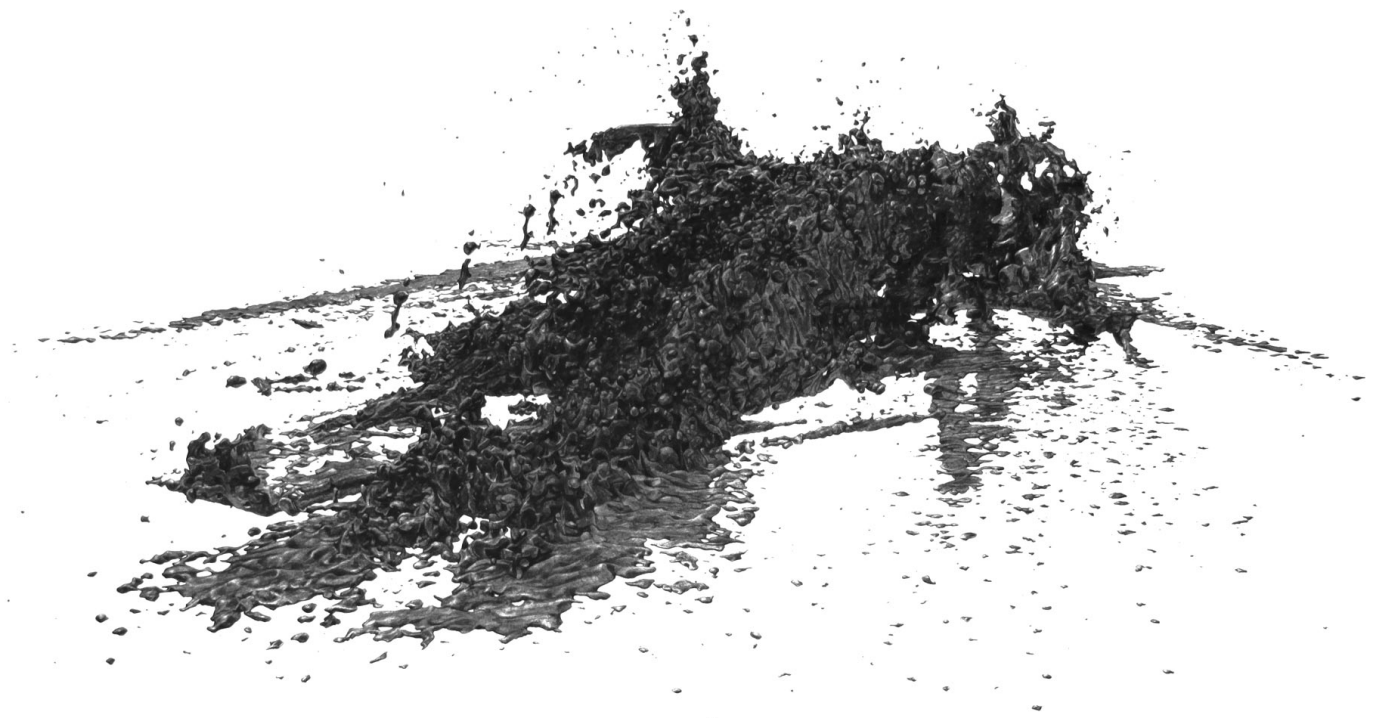


# SIMON FINN WARNING



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**MOANA**

PROJECT SPACE

# RUINED LANDSCAPES: VISION AND SIMON FINN

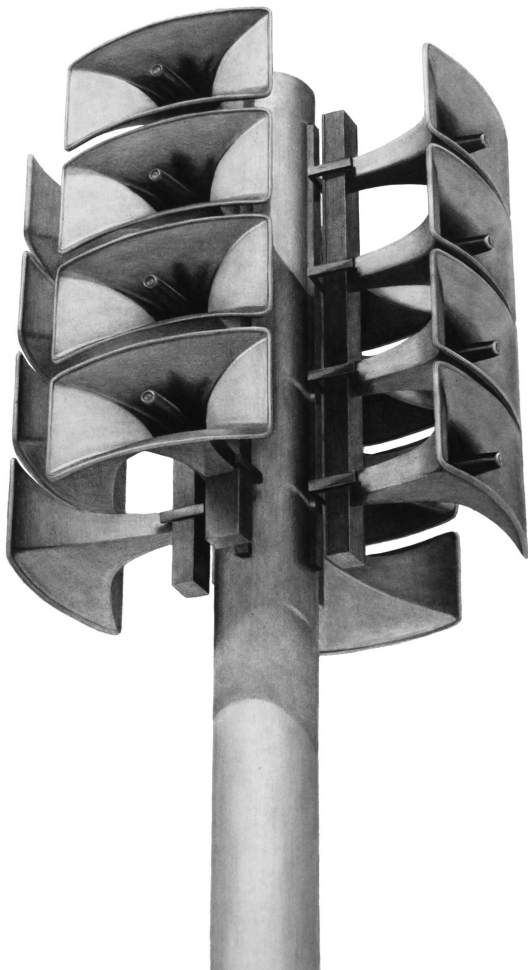
I am in England on a train between Whitby and Manchester. Whitby, on the East Coast, is famed for the ruined abbey which sits atop its cliff over the North Sea, destroyed in the first millennium by the raiding Danes, and in the second under Henry VIII. Manchester is famous for its might as the centre of the Industrial Revolution, and in the 200 or so years since, for its hulking derelict mills, urban ruination and general wretchedness. As the train approaches cities in-between, my view is marked by the rise of miserable modernist tower blocks, and the track is joined by the old canal system, which once brought industry and labour to these regions.

It is a grim view but it could be anywhere. I look from here to the comparatively hyper-real Perth, with its flat, hot overexposed light and clean, tilt-up suburbs; it is a vision no less implicitly and imminently ruined than this old empire.

In the new West of Perth, the vision of future ruin appears over places named after very small, very old bits of Europe. These new suburbs are built on the frictionless wealth of the mineral industry up North, where huge supertankers are filled ceaselessly day and night from ports with names that are starting to take on mythical proportions.

In a new Northern suburb I once saw the bizarre, bad-joke spectacle of a sprinkler watering the singular green lawn of the only finished house in a huge spectral suburban development of sandy boulevards-to-nowhere in the dunes. It was a strange apocalyptic view: it could have been the last house on the coast, or the first. Nearby, another new suburb, Alkimos, is named after a ship that wrecked on its shores.

In the early 1970s, the architectural historian Reyner Banham considered Perth the sole potential rival to Los Angeles as the greatest city-on-the-shore. Now the city has expanded on borrowed boom-time to stretch all the way from Mandurah to Two-rocks – from the area where Thomas Peel once lamented his failed settlement, to the abandoned sea-world named 'Atlantis' where a huge limestone Poseidon looks out onto a blank Indian Ocean. In this vision, we can imagine a Perth huddled on the coast as the sun sets over the ocean with its back to the desert and the tap running. The view from there is no less alarming than the one which Whitby Abbey once boasted of the Northern sea.



The ruinous vision which touches these places is the sort of vision we see embedded in Simon Finn's work. Here the alarm is raised ostensibly for the threat of a tsunami. The tsunami warning towers – which Finn articulates in high definition both in film and on paper – wait for a wave which comes from the ocean to wipe away whole towns or cities. In this way, they are permanent reminders of the inevitability and ubiquity of disaster. These are objects of ruin because they frame a vision of a world in which every moment is sewn with the shadow of destruction and dissolution. The structures stand, somewhat ironically, as a concrete symbology for the imminence of any disaster, any dissolution or destruction. Finn's warning towers give spectral form to a wave over the horizon, to a sort of disaster-in-waiting just beyond view. The wave here is not represented; it must be called to – implicated in the strange sort of incompleteness and impermanence of the picture.

Similarly, in the sound of the ringing klaxon we find an alarm that hails its subject. Because it needs to be heard to function, and so is incomplete without it, it is a form that implicates its subject, an incomplete form that implicates its function and emphasises the virtual space between the sound and its reception in subjects such as ourselves. Alarms raise imminent and pressing ambiguity, which in everyday life make us turn off the car radio, or pull an earphone out in the library. This anxiety is recalled in Finn's drawings of the warning towers, which in framing resemble the shots old Hollywood films would use to resolve the uncertainties of diegetic versus non-diegetic sound.

Finn's work tends towards these qualities of form which suggest intangibility and loss. We see this, for instance, in the way the work handles translation between mediums. When the virtual model of the tsunami warning tower is turned into a charcoal drawing, it gains tactile presence but loses its three-dimensionality. Likewise, in *Liquid Surge* we see that a surge of water is frozen into a moment, and is given a new delicate, brittle aspect in its detail, but in that still quality something becomes dead about it. This fossilised moment is then laboured over in the process of drawing in charcoal. The idea of the liquid surge or the wall of water has in itself something of a spatial ambiguity, of being hard and permeable at the same time.

When the virtual model is rendered on screen, as in these images of the tsunami warning towers, it has a certain focused presence, like a relived memory. However, the rendering also implicates the infinite white unmodelled space outside of the model, which rushes into the frame and makes it unstable. This space of infinite-nothing destabilises the wholeness and integrity of the rendered form.

In Finn's works the transmutations, ambiguities and impermanence of form circumscribe a disappearance that occurs in them. They bring to bear the vision of ruin, that 'spectre of the invisible that the work lets be seen without ever presenting'.<sup>1</sup> When Derrida described the viscosity of ruin, he described its state as 'memory open like an eye, or like a hole in a bone socket that lets you see without showing you anything at all, anything of the all'. In such a vision of busted totality, the alarm seems to ring every second through my train compartment and on a southern shore alike.

Guy Loudon

<sup>1</sup> Derrida, Jacques, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Michael B. Naas, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 43

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SIMON FINN lives and works in Melbourne, Australia. He is currently researching the drawn in regard to synthetic animated realities being mapped into the tangible world as part of his *Masters of Fine Art* by research at the Victorian College of the Arts. He was the recipient of 2012's Arkley Prize for his work in Not Fair Art Fair, Melbourne. In 1999 he successfully completed a Fine Art Degree with First Class honours from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and Electronic Design and Interactive Multimedia from Swinburne University in 2003. Finn is currently represented by Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne.