluttering in the wind and the steady stevedoring movements of forklifts and cranes. Everything brought to the fore in high visibility.

### **SEAROAD TAMAR, Australia**

My mother's brother was a seafarer, sometimes carrying goods across Bass Strait to Launceston. When I was young we knew that not long after watching my uncle's ship berth, he would appear at the back fly-wire door, bottle of beer in hand and settle in for an evening of stories. My uncle served in the Merchant Navy



and on the S.S. YARRA and was lost at sea for 10 days during World War II. He led a seafaring life and found company in the Seamen's Missions in various ports around the world. Sadly, many years later it was my father who was lost at sea. Today, I live in a repurposed Sea Scout Hall, with a verandah shaped like a ship's prow, and the sound of waves lapping its balconies and decks. The sea is all around us.

### **GLOBAL GALAXY, Panama**

*The Sea is All Around Us* is an installation inviting seafarers and visitors to participate in a global project which aims to map the mobile life of seafaring souvenirs. For a fortnight in May 2015, visiting seafarers activate a chalk drawn compass on the circular floor of the Dome Gallery at The Mission to Seafarers Victoria in Flinders Street, Melbourne, marking the intersection of its latitude and longitude (37° 49'21" S 144° 57'03"E). Over these two weeks the Dome Gallery will be inscribed with marks mapping the multifarious journeys made by seafarers, recording destination and departure ports, homelands and waterways, and in doing so will make visible a small segment of the global patterns of seafaring. Custom-made souvenirs designed for the installation are gifted to seafarers as gestures of welcome and receptacles for future memories. I design these souvenirs in Australia and have them manufactured in Poland so they can continue their journey by sea, to destinations far beyond the Dome. Each of the limited edition enamelware mugs, postcards and catalogues imprinted with a QR code become trackable, mobile objects. Like messages in bottles these souvenirs will leave our shores, as ambassadors, carrying with them memories of the Norla Dome, the waters

*Floor chalk drawing (2015). (Detail). >*



of Port Phillip Bay, Australia's red soil and vegetation, and the passage of a fleeting visit to Melbourne.

### **GLEAMING OASIS, Panama**

As an artist and researcher at Charles Sturt University, located in inland New South Wales, I am often at a distance from Australia's coastal edges. The university's many campuses are distributed in a network of agri-urban population clusters, rural 'islands' surrounded by agricultural land<sup>1</sup>. I work in the Faculty of Arts which embraces diverse disciplinary perspectives including creative arts, social welfare, social work, psychology, theology, customs and excise, policing and security, social justice, human geography, politics, history and humanities. *The Sea is All Around Us* pays attention to the working lives of seafarers and threads together many of these fields in the welcoming and safe environment of The Mission to Seafarers Victoria. Background research for this project has led to many conversations with volunteers, staff from Ports of Melbourne and ex-seafarers, all of whom speak of the loneliness and isolation of contemporary seafaring, quick turnarounds and short stays in port, dangerous conditions at sea, the regimented working life and the impact of these factors on seafarers families. I am grateful for these conversations and the many destinations to which they lead.

The Mission to Seafarers Victoria is located at latitude 37° 49'21" S and longitude 144° 57'03"E in the heritage building at 717 Flinders Street, Docklands. It has welcomed seafarers continuously for nearly 100 years. The Mission, designed by architect Walter Butler is built in a Spanish Mission style and was completed in 1917.

[The Mission to Seafarers Victoria, Docklands, Melbourne. >](#)

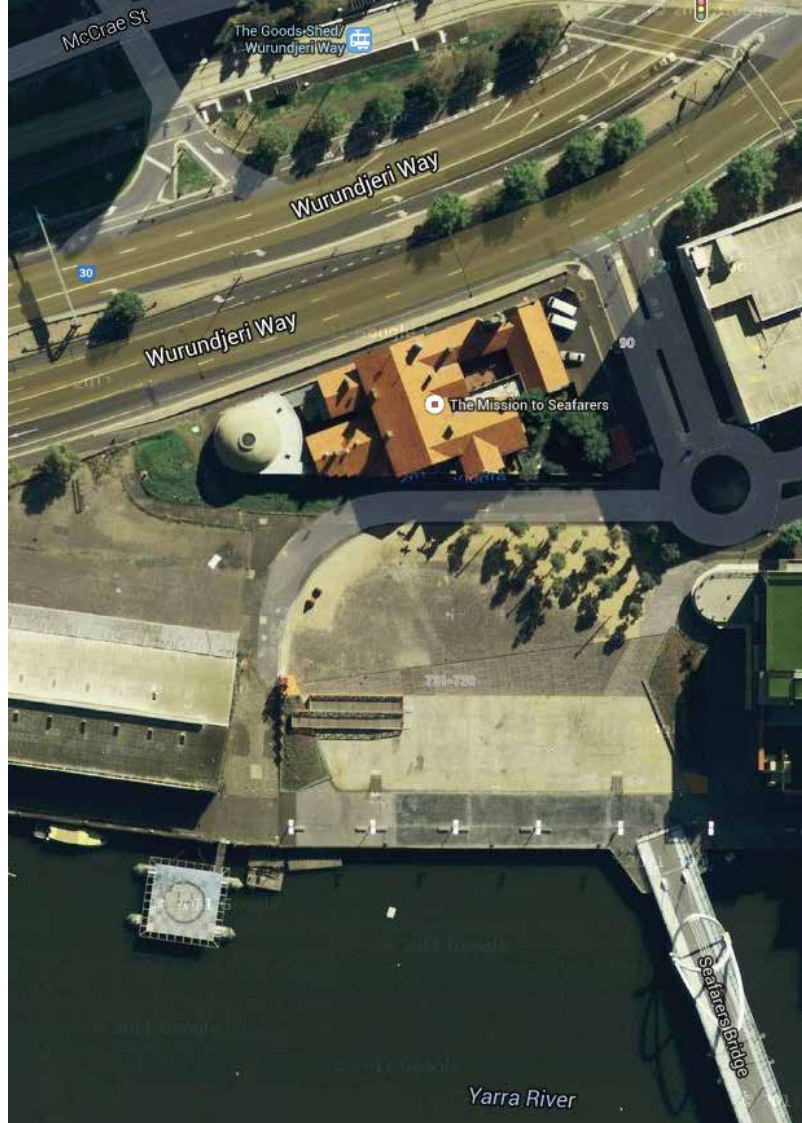


Its architectural style accords with its function as a mission. Inside is a complex which feels like a village, enclosed within stucco walls and complete with a courtyard, garden, kitchen, chapel, dining room and a circular gymnasium (now a gallery space called the Norla Dome). Peter the Mariner's Chapel offers a place for reflection, while the sociability of the Flying Angel Club Hall provides a warm oasis – a respite from the city and its port. It is a mission within a mission. On the door, a laser-printed sign greets visitors, saying *'This Mission is more than a building. It is a collection of unique people. We strive to offer a warm welcome to all'*. Seafarers are brought to the mission from Melbourne's ports in a mini-bus where they sign the visitor book, a living archive that logs names, nationalities, ship's names and ports. PATRAIKOS, Liberia; BOX EMMA, Marshall Islands; GOLIATH, Australia; MOL EARNEST, Panama; FRISIA ALLER, Liberia<sup>2</sup>.

### **GOLDEN RESOLUTION, Hong Kong**

Local visitors curious about the anachronistic island surrounded by Melbourne's remodeled docklands are welcomed inside. They mingle with working seafarers, port workers, chaplains, volunteers and artists. The Mission to Seafarers Victoria is more than the collection of unique people that enter its doors day in and day out. It is also a unique collection of objects; a time capsule recording maritime histories and memories, a living archive of memorials and souvenirs. From the moment you set foot on the inlaid terrazzo mariner's compass in the foyer you are entering an environment steeped in artefacts from the sea; the chapel's pulpit carved in the shape of a ship's poop deck, a brass ship's bell inscribed with the name DIOMED, a flag listing the many

[Google Maps aerial view, The Mission to Seafarers Victoria, Docklands, Melbourne.](#)



names of Australia's merchant sailors who served in the British Merchant Navy fleet during the second world war, and stained glass windows commemorating seafarers lost at sea. In The Mission's archives are letters, photographs, visitor books, badges, newspaper clippings and souvenirs from de-commissioned ships<sup>3</sup>. These artefacts that once formed part of the everyday working life of ships and seafarers are emotionally charged, touchstones of memories, integrated into a working mission. They are a link to nostalgia, to memory, to loss and longing. Through their 'emotional life' they are transformed from everyday objects into a highly significant collection of powerful emotional triggers.

### **AFRICAN TERN, Bahamas**

*The Sea is All Around Us* marks the third stage of *Tourism Telemetry*, my ongoing research project which seeks to reveal the 'mobile life' of souvenirs<sup>4</sup>. This artwork builds on two recent projects in which I use creative practice to activate souvenirs as a strategy for research generation. In *Greetings from Aggaw Aggaw*, a sculptural installation at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery (2011), I created a 'fictive' destination complete with its own customised souvenir cloth badges, engraved pencils, postcards and footstools. In *Tabletop Cairns*, Reykjavik (2012), I compared the islands of Iceland and Tasmania through souvenir objects that travelled between the two locations. This artwork explored the capacity of souvenirs to transmit messages about remote places to distant audiences. The *Tourism Telemetry* project uses the concept of telemetry to understand how souvenirs as portable artefacts have the capacity to carry and send messages about places, remotely. Telemetry is used in science to measure and send data



through transmitters back to distant monitoring stations. It is used for example to track the movements of wildlife that have been tagged with radio transmitters, or to transmit meteorological data from weather balloons to weather stations. Extending the notion of telemetry to souvenirs allows us to understand their potential as transmitters of information about destinations and places. Purchased at a distance and then sent as gifts to others or carried home, souvenirs transmit representations and myths about places to their receiving 'stations' in the domestic settings of everyday life. Cultural studies scholar Beverly Gordon proposes that the power of souvenirs is enhanced by their travel. Sent as messengers from places of heightened, extraordinary experience souvenirs are received back in the realm of the ordinary<sup>5</sup>.

### **SHANGHAI HIGHWAY, Panama**

Making visible the complex geography of seafaring is possible through a range of technologies and means. My tools of chalk, mobile phone, tablet, QR codes, websites and conversations become my tracking devices. I map the journeys of seafaring visitors using a mariner's compass and chalk to make a series of floor drawings. The ebb and flow of routes accumulate and blur with the drawing process, a time-lapse of journeys made and imagined that registers seafarer's destinations over a two week period. Recent conversations at The Mission have led me to the many websites and apps available that incorporate sophisticated Geographical Information Systems (GIS), Satellite imagery and Global Positioning Systems (GPS). In tandem with the Universal Shipborne Automatic Identification System (AIS) – a telemetry system used on vessels for identifying, locating and tracking

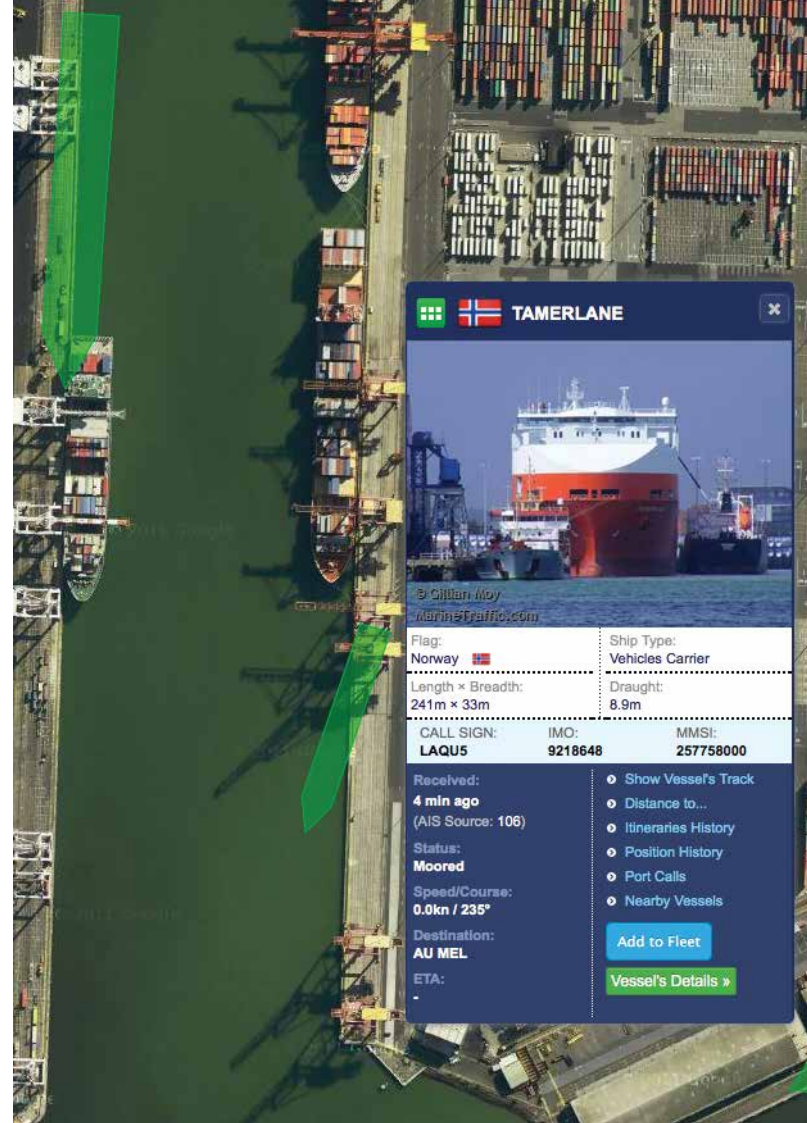




shipping traffic – these technologies work in consort to deliver live shipping data on public sites such as Marine Traffic<sup>6</sup>. Data on ships' location, tracking, cargo, type, size, capacity, speed, draught and more are available at all hours, in ports all over the world. As I write this essay, the Marine Traffic website hosts live data on 70,645 ships worldwide. ARGENT FREESIA, Panama; ZEMIRA, Australia; OCEAN CROWN, Singapore; MACHIAVELLI, New Zealand.<sup>7</sup>

### GLOBAL VISION, Panama

Like seafarers, souvenirs have complex social and geographical lives. Some souvenirs are crafted and made in the place they are purchased, but more commonly they are produced somewhere entirely different and inscribed with words which connect them to a location. Their association with place makes them what Beverly Gordon<sup>8</sup> and Dean MacCannell<sup>9</sup> call tourist 'markers'. They carry the mark of the place they represent, through image or text or invisibly through memories associated with a particular place. This quality as a marker makes it possible map their place of purchase and representation. However the souvenir's place of production is less easy to map and frequently bears no relation to the place they represent. Shipped to Australia by ships and seafarers, the geographic life of the enamelware mugs in this installation is typical of most souvenirs, and indeed most commodities that we accept into our lives.



**TAMERLANE**

Flag: Norway  Ship Type: Vehicles Carrier

Length x Breadth: 241m x 33m Draught: 8.9m

CALL SIGN: LAQU5	IMO: 9218648	MMSI: 257758000
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Received: 4 min ago (AIS Source: 106)

Status: Moored

Speed/Course: 0.0kn / 235°

Destination: AU MEL

ETA: -

- Show Vessel's Track
- Distance to...
- Itineraries History
- Position History
- Port Calls
- Nearby Vessels

[Add to Fleet](#)

[Vessel's Details >](#)

## UNITED SPIRIT, Liberia

This project reveals more than the obsessive and mesmerising tracking of shipping data. With the relentless flow of information on shipping vessels, cargo and destinations accessible from anywhere in the world – including from my office at an inland Australian university – I ask myself what is the driving force behind my desire to map the mobile life of souvenirs? How might this process of artistic research that uses objects, drawings and mobile phone technology create new journeys and map new connections that cross new bodies of land and sea? My earlier research into the design of communication about natural and cultural heritage focused on John Urry's concept of the 'tourist gaze'<sup>10</sup>. This is a concept that privileges the eye and the visual over other senses. Recently, and in response to the tourist gaze a 'performance turn' has emerged which emphasises the multi-sensory aspects of the tourism experience through tasting, touching, smelling and hearing. Jonas Larsen explains that the performance turn 'studies the "liveliness" of social life, by highlighting how tourists experience places in multi-sensory ways that involve not only bodily sensations but also affect and various technologies'<sup>11</sup>.

Beyond their representational role, souvenirs also trigger intangible, affective qualities. They offer reminders of journeys and places, new associations with tastes, sounds and people, and thereby become objects which focus and hold memories. This artwork bears witness to and raises awareness of the working lives and journeys of seafarers. It makes visible their role in

18 [Tea Urn \(37° 49'21" S 144° 57'03" E\) \(2015\). Installation view \(detail\). >](#)



transporting commodities, materials and objects to and from Australia's shores. This project is about forging connections between people, people and places and people and objects. Everyday objects such as souvenirs, proposes Susan Stewart, have a 'secret life', which can 'reveal a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside the given field of perception'<sup>12</sup>. This suggests that souvenirs are 'relational objects'<sup>13</sup> that forge emotional connections between people and places and sometimes, between places never visited and people who may never meet.

### **SEA MELODY, Panama**

From the outset this project is concerned with the life of the seafarer and the seafaring souvenir. The souvenir object is gifted with a personal invitation to be 'followed' – to stay connected through ongoing mobile scanning and mapping technologies. Although facilitated by technology, this project revolves around human enterprise. A tea urn marks the centre of the compass. Australian green tea is served in souvenir enamelware mugs and cakes are baked daily from the *Central Cookery Book*. This book is a staple of Australian home cooking and the rituals of welcoming guests. Together, these sensorial gestures flavor the experience of visiting seafarers and infuse their shipping data with a human dimension. I issue an invitation with each souvenir mug of tea. Drink. Journey. Scan. Map. Drink. Journey. Scan. Map. *The sea is all around us.*

© Margaret Woodward, May 2015.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The concept of rural islands is presented in Woodward, M., Bremner, C. and James M. 2014) *Murray Living: an argument for the future of creative industries in regional communities*. Australian Regional Development Conference, 2014 Albury.

<sup>2</sup> Cargo ships in port in Melbourne 21.30 EST 23/04/2015

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the end of life of naval vessels and their conversion to souvenirs see Gregson, N., Crang, M. and H. Watkins (2011). "Souvenir salvage and the death of great naval ships." *Journal of Material Culture* 16(3): 301-324.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the *Tourism Telemetry* project visit: [www.sensingtheremote.net](http://www.sensingtheremote.net)

<sup>5</sup> Gordon, B. 1986. 'The souvenir: messenger of the extraordinary'. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 20:3, p141)

<sup>6</sup> [www.marinetraffic.com](http://www.marinetraffic.com)

<sup>7</sup> Ships in port in Melbourne 21.47 EST 23/04/2015

<sup>8</sup> Gordon, B. *Ibid* (140-142)

<sup>9</sup> MacCannell, D. 1976 *The Tourist: A new theory of the leisure class*. New York: Schocken.

<sup>10</sup> Urry, J. 2002. *The tourist gaze*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.

<sup>11</sup> Larsen 2012, 'Performance, space and tourism'. In Wilson J. (Ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Tourism Technologies*. Abingdon: Routledge, p 67.

<sup>12</sup> Stewart, S. 1993. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Baltimore: Duke University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Ramsay, N. 2009. 'Taking-place: refracted enchantment and the habitual spaces of the tourist souvenir', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 10:2, 197-217.

