

NEWS

Someone died trying to have a life like mine...

Best known for his refined technical skill in carving Wombeyan marble, Australian artist Alex Seton's recent work engages in a topic at the forefront of Australian consciousness: asylum seekers. **Kate Britton** reports.

There seems to be, broadly speaking, a dearth of overtly political work being made in Australia about the experience of asylum seekers. For an issue that burns uncomfortably at the forefront of our nation's psyche, there are remarkably few attempts to come at it directly in artistic practice.

Alex Seton is an exception to this rule. Since his major installation in the 2014 Adelaide Biennial *Dark Heart*, he has been making work about little else. That initial work, *Someone died trying to have a life like mine*, is an expression of the strange cognitive dissonance that seems endemic to the asylum seeker debate. 23 marble life jackets lay strewn across the gallery floor, made for 23 life jackets that washed ominously ashore the Cocos Islands in 2013, presumed to have come from a boat lost at sea.

A new body of work for shown by Sydney gallery Sullivan+Strumpf at Art Basel Hong Kong 2015 continues this line of investigation, with an inflatable lifeboat, a series of paddles and an anchor, all carved in marble. These objects may promise a better life, but will ultimately sink, heavy as stone, Seton warns. The paddles, inlaid with symbols, compose a cry for help in simplified code from international maritime flag signalling.

It's satisfying to see this progression of work over time. Seton has come at it from a number of angles. In *Someone died trying to have a life like mine* we experience the unsettling encounter, the clue, the not-quite-hidden tragedy happening just off our shores. In recent solo shows in Australia at Sullivan + Strumpf in Sydney and McClelland Sculpture Park + Gallery and Linden Contemporary Art Centre in Melbourne, he turned his attention to our own privilege and by proxy complicity in the suffering of others. Here we see the journey itself; fearful, uncertain, a perilous last resort.

Alex Seton exhibits with Sullivan+Strumpf, stand 3C12 at Art Basel Hong Kong 2015.



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Alex Seton, *H.E.L.P.*, 2015. Wood, Yass black marble and bianco marble, each 100 x 18 x 4cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND SULLIVAN+STRUMPF, SYDNEY