

Introduction to the Work of Eaten Fish

Janet Galbraith*

Eaten Fish has been drawing since he was the age of 4. He is self-taught, having honed his craft over decades. Now incarcerated in Australia's immigration detention camp on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, he is dedicated to continuing his art practice. Art, for Eaten Fish is a matter of survival.

On 17 August 2012, both houses of the Australian Parliament passed legislation to allow offshore 'processing' of people seeking asylum in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. On 19 July 2013, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced a 'Regional Resettlement Arrangement' with Papua New Guinea where all people seeking asylum arriving on or after 19 July 2013 would be transferred to Manus Island or Nauru and would never be settled in Australia.

The power of Eaten Fish's work resides in his careful observation and his skill as an illustrator. Using what materials he is able to access – often just a simple black ink texta or coloured pencils on paper. His attention to detail means that his art work is not made up of arbitrary characters. Each character is a caricature of an individual he comes into contact with in the compound – someone he comes to know intimately.

The arbitrariness and inhumanity of Australia's immigration detention policies alongside the failure of international human rights are clear throughout Eaten Fish's work. The 19th of July figures often, most obviously in 'Before 19 July/After 19 July'. The death of human rights and the failure of International Law to effect protection of human

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rights is also a recurring theme. 'I'm just a REFUGEE' highlights the lived effects of the Offshore Processing under a policy of deterrence, a lack of 'fairness', the death of freedom.

On 17 February 2014, Reza Barati was murdered by people who had stormed the detention camp. Reza is often remembered in the drawings. Hamid Khazaei, whose death due to lack of medical care, negligence and unsanitary conditions in the camp, is also a recurring figure. There has been no justice here: no one has been brought to justice for the murder of Reza Barati, nor for the death of Hamid Khazaei. In "I don't want to be next", Eaten Fish voices the collective fear of many people incarcerated in Australia's immigration detention system.

The depiction of small moments and intimate interactions resists, as Safdar Ahmed of the Refugee Art Project says, 'a monumentalist approach to history'. Eaten Fish's series on children are simple, beautifully drawn images that cut through any rhetoric. These images bring the viewer into a point of connection as they highlight the intimate harms of a system that imprisons children and babies indefinitely.

With bans against media and little access to communications the drawings of Eaten Fish are a voice of resistance, exercising his agency against particular experiences of laws that would attempt to silence and present him as a non-person. The profundity of his work, for me, is in his ability to strip away rhetoric and draw from the heart calling into question the propaganda of the Australian Government that would present him and others as illegal.

Artist's Statement

Eaten Fish is a sensitive and courageous young artist who perceives both the fine details of his environment and observes the large issues that impact his and others' lives. He suffers considerably for the sake of free speech and expression continuing to hope that his goal for freedom will be achieved.

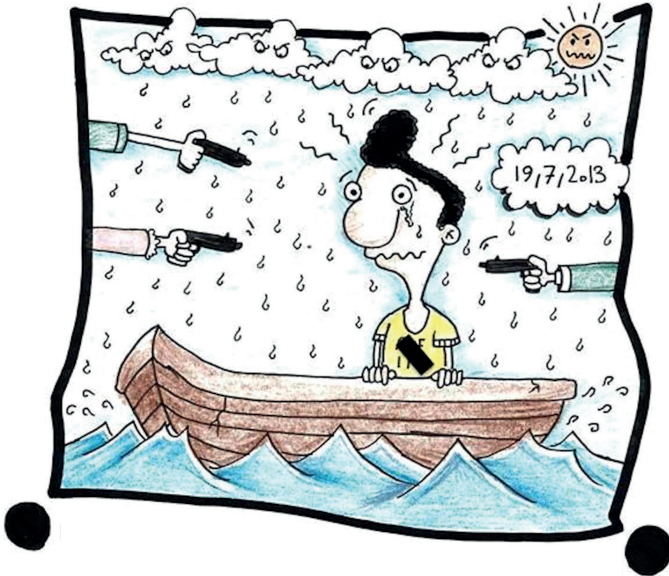
People detained in the Australian Immigration industry are referred

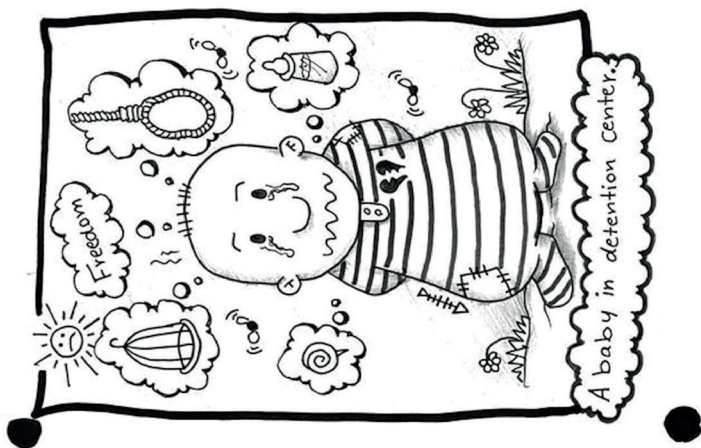
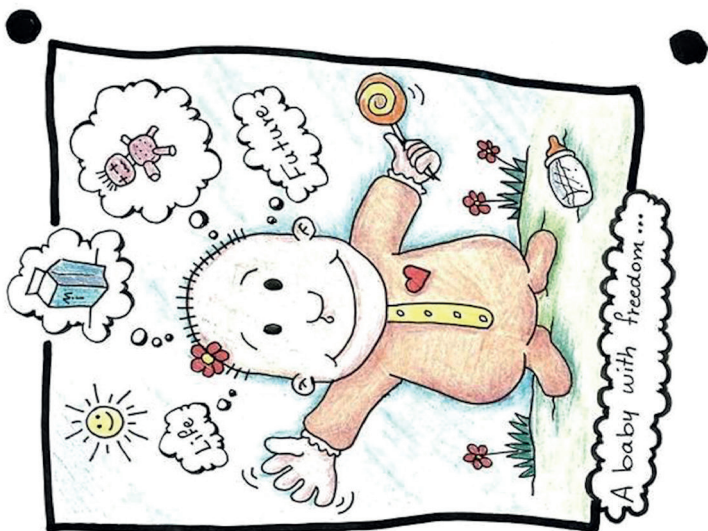
Galbraith

to by number, not name. Eaten Fish often signs his art work with the number allocated him by Australian Department of Border Protection. He says: 'it is XXX XXX who is making this art not the real person'. As it is not safe for the artist to be identified we have redacted his boat ID number and family name that are part of his art work.

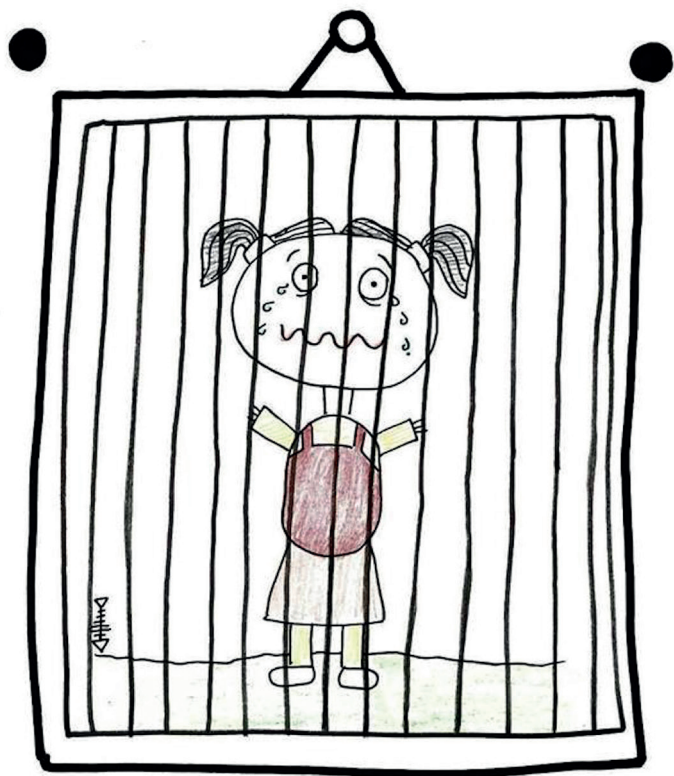
Notes

- * Janet Galbraith is a poet and founder and co-ordinator of Writing Through Fences

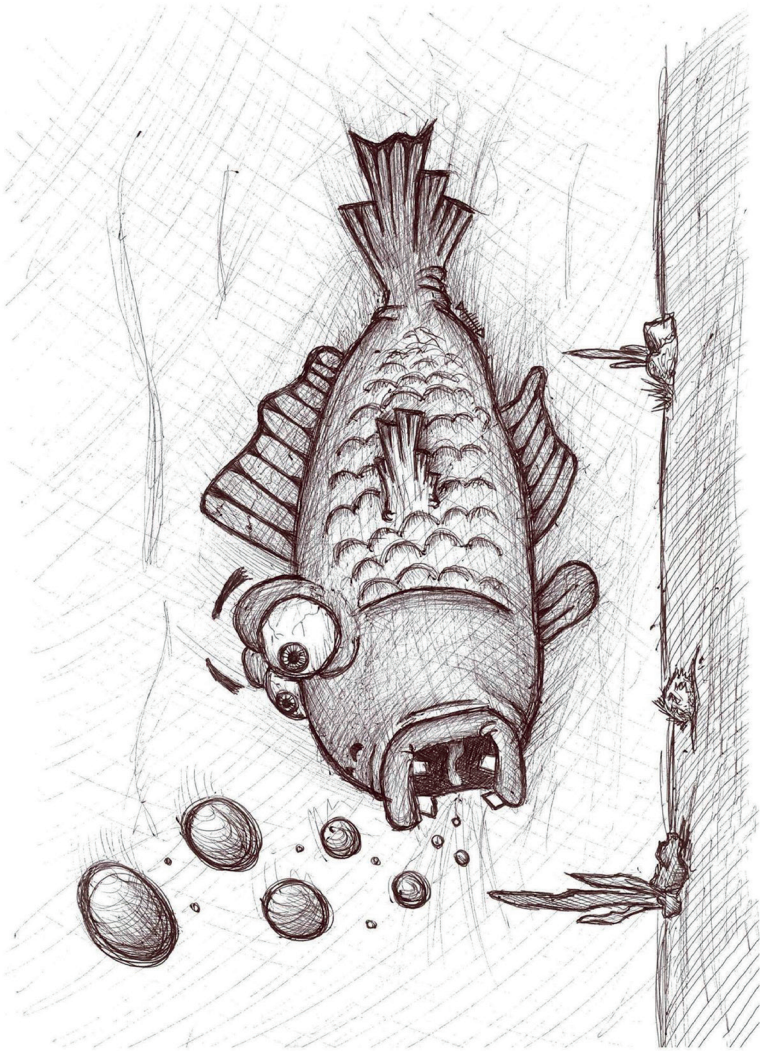




Eaten Fish



≧Children need some≦
more kindness



Eaten Fish



OFFSHORE PROCESSING CENTRE



* DOB: ~~11/07/1991~~



I don't want to be
Help me...
NEXT...



* THIS CARD MUST BE DISPLAYED AT ALL TIMES *

Eaten Fish

