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Jane Giblin, *Self-portrait in the Sound*, 2018, lithograph, 24.5 x 20 cm, edition of 6. Reproduced with permission of the artist.



Getting real

Jane Giblin's latest project is a courageous 'skin-shedding' exploration, writes Andrew Harper.

The Furneaux Group consists of a scattering of more than 100 islands at the eastern side of Bass Strait. Isolated and wild, the history of this region is complex. Far back in geological time, it was not a group of islands, eternally windswept by the Roaring Forties in a wild sea, but an isthmus: a space that allowed the first indigenous people of a very different world to explore and eventually settle in Tasmania. Some of these travelers did stay on what eventually became an island, but after a time they left, leaving the spaces of the Furneaux Group to be inhabited largely by a vast range of bird life and a great many seals. The islands remained a secluded place until sighted by British navigator Tobias Furneaux, giving them his name. Matthew Flinders set foot there in 1798, and eventually other people arrived to harvest the wildlife, and make homes and have families there. Aboriginal

people from mainland Tasmania were taken to Flinders Island in the 1830s by George Augustus Robinson. The fate of this group of people was appalling, but it is now generally understood that the islands of Bass Strait were one of the places where the Aboriginal people of Tasmania survived, and there is still community in the region to this day.

The Furneaux Group is rich with complex, interwoven human history that takes place in an area of unique beauty that has a story not quite like that of anywhere else. Artist Jane Giblin traces the ancestral line of her own family back to people still living on the islands, and has painstakingly investigated these connections, eventually spending much time at various sites and homes, meeting her relatives and fleshing out the narrative of who her family was, and who they are today. Giblin is a member of the Willis family, still found on the Islands. The

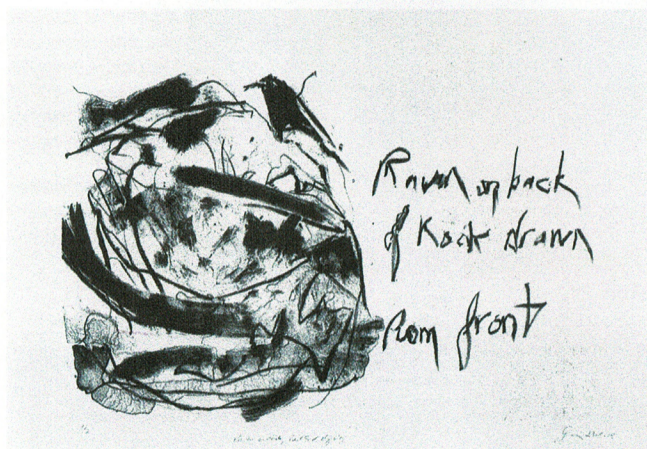
Willis people, among other things, took part in the traditional activity of hunting and gathering muttonbirds for food and trade (known as 'birding') and once had a muttonbird shed on Big Dog Island. That island now belongs to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, and is a place few may visit. Fortunately, through marriage, there is still a Willis shed allowed on Big Dog—Giblin was allowed to visit this place, and much of the work in her latest project, *I Shed My Skin, a Furneaux Islands Story*, reflects this unique experience.

Giblin's art practice takes in photography, painting with ink and watercolours, and lithographic printmaking. Her exhibitions generally contain all formats with many inter-connections. Her lithography work is central, with photography often made as reference material for the prints and paintings. The practice of making strong, defined marks (integral to the

lithographic process) is reflected in her painted images: lines are vigorous and stark and appear as scratches or marks on the surfaces she paints on, her very distinctive gesture readily visible in both mediums. Giblin's work is always visceral, with lines having a brisk, sharp savageness of attack that can underscore the content of her imagery. Previous collections of Giblin's work have examined an interaction between humanity and the natural world. In particular, the focus has been on a narrative where boundaries between these spheres become blurred and where people have lived so far away from other humans that they have begun to shed the trappings of civilisation, beginning to merge with their environment out of necessity. Giblin's history of living in Tasmania for much of her life informs this. She also works with models, making the human form a strong element in her work, juxtaposing this with animal forms and harsh environments, to give the work a rawness that can be dark and confronting.

I Shed My Skin is notably different to Giblin's previous output. Her methods of production have not changed, but this body of work is the culmination of an extended investigation into the artist's family and ancestry. This entails a long personal process of connecting with family who live on or are from the Furneaux islands. Giblin spent time exploring and documenting the lives of people, collating information and writing a large, complex history which will form a section of a forthcoming book. As part of the process, Giblin collaborated with poet Peter Hay, who travelled to the islands, and who created a series of poems as a critical part of this exhibition. Giblin makes a huge jump in her practice by making imagery of 'real' people she came across—not models or people connected with the art world.

Giblin begins her process with black and white photography of herself and of the people she met and visited, plus historical photos of her family. These resemble traditional portraits. These indicate the 'skin-shedding' of the show's title—removing her usual conceptual framework of investigation in order to get to a more visceral realism. For example, in the simple yet affecting image of a dead wombat, encountered by Giblin and Hay in their travels about the islands, the tragedy is already there, implicit in the animal's loss of life. There is nothing Giblin really needs to do beyond showing the stark image. In this restraint and realism, Giblin has perhaps found a powerful form of expression.



Jane Giblin, *Raven on Rock—East End Big Dog*, 2018, lithograph, 37.5 x 26.5 cm, edition of 7. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

Jane Giblin, *The Wombat on The Road*, 2018, lithograph, 38 x 26.5 cm, edition of 8. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

Jane Giblin, *Big Dog, White Eye*, 2019, lithograph, 22 x 20 cm, edition of 7. Reproduced with permission of the artist.



This exhibition is an exercise in genealogy, social history, and an attempt to capture the inhabitants of very specific pocket of culture. Beyond this though, Giblin stares hard at herself, her identity and history. The remarkable density of the show—Giblin has made an impressive number of images—serves to create a web of connections, names, faces and families. Fittingly the resulting exhibition faced its most critical audience, the people it depicts, in an exhibition at The Furneaux Museum on Flinders Island, and

has since toured to Launceston, Burnie, and Hobart. A publication is forthcoming and will be launched at Colville Gallery, Hobart, in June. Giblin's passionate love for the community she describes and the extraordinary place they inhabit comes across, as does her understanding of what it is to live a life on an island, at the mercy of the wind and ocean.

I Shed my Skin, a Furneaux Islands Story is at Colville Gallery, Hobart, 2 June.

top left

Jane Giblin, *Bradley's Big Dog Heart*, 2018, lithograph, 24 x 20 cm, edition of 7.

top right

Jane Giblin, *The rescued calf*, 2018, lithograph, 31 x 23 cm, edition of 5.

bottom left

Jane Giblin, *Yaron in the Pluck Shed*, 2018, lithograph, 29 x 24.5 cm, edition of 7.

bottom right

Jane Giblin, *Valentine Willis, Still got that Squeezing habit*, 2018, lithograph, 25 x 20 cm, edition of 8.

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