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### **Vasantha Yoganathan, *The Fishermen***

The first photograph I am going to describe is titled *The Fishermen*. It is dated 2013 and is landscape in format. The photograph measures 80cm in height and 100cm in width, which, is around the same width as two kitchen cabinets side by side, and the height of an average kitchen worktop. This is an archival inkjet photographic print on pure cotton paper with hand painted sections in gouache painted over the top.

This photograph has been taken looking out to sea. The horizon forms a horizontal line across the middle of the photograph, with sky at the top, a thin strip of sea in the middle, and light-coloured sand in the bottom half of the composition. Seven figures stand on the sand, busy at work. Their faces, arms and legs are overpainted with bright, solid colours which I will come to shortly.

The calm, pale blue sky fades into a very light covering of almost transparent clouds that hover just above the sea. The deep, rich turquoise of the ocean is a stark contrast to the subdued sky. The sea lightly ripples with the smallest of waves.

At the far right, away in the distance, is a small fishing boat bobbing in the ocean. At the left side, five more small empty fishing boats, closer to the shore, wait in the water. Each one is lit brightly by sunlight on the side of the boat to the left of the photograph.

At the shore, the pale sand is well trodden with footsteps. There are at least six huge piles of nets. At first glance, the nets looked organic – like bunches of tall grasses growing on the sand. On closer inspection, the man-made fibres look to be made from plastic. The majority of the nets are beige, or a very light muddy cream.

To the right of the centre, near the shoreline, there is a net in a very dark green colour. This net hangs over the edge of another small boat, waiting ... almost camouflaged on the sand.

On the right side of the photograph the beige nets are interspersed with much lighter green nets, and black ones too, tied up within creamy nets in varying structural size.

On the sand, just to the right of the centre ... at the bottom of the photograph, there is a pile of around 30 pale pink and white fish. Just slightly further back to our left ... closer to the water, there is another pile of the same fish ... and another, much closer to the ocean, further to the left of the composition. These three piles of fish create a curve in the composition, leading the eye through the photograph from the bottom centre, to the left centre.

To the right of the photograph, further back towards the water than the sand-coloured boat ... is another boat. This one is a slightly bigger fishing boat, with a black bottom ... blue middle, and yellow rim around the top. The boat appears well used – the colours are faded. The blue looks like it was once the same turquoise as the sea. The black is chipped. White and yellow lettering, with a black shadow drop, has been painted across the boat.

A bird perches on the bow of the boat, its black feathers shining in the sunlight.

Three of the figures are on the left side, and the remaining four are on the right. Each figure is consumed with their work – holding, lifting, organising, detangling the array of nets on the sand.

On the left, a figure that looks to be male ... stands with his left arm bent upwards, and his right arm held out almost straight. His back is turned to the camera. His head is tilted downwards, focusing on the work he is doing with the net he holds in his hands. He wears a piece of pale blue and red checked fabric wrapped around his head and a white shirt with a

very pale checked pattern in pink, rolled to the elbows. He wears clear framed glasses, visible only on his left side. His shirt is tucked into a short piece of fabric tied around his waist extending down to the top of his thighs. This fabric has a cooked salmon-coloured pink check, with cream and black lines across it. On his feet he wears black leather slip on shoes. All areas of visible skin – the back of his neck, his arms and hands, and his legs and feet – have been painted in a primary green.

Another male looking figure stands next to the first man, to his right ... on the left side of the photograph. He holds the strings of the same net and faces towards the ocean. His body is turned to his left slightly, towards the direction of the first man. We see the left side of his body and his back. He wears a piece of light green fabric with a pale red check wrapped around his head, and a light brown, silky long-sleeved shirt. A fabric with a very small red and brown check is tied around his waist. His left hand and head have been painted in primary red gouache.

Blocking the view of the legs and feet of this man is the figure of what appears to be a woman. This woman stands much closer to the camera and is larger in the perspective than the two men. The majority of her body is in the left side of the photograph. She leans to her right and her right hand crosses the midline of the composition, onto the right side. Her visible skin – her hands, feet and head have been painted in primary blue.

This woman has her back to the camera, and her body turns slightly to the right as she leans and looks toward the pile of fish to her right. She wears black leather flip-flops on her feet, and a brown cotton long sleeved top. Wrapped from her left shoulder ... under her right arm, and then around the bottom of her body as a skirt, is a yellow fabric, decorated with a small yellow pattern, and much larger pink and blue leaves.

To the right of this woman, closer to the water, stands another figure that looks to be female. She is just to the right side of the composition. Her head, hands and feet have been painted in primary red. She is in side profile ... her body faces towards the left side of the photograph so that

her left side is visible. Her head hangs downwards, focusing on what she holds in her hands. Her hands are held out in front of her ... just to the left side of the photograph. She wears patterned flip flops, and a pale pink fabric, with white stripes and leaf motifs across it. The fabric is wrapped over her shoulders, her arms, around her body ... hanging down towards her feet.

Next along, to the right, there is another figure ... closer to the sea, on the other side of the sand-coloured boat. This person looks to be male. His body is leant over in a curved shape. His left arm stretches out in front of him, holding onto a piece of net with his hand. His right arm is held slightly in front for balance. His head and arms are painted in primary yellow. He wears a pale brown shirt, rolled up at the elbows. Underneath the untucked shirt there are two pieces of fabric, wrapped around his hips as a sort of skirt. The piece near the top is dark brown with a red triangular pattern across it. Underneath hangs a piece of rosy pink fabric. The bottom of his legs and his feet are hidden behind the sand-coloured boat.

Holding onto the same piece of net is another figure at the right of the composition. This person looks to be a young boy, perhaps aged 10. He stands turned towards the last man, next to the colourful boat. He pulls the net in his right arm ... his right hand hidden behind his turned torso. His left arm reaches out in front of him for the net. His head, left hand and legs have been painted in a primary blue gouache. He wears a discoloured, very pale brown long sleeved top, tucked into a piece of fabric, wrapped around his waist like a short skirt. The fabric is black with a repeating orange and green-squared pattern across it. His feet are tucked under nets.

Between the two figures just described, closer to the camera, there is one last figure – who looks to be female. She sits on a pile of nets, with her left foot tucked underneath her. Her right leg is lost in the pile of nets. Her body is turned to the left side of the photograph, and her head is crooked around to look at the figures closer to the sea. She wears a short sleeved rosy pink satin shirt, worn loose over a long black silky

fabric. Her head, hair, arms and left foot have been painted in primary green.

The three primary colours used to paint the skin of the people are the same across the image. The blues are the same blue, the reds the same red, the greens the same green. Each colour is pure. The brush strokes of the paint leave small ridges.

The photographer's long shadow protrudes into the bottom right of the composition.

In a recent Q&A between Vasantha Yoganathan and The Photographers' Gallery Print Sales Team, the artist said:

And I can show one of the acrylic work which is titled The Fishermen, and I remember looking at the pictures, so many pictures, as I was explaining were too classical portraits or scenes of life, and when I had the idea of putting colours over the people over the figures that were moving into the landscape suddenly I realised that it was through colours that the works could become more abstract, and that that abstract quality to the work would bring them to a wider way of looking to the picture. If you had seen this picture, the negative, the film of it you know it's just a scene showing some fisherman by the sea working with the nets, and you doing it as a fisherman daily life picture, but now with the colour added to it you really wonder if they are dancing, if they are walking, if they are ghosts, if they are human, and I was really interested in using colours in that way, to create new layers to the prints, and to the works.