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MILKED SPILL 7

Chris Wallace on what drives leadership reporting

SINGLE OREGON 20

Helen Razer on *Portlandia's* comic critique of hipsterdom

CIVIL UNION 31

David Pocock talks rugby, protest and privilege

Nauru Salvos neglect PTSD staff

Young and untrained, they were sent to work in detention centres. They saw atrocity and were harassed, returning disturbed and uncared for. *Chris Shearer* reports.

The first thing Nicole Judge noticed when she arrived on Nauru was the poster on the wall. It described the procedure for using a specialist Hoffman knife, with a hook-like blade designed to quickly cut down someone trying to hang themselves.

"I will always remember that," Nicole says, "because that's when it first started to dawn on me that it wasn't like a fun holiday."

A few days earlier Nicole was a psychology student and salesperson at JB Hi-Fi. It was through a Facebook ad shared by one of her university friends that she became aware the Salvation Army was looking for young people to work on Nauru.

"It looked really cool," she says of the Salvation Army advertisement. "They said on the ad, 'Come to Nauru, work with asylum seekers, meals paid for, accommodation paid for, bring your friends', pretty much."

Nicole called the number provided and spoke to an enthusiastic Salvation Army representative. She remembers the process as being very informal; she felt like she was the one doing the interviewing. The person on the phone didn't ask about her experience. They asked if she could leave the next day and whether she had any other friends who could come.

She called Chris Iacono and another friend and told them about the two-week paid adventure. Both applied. All three were readily accepted. Nicole received

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STEFAN POSTLES / GETTY IMAGES

Bishop's long play moves to old mate

Julie Bishop finds herself in a unique position: pointedly wedged between two rivals and ready to decide the future of both. By Sophie Morris.

When Julie Bishop cast her vote in the secret ballot on the Liberal leadership spill, she took a precaution to protect herself against any challenge to her loyalty.

The party's perennial deputy leader made a note of the number inscribed on her ballot paper, so she could retrieve it, if necessary, to prove she had voted as promised. In the climate of distrust that surrounded the spill motion on Monday morning, it was a smart move.

Malcolm Turnbull and Julie Bishop in parliament, Monday.



SOPHIE MORRIS is *The Saturday Paper's* chief political correspondent.

Bishop played a starring role in the charade preceding the vote. Not for her the second billing of the best supporting actress. This time she wrote her own carefully worded script, treading a fine line between doing her duty to the leader, while also acknowledging backbench concerns and manoeuvring to preserve her position, whatever the outcome.

Bishop took the same precaution with her ballot when Abbott became opposition leader in December 2009.

Following that vote, she requested the whip dig out her ballot paper to prove to an aggrieved Malcolm Turnbull that she had stuck by him until the end of his leadership.

Her caution is understandable, given that her loyalty was questioned in the days leading up to Monday's vote. She found this deeply insulting.

"I shouldn't have to do this," she reportedly told Abbott when he probed her loyalty in a private conversation, revealed by *The Sydney Morning Herald's* political

editor Peter Hartcher. "I'm not your problem. You're your own worst enemy."

If it is shocking that such a conversation occurred, it is equally fascinating that it was relayed to a journalist. Particularly at a time when the prime minister was publicly insisting they were united against a leadership spill, in what was only the third ever challenge to a sitting Liberal PM, albeit one without a declared challenger.

After defeating the spill motion 61 votes to 39, with one informal vote and one MP absent, a "chastened" Abbott conceded he had survived a "near-death experience" and would heed the concerns raised by his colleagues. He urged MPs to let him get back to fighting Labor, rather than Liberals.

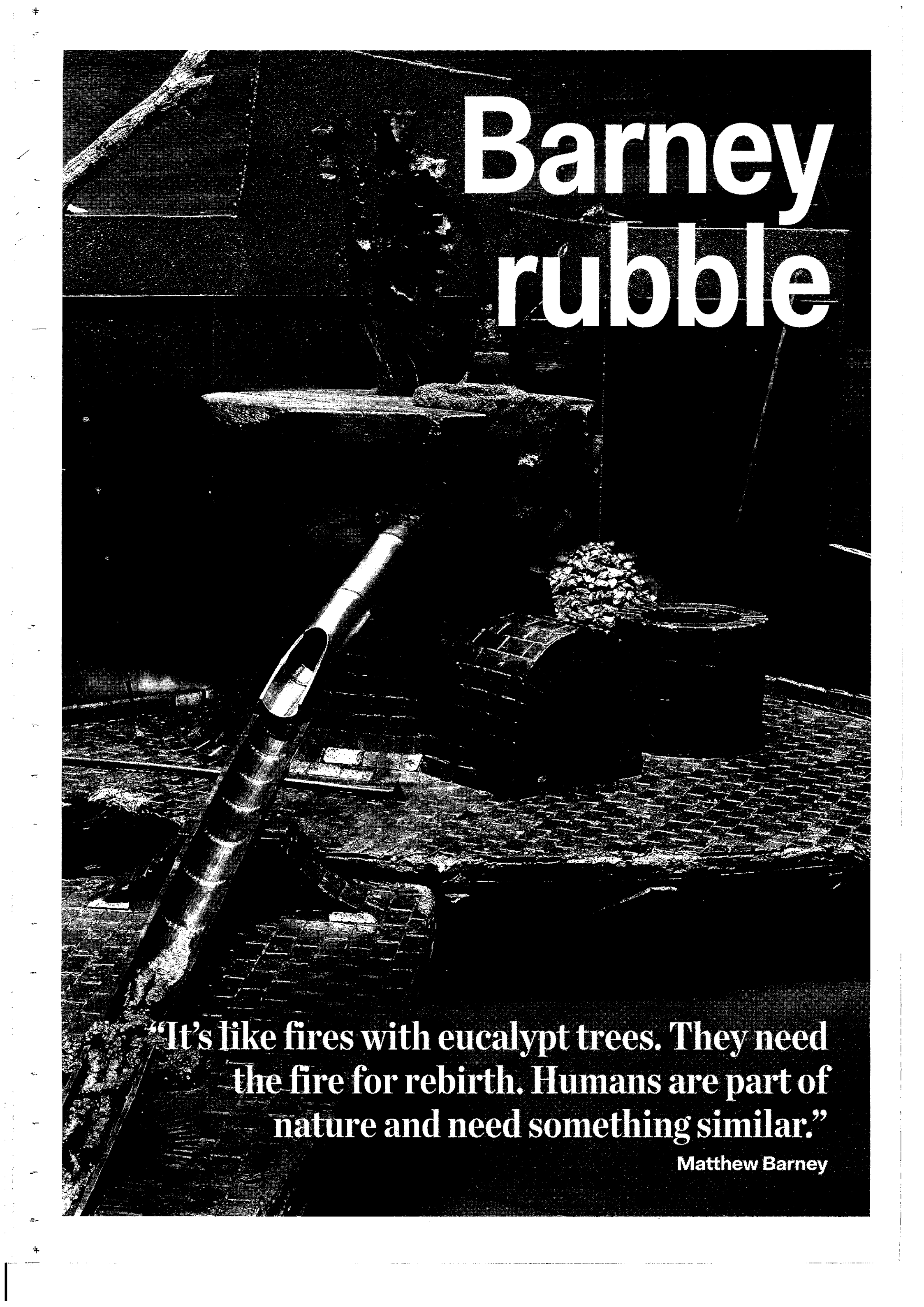
Bishop seemed buoyed by the experience, not diminished.

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MAX OPRAY 8 PAUL BONGIORNO 15 GILLIAN TERZIS 26 MAXINE BENEBA CLARKE 30



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Barney rubble

“It’s like fires with eucalypt trees. They need the fire for rebirth. Humans are part of nature and need something similar.”

Matthew Barney

CULTURE

Confronting artist Matthew Barney seems a perfect fit for Hobart's subterranean MONA. For *River of Fundament*, a film and sculptural exploration of decay and detritus, he was let loose in the gallery's idiosyncratic collection. By Ashley Crawford.

Matthew Barney, once described in *The New York Times* as "the most important American artist of his generation", is in person not what one may expect. A former football player, he is far from physically imposing; indeed, he is of slight build. A former male model for clothing retailer J. Crew, he is not conventionally handsome. But the real surprise is his voice: a slightly weedy, almost high-pitched tonality that makes it difficult to imagine him giving orders to the host of people involved in his latest, and most daunting film/performance/sculptural/installation project, *River of Fundament*.

But give orders he does and, in the bowels of David Walsh's fortress-like MONA in Hobart, he knows exactly what he wants, as massive sculptures are shunted by equally massive machines into the positions he has planned for them. The extra surprise is, in talking with him, that his slightly nasally voice does indeed take on a strange authority and confidence.

Despite the hype, the hubris, the rock-star profile enhanced by his former relationship with the idiosyncratic Icelandic musician Björk, Barney is easy company, quick to laugh. During artists' talks - he held a discussion with David Walsh to a packed audience while in Hobart - he is tentative. One on one, surrounded by his behemoth sculptures, he is quick to respond and sharply erudite.

River of Fundament - both the epic film/opera produced in collaboration with composer Jonathan Bepler, which runs to almost six hours, and the massive accompanying exhibition of sculptures and one-dimensional artworks, including 100 items of Egyptian artefacts from Walsh's collection - is a coup for MONA. While the film had its Australian debut at the Adelaide Festival last year, to reviews that Barney admits perturbed him, this is only the second time anywhere in the world that the filmic and sculptural elements have been shown side by side.

When Barney utilises Walsh's collection, which he does extensively, he describes the process as an "intervention", and he has clearly delighted in it. "I had half expected coming to Tasmania would be a highly parochial and pedestrian exercise," he admits. "Thankfully it's the other extreme. It's hard to imagine another institution in the world being so generous with these interventions."

Among these is his use of a selection of Walsh's encased sarcophagi, over which he has placed zinc covers with rough sculpted holes revealing portions of the ancient coffins below. Atop the zinc plates rest cast and maimed crowbars, "spines" for malformed zinc heads which, while heated, had been immersed in water to explode into amorphous blobs.

Elsewhere, he has selected a number of ancient carved basalt, steatite and stone objects which, in an act of hubris some might argue, he has juxtaposed with his own one-dimensional works on brass and copper.

It is hardly surprising Barney expected a degree of parochialism. The Adelaide showing inspired outrage, with the suggestion made that the festival was assisting in the funding of "pornography". Reviews were decidedly mixed. *The Sydney Morning Herald* piece

was titled "River flows deep with gilt-edged crap" and attacked Barney's portrayal of women. In reality, men in the film suffer far worse physical fates than any of the female characters. Men are sodomised and castrated, and one loses an eye. When a woman is sodomised, she appears to engage in it for pleasure. The two key female protagonists, played by Maggie Gyllenhaal and Aimee Mullins, glide through the proceedings unscathed.

Fundament is a strange blend of Hollywood gloss and contemporary surrealism. Starring Gyllenhaal and Paul Giamatti, and featuring cameos by Salman Rushdie, Deborah Harry and Fran Lebowitz among others, it is based loosely on Norman Mailer's 1983 book *Ancient Evenings*. It is a tale of rebirth and reincarnation and arguably a melancholic lament over the death of the "American spirit".

Mailer had appeared in Barney's *Cremaster 2* as Harry Houdini, and went on to encourage Barney to read *Ancient Evenings*, a book described by most critics upon its release as unreadable. Barney himself admits that he was helped along in his reading by a Harold Bloom review in *The New York Review of Books*. "Bloom definitely gave me a vantage point, a way in," he says. "His other writings on Egyptian mythology were also an influence. One of the reasons I was attracted to Mailer's book is, to be honest, it wasn't something I loved. I could have some distance from it, unlike, say, certain books by Ballard or DeLillo."

The English author J.G. Ballard is often mentioned in the context of Barney's work, especially his classic surrealist psych-fi novel *Crash*, which was adapted to film by David Cronenberg. "I was asked by *Artforum* to review Cronenberg's *Crash*," Barney says, "but there was no way I was going to like Cronenberg's version. There was no way I was going to like my version. *Crash* remains one of my favourite books. There were also those wonderful RE/Search books, which were definitely an inspiration."

Barney's referencing of RE/Search, a countercultural publisher in San Francisco that produced anthologies featuring the likes of Ballard, William S. Burroughs and the industrial performance group Survival Research Laboratories, shines light on his fascination with the obscure corners of American culture. This leads us into a segue about our both having met SRL's leader Mark Pauline, whose thumb was infamously blown off during a performance and was replaced with one of his toes. Recalling shaking hands with Pauline leads us both into a brief silence.

Born in San Francisco in 1967, Barney moved to Idaho with his family at the age of six. After his parents divorced, he lived with his father in Idaho, playing football on his high school team and visiting his mother in New York City, where she introduced him to art and museums - an unusual intermingling of sports and culture that clearly informs his work as a sculptor and filmmaker.

After graduating from Yale in 1989, Barney entered the art world to almost instant controversy and success. He is best known as the producer and creator of the *Cremaster* cycle, a series of five films with a gruelling duration of 403 minutes. *Cremaster* was made over a period of eight years (1994-2002) and culminated in a major museum exhibition organised by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

With its cornucopia of bizarre and surreal imagery, and despite its arduous nature, the *Cremaster* cycle inspired critical, and largely positive, comparisons to such filmmakers as Ingmar Bergman, Jean Cocteau, Luis Buñuel and Alejandro Jodorowsky. The second and third of the films revolve around specifically American themes, as does *River of Fundament*. I ask Barney whether the three films are something of an American trilogy. "Yes, I can see that," he responds with enthusiasm. "There are the themes of Mormonism, the masonic and Egyptology..."

Somewhat perversely, Barney has insisted on lighting his MONA show with the basic fluorescent lights that act as a back-up to the high-tech floodlights conventionally used in the museum, creating the aesthetic of an underground car park. During the installation MONA's curators were quietly grumbling about this eccentric choice which, quite deliberately, does little to enhance the extraordinary detail in the works. But, except for Walsh's senior research curator, Jane Clark, they had yet to see the film, sections of which are shot in just such a setting.

As with the works of one of his heroes, the modernist Richard Serra, one is aware of the sheer weight of these objects. The heaviest, *Rouge Battery*, weighs more than five tonnes. The massive *Boat of Ra*, it's Ark-like structure clearly suggestive also of the Covenant, must be disassembled for shipment. Consisting of 400 items, the reassembly takes two weeks and includes the ladders, or at least crude reconstructions thereof, from Mailer's library, as well as parts of his writing desk. The towropes snaking away

from the craft similarly replicate ropes used in the film to tow a Pontiac Firebird in a Detroit salesroom.

Rot and decay come in many forms in both film and sculpture. In one vitrine sits a "sketch" for *The Case for Saving Detroit*, a number of model cars exuding a black fungal-looking growth. Elsewhere, another case features the rotted remains of the pig from Mailer's wake in the film, the dried epidermis of dead maggots still visible, its teeth painted blue and gold, the apple from its mouth a dry, blackened shell.

This is not the first time Barney has integrated his own work with that of a museum or library. In 2013, *Subliming Vessel: The Drawings of Matthew Barney*, shown at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, featured an array of his works on paper from the 1980s through to the present day with *River of Fundament*. Barney made his own selections from the two host institutions' collections to include in the show, revealing his fascination with often arcane mythology through to contemporary pop and pornography, ranging from a copy of a more than 2000-year-old Egyptian Book of the Dead alongside drawings by Michelangelo and Francisco de Goya through to mutilated copies of *Sports Illustrated*.

The difference for the MONA show is that Barney has been allowed to present almost every element of the film alongside its actual viewing - presenting his celluloid visions in steel, wax, bronze, rope, copper, timber and sulphur.

Never one for allowing personal restraint in his projects, Barney undertook another intervention by employing the Glenorchy women's AFL team to drag a gigantic 2268-kilogram hunk of graphite along the gallery floor, "drawing" a ragged line on the walls that linked the hung works, an umbilical cord of sorts metaphorically joining his own one-dimensional metal works to Walsh's stone reliefs from Egypt.

The overall aesthetic carries a post-apocalyptic sensibility, an almost *Mad Max*-style scenario, the vehicles dismembered, now celebrated archaic documents of a once fossil-fuelled renaissance, reliquaries, objects of theoretical religiosity, relics in a sci-fi world of Barney's making. There is a brief nod to *Blade Runner* in the film's opening scenes of Detroit, with gas flames emitting from industrial chimneys, and more than a few hints of Cronenberg's influence - Barney's puckering arseholes are surely not-so-distant cousins to those of Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*. And then there are the insects. The larvae and pupae are pre-empted in the kitchen of Mailer's brownstone when one of the chefs moves a box clearly labelled "LIVE INSECTS PERISHABLE". Maggots and beetles invade every other scene.

The film finishes on a somewhat lighter note, that of fish spawning in a pristine stream, an ending almost identical to that of Cormac McCarthy's apocalyptic novel *The Road*. "I grew up in Idaho, which is quite close to where Hemingway's cabin was and where the fish spawn, and you knew how it ended up. It was a local mythology," he says.

"Yes, there is a sense of the apocalyptic about it, especially the depiction of the city of Detroit, but there are glimpses of rebirth. There's a strange sense of logic to it. It's like fires with eucalypt trees. They need the fire for rebirth. Humans are part of nature and need something similar."

Having only visited Tasmania, Barney is curious to revisit Australia. During the afterparty for his show, he asks me whether much remains of traditional Indigenous culture. I tell him that strong remnants can still be found in Central Australia and Arnhem Land and a visit could be arranged. "That would be awesome," he says.

I tell him it's an arduous trip, but he only smiles. "Let's do it." ●



ASHLEY CRAWFORD is a writer, critic and former editor of *World Art*.

