

The Start of a Gauntlet of Beings.

The Start of a Gauntlet of Beings is a collaborative installation by Kevin Hanley and Euan Macdonald, conceived specifically for Compact Gallery in San Luis Obispo, and re-created for Ditch Projects. The project originates from observation of the light that passes through the given space of exhibition, and from the form of a boat out of local history. In the exhibition space, the gallery floor suggests an expanse of water on which a sculpture with the likeness of a boat has been created. Defined by ambient and artificial light, the sculpture itself, varnished in a phosphorescent compound, becomes luminous in darkness. Illuminated then reciprocating light in darkness, the installation is articulated to the viewer in two distinct ways. In light the fabricated shape and the entire surrounding space, including the gallery walls and floor, appear as a single sculptural proposition. In darkness, the fabricated shape becomes the primary light source and articulates only itself and a reflection in a space of darkness and ambiguity.

The title of the installation comes from a quote by Sandal Makara, the unofficial "Bay Keeper" of the neighboring coastal community Baywood Park, published in the San Luis Obispo County Telegram Tribune, November 11, 1968. "This is the beginning of man — the start of a gauntlet of beings — which has brought us to what we are now." The quote comes from an interview Sandal gave to journalist Milt Hartsell, who unequivocally portrayed his subject as an "eccentric".

"Sous les pavés, la plage" (Under the cobble-stones, the beach) read a celebrated saying painted on a Paris wall during the May '68 revolts. During 1968, as the Vietnam War was raging and Elvis was visiting Hawaii, many in major population centers embarked on social, political, economic and sexual revolt; from Chicago to Paris, Prague to D.C. and beyond. ¹ A climate of change was upon the conventional social orders of the time and forging an existence outside of the mainstream became a popular aspiration, or at least notion, for the young and discontent. Despite the fact that such social experiments would often be abandoned as a result of fatigue or state oppression, some would be able to sustain rare and particular efforts to "drop out" of the larger social order.

Whether attentive to events at the Sorbonne, or likely not, in 1968 Sandal Makara with his son Paka were also circumnavigating a conventional lifestyle; they had "dropped out". Living on a self-made boat, Sandal scavenged, salvaged, fished, made sandals and candle holders, and did other odd jobs to survive. His self-appointment was to monitor the bay he lived on for illegal dumping, threats to wildlife from people and inexperienced boaters exposing themselves to danger. ²

Sandal's home, *Shangri-la* (eventually re-named *Monastery*) cut an iconic presence into the foggy bay; a dark green, angular, self-made 26-foot long wooden boat adorned with its maker's paintings of sea life and scarred by its environment. After living "his way" for nearly 50 years on the bay, in 2004 Sandal died, elderly and ill, on his boat. Within weeks, local efforts to see his dwelling preserved failed, and the boat was condemned. In the small window of time between the craft being beached and demolished, Morro Bay resident artist Stuart Denker photographed, measured and diagrammed Sandal's "Monastery".

It is from Stuart Denker's efforts that Hanley and Macdonald produced a sculpture resembling the boat, visible from its waterline up. The sculpture makes present a form familiar to local residents, that has recently disappeared. The boat, a manifestation of an individual's refusal to live as others, is in the space of this exhibition a memorial. In this case however, *The Start of a Gauntlet of Beings* is not a memorial exclusive to a person, but to the very dynamic of something which only exists in perception, and particular circumstance.

1. Historical reference for 1968: *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968* by David Caute

2. "An August 28, 1972 article in the Los Angeles Times was headlined Man and Son Shun Progress, Live in Harmony With Nature". In 1970 Sandal rescued a man from the breakwater when their 41 foot cabin cruiser lost power before dawn and crashed into the south breakwater. Two other men drowned. A letter to the editor called Sandal a hero." - extracted from San Luis Obispo Tribune staff photographer David Middlecamp's article in The Tribune Photos From the Vault website, sloblogs.thetribunenews.com











