



David Lynch begins his book on meditation and creativity with some reflections on fish.

*Ideas are like fish. If you want to catch little fish, you can stay in the shallow water. But if you want to catch the big fish, you've got to go deeper.*<sup>(1)</sup>

Deeper down, Lynch says, the fish—like ideas—are stronger, more powerful; they are “huge and abstract.”

As Lynch suggests, in order to talk about ideas, surrealist or otherwise, it's helpful to start with the things we know about. At Gloria Knight—a gallery run by artist-professionals in central Auckland—a 51-inch TV monitor playing a ten-minute video sequence is mounted on the cross-bars of two large steel fish, the outlines of which stand either side of a vinyl banner that reads, “Fish For The Future.” This shiny, galvanised copy of the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) fishing limits sign, posted at marinas all over the country, has had a couple of modifications. Apart from the obvious addition of the screen, its enormous fish ends now pivot on castor wheels and the QR codes across its top bar link not only to the websites of the MPI and Westhaven Marina, but also to those of Wes Craven and Eddie Clemens. The sign (it seems) is mobile,<sup>(2)</sup> networked.

The piped and bent fish sign provides a sculptural ‘setting’ for Clemens’ embedded video work, and as a literal framing device its purpose is two-fold. Carrying marks of its original use, the sign continues to warn against over-fishing and outlines restrictions on the recreational fishing of areas of coastline and harbour. It indexes past and present development of the marina, and subsequently, highlights the further gentrification of the waterfront currently underway. Following the ‘Westhaven Plan’ new walkways will open up the area to the public for wider recreational use, with the ‘public’ for the most part meaning the new inhabitants of a high-end residential development.<sup>(3)</sup> In its new appearance at Gloria Knight, the sign also contains links to the websites of these new ‘sponsors,’ Wes Craven and Eddie Clemens—an inclusion which gives context to the work without disrupting the sign’s function and cites all four sources as sites of appropriation and inspiration.

But if we stick with fish and use the ocean as a metaphor for the mind, as Lynch does, the sign’s symbolism seems to suggest that while the boundaries of ‘recreational use’ are physical, and often useful, play is in the mind of the dreamer, who is limited only by desire and imagination.

The seed for *Wes Craven Marina* was, as the artist tells me, a sequence from *Mulholland Drive*. In this scene—set in a diner called ‘Winkies’—a character recalls his recurring nightmare to a companion. He reveals that his friend also features in the nightmare, which also happens to take place at Winkies, and then to his horror the events he is describing begin to repeat themselves in ‘real’ time, and he loses control as his body moves toward the trauma of the *something* lurking at the rear of the diner. In one of Clemens’ daily walks along the waterfront, likely checking the progress of the building of the promenades, he wonders if Sitting Duck Cafe, with its fake crocodile and real fish and the homeless guy living in the bushes on the bank between the highway and dumpsters, is Westhaven’s ‘Winkies.’

In the ensuing months, a video is made starring the artist as he remakes an earlier film-favourite wherein reality is made the stuff of nightmares. ‘Key moments’ in the urban redevelopment of Auckland’s waterfront are made the visual clues of a larger, more sinister (and more fun) situation. A montage of cut and copied footage—pirated film clips, alternate endings and making-ofs, brand analyses and DIY prop-making exercises—relays the contents of a crazed dream-sequence. Clemens’ moving picture produces an experience of video that lies somewhere between having spent too much time on Youtube and the watching of a film trailer, and can be loosely defined as an attempt to ‘trailer’ a cautionary tale about the loss of innocence inherent in the slow gentrification of Westhaven Marina. But its appeal to the excess of collage and the desire to find uncanny connections between collateral observations and distractions that occur in the process of producing the work—the relationship, say, between the green construction spray paint that decorates the pavements where the promenades will be built, and Monster Energy Drink—identifies with how Lynch talks about the way an idea for a film comes in fragments.

*Desire for an idea is like bait. The desire is the bait that pulls those fish in, those ideas. [When] you catch one fish that you love, even if it's a little fish, a fragment of an idea, that fish will draw in other fish.*<sup>(4)</sup>

The footage for *Mulholland Drive* was originally shot for the purposes of making a pilot for an open-ended television series, but the project lost support from the network and Lynch made a film instead. A returning theme in his films of the same period, one which has become a defining aspect of his surrealist style, is the blurring of dreams and reality. Characters (or viewers observing the plot) aren't sure whether they are dreaming or awake, or which of these states (if it could be known) would be more helpful for making sense of things. This "dream-logic" also gave Lynch a practical way to ignore the conventions of linear narrative and go about his intuitive, unrestrained process of gathering material for a film.

*Wes Craven Marina* takes the cult hero of the Nightmare on Elm St franchise, Freddy Krueger, and drops him into Westhaven. But already the choice of film and character—a pre-CGI slasher movie, complete with laughable special effects and labour-intensive prosthetics, and the readily-identifiable 'Freddy' in his red-and-green sweater—lends itself to the kinds of amateur spin-offs imaginable in teenagers' front gardens everywhere. This re-makability is indicative of the artist's desire to transform objects. In abstracting the contents of his surroundings he sees particular objects for their possibilities as things-in-themselves and metonymically shifts their meaning to reshow them as props and visual clues of an alternative narrative. A Girl Scout shed bears a suspicious seahorse in red, the Harbour Bridge becomes 'the coat hanger,' a "No Wake" sign at the entrance to the marina seems to suggest a state of non-return, and a brand of energy drink becomes the sign of the devil. Indeed, *Wes Craven Marina* seems to suggest that objects can be both cheerful and eerie, derivative of the way that suburban objects and locations might be both ordinary and unsettling in Lynch's films. However, the artist's portrayal of Westhaven is closer to a pastiche of a Lynchian setting, combined with the energy of an over-identifying fan who remakes props and costumes from their favourite Hollywood fantasy, or a guy that serially films himself unboxing hi-tech gadgets at home for thousands of followers on Youtube.

For Lynch, film is an emotive and intuitive experience that should stand alone: in order to enter into the world of the cinema as a viewer, all you should need is the work. But Clemens flips this on its head—physically entering the work by making it about remaking the work. Watching the makings of, extended scenes, production footage, and whatever he can find online, he then casts himself and his environment as props to carry the film's brand out into the world.

Co-opting an existing narrative for its meme-like qualities can have a flattening effect, and this is something that tends to happen among many contemporary practices grounded in an internet aesthetic. Fortunately, however, it doesn't seem to be the result for *Wes Craven Marina*. The artist's energy for real objects, and making stuff, seems to enable him to retain playfulness. The moment in the garden in which the leaves turn red while Freddy's supposed to be spray-painting his sweater, and the scene where his claws get wet when Freddy jumps off the bridge, are warm-jokes about the absurd situation of being an artist. *Wes Craven Marina* thus resists a collapse under self-referentiality because Clemens permits the work to breathe, allowing unplanned moments and side-tracking to occur while pushing ideas to playful extremes.

**Rebecca Boswell 2014**

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(1) "Catching the Big Fish (Full Audiobook)," accessed 11 July, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QsTnxUTx7U&feature=kp>

(2) In unseen footage the artist rolls it from his house on Hackett St, Saint Marys Bay down to the AJ Hackett Bungy hub, around to Westhaven Drive and Sitting Duck Cafe to its final destination, Gloria Knight in Madden St, completing a sculpture tour of original locations for his film.

(3) Anne Gibson, "Auckland waterfront plan slammed as 'ghettos for the rich,'" *The New Zealand Herald*, accessed 6 July, 2014, [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=11287247](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11287247)

(4) "Catching the Big Fish (Full Audiobook)."

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