

# **Shipbuilding as Romantic Abstraction**

John Macpherson Bissland - MFAD

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
Requirements of the degree of  
Master of Art (Research)

School of Visual & Performing Arts  
Academy of the Arts  
University of Tasmania  
Launceston

May, 2008

The divine essence is all in all, it fills everything, pervades everything. This is the life of lives, the soul of souls. There are two active principles in motion. The one finite and moving in time, the other infinite, which is the nature of the Soul of the World, of divinity in fact, which is everywhere and everything.

**Giordano Bruno – Dominican Monk.**

Burnt at the stake for heresy in Campo die Fieri, Rome, and Feb.17<sup>th</sup>  
1600.

## **Dedication.**

This study is dedicated to all the shipyard workers throughout the world and ages who built the ships they couldn't afford to travel on, and to all their wives like my mother who put up with and ran households on the low wages but most of all to my father, 'Wee Hughie' who worked in the yards of the Clyde for almost forty years. *Good on ye wee man!*

This thesis may be made available for loan. Copying of any part of this thesis is prohibited for two years from the date this statement was signed; after that time limited copying is permitted in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

## **Declaration of originality.**

I declare that all material in this assignment is my own work except where there is clear acknowledgement or reference to the work of others. I am aware that my assignment may be submitted to plagiarism detection software, and might be retained on its database. I have read the University statement on Academic Misconduct (Plagiarism) on the University website at [www.utas.edu.au/plagiarism](http://www.utas.edu.au/plagiarism) and in the Student Information Handbook

Signed,

Launceston, May 2008

## **Abstract.**

The object and primary aim of this MFA project was to create a body of photographic images that combine the notion of maritime romance with the practicalities of shipbuilding. The images are visual evidence relating to personal experience and as such are reflective in content.

As a photographic artist my intention and motivation was to gain a thorough and intense command and understanding of my chosen medium in terms of theory, concept, practice and skill. My investigation process is informed by years of experience in both shipbuilding and photography. It involved experimentation into processes and materials in order that the viewer is informed of an aesthetic notion through visual stimuli.

In order that I engage with the broader photographic history by means of abstraction, highlighting the aesthetic and that I gain insight into a broaden aesthetic, I studied extracts from the works of philosophers such as Russell, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and artist such as Motherwell and Rothko.

Conceptually, the body of work, resulting from my examination, is a combination of photographic images that are indicative of the shipbuilding environment. My intention is to draw the viewer into the world of the shipbuilder; to question the very notion of romance when related to shipbuilding.

From a practical standpoint I have explored new territories in film and paper development, and revisited some old ones in order that the images attain their optimum potential within the confines of practicality.

My intention was to show that romance may exist in shipbuilding but it is romance built around hard work on hard materials in a hard environment and as such is not for the faint hearted.

## **Acknowledgements.**

The realisation of a Master's degree is a major undertaking which from the germination of the idea to completion spans at least a couple of years. If, as has been my case and the degree is undertaken on a part-time basis, the time span is extended accordingly. During this time the candidate has impute from numerous sources, not least of which is from colleagues, peers and friends. Sometimes the influence is immediate while at other times it is more subtle and/or only appreciated in retrospect.

I would like to thank Professor Vincent McGrath for giving me the opportunity to undertake these studies and for his impute over the years. Dr. Deborah Malor for her inspiration, insight and humour; Dr. Christl Berg for keeping me on track at the beginning and Dr. Troy Ruffles for showing me where the buffers were at the end of the line.

I owe special thanks to the following people, who have supported me conceptually, practically and emotionally. Their enthusiasm, encouragement, input and support over the period of this endeavour is acknowledged and appreciated: David Hamilton, Dr. Stephen Hudson, Denise Campbell, Sue Mc Adams, Malcolm Bywaters and Dr. Jo Pitchford who put up with my ranting and Ms.Eliza Toddle-Bonnie for reminding me what it's all about.

Without the support of these people, and many more, it would have been a much less pleasant experience.

## **Table of Contents.**

<b>1. Introduction.</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2. The Notion of Maritime Romance.</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3. Inspirations.</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>4. My Interpretation.</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>5. Conclusion.</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>6. References.</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>7. Bibliography.</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>8. Appendix.</b>	
1. The Can o Tea – Matt McGinn	<b>66</b>
2. You Can't Weld a Body- Karine Polwart	<b>67</b>

## List of Figures.

- Fig.1 Corrance, Douglas, Welder, 1981,  
photograph  
Source: Corrance, Douglas, 1981 Glasgow, William Collins,  
Glasgow, p16
- Fig. 2 Rockwell, Norman, 1943, Rosie the Riveter, Oil on Canvas  
Source: <http://www.rosietheriveter.org/painting.htm>
- Fig. 3 Carolsfeld, Julius Schnoor von,(1794-1872), Noah Builds the Ark,  
woodcut,  
Source: Gardner, Lawrence, the Shadow of Solomon, Harper  
Collins, London, 2005, p185
- Fig. 4 Illustrator unknown, Venice 1572 – Braun and Hogenberg Civities  
Orbis Terrarum. Courtesy of <http://historic-cities.huji.ac.il/>  
Source: <http://venicexplorer.net/venice-guide/index.php?hlangs=en>
- Fig. 5 Photographer unknown, Venice Arsenal  
Source: Szarkowski & Benson, A Maritime Album, Yale  
University Press, Newhaven & London, 1997, p47
- Fig. 6 Roberts, Tom, Coming South, 1886, Oil on Canvas  
Source: Scots Magazine No34, p33
- Fig. 7 Southworth,A.S. & Hawes,J.J. Photograph of Donald McKay  
Source: Szarkowski & Benson, A Maritime Album, Yale  
University Press, Newhaven & London, 1997, p47
- Fig. 8 Lowry, Laurence Stephen, 1957, The Sea, Oil on Canvas  
Source: <http://www.waterman.co.uk/pages/single/393.html>
- Fig. 9 Sugimoto, Quatric surface of revolution with singularity,  
photograph,  
Source: Kellen, Thomas, Sugimoto, Thames & Hudson, London,  
2004, p47
- Fig. 10 Sugimoto, Diagonal Clebsch surface, cubic with 27 lines,  
photograph,  
Source: Ibid, p57
- Fig.11 Sugimoto, Worm Gear, photograph,  
Source: Ibid, p90
- Fig. 12 Photographer unknown, One of Tetanic’s main reciprocating  
engines, photograph, p94  
Source: Green, Rod, Building the Titanic, Carlton Books, London,  
2004, p147
- Fig. 13 Maclean Will, Leviathan Elogy (1982), construction,  
Source: Macmillan Duncan, Symbols of Survival, Mainstream,  
Edinburgh,1992, p81
- Fig. 14 Maclean, Will, Raft of the Medusa 11 (1985), construction,  
Source: Ibid, p79
- Fig. 15 Maclean Will, Great Rivet God  
Source: <http://www.tommckendrick.com/code/galleryim2htm p1>  
Viewed 12.09.06
- Fig. 16 McKendrick, Tom, Armoured Panel, oil painting,

Source: <http://www.tommckendrick.com/code/galleryirn4htm p1>  
Viewed 12.09.06

Fig. 17 McKendrick, Tom, Rivet Markers, oil painting,  
Source: <http://www.tommckendrick.com/code/galleryirn1.htmp p1>  
Viewed 12.09.06

Fig. 18 Bissland, John, Shipbuilding plates, Silver Gelatin Print, size  
variable

Source: Photographs Bissland, John, 2006

Fig. 19 Bissland, John, Shipbuilding plates, Collagraph print, 6"x5"

Source: Print work, Bissland, John, 2006

Fig. 20 Bissland, John, Shipbuilding plates, Silver Gelatin Print, size  
Variable

Source: Photographs Bissland, John, 2006