

# ALEX SETON

*Bake a nice cake - pram* 2008

Collection learning resource



**Alex SETON** *Bake a nice cake - pram* 2008 Bianco Carrara marble, 45.0 x 30.0 x 56.0cm Gift of Newcastle Region Art Gallery Foundation 2008  
Newcastle Art Gallery collection

**NEWCASTLE  
ART GALLERY**



Collection learning resource to support the exhibition  
**ALEX SETON: THE ISLAND**  
18 February – 7 May 2017

## General information

nag.org.au |  | 

Newcastle Art Gallery, 1 Laman Street Newcastle  
02 4974 5100 | [artgallery@ncc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:artgallery@ncc.nsw.gov.au)  
Open: 10am - 5pm, every day except Monday

This exhibition is supported by the NSW  
Government through Arts NSW



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## ALEX SETON

born 1977 Southern Highlands, NSW

Lives and works in Sydney

## CONTEMPLATE AND IMAGINE

Alex Seton is one of Australia's foremost sculptors. He works primarily in marble and with a photo realism approach that gives his sculptures an illusionary quality. Seton is represented in the Newcastle Art Gallery collection, public and private collections nationally and internationally and is supported by Jan Murphy Gallery, Brisbane and Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney.

Marble is an established sculptural material that has been used for centuries by artists. Seton employs technical skills reminiscent of the incredible realism of Ancient Greek Hellenistic sculpture. His delicate marble carvings evoke classical references to sculptors of the Baroque period, such as Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Other periods and artists which could be seen as influences on Seton's work include photographer Man Ray, and environmental artists Christo and Jean Claude, who also draw on a long history of concealment and enigma in art.

Seton's marble sculpture *Bake a nice cake - pram* 2008 depicts a pram completely covered by a piece of cloth. He provides clues in the title that confirm what is underneath the cloth, yet due to the limits of the marble medium, the pram itself can never be revealed. Dramatic shadows and texture imply rounded shapes, wheels, a handle and the pram's shade covering. The act of shrouding or covering an object draws on different connotations. The puzzle is left to the viewer to contemplate and imagine why the object has been hidden. The sculpture is also diminutive in scale; it is smaller than life size.

In 2008, in an exhibition of Seton's marble sculptures titled *On Hold* at the Melbourne Art Fair, *Bake a nice cake - pram* 2008 was first displayed. That same year the work was acquired into the Newcastle Art Gallery collection as a gift from the Newcastle Art Gallery Foundation. This series of sculptures shrouded in cloth, included other everyday items such as a Harley Davidson, Porsche, wedding cake and a grand piano. Ultimately the series refers to aspirations and goals - just out of reach.

*It's interesting to view the work now a decade after having made the piece. My relationship with my studio practice has changed a lot since then, having evolved in skills and approach. It's also interesting to note how I've changed, particularly as this series was created from my ideas at the time of totems for a life well lived. The title is actually an extraction of a quote from Irish Comedian Dylan Moran, something along the lines of 'we're gonna die, make a nice cake'.*

Alex Seton 2017

Using marble as a flexible medium in his art practice today, Seton plays with ideas inspired from politics, news headlines or current events and places them in a new context. He is able to manipulate the medium into emphatic motifs and metaphors of current socio-political themes and humanitarian narratives.



**Alex SETON** *Last Resort* 2014 Wombeyan marble dimensions variable  
Gold Coast City Gallery collection

## VISIT AND DISCOVER

ALEX SETON: THE ISLAND

Newcastle Art Gallery, 18 February - 7 May 2017

About the exhibition:

*THE ISLAND* is a compelling solo exhibition in which artist and sculptor Alex Seton contemplates and questions Australia's role in the refugee and asylum seeker debate. In context with the exhibition *THE ISLAND* can be a safe place of refuge isolated from the humanitarian challenges the world is grappling with today, or it can take on a more sinister tone as a desolate place for those survivors of perilous sea journeys seeking asylum only to be marooned, stateless, looking to the horizon for help.

The transformation of solid stone into the fluid folds and bends of *Life vest S (Emergency)* 2014 and the inflatable palm trees of *Last Resort* 2014 displayed in this exhibition are remarkable artistic achievements that result from Seton continually innovating and developing his own unique shaping techniques. Marble is a remarkably heavy stone, and so the pieces are substantially heavier than their size infers.

*Alex Seton performs the miraculous. He transforms heavy, dense marble into light, buoyant objects - lifejackets lifeboats and the whimsical inflatable palm trees that take our thoughts on holiday, with their suggestion of swimming pools, pina colodas and Hawaiian shirts. At the same time, he grounds them, casting them from the water, chucking them up against the wall, displaying them high and dry on plinths or, in the case of the inflatable palms, planting them on barren islands of marble rubble that might as well be a heap of shattered dreams and broken promises.*

Linda Jaivin 2017, *THE ISLAND* catalogue essay p.10.

In this exhibition Seton's intention is clear, his moral compass is set on revealing true stories about real people as embodied in his major work *Someone died trying to have a life like mine* 2013. Generously loaned by the Art Gallery of South Australia the inspiration for this work of art is based on an actual event where 28 life jackets were found washed up on the shores of the Cocos Islands, the owners still remain unidentified.



**Alex SETON** *Bake a nice cake – pram* 2008 (detail) Bianco Carrara marble 45.0 x 30.0 x 56.0cm Gift of Newcastle Region Art Gallery Foundation 2008 Newcastle Art Gallery collection

## CREATE

Record your impression of *Bake a nice cake - pram* 2008 with drawing or photography.

Cover an everyday object with a piece of cloth to conceal it. Set up a single source of light and point it at your shrouded object. Make drawings of the object, shadows and textures of the folds.

Create your own *Bake a nice cake - pram* 2008 work of art. Use chicken wire to make the armature or base of the sculpture, include some dynamic shapes with peaks and valleys. Collect a piece of cloth and some Plaster of Paris. Dip your cloth in the Plaster of Paris and drape it on your armature to finish your piece.

Try a paper folding origami technique and create multiples of the same objects. Display this as a temporary installation in a specific place. Consider the use of light and shadow in your installation design.

## RESPOND

Look at Seton's work of art *Bake a nice cake - pram* 2008. In this sculpture the concealed pram is made from marble. Why do you think Alex chose marble for this object? Would you have guessed Seton's work of art was made from marble just from looking at it?

Some of Seton's marble sculptures are diminutive or smaller than the actual size of the physical object. What impact does this have on you when viewing *Bake a nice cake - pram* 2008?

Visit Seton's website to view the other carved marble sculptures displayed at the Melbourne Art Fair in the exhibition *On Hold, 2008*: <http://www.alexseton.com/2008-on-hold/>

Discuss the differences and similarities in the works of art and what dreams and desires Seton has emphasised.

Look at the other works of art in the exhibition *THE ISLAND* either by visiting the exhibition or reading the catalogue. The works of art are all based on incidents involving refugees and asylum seekers. Compare the sculptures in *THE ISLAND* with others you see in the Gallery's sculpture garden either in person or on the Gallery's website. What humanitarian statement is Seton trying to make through his works of art?

The Australian Government's Harmony Day website identifies some fascinating statistics about Australia's diversity. Did you know that around 45 per cent of Australians were born overseas or have at least one parent who was? Visit the further reading links in this resource to find out more information about cultural diversity in Australia and belonging.

Do you know of a family, friend or community member who has travelled to Australia as a migrant or refugee, perhaps even to seek asylum? Write a short prose piece about the experience from the perspective of the individual. If you don't know someone, try to imagine yourself in their shoes. To read more information about someone who has experienced this, visit our further reading resources for suggested website links.

Investigate other Australian artists, such as Ben Quilty, who have created works of art and responded to the topic of Australia's asylum seeker issues.

## FURTHER READING

Newcastle Art Gallery resources

Jaivin, L. 2017, *ALEX SETON: THE ISLAND* exhibition catalogue, Newcastle Art Gallery, Newcastle.

<http://nag.org.au/Exhibitions/Current/ALEX-SETON-The-Island>

External Resources

Australian Seeker Resource Centre (website) advocates for the human rights of people seeking asylum.

[www.asrc.org.au/](http://www.asrc.org.au/)

Chasing Asylum, 2016 (film) exposes the real impact of Australia's offshore detention policies.

<http://www.chasingasylum.com.au/>

Harmony Day (website) (Accessed February 2017).

[www.harmony.gov.au/get-involved/schools/](http://www.harmony.gov.au/get-involved/schools/)

[www.harmony.gov.au/about/](http://www.harmony.gov.au/about/)

Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) a national umbrella body for refugees and the organisations and individuals who support them.

[www.refugeecouncil.org.au/](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/)

Seton, Alex (artist website).

[www.alexseton.com/](http://www.alexseton.com/)

Sullivan+Strumpf, 'Alex Seton' (artist profile).

[www.sullivanstrumpf.com/artists/alex-seton/bio](http://www.sullivanstrumpf.com/artists/alex-seton/bio)