



AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES
ROYLSTON STREET

NEIL CUTHBERT

Bligh

MEDIA RELEASE

Exhibition Dates: 27 May – 15 June 2014
15 Roylston Street Paddington NSW 2021
Open 7 days 10am to 6pm

Neil Cuthbert's large scale paintings, influenced by the notorious mutiny on the *Bounty*, are insightful narratives of social interactions and humankind. With a background as a radio officer in the British and Australian Merchant Navies, and as an avid observer of human nature, Cuthbert is uniquely placed to explore the complex relationships of this infamous voyage.

In 1789 the merchant vessel, the *HMS Bounty*, departed from England's south coast under the command of William Bligh, on a voyage to Tahiti for His Majesty's commercial interests, with orders from the Admiralty and the backing of Sir Joseph Banks. For Bligh and his crew of 43 men the lengthy return passage was to end in mutiny with Bligh bound and the ship taken bloodlessly without struggle. Cast adrift in the *Bounty's* launch by the master's mate, Fletcher Christian, Bligh and 18 loyal men made a heroic sea passage 6,700 km to Timor with little food or water, and no Marine charts.

As Bligh was set adrift he appealed to Christian, once a family friend, saying "you have dandled my children upon your knee". Appearing disturbed, Christian replied, "That, Captain Bligh, that is the thing; I am in hell, I am in hell."¹

Once mutiny was declared each crew member was faced with a life altering decision, to remain loyal or take the unknown fugitive road. It is these individual choices and the question of what drove Fletcher to turn against his old friend and commander which Cuthbert examines through his emotive narratives populated by commanding figures. The viewer is emotionally drawn to the theatrical characterisations of officers with ambiguous features, defined and purposeful by the power of their pristine uniforms; and dishevelled sailors, with thick hands reaching and faces distorted.

Cuthbert's depictions of the souls of the *Bounty* encourage thought on our own innate nature and the choices of man.

Bligh is current until 15 June 2014

¹ William Bligh's Narrative of the Mutiny of the *Bounty*, George Nicol, London, 1970

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