

# desperate measures

Netherlands-based Australian artist Belinda Fox immerses herself, and us, in a human tragedy we are used to seeing from a distance.



Belinda Fox regards her own work with an engaged heart. Here in the gallery space, the work *Tilt I* is enormous—almost six metres in length—and it shows massive waves curling around a boat teetering on the brink of capsizing. We almost plunge in, such is the expanse of image and emotion.

Fox is a multi-disciplinary artist but her most enduring love is printmaking: she once worked as a master printer at Port Jackson Press and all the skills she has accumulated and deployed over the years are, ultimately, tools to use. This is reflected in the images in front of her: they are intricately textured, richly toned and deeply marked with strokes, lines and flecks.

*Tilt I* and its companion *Tilt II* are part of a bigger installation in which she worked with ceramicist Neville French, making marks on his fired vessels. It is the content of the two large digital prints, though, that forms the first part of her journey from idea to realisation. Fox had read an article by Richard Flanagan in which he discussed the refugee crisis, and his words profoundly affected her. She realised how much she cared about the issue and how much she wanted to work with it.

She was nervous tackling the subject for fear of seeming disrespectful, too emotional or clichéd. Then she came across the image of a boat about to tip over and she was compelled to move forward. 'I can't tell you how powerful it is to look at something, real photos, real people, their real moment—and you have to draw each person. You watch what they are doing. Some are jumping. Other people are holding on. Or there is this other person trying to help someone else up.

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Belinda Fox, *Tilt I*, 2017, archival pigment print on paper mounted to dibond aluminium, edition of 3, 240 x 590 cm.

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Belinda Fox.  
Photo: Hein van Liempd

'It's very humbling to spend that time with this image and really scrutinise that image and really see those people, and to draw them you have to take them into your heart and recreate it. It was really heavy... but it was kind of nice because I felt I was really looking. We don't look at stuff anymore, we just scan. Flick flick flick flick.'

Her drawings were always intended to be enlarged to a grand scale so that viewers can connect physically as well as visually. She chose to print them digitally: conceptually it was important for her to be at a remove from the original photograph, which itself was at a remove from the real situation. 'These divides are important,' Fox says. 'For all of us here [in Australia] unless you have been on a boat like this, you can only experience it from a remove. I wanted to be honest about the fact I can only experience this from a distance.'

Going through the process of having the work printed digitally in an edition of three was a big step for Fox. 'It was carefully considered. I can honestly say I am very against using the digital medium to reproduce paintings and then price them and call them 'limited edition fine



art prints'. It is something I am very disappointed by with the market these days. So for me to actually go and use digital printmaking would shock many who follow my career. But it is a very deliberate move.

'The original drawings I have called 'the study'—because the drawings were always made to be digital prints, rather than the other way around. I have tried to be as transparent as I can regarding the medium perhaps due to my own unease with how digital prints can be used/abused. The final product is something of great beauty and I am very proud of it—even if it's not a traditional print! And I feel I have maintained my integrity as a printmaker through using the best medium available to me and through this process learned what skills are required to make a beautiful digital print. It is not just pressing a button and out it comes.'

— Andrew Stephens

**Belinda Fox + Neville French are at Manly Art Gallery and Museum until 3 September and at Arthouse Gallery 12-28 October.**