



IZABELA PLUTA

Sailing for the abyss

The abyss, that dark unknowable depth of the ocean that has inspired everything from science fiction narratives to religious metaphor, does seem an odd place to be sailing *for*. As a destination, the abyss could be read as the final stop in a nihilistic voyage away from all that is comfortable and familiar, all that is associated with a dry land 'home'. But this is clearly not the abyss that Izabela Pluta is evoking in her exhibition, *Sailing for the abyss*. The collection of photographs, objects and video collectively suggest the destination not as a finality or even an actual place but simply as something to be desired.

In this work Pluta continues her exploration of space, movement and migration and the search for 'place' in a globalised culture. As a Polish-Australian artist based in Sydney/Newcastle who creates a large proportion of her work in overseas locations, Pluta is able to communicate elements of the migrant experience that escape accurate linguistic description. The video piece *Lock* for example isolates the simple rise and fall of the water level in a Parisian canal lock near Place de Stalingrad. The lock enables the passage boats between canals of two different levels by blocking the flow of water and raising or lowering it accordingly. It is a marginal space, a space between destinations and never a destination in itself. Yet by isolating it in this way, Pluta suggests a rethinking of marginality as a form of permanence and foundation.

In 1928 the American sociologist, Robert E. Park introduced the figure of the "marginal man" to sociological discourse to explain the intercultural experience of migrants in the globalised culture emerging in the early 20th Century. The character of the "marginal man" is animated by the struggle to live simultaneously in two diverse cultural groups. The result, Park says, is that one develops a character based on marginality rather than on the stability of cultural and physical foundations or mental and spatial boundaries.

To a large extent the urban development of modern Australia and the subsequent concentration of the majority of the country's population to coastal areas is symptomatic of this same kind of marginality. The coast represents a marginal space, the site of arrivals and departures, where things drift away from and wash up on. This marginal area between the shore and the sea is also known as the 'littoral'. The littoral is a space that is not any single static or definitely locatable area. By its very definition the littoral is constantly changing and moving, always in a state of flux and always between spaces.

In many ways Australian society, after colonial occupation, has been a littoral culture, in that it both clings tightly to the coast and is founded on constant displacement. It is little wonder then that today, the most politically and emotionally charged space in the contemporary Australian psyche is the littoral. Not only is it the mythical boundary that the military will 'protect' from would-be refugee transgressors but the littoral is also the interstitial site that shifts between, but never settles at, states such as home and away, known and unknown, general and specific, solid and liquid, permanence and impermanence; much like the migrant's sense of 'place' the littoral is a place defined by the tension of the two places that, by virtue of its being between, it is not.

The littoral gap may not initially appear to have much to do with abyssal depths but what Pluta has done in this work is add a dimension to the traditional voyage between littoral spaces. The voyage now becomes one that embraces fully the unknown as a destination leaving behind the ambiguity of the littoral. In its engagement with space, landscape, movement and destination the work in *Sailing for the abyss* navigates a course to an idea of home that is a constant destination no matter how close we get.

Dr Ashley Whamond
2010



Sailing for the abyss, 2010
Pigment prints on BFK Rives
100 x 123 cm, 66 x 66 cm, 76 x 76 cm





15 April – 8 May 2010

Nellie Castan Gallery

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Tuesday–Saturday 12–5pm



Untitled (LOT card 1–2), 2010
from series of 9

Screen print on found postcard

14.5 x 10.5 cm each

cover image: *Mountain*, 2010

detail from xerox copy

www.izabelapluta.net

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