



NG Art Gallery FB posting: A fabulous occasion! Ian Milliss' Speech officially opening [Mai Nguyen-Long](#)'s beautiful work 'Neat Severances' now showing until the 29th November at NG Art Gallery Chippendale.

"When I began thinking about tonight I had to think through why it is that I like Mai, and why I like her work.

I've known her since the late 1990's when she first started showing with Ray Hughes and that is much of her life as an artist. Over that time her work has gone through three distinct phases. It has also managed to generate quite a lot of controversy, which seems so strange when you know her and what a quiet and modest person she is, humble and shy even. But I think the fact that she has also generated a lot of controversy and has withstood it and grown through it points to what I want to emphasize in opening this exhibition, the fact that above Mai is an incredibly courageous person, courageous in the most important way possible which is courageous in facing herself, her own history and psychology, and then pursuing that deeper and deeper event when the product of that process is confronting for other people, even when their response is aggressive and bullying.

When I first met Mai she was a good artist but one thing I have often said is that being a good artist really is worthless, it doesn't count for anything, the world is overloaded with good artists, being good only gets you to the starting line. It's what happens next that matters and you can always see that point where a better than good artist breaks through, makes that rupture that brings out something much deeper in them more significant, more revealing, more vulnerable. That happened first with Mai's dogs, they weren't like anything else around, they made no sense in terms of any known art world fashion or trend, but they made enormous sense in terms of Mai coming to grips with parts of her personal history and because that history was shared in problematic ways with many others they were threatening to at least one small group of people incapable of being as open as she was.

But in fact she turned that into a triumph in itself, I think her burning of the dogs was one of the most extraordinary moments of recent Australian art history. And that scorched earth then produced the beginnings of the works we have here today. It's a bit obvious to say they are visceral, even though they are so, both visually and metaphorically but they are so many things, like microscopic examinations, like maps, like strange fragments of greater patterns. One of the things they remind me of is the patterns found on the soft insides or aboriginal possum skin cloaks, each possum skin marked with an ochre pattern, denoting the country of the animal I think. That's the thing; there is so much complexity so much that can be read in these images.

And above all they don't fit in. I don't want to say that Mai doesn't fit in, as we all know she is charming and does fit in but good art never fits in at first, only mediocre art fits in, is immediately comfortable because really it is just something you know already. This work doesn't really look like anything you know already, there is no fashion like this. That's what good art is, different to anything you know already because it's about the world and the world is always becoming different to anything you know already.

But just one last small point. This is actually the second time I have opened one of Mai's shows and I am sure she has asked me just so I can make up for the horrible trick I played on her last time by devoting my whole speech to making a big fuss about how she could never be like us other Australians, her supposed exotic origins and supposed refugee status. I was of course joking about her being a Tasmanian. I hope she... and her parents and brother... have forgiven me for that irreverent take of identity and the superficial absurdity of what passes for discussion of identity in so much of Australia. Mai's mix of cultural backgrounds, her Tasmanian Irish and Vietnamese heritage makes her the quintessential modern Australian and her ability to probe so deeply into that history and herself means she represents the best of what Australia can be, something incredibly important when right now we are going through probably the worst cultural period certainly in my lifetime. So I hope I have made amends tonight. I think she is doing pretty well for a Tasmanian.

So let me recommend this exhibition to you and declare it open."

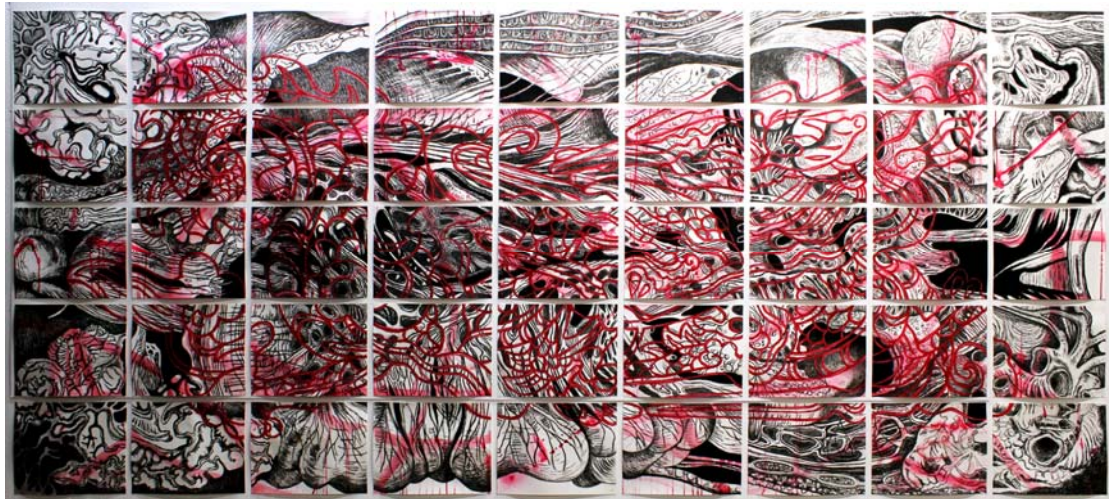
Some of the works on display are included below:





*Imprint*

2014 charcoal, paste, gouache on paper 126 x 200 cm



*Fully Loaded (Is a Dragon a Dragon is a Dragon)*

2014 charcoal, pastel, gouache on paper 126 x 300cm



*Contained*

2014 jars, found & mixed media objects dimensions variable







*Spirit Map Series; Vomit Girl Series*  
2014 pen on paper & other surfaces dimensions variable



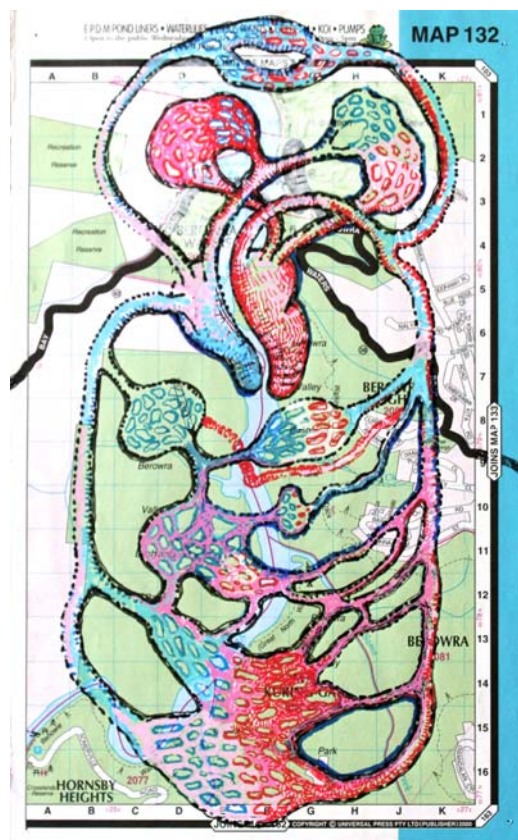
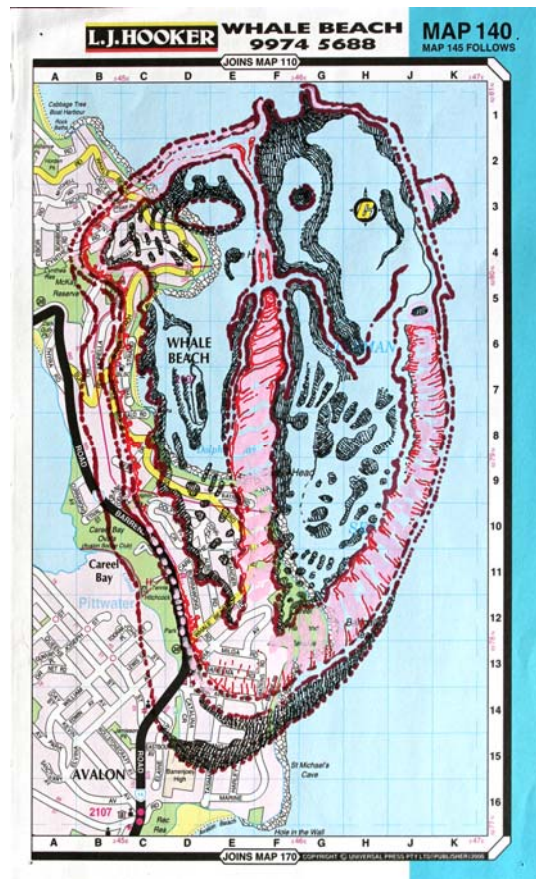
*Spirit Map Series (Triptych)*  
2014 ink, collage on raw silk dzo 25 x 18 (x3)



*Vomit Girl Series*

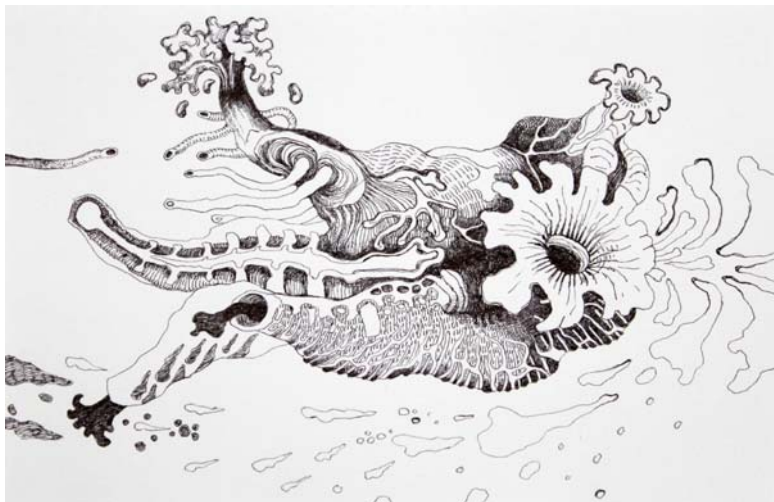
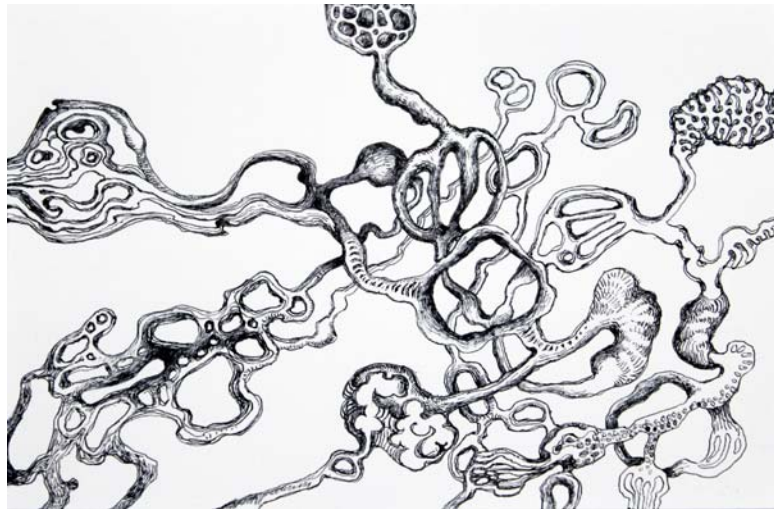
2014 pen on paper; dimensions variable (approx A3, A4, A5, A6)





*Spirit Map Series*

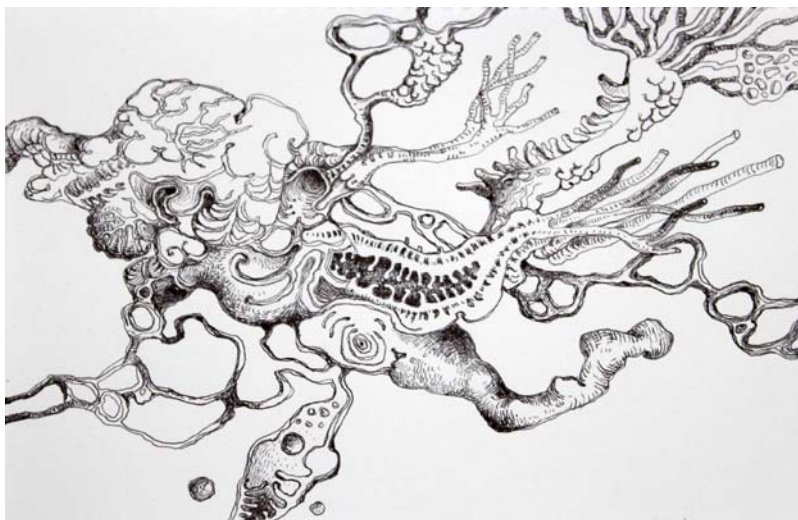
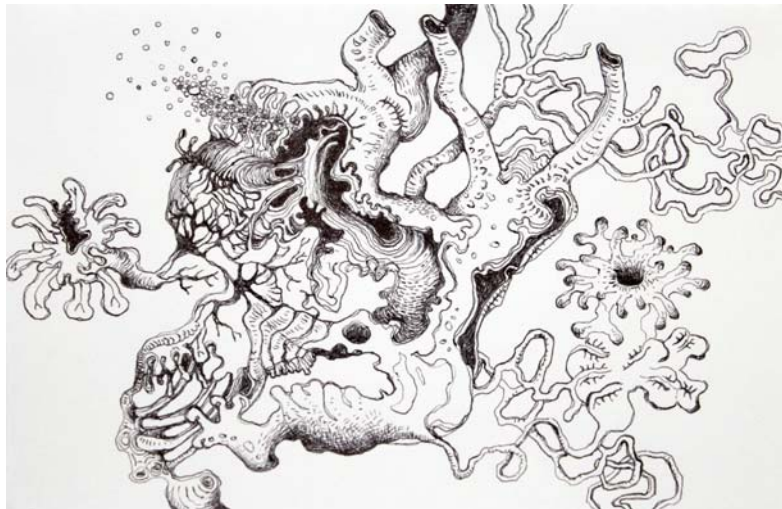
2014 pen on paper; dimensions variable (approx A3, A4, A5, A6)



*Spirit Map Series*

2014 pen on paper; dimensions variable (approx A3, A4, A5, A6)





*Spirit Map Series*  
2014 pen on paper; dimensions variable (approx A3, A4, A5, A6)



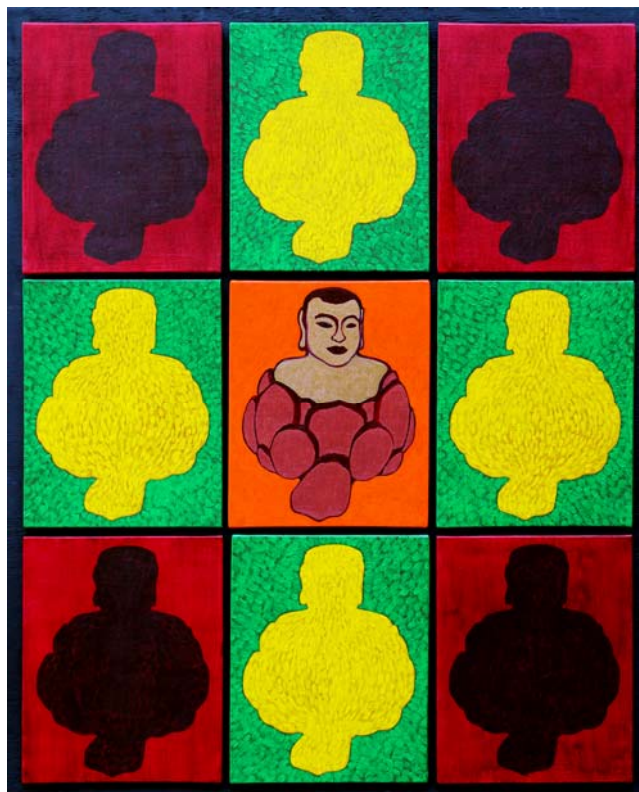
*Family*  
2014 found and collected objects 41 x 30 x 18cm





*I Spy*

2014 acrylic paint on canvas boards 82 x 66cm



*Home*

2014 acrylic paint on canvas boards 82 x 66cm



*Beyogmos*

2014 HDV digital stills, stop animation 05:11:00; charcoal drawing: Mai Nguyen-Long; animation editor: Stuart Horstman; music: "Diem Xua" by Trinh Cong Son, sung by Khanh Ly



*Re-visitation*

2014 pancel, gouache on paper 140 x 100cm