FIGHT//FLIGHT

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Kate Hallen

Fight // Flight

Visual Arts Honours Thesis Statement 2014
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Many thanks to friends, teachers and the people at The TPI Association of NSW and AVCAT (Australian Veterans Children's Association) for their support throughout the duration of my four years of study.

I would like to thank my supervisor John Smith for his constant mentorship and support during this year and my entire degree.

It's like Aerosmith. If you book them, they will come.

**AUSTRALIAN VETERANS'
CHILDREN ASSISTANCE TRUST**

\\ Abstract

Fight // Flight explores aspects of war and conflict, specifically the aftermath: Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There is a sense of heroism and honour that is portrayed in renowned past-war art and the focus is often on the battle itself. We remember the 'heroes' depicted charging into battle and forget about the 'humans' in the image, their fragility and damage that they experience afterwards. My visual arts project seeks to challenge the ways in which we value and view war. Within my project, I create allegorical paintings that visually link diverse concepts like Diving Birds and Fighter Jets to represent the tensions between PTSD and the sufferer. I approach my process with an auto-ethnographic stance, drawing experience from living with a sufferer of PTSD; a stance that theorist Craig Owens suggests is at the crux of Allegory in his seminal work "The Allegorical Impulse".

\\ Contents

"…Humans are not creatures that necessarily go out and fight as a part of everyday life. So what we have to do is we have got to start to change the way you operate…

…What do we have as humans?
When you're confronted with something totally out of the ordinary that you do not expect, what would you normally do?
What is our normal stress response?"

-Nick Fothergill
You're not in the forces now

\\ Brief

Fight // Flight is a visual arts project that explores how allegorical painting can contribute to the depiction and recognition of military-related PTSD (Post traumatic stress disorder) within the war art genre. Through the production of work, a combination of allegorical painting, mythopoeia and auto-ethnography, I seek to evoke a tension that references the nature of PTSD.

The work originates from my experience of living with a PTSD sufferer and a desire to explore ways to effectively represent this issue and give it a strong, accessible voice. What resulted from this was an evolution into a project that acknowledged past and present tropes surrounding the representation of war, explored war artists' practice and the importance of Experientiality in creating an effective body of work.

By researching and orientating my project with war art, I not only engage in the discourse of war art, but the long history of painting techniques and practices. With PTSD now coming to the fore of contemporary discussion, past representational tropes of the glorification of war and heroism become damaging to this salient issue. Heroicised images of war, as well as contemporary media such as films and games supress the gravity of war and trivialise conflict as entertainment. Our culture has been, and is constantly permeated by these images, which contributes to a generalised idea of war as *spectacle* or *simulation.*

Through studio enquiry I utilise an experiential approach in order to immerse myself within the painting process. This Experientiality is integral in the projects conception and enactment. It is within the making of the work that I draw on my lifelong experiences of witnessing PTSD. As I paint an image, my hand is guided by various sensory prompts, from within my memory.
This process is an effective way for me to represent the trauma of post militarism, as battle is an experience that is removed from my own.

Investigations into military-related PTSD locate the cause of the illness in the latter years of service, usually after the soldier has been discharged. Within the military, soldiers are exposed to and formed by major aspects of military culture. During training, a soldier is taught to respond to a threat or issue in an 'aggressive' and immediate way as opposed to the way a civilian would – *fight or flight.* Within each work, I focus on these different responses and the tensions that occur between them.

Allegory and mythopoeia are vital tools in the projects conception. They introduce an interplay of the biological (creatures) and the mechanical (war machines). Combining this with the *fight or flight* response, I create an effective way to depict and evoke tensions generated in the soldier due to the self-conscious awareness that they are PTSD sufferers. Through this interplay, of the biological and the mechanical I draw attention to the dualistic nature of military and human (animal) in the paintings. This is a successful formula that encapsulates the origins of PTSD. The images present the two forces. Are they opposing each other? Are they mimicking each other? *Surely, that animal will be killed?* As each piece is viewed, a narrative begins to unfold and begs the question *"Is it in my nature?"*

The way in which images of war and conflict are usually presented (contemporary media sources) are numerous, constant and become tools to confront and scare. Through their shock value and rapid exposure, they become dominating, impenetrable forces that direct the viewer to accept and not question. The works I create suspend these images in a slow, quiet space. By presenting these images in such a way, I discover how I can create a space where the viewer can participate and analyse the 'situation' within each image.

In their seminal writings on Narrativity and Experientiality, Vera and Ansgar Nünning's explain that the way narrative works in paintings act as transmedial narrative: The story being told does not rely on the embedded plot and the

temporal structure in the same way as narrative works in writing. (Nünning, cited in Olson 2011 p.6).

This exegesis illustrates how I came to perceive a need to shift the way I approached the representation of PTSD through painting. This transition led me to consider how painting could operate as a transmedial narrative and that is fundamental to my way of providing a critique of the popular representations of war that were not accommodating the issues of PTSD that I wanted to address.

\\ Intel.

Fight // Flight uses a practice based research methodology. This method of research, whilst considered contemporary and only recently recognised (Barrett, 2007, p.2) is actually a process that has existed long before academia had a contemporary influence on the description of art-making processes as 'research'. It can be argued that 'creative' or 'visual' perception is at the crux of the development of human thinking. Merlin Donald (Donald, 1991, p.14) calls image making 'visualgraphic-invention' in referring to the symbolic use of graphical devices. This can be seen in prehistoric cave paintings and Aboriginal rock paintings, where an experience is internalised and the output is knowledge communicated visually (Orna, Stevens, 1995, p.14).

This notion of the experiential is at the crux of practice led/based research. Brad Haseman describes it as "…intrinsically experiential and comes to the fore when the researcher creates new artistic forms…" (Haseman, 2006, p.3) The significance of the experiential supports the role of the individual within autobiographic or auto-ethnographic approaches (Pace, 2012, p.2) and is considered integral by Robyn Stewart, "…practitioners have a strong base in autobiography as a means of linking art and life." (Stewart, 2007, p.128) This supports the artist using personal experience and gives insight into cultural values, social norms and contemporary issues of her time. Robert Rauschenberg describes a similar sentiment: "The artists job is to be a witness to his *(her)* time in history." (Rauschenberg commonly attributed but unknown source.).

It is within the making of the work that I draw on my lifelong experiences of witnessing PTSD. The depth of this experience functions like tacit knowledge that can only be gained through deep levels of experience (Treadaway, 2009, p.235). As I paint an image, my hand is guided by various sensory prompts, from within my memory. The artistic process (and mine) is like "the interplay

between what we see now and how we interpret what we have seen in the past." (Dormer, 1994, p.27).

The role of the War Artist throughout the years has been to record the various elements of war: the battle, soldiers, preparations, celebrations and destruction (Canadian War Museum, 2014). The outcomes are social artefacts that "…raise public taste, foster a national culture and lay groundwork for post-war patronage of art by the state…" (Foss, 2007, p.9).

Edouard Detaille *Vive L'Empereur* 1891
oil on canvas
376x445 cm

One of the most important methods of the war artist is the involvement with the site/subject matter and their connection to the experience to create successful work. Past Australian war artists Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan both found this a useful insight, as they found war "…an irresistible force in helping guide their hand when creating images of humans, damaged and deranged…' (Bevan, 2004, p.70). When discussing Vietnam Veteran artists, Kathleen James suggests that the best works by veteran artists question the value of war, and due to their involvement, are able to portray raw personal experiences to challenge our comfort zones (James, 2011, p.10).

Ken McFadyen *Crew Members, HMAS 'Hobart'; resupply at sea in demilitarised zone off the coast of Vietnam* 1968
oil on canvas on hardboard
36x54.9 cm

When viewing examples of war art throughout history, a pattern begins to emerge in the ways in which conflict is depicted. It is triumphant, masculine, brave and challenging, graphic and

fragile. This highlights a viewpoint divided, with some artists questioning traditional myths of masculinity (James, 2011, p.10) and heroism whilst others contribute to the glorification of war (Bartov, 2002, p.30). Richard Haese has remarked that American war art had been praised for showing the reality of war in all "…its horrible gory reality." Arguments arose that Australian war artists had been "instructed to make 'nice' pictures for the national collection." (Turnbull, cited in Haese, 1982, p.225). Clive Turnbull argued, "…The least we as civilians can be asked to face is the truth." (Turnbull, cited in Haese 1982 p.225).

Ben Quilty, an official Australian War Artist, is one of many war artists in history who has challenged the portrayal of wartime artwork and potentially expanded the war art genre. Quilty describes his time in Afghanistan as "This very wild place" (Quilty, 2012, *Australian Story*) filled with extreme situations and intensity. Instead of observing the actions of soldiers as many war artists had done, he chose to engage with the soldiers themselves both in the field and in his studio. Quilty's work was not attempting to

Ben Quilty *Captain Kate Porter, after Afghanistan* 2012
oil on linen
180x170 cm

"…depict the landscape of war, but the reality and aftermath, a representation, which is carried in the soul of the raw soldier." (Trooper M, 2012, *Australian Story*).

As well as the engagement with the soldiers to guide his work, Quilty's technical considerations when painting were integral to the development of the *After Afghanistan* series. His consideration of the use of colours, application of paint and posing of subjects was integral in portraying the

fragility of the human body and the emotional burden of war (Quilty, 2012, p.15). These same considerations are visible when observing the works of Henry Moore and Alan Moore, where they intervene in the heroic, masculine representation of war. Alan Moore emphasised the same importance of experience to make his work where he expressed the desire to create works in Germany, portraying the POW (Prisoner of War) camps (Moore, cited in Bevan 2004 p.67). He stated, "I wanted to [draw] because I thought it would possibly stop the awfulness, the death of war." (Moore, cited in Heanue 2014).

Henry Moore *Shelters in the Tube* 1941
graphite, ink, watercolour and crayon on paper
38x56.8 cm

Alan Moore *Blind man in Belsen* 1947
oil on canvas
72.2x82.7 cm

Each of these artists uses painting in various ways to represent aspects of militarism to contribute to the ongoing representation of war and conflict. My practice continues in this tradition, adding to the continuum of representation, focusing on PTSD.

Theorist Guy Debord explores the issue of representation extensively in his seminal text *'The Society of The Spectacle.'* Debord claims, "The spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images." (Debord, 1967 p.25). Jacques Rancière responds to this, suggesting that the spectacle is simultaneously society and a means of unification, which accomplishes nothing other than creating a language of separation" (Rancière, 2007 p.37). This notion was also explored through Jean Baudrillard's work *Simulacra and Simulation*. He questions the understanding that society is based on underlying truths, which he views as re-presentations

and therefore does not embody actuality. Baudrillard argues that our society has enculturated us with these re-presentations and therefore the "copy" (simulacrum) precedes reality (Baudrillard, 1998, p.168).

This is evident in the history of the war art genre, where for countless years, we have been presented with images of heroic men on horses, soldiers jumping out of helicopters or soldiers patrolling enemy borders etc. etc... Notions of masculinity and heroism extend into contemporary media with films such as *300, Tropic Thunder,* and video games such as the *Call of Duty* franchise. In these examples the gravity of war is trivialised as entertainment.

Still frame from *Call of Duty* advertisement.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pblj3JHF-Jo
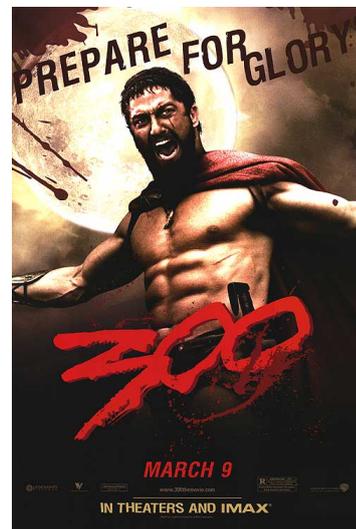
300 movie poster

I am interested the interruption and intervention of the 'spectacle of war' and how it is achieved by many artists, historical and contemporary, across various media platforms. A recent stage production by Daniel Keene *The Long Way Home* made in conjunction with the Australian Defence Force (ADF), emphasises the side effects of PTSD and how soldiers (often fail to) navigate the condition, interrupting mainstream ideas that war is a game or for entertainment. There is an increased awareness of PTSD, brought by media and statistics, which make this a timely and relevant project. In a recent study,

it was shown that the number of US military suicides superseded the amount of deaths in Afghanistan in 2012. (RT Think More, 2014)

The Long Way Home by Daniel Keene in conjunction with the ADF.

I locate my projects rationale within this intervention strategy and I am interested in how the method of painting can evoke the gravitas of PTSD and war. With recent conflicts such as Afghanistan constantly permeating the media, graphic images and stories of war become commonplace as we are exposed to them daily through new media advances such as YouTube and online forums (Fahmy, 2011).

Through the rapid increase of exposure to these media images or 'the spectacle', we learn to read and navigate these representations rapidly and quickly. I have attempted to investigate how my method of painting can provide an alternative to the dominating functionality of the 'spectacle'. Research into mnemonic function, describes how memory/information retention is put to the test when photography and painting are compared. It is argued that with the abundance of photography today, we are shown that the precision of photography does not correlate with the 'nebulous, malleable, ever-changing' ways in which the brain remembers and recognises information (Gingeras, 2014). Geoffrey Batchen argues, "…The 'straight' photograph has always been an insufficient vehicle for memory." (Batchen, 2004, p.96).

Painting does not operate in the same instantaneous way that a photograph does. A painting's "material sensuality, tactility and atmospheric possibilities" are closer to the mnemonic functions of the human brain; they lack "pictorial authority and truth telling capacity of photography", instead prompting the viewer to call on their own memory bank to generate connections and associations unique to them (Gingeras, 2014). Meaning found within paintings

is accumulative as the viewer slowly scans the image; paintings delay the eye (Moffatt, 2011 p.3).

Narrativity and experientiality operate in the same way that mnemonic function does because experientiality refers to the ways which narrative prompts the readers' familiarity of an experience. This requires the "…activation of 'natural' cognitive parameters'…" and the "emotional evaluation of experience." (Caracciolo, 2013). Carracciolo identifies this in writing about Monika Fludernicks' contribution to the field of Narratology. This correlation between human and the representation of human experience is at the crux of narrative (Caracciolo, 2013).

In my project I have investigated how combinations of animal imagery and subtle military imagery are a successful catalyst for experientiality. In these paintings I am attempting to link, but differentiate two narratives about war. By depicting the military in a very literal or direct way, I risk using symbols that are not accessible to all, or which fail to evoke any gravitas due to desensitization. If I was not careful about using value-loaded symbols such as uniforms or guns it could potentially skew the meaning and intention of my work. Whilst my work does use these symbols, by allegorically comparing them to animals or making them subtle, I am attempting to create a space of contemplation where the viewer can link these diverse, but not dissimilar concepts together. My aim has been to provide an embodied experience of the narrative focused on PTSD as an alternative to the narrative of the 'spectacular' myths of war.

My previous works (Appendix I) were allegorical - "saying one thing through the guise of another" (*Online Dictionary* 2005). The concept of 'Allegoresis' sits within Modernisms conception of 'the autonomy of the artwork'. In this, the artist assigns meaning to the work and the audience interprets what has been signified (Ulmer 1983, p.95). My new work engages with 'Narrative Allegory'. Through this I focus on how the structural form of the work

correlates with the content. I have investigated how the idea of being 'absorbed' in a work, either whilst painting it myself or through dwelling on it as a spectator, a 'situation' is created that provides a contemplative alternative to the 'spectacle'. Here the work operates less like "language" and more importantly through Experientiality. The focus on how pictorial elements correlate to ideas and how the audience participates in the construction of meaning alludes to the issues around PTSD.

Within Allegory, there must be a literal anecdote or assumption of reality, a rhetorical intention that imposes a meaning and a third notion of the obtuse or disguise (Barthes, 1970, p.66). The latter component is vague as Barthes states, "The obtuse meaning is a signifier without the signified. How do you describe something that does not represent anything?" (Barthes, 1970, p.61). The third notion encapsulates allegory, as the depiction of elements that often do not have direct relations (in my case, birds and planes).

This is evidenced in Longo's work Boys Slow Dance. In this work, men appear to be locked in combat or passionate embrace. Through this, a potentially violent scenario is given new meaning. Longo's work is an example of what Monika Fludernick describes when expounding on Narrativity and Experientiality. I believe that Ulmers' concept of Narrative Allegory and Fludernick's emphasis on experientiality are linked back through philosophical positions emerging from Phenomenology.
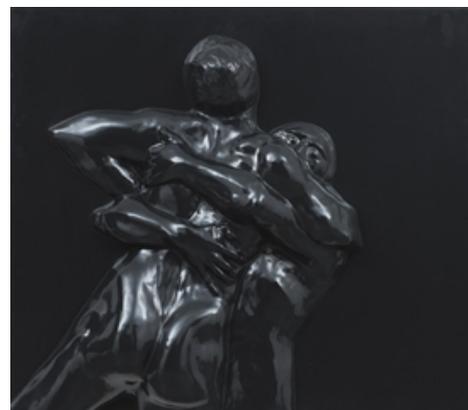
Robert Longo *The Wrestlers (Slow Boys Dance series)* 1979
Cast hydro-stone, wood and lacquer
42 X 48 (Depth: 8) in (106.68 X 121.92 (Depth: 20.32) cm)

Similar concepts resonate in Paul Carter's *Material Thinking* where, through an engagement of 'myth making' to bring together diverse things, a

materialisation of abstract ideas becomes present. Paul Carter's material thinking engages with aspects of myth, "The artist, through a capacity to perceive analogies existing between matters far apart and, apparently, most dissimilar, mythopoetically creates 'poetic wisdom'" (Carter, 2004, p.7); "…an acute wit penetrates more quickly and unites diverse things…" (Vico, cited in Carter 2004 p.7).

I utilize a limited palette and foggy atmospheric effects to create a quiet, sensitive space where my diverse, but not dissimilar concepts can be linked. Within the painting process, there is a sense of immersion and absorption that is supported by my choice of colours and empty, quiet compositions. This immersive quality extends into the installation and viewing of work where the audience is placed in an appropriate 'situation'. Nonetheless my work certainly has a socio-political agenda. I am aware of positioning my work within a military narrative. I have taken steps to identify the military as a targeted audience. (See conclusion).

Mythopoeia and mythic narratives are explored extensively in William Irwin Thompson's *Coming Into Being*. He explains the importance and attraction of the mythic narrative when trying to compare major ontological questions such as the nature of the human condition. (Thompson, 1996, p.46). The agency of the mythic narrative lies in the audiences' participation of its construction, how from "…a few teeth and half a skull…" we arrive at conclusions on human origins (Thompson, 1996, p.55).

> *"Art is emotionally compelling, but science is emotionally confusing. It cons us into thinking it has answered the question when it hasn't." (Thompson, 1996, p.63).*

PTSD as defined by the Australian Government is an anxiety disorder that is caused by a traumatic event (VVCS, 2012 VCS06 p1). In a military context, the most common cause of PTSD is a hybrid of a traumatic experience and a

lifestyle change. Within the military, soldiers are exposed to and formed by major aspects of military culture - strong identification, a heightened sense of importance and discipline. After service a soldier may become frustrated when they can no longer locate and identify themselves in a civilian life that often lacks these ideas (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011, p.2). Another cause of PTSD lies within military training. Due to the nature of training and regimented behaviour, soldiers returning to civilian life have trouble adjusting to a 'normal' human stress response of *flight* as opposed to a military stress response of *fight* (VVCS, 2004, p.3).

A flock of starlings is called a *murmuration.*

This prompted me to think about the ways in which animals conducted themselves in large groups: particularly flocks of birds and schools of fish that move as a unit to survive. A study by the *Environmental Biology of Fishes* revealed that fish "…removed from a school will have an artificially high respiratory rate due to stress. Schooling fish then have an automatically lower respiratory rate due to the calming effect of being with conspecifics." (Abrahams, Colgan, 1985, p.198). Consequently, research into PTSD and health issues revealed that PTSD is often associated with "…impaired cardiovascular function." (Schnurr, 2014). Similarly, research into starling flocks by *The Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour* drew parallels to the ways in which schools of fish and starlings conducted themselves. The article presents the idea that starlings move as a whole not due to environmental concerns. Each bird moves individually to keep its surrounding neighbours in the same visual plane; on mass this action appears to be in

unison (Ballerini, 2008, p.207). It explains that each bird is aware of up to seven of its nearest neighbours and is constantly interacting with each in terms of its movement (Ballerini, 2008, p.213).

Whilst Ulmer has described Narrative Allegory in the context of its polysemous, expansive meaning, (Ulmer, 1983, p.95) the components of an allegorical figure of speech must have a resonant and appropriate correlation. I believe my personal experience of PTSD equipped me to identify allegorical comparisons between birds, sea creatures, and aircraft and weaponry as appropriate correlations.

\\ Execution

When reflecting on the memories, I find myself standing where I did as a child, suspended in disbelief and confusion. I try to simplify the situation as best as I can. The thought of battle scenes suddenly becomes so much bigger than myself, and dares to confront and scare me away. Perhaps if the birds were planes, or the soldiers were fish…

I begin my process by collecting imagery of birds, fish and other creatures and finding correlations between images of warplanes, helicopters and weaponry. I have no difficulty in trying to find imagery of these things, specifically, the military as the current sociopolitical climate has such images on high rotation. I remove these images from their place of spectacularization and collage them against their animal counterpart.


Once I have gathered successful images, I will begin several processes to create a painting. The images are collaged in two ways: within Photoshop or through quick charcoal drawings. Depending on how confident I feel about a composition I decide whether I make a collage or drawing before painting. By creating a drawing, I am able to get a greater sense of how the design and composition will work. During the making of the drawing, I am able to think of technical aspects such as how the painting needs to be constructed and

executed. Through this process, I engage in material thinking; my decisions are directly influenced by the process of drawing (and painting) as the tools I use are not passive objects, but have "…their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist's creative intelligence." (Bolt, cited in Barrett 2010 p.30).
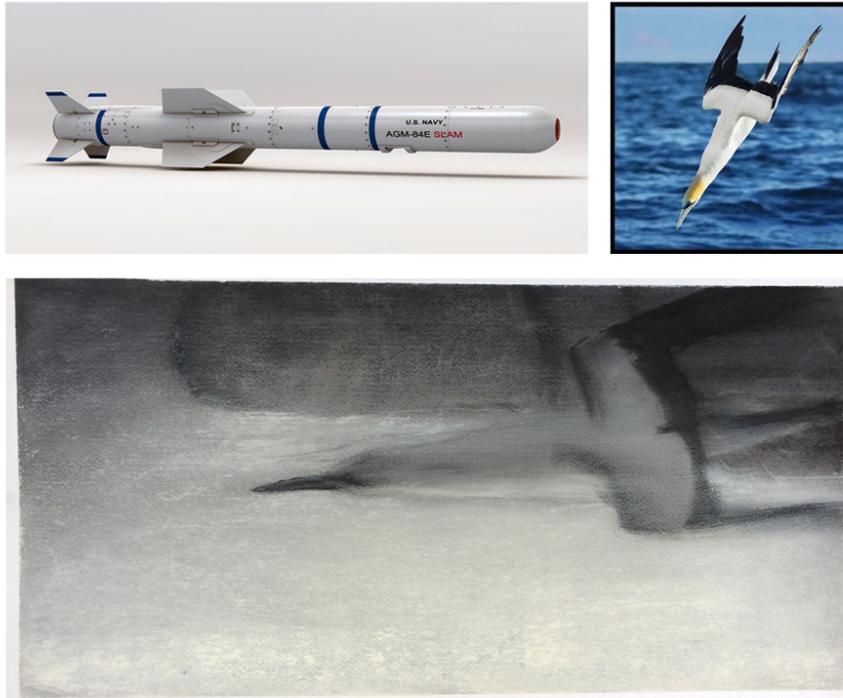
Here, I Sourced images of a diving gannet and an AGM-84E SLAM missile and collaged them within the drawing space. Here, I was able to decide how I would create depth and play with lighting. (*AGM-84E*)
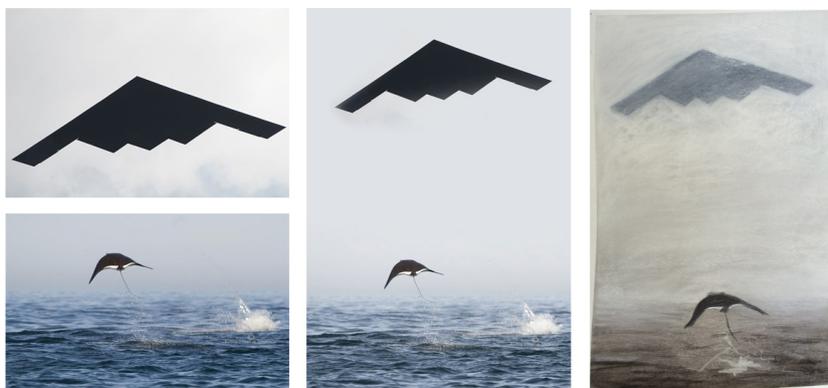
Here, a similar process was used, but instead I chose to collage within Photoshop and also re-draw the composition. (*B.II*)

Earlier in the 20th century artists like John Heartfield and Raoul Haussmann utilised collage strategies to create strong, confrontational and metaphorical artworks challenging militarisation. Their collage and photomontage was a successful practice that grew from the Dadaist movement. Through the transference of different materials from one context to another (Ulmer, 1983, p.84), an image is created that links diverse concepts and imagery which is often quite disruptive or challenging. This enables the viewer to participate in the construction of meaning similarly to the way that allegory operates.

John Heartfield *War and Corpses – The Last Hope of the Rich* 1932
Magazine
385x650 mm

Raoul Haussmann *Der Kunstkritiker (The Art Critic)* 1919-20
Lithograph and printed paper on paper
318x254mm

Heartfield's and Haussmann's collages, whilst allegorical, operate very differently to my own. Their images are largely political and highly confrontational, like many collage works of the time. My collages do not work in this fashion. Instead, they are slow, subtle and inviting. Whilst they do have political significance, they do not function abruptly or aggressively.

Through the process of digital collage, I create diverse combinations to make my works. Once I have decided on a composition, I project the collage directly onto the canvas. Historically, artists have used similar methods through the *camera obscura* room technique, where artists would outline some parts of their work for greater definition (PetaPixel 2012). Projection enables me to

play within the space of the canvas before I start painting by changing the scale of the figures and their position in the picture plane, effortlessly.
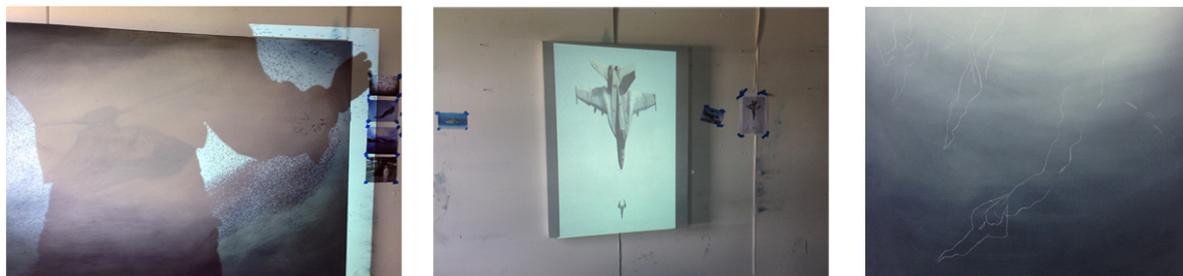
Pictured left to right: *Death Angels* (Process), *When I grow up I want to fly planes* (Process), *AGM* (Process detail.)

The paintings, once sketched are constructed quite methodically. I will usually start with a gradient of light colours that shows through each layer as I paint. This gives my work an immersive feel or "glow". I then build up the background to a degree and then begin to define the objects within it. I will usually complete each piece with further washes of lights and darks to push and pull certain details in each image. By doing this I create a space where the eye can travel through the picture plane and make discoveries in each image, rather than create abrupt depictions. Both painting and viewing each of these works becomes an act of immersion – I invite the viewer to float and dive into each of the quiet spaces where they can begin to discover hidden or subtle elements within the work to construct the final image.

Contemporary theories of experientiality and narrativity have influenced my understanding of the way I make work and have helped me contextualise my paintings in a number of ways. When painting, I immerse myself in a narrative I have lived and created. Each image begins to respond to each other alongside the audience viewing them. We are all narrators - we enact narratives and participate in others constantly. It provides a way to capture multiple "…complex relationships in the form of narrative structures,

metaphors and analogies." (Fludernik, 2009, p.1). By engaging with narrativity in both making and viewing, I produce an explanatory pattern for the work.

Pattern plays an important role in the construction of my work. I had tried various arrangements and numbers of the figures, but found that the most effective way to represent a tension was within a quiet space with two elements. I initially explored this in a very early digital collage of a black hawk helicopter and an early drawing of a starling murmuration. Earlier works in the series were less successful as they either became visually busy or too 'animated'. I found that they became literal depictions of a theatrical moment and did not invite investigation or effective allusion.

There are many resonate mythopoeic patterns that emerge when one thinks of the history of war. They are largely dominated by imagery of conflagration, upheaval, explosive power and testosterone dominated masculine aggression. But the patterns that emerge from the dispossession of the experience of PTSD comes from a place unlike these macho displays - these patterns do not fit the mythology of bravery, gallantry and honour.

Pictured left to right: *Untitled Collage, SSN – 774* and *The Flying Tigers*. These works are not included in the final body of work.

Australian printmakers Darren Bryant and Travis Patterson have used similar 'pattern'-based compositions within their work. By isolating key elements in each piece, relationships and tensions are revealed.

Darren Bryant *Rabbit Behind Rocks (Advance Wars)* 2010
Mixed Media
20x15cm

Travis Patterson *Is this
where your heart is* 2012
Aquatint
38x28cm

Travis Patterson *Campfire
Stories* 2012
Aquatint
38x30cm

This compositional strategy became ongoing in each piece I produced. This was useful in exploring the relationship between the war-machines and the animals. Gannets became the most commonly depicted creatures as I found many visual links and allusions between them and missiles and planes. Other combinations included a B.II stealth bomber with a manta ray, murmurations of starlings, stealth helicopters and boats and a bumphead parrotfish with a sea-mine. (Appendix 2) (And some pictures)

I chose to explore this compositional strategy further in another set of works on paper. In these works, I explored the resonance between certain species of fish and common military symbols. I had grown very fond of the symbol of the fish in my past work and wanted to utilize it in my final project. Amongst my large collection of imagery I had found that certain species of fish had names that alluded to the military and when matched with their similar

'counterpart' or namesake, became powerful statements that question the authority and importance we place on war and conflict.
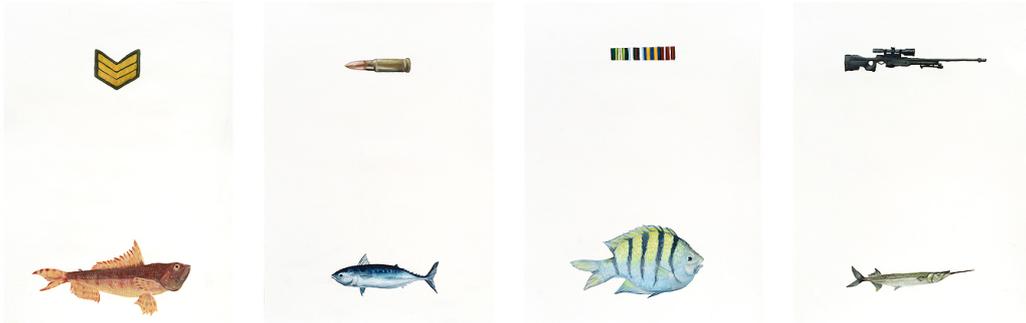
Kate Hallen (Left to right) *Sergeant Baker, Bullet Tuna, Sergeant Major, Garfish* 2014
Oils on paper
50x70.5cm

I chose to pair the fish *Sergeant Baker* with a Sergeant uniform stripe, a *Bullet Tuna* with the round of an AK-47, a *Sergeant Major* with medal stripes and a *Garfish* (For its similarity of shape) with an SR-98 sniper rifle.

I began to research oil painting techniques on paper and how to best prepare the paper so it would be able to hold the oil and not rot when given time. Online forums hinted towards coating the paper with rabbit skin glue to seal the paper followed by several coats of gesso (Artist Daily, 2008). I chose to prime the paper excessively and seal the back with an archival binder medium and when completed varnish the surface of the painting. I discovered this also became a very useful installation strategy by making the paper quite heavy and therefore, preventing curling and warping.

When installed, relationships between the paintings begin to emerge, and reveal a trans-medial narrative through content, audience and installation. I began to notice that *Death Angels I* & *II* transcended beyond the mimicry aspect of the gannet and ray images. The large, organic, unidentifiable shapes the starlings made became an omen where the roles seemed to

reverse; *the issue was greater than the cause.* The ambiguity of the formation itself has a foreboding presence, which resonates with the entire installation.

The paper works are installed in the same space as the larger paintings, but are distanced in a way that they operate on their own and are not overtly distracting from the canvas works.

Through a unification of these methods, *Fight // Flight* is able to suggest the cause of PTSD, which is emphasised through the tension of elements within each painted space. The installation and enactment of each of the works suggests the evocation of an experiencing consciousness on the part of both artist and spectator. According to Fludernick this experientiality is both necessary and sufficient for establishing narrativity.

\\ Conclusion

"The Artists job is to be a witness to his (her) time in history."

- Robert Rauschenberg

As an artist, I constantly engage with the world I occupy and I am interested in how audiences can respond to themes, which resonate through their diverse experiences. My particular perspective and experience influences my work. Like many artists, my outputs are reflective of the times and contribute to social consciousness. The currency of the historical situation that I am experiencing has always informed my practice.

In a previous body of work, *PTSD: Post Traumatic Shoaling Disorder*, (see Appendix I) I chose to focus on the sufferer. That project resulted in very abrupt works that were quite personal. Whilst I had created evocative work, I felt that it would have been harder to access for someone who was not directly related to the person in question. In this more recent work I decided to adjust my personal focus and try to look at PTSD in a more "holistic" way by choosing to engage with the cause and effect of the illness in an attempt to be more accessible. I aimed to invite wider audience participation through this method of engagement.

In the previous project, I chose to depict fish, traumatised or in military regalia. This was a successful visual tool relying primarily on metaphor. It became more effective as I developed a strong correlation between PTSD, fish and separation. Through research, I had found that fish removed from their school became stressed. Research showed this was evidenced by their heart rate. This finding provided the platform for my use of allegory.

I continued to use animal signifiers from my previous project, initially starting with the fish and the affinity I likened to military personnel. In Fight // Flight, I expanded my symbols to other species and then created visual links between

these and war machines such as planes and submarines. By composing these elements in certain ways, I had found allegory an effective way to create a tension that became more reflective of the nature of PTSD.

The concept of Narrative Allegory became integral to my understanding of the construction of meaning within the work. Narrative Allegory suggested aspects of how the meaning of the work includes audience participation (Ulmer, 1983, p.95). Fight // Flight focused on how diverse pictorial elements such as gannets and fighter jets could visually correlate with ideas surrounding PTSD. The design and compositional aspects of the paintings are meant to provide the audience with an immersive experience that gradually evokes the 'story' I am trying to tell and enables them to participate in the 'situation' of this body of work.

In my studies into PTSD, I had discovered the cause was due to multiple factors - training and traumatic events during service. The training cause was what resonated with me strongly, as I recalled many moments where I could see a PTSD sufferer "snap" from the militant to the civilian. On reflection of PTSD - It made no sense how this person could change so suddenly and it began to make me question where their true personality lay - *were they to love you or kill you?*

When my compositions began to evolve into surreal, quiet spaces I began to find myself thinking about the mindscape of a sufferer and what they could have been thinking or feeling. In this space a perpetual war waged between the human/animal and the oppressive military construct.

//

In this space, a human psyche was trying desperately to be something it was obviously not meant to be.

"You were a human being first."

2014 marks the 100th anniversary of The Great War, World War I. Since 2001, the 'War Against Terror' has raged, and with it, a rise in PTSD cases from returned soldiers. Images of war and trauma from recent conflicts have become more commonplace to us through our daily exposure to them, contributing to a generalising of the idea of conflict. Through this constant exposure through western dominated media, we can begin to find ourselves distanced from the reality of the situation that Rancière describes as a "…collective world whose reality is nothing but mans own dispossession." (Rancière, 2004, p.274). With this rapid increase, we are conditioned to register these images as quickly as they are generated.

Paintings operate differently to photographs, inviting the audience to slowly inspect each pictorial element, which delays the eye and prompts sensory responses. This correlates to the ways in which we remember and recognise information (Batchen, 2004, p.96), inviting the viewer to create a space of "…free-play of association" (Gingeras, 2000). Paintings lack the pictorial authority of a photograph, and invite the viewer to think deeply about an issue instead of the quick reading and passing on 'representation' used in mass media. Through this project, I have concluded that the best strategy for me to contribute to the genre of War Art in the future is to pursue existing associations I have with the military.

Throughout my four years of study, I have been in consistent contact with several veterans programs associations, particularly AVCAT (Australian Veterans Children's Assistance Trust) and the TPI (Totally and Permanently Incapacitated) Federation of Australia. Through these two organisations, I was granted a four-year scholarship for the duration of my study. In 2013 I invited Pat Bright, the director of the New South Wales TPI association to visit my

graduation show. His attendance was of great significance as returned veterans are an important part of my audience.

Many people who have viewed and responded to my work have either been sufferers of PTSD or closely associated with a sufferer. This has been an inspiration to continue developing this project in the future with the potential for post-graduate studies or further involvement with war artists, veterans and the Official War Artist Scheme.

I may become a War Artist.
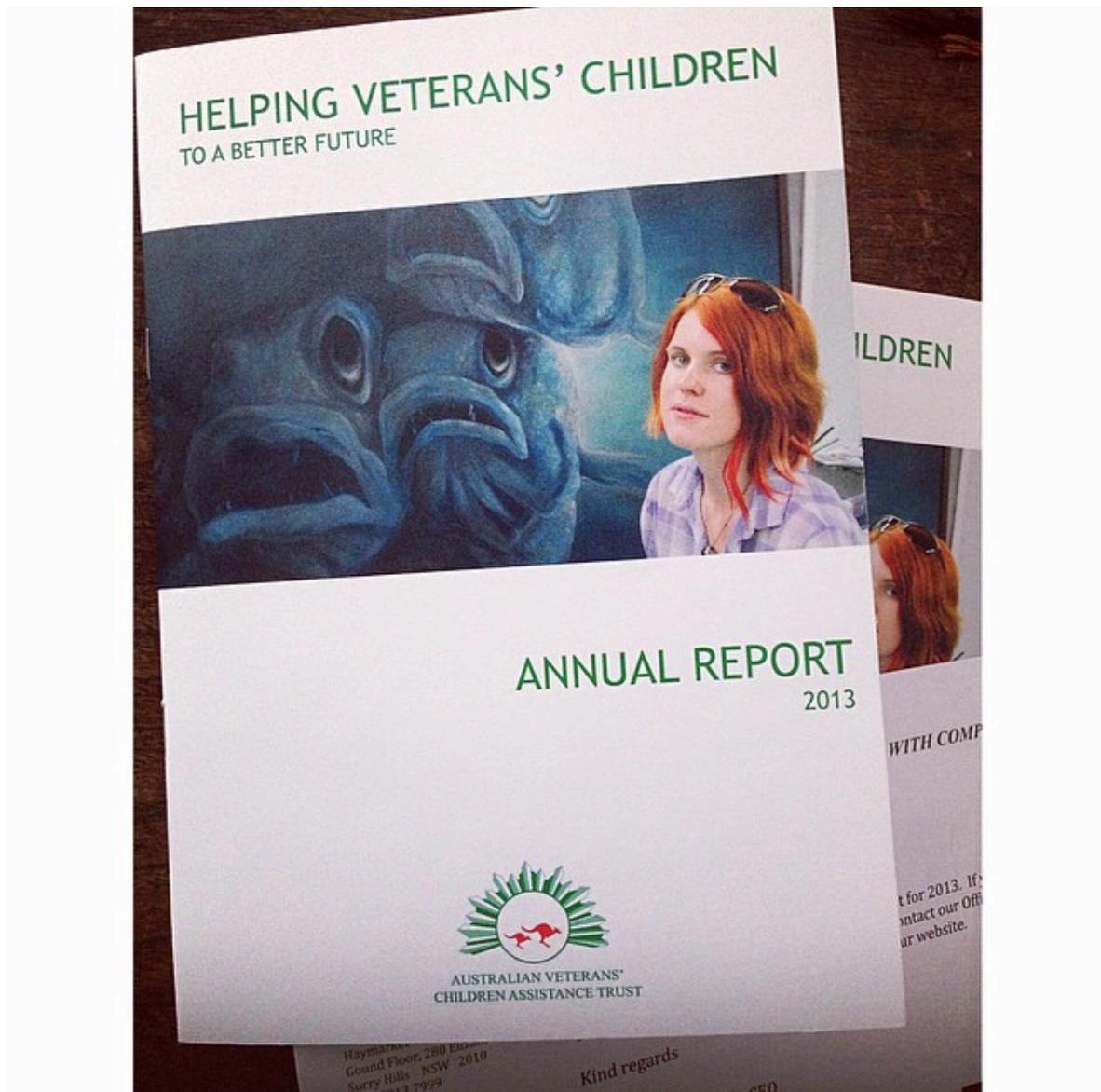
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\\ Appendix I

2013

PTSD: POST TRAUMATIC
SHOALING DISORDER

Schooling 2013
Oils on canvas
104x64 cm

Stunned Mullet 2013
Oils on canvas
121.3x84.3 cm

Big Black Blue 2013
Oils on canvas
121.3x84.3 cm

Lost 2013
Oils on canvas
121.3x84.3 cm

Stunned Mullet II 2013
Oils on canvas
121.3x84.3 cm

Stay Close 2013
Oils on canvas
121.3x84.3 cm

2014

Fight//Flight
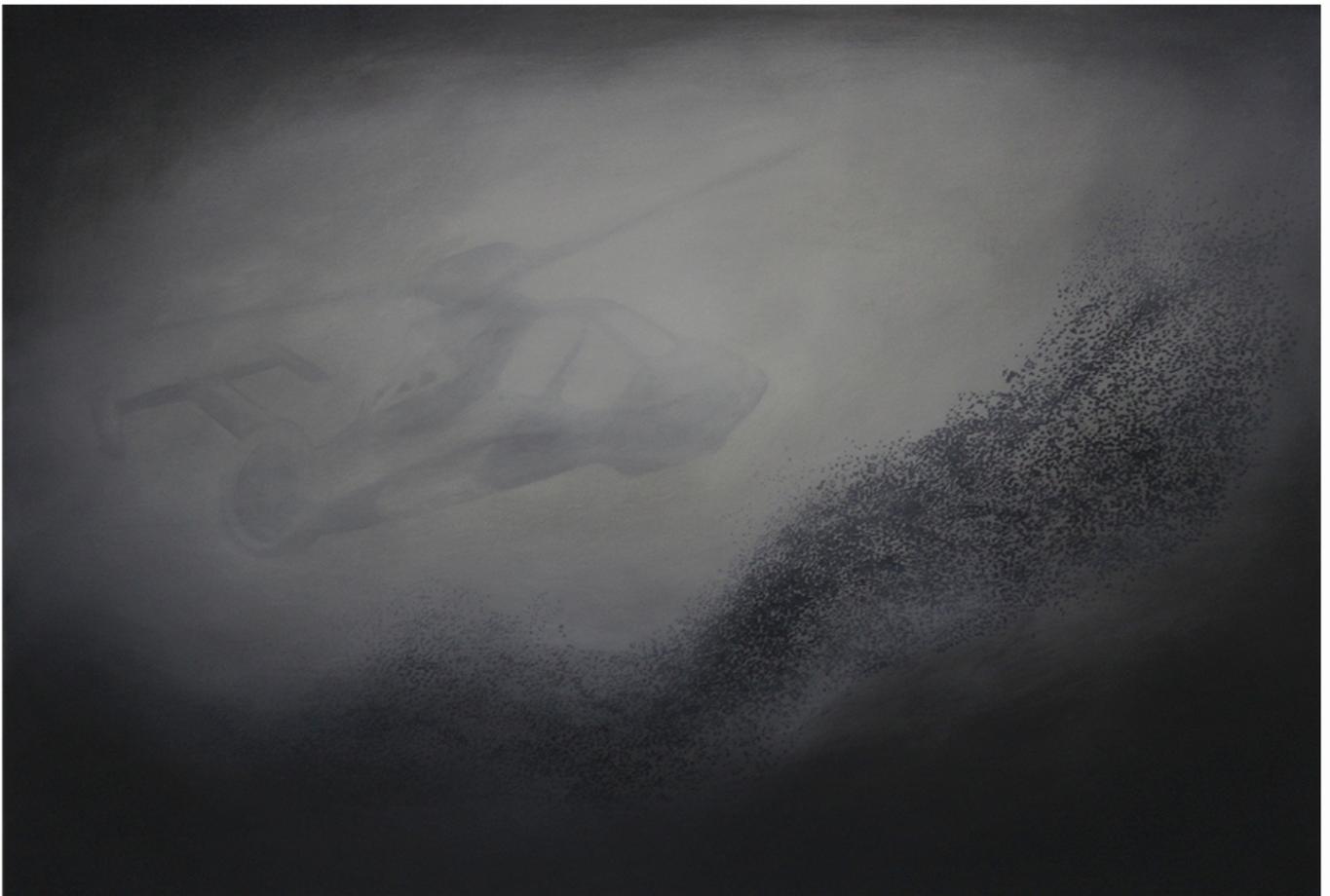
Death Angels 2014
Oils and charcoal on canvas
160x110 cm

AGM-84E 2014
Oils on canvas
130x60.5 cm

ASM 2014
Oils on canvas
80x117 cm

B.II 2014
Oils on canvas
80x117 cm
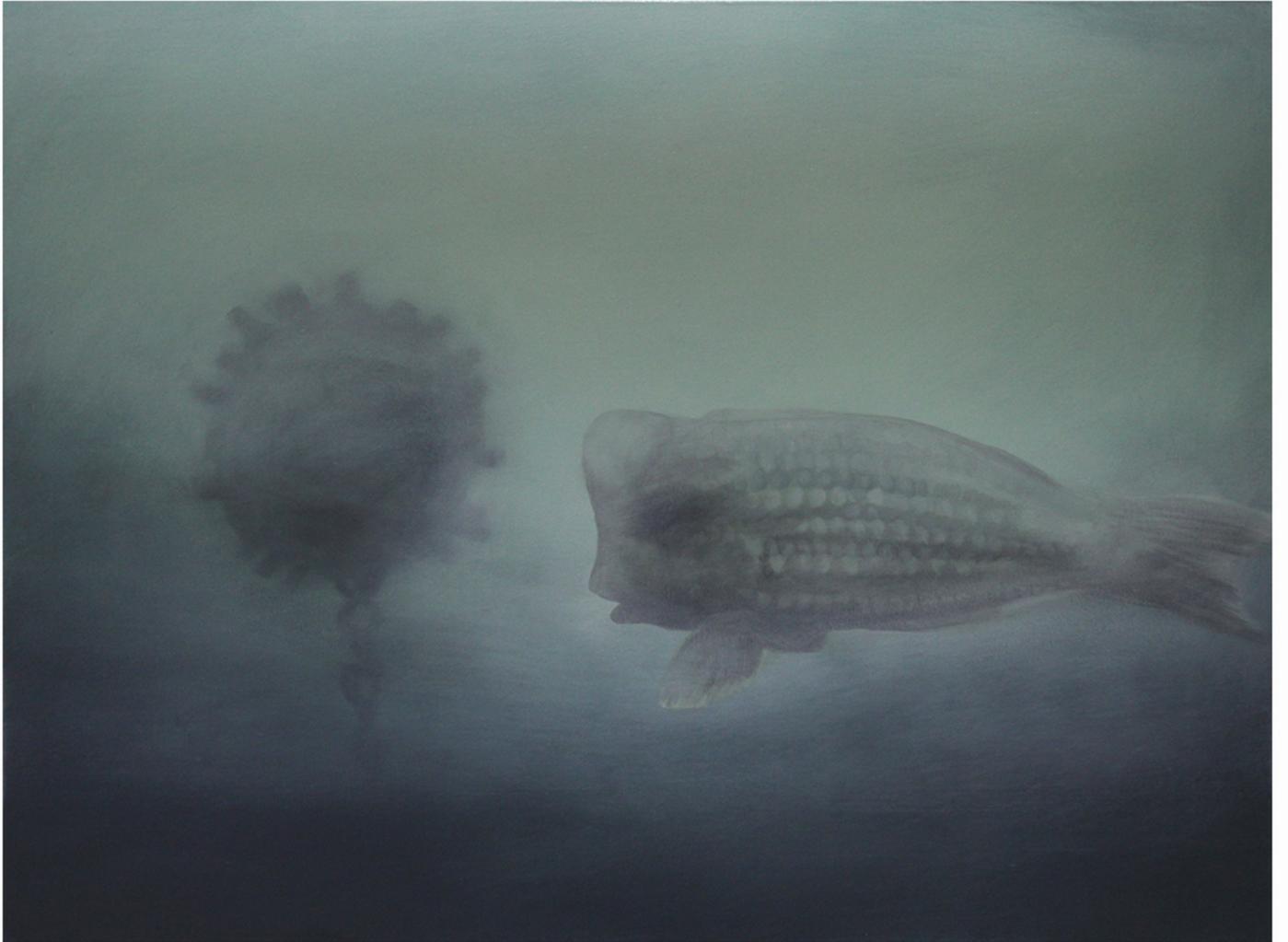
B.II 2014
Oils on canvas
122.5x92 cm

When I grow up I want to fly planes 2014
Oils on canvas
92x122.5 cm

Death Angels II 2014
Oils and charcoal on canvas
122.5x92 cm

Sergeant Baker 2014
Oils on paper
50x70.5cm

SR-98 2014
Oils on paper
50x70.5cm

Sergeant Major 2014
Oils on paper
50x70.5cm

Bang Bang 2014
Oils on paper
50x70.5cm