

## THE FAIRWEATHER RAFT

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RAFT Artspace is named in honour of the Australian artist IAN FAIRWEATHER who fifty years ago arrived in Darwin, and lived in an abandoned hulk at Dinah Beach on Frances Bay not far from here. The Scottish born artist was sixty when he hitchiked from Townsville to Darwin after years of wandering in Europe, Asia and North Queensland. Desperate about the loss of a consignment of his paintings he had sent from London back to Sydney, destitute and distressed he conceived the suicidal plan to sail from Darwin to Portuguese Timor.

Fairweather built his LIT-BATEAU from materials he scavanged from the detritus of post-war Darwin. The ten foot triangular shaped raft had floats made from belly carriers- torpedo shaped aluminium aircraft fuel tanks, the planks were driftwood and washed up timber decking, a bush timber pole made the mast, the square sails were made from parachute silk and the stays were clothesline wire. His provisions were some tinned food, eight gallons of water, a blanket and a change of clothes. To navigate he had a thirty shilling compass and a rudder that proved unworkable. The raft had a freeboard of less than six inches and was too small for him to stand up.

After a couple of unsuccessful attempts Fairweather finally launched himself off at Bullocky Point on a King tide heading into the SE Trades on April 29, 1952. Constantly drenched and forced to lie on the raft his feet lashed to the mast to stop himself falling overboard, he drifted and drifted. By the third day out, his obituaries were being published in the Australian press. By the fourth day he had begun to hallucinate and in his minds eye painted his best paintings.

"The sea was quite black and the haze took on the appearance of a mosquito net hanging down all over the raft through which the stars would move and jump about as the boat rocked, but always the net remained stationary. I could not understand this. On the net I could see lines, drawings of figures behind which danced other figures. I lay and contemplated these for they were better than any drawings I had ever made on land."

Blown off course he missed Timor and was almost swept into the Indian Ocean but on the sixteenth day he washed up on a reef outside Roti. Imprisoned by the Indonesians, he was eventually repatriated to London by the British Consul. In 1953 he returned to Australia and lived on Bribie Island where he painted until his death in 1974. It was in this last period, after his raft journey, that he produced his major works.

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