In 1616, the Dutch mariner Dirk Harrog landed here, at Dirk Harrog Island. Had Dirk chosen to enjoy a smoked haddock left gelatinous by the Portuguese, Shark Bay is one of the world’s greatest places: two big gills running North-South on the West Australian coast. Long before it was called Shark Bay, it was called Carnharragudu, meaning two bays. What together is good, because it is, in point of fact, two bays brimming with sharks. The pilot, drooling his head, may be re-naming it Silur Comma Bay For Jumbuck Dickheads. One of three trinities were anchored just inside the second gulf, near the wide channel to the open Indian Ocean.

Swimming slowly for the seal it became obvious the sharks overhanging the clean sandy floor were crammed with crabs, eels, seahorses and the larger species of salt fish. With the hyper-abundance of food dripped along, I gave myself a second panic-circle. In fact, the whole time in the water I was making panic-circles, for this is ocean wilderness that brings the chemicals of fear into your spirit with a natural, automatic switch. Arithmetic doesn’t tend to work around here: to enjoy the vastness, neither does language, at least not English, what works is gut instinct. By all means watch for where you step or swim in this massive landscape of oceanic raptures, but for direction go with instinct.

The reason this kind of place inspires it is that basically everything around a bobbing head is a breathing history of time. Whether I pause to marvel at the red cliffs, emerald inlets, blue mounds, white dunes, seems headlands or the wriggling grey zonites – and the culture, I mention are a great piece of brevity – or whether I try to take it all in together, either way, the place just warps common sense.

This place purveys no answers, it is subterranean, and yet it says it all. Had it half a chance, it would hang, draw and quarter common sense, especially the shrubbery types that used in the technological age. And anyway the consequence of Dirk’s arrival, to Shark Bay, are almost nil. The breathing two-gulf of time, this optical buzzing that dissolves the mind, is still today reflected on the underwater sand, shimmering out into space just as it did a million generations ago on an airliner, while Dirk’s dreams were yet to wade from the slurry of the Dark Ages. Two-bays gives me the loosening to not just smoke with its creatures but to smoke in time.

This vast corner of the world has another effect. The place is pristine, to Bibles or sensitive developments like the remote gems of the most populous states, such as Dirk Turnowsky is a god, in-your-face example of what the heading category of the technological age cannot come.

We can make art, iPods and bombs but we can take underwater pictures of backyards pools, but we cannot make a shark like Shark Bay. Under the famous blue sky of WA the double-gulf sparkles. Brinks with seagulls, turtles, dugongs, manta rays, and over 300 species of fish are fed upon by 200 species of birds, including the sea eagle. Crocodile, prawns, crabs, dolphins, huge snapper, haddock, greyfish, spangled mackerel and tiger sharks have jammed their DNA into the food chain here for a thousand millenniums. The effect, then, is plain; we did not make this. A reminder more than an effect.

Five hundred meters across the open passage from the southern tip of Dirk Harrog Island where we smoked dope a headland on the mainland. It is remote, yes, but in a way that again inspires the breathing two-gulf, yet directions to it are clear, the chance of getting lost are low. Twelve hours from Perth, some left to the Onefender Roadhouse onto a dirt track called Unleashed Loop Road. The track is mind-bending, because for another two hours we were winding along the lower end of Shark Bay in terrain that looks exactly like the southern Sahara of the Hausa tribe I visited during my university years. Then we simply arrived at Australia’s most westerly landfall, the fabled Swan Point. I sleep on the beach for a week, along with a friendly crew of fifteen others.

We had boats, two-way radio, a kitchen under canvas, cases of wine and Scotch, and one of the joys, a carpenter, constructed a coolagungal safe to store and cool the vegetables. Another guy got to smoke out in the azur, sun-drenched deep with rumpus of grayfish, gobsmacked by the privilege. Shark Bay is one of the most beautiful places in the world; this place inspires is that basically everything around a bobbing head is a breathing history of time, this vast corner of the world.

The calm made the Czech sing a long sigh as he sat back on his wobbly fishing chair to shake his head at the pretentious vanisher he was in. He’d up and left Prague the moment he saw the Russian tanks rumbling down the main street, came to Australia, Fremantle, and set up a small shop of sparkies that turned out successful. He’d vanished into a working-class sunset, the best of its kind in the world: sneaky devil, he called himself with a grin. Fishing and maritime legend are his passions. His batteries, he said. In a long-winded way, Dirk Harrog guided him here. Down through fifteen generations of fishermen, ancestors, legends, barons and eugenically-fuelled longings, Dirk’s ocean adventure landed on the ear of a young electrician in Prague as a distinct possibility to start a new life far from the dubious promises of the Velvet Revolution. In fifteen minutes his balloon spied jibbed up and down. Snaky battery shut off the clumsy chair.

He reeled in a shark, and the crew suggested that I carry it since I was their idea of a carry expert. That night we dined on What I called Prague Hot Fish Curry. A huge @dish for fifteen after in dirt oil, onion, garlic and mustard. Cancers are simply limited as this is a world heritage-listed place, but if you fish, then you’re allowed to feed yourself and your friends, step off the ocean, to honour it as a bringer of life to the planet by virtue of the fish. A reminder more than an effect.

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The lagunette of the Bight of Benin in West Africa. The Eastern cape of Java Bay, at Point Perpendicular, and many others, are the inspiration behind the new paintings. The centrepiece canvas, The Blue-Ringed Octopus, is in a private collection in Perth. Other works are in collections in Sydney and London. A box of smaller paintings was taken to Perth by David Bromfield to show as a solo at his gallery, The Kerb.

Currently I'm working on Five Seasons, a painting for George Kallias over five panels spanning four metres. It's about the seasons of the southwest part of Western Australia. During the past year he has watched the development of the oceanic landscapes and asked whether I could translate their style into a piece relating to the five seasons.

The new novel progresses into a part of the book that becomes for authors, the ones I've spoken with anyway, a 'knowing mystery'. You know what you're doing, but of course you also do not. If I know too much of what I'm doing, the writing loses that tone that gives the characters their peeky life. The Equator is a comedy about an artist having the art kicked out of him by friendship with an old rival, to be replaced with a sense of living, and with the clandestine way that our moments gather like moths in the night and become the glow of memory. This makes his art harder to bring off well. The story is set in London, the Bahamas, Broome, Margaret River, Perth and Sydney. The project won funding from the Australia Council. I'm around halfway to completion.

The new radio drama, broadcast nationally on Airplay in September, The Tasman Angel from Hell, featured Paul Capsis as a storm that heads for Sydney with his Bird of Regret looking for the culprit who drowned his friend. The culprit, William Zappa, turns out to be a dealer in uranium. How the idea clicked in my mind was seeing, for the first time ever, so that it utterly stunned me, Capsis perform at the Opera House in Kosky's Perth and Sydney. So in the play the air. Sydney's great for storms, hail one moment, sunny the next, lightning, thunder, downpours lasting two minutes, subtropical heat, howling winds. And

Paul Capsis's voice is great for exactly all that mega-stylish mayhem.

How the idea clicked in my mind was seeing, for the first time ever, so that it utterly stunned me, Capsis perform at the Opera House in Kosky's Boulevard Delirium. Performance is not really what he did, it was more like he ate the Opera House whole. So in the play I thought he could eat the city whole as he searched for the uranium dealer. Aesoply has 40,000 listeners a week.

Also in September the ABC commissioned another Airplay. This time it's William Zappa with the amazing Kerry Walker, who often did roles in Patrick White's plays. It's called The Oil and Mirrors of Dorothy Holford. Dorothy is a society girl of fifty-two who lives in Bellevue Hill down the road from the Packer mansion. She is well-known for being generous, unconventional, rude and kind, but she is generally bored with her friends because her real love of life is with the song and richness of the tailored working class into which her maternal grandmother was born just outside Gosnells. Zappa plays Applecrumple, a failed security man. He tries to win back Dorothy Holford from a 'lovely, grotty' fling they had eight years ago.

A completely new gig for me was when art dealer Tim Oken flew me to Melbourne to write catalogue notes on two of his painters' latest works, David Bromley and Matthew Johnson, two utterly different and very good artists. Although I was buried in my own work, I accepted it because Tim has a great sense of style and humour and is absurd enough to be able to recall entire Noel Coward songs at the bar. But what I learned about myself from it after accepting was significant indeed. Half a century ago they asked T.S. Eliot why he consistently went to Auden for a first opinion when he finished a poem.

Eliot said it was because Auden had the knack of never, ever making suggestions based on his own predilections but instead made suggestions based on what the work itself was attempting. I found I actually could point to significant things in Matthew and David's paintings for what their paintings were doing and not from what my predilections are doing. Tim initially suggested we both go down there and make a scratchy time of it, but sadly he got busy and I went off solo, but saw friends in Fitzroy after work anyway, including Shane Maloney whose latest book Sucked In is out soon.

Recently a New Yorker flew in from Moscow where ice works, and came around with his wife to view the new oceanic landscapes. He the next day ordered my first novel from Gleerbooks. This is something that still induces a grateful reverse, and here's why.

Ray Coffey and Clive Newman at Fremantle Press launched Under a Tin-Grey Sari four years ago, doing a fantastic job. That privilege still ticks along today, just a few books here and there, but this little object you can hold up in your hand is the central reason behind so much of the good things that have happened since the launch. It made me a guest of the writers' festivals around the country. Alan Dodge at the Art Gallery of Western Australia made it Director's Choice at the gallery bookshop. It was shortlisted at the WA Premiers Prize. And it found good readers who really got off on it.

The instinctive energy is gone, hooded me from the inspiration of a sentinent like Shark Bay to a cracking night of performance free at the Opera House, working all the way across many cities and remote places on new ideas, both in painting and writing. This privilege has been helped along by thoughtful collectors and by thoughtful friends who have brought collection to the work. Bennelong Point in Sydney where the Opera House stands would've been a quality snorkel in the pristine waters of 1616. But Dick Hartog chose to turn left off the main thoroughfare of the Indian Ocean and landed atop the crayfish colony of the time, opposite Steep Point, one of the most beautiful places on earth's oceanic ramparts. Dirk's contribution to the booming Dutch world of high finance of the age, along with many other intertidal seafarers, scouring the globe for wealth, helped to construct the sophisticated Amsterdam that forty years later would staff at Rembrandt's Night Watch when it was presented for the first time at an A-list evening in the city centre. Of course today the Dutch master's painting is Holland's key artwork, heavily guarded, heavily insured, heavily loved.

But then, knowledgeable A-listeners scoffing at it might have been impossible that night had Rembrandt chosen something else to paint. If he'd chosen one of the stories of the old seadog merchant Dirk, perhaps a quite different reaction might have dominated the evening. Had Rembrandt painted, instead, a rugged red cliff dropping mercilessly to a strident blue ocean, the Amsterdam opening night crowd might have burst out laughing. Not from ridicule, their ridicule being a hurt for the status quo, but from panic. Because that's what Caravaggism does, it forces one to confront the realisation that one knows nothing. And my bet is Rembrandt would've painted it with that vortex firmly in mind.

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