

Seeking Asylum, Staging Withdrawal  
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Over the past four decades, five waves of so-called 'boat people' have arrived on Australia's shores, seeking refuge and protection. This paper compares and contrasts the artistic responses to the two most recent waves in 1999-2001 and 2009-13. More specifically, it seeks to understand why the response to the fifth wave has been so subdued, when the response to the fourth was so voluble. What has changed in the intervening years and why? This paper speculates on the rise of social media, the government's own startling appropriation of fourth-wave aesthetics, as well as the feelings of failure and fatigue that are widespread in the artistic and activist communities. It concludes by reading the recent boycott of the Sydney Biennale as a staging of this withdrawal from/as witnessing.

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Respondent >

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