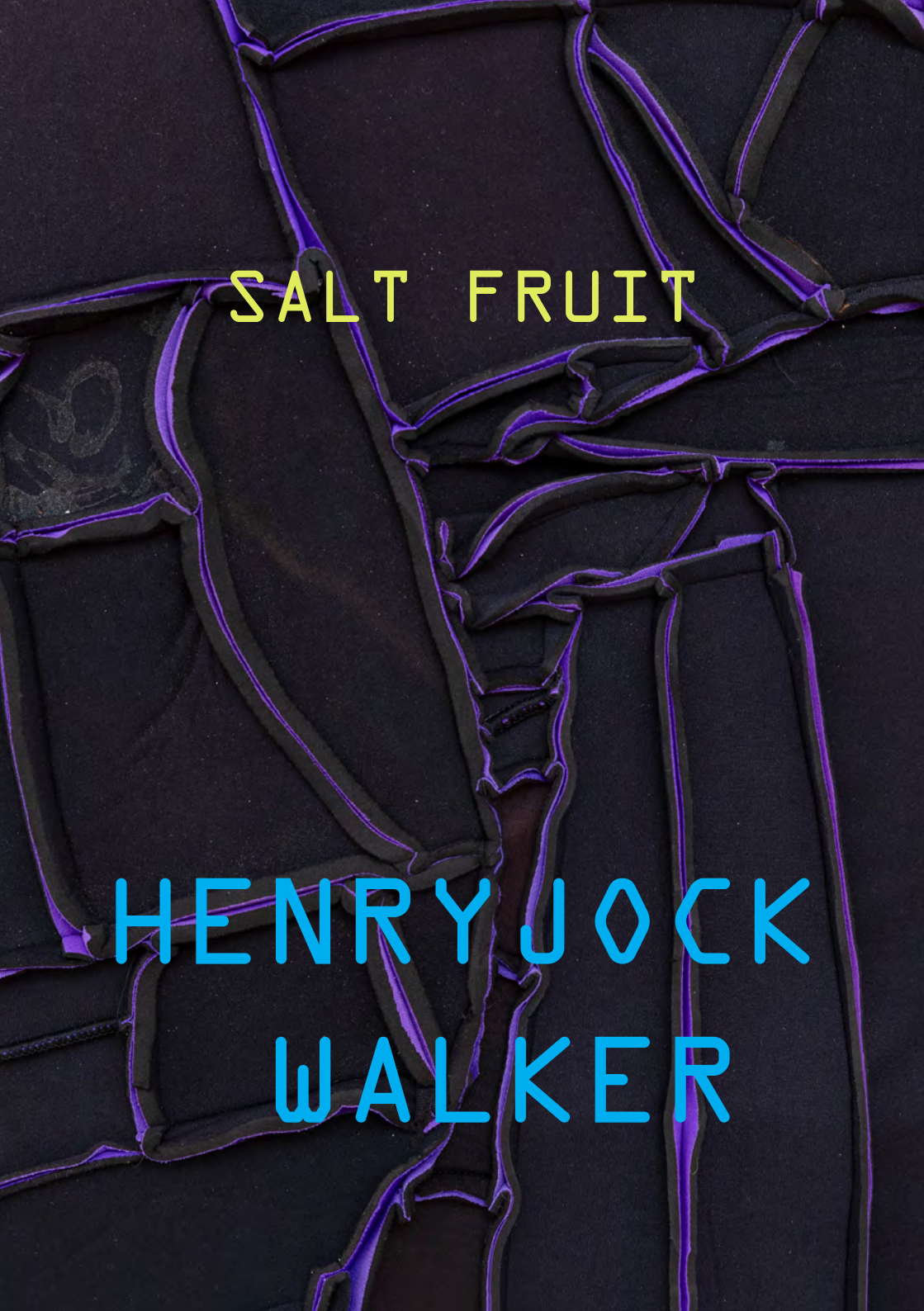

SALT FRUIT
HENRY JOCK
WALKER



Henry Jock Walker's art practice blends into surfing, and his surfing back into art.

An avid beachgoer, Walker's love for the water and riding the waves has framed much of his artmaking practice around the use of neoprene, the fabric used to make wetsuits. Moving from performative action painting at art school and into a world of cutting, stitching and sewing salvaged neoprene, Walker taps into the untold narrative and material qualities of the fabric to express his own relationship to the ocean. Alongside his two-dimensional artworks, his practice spills into other mediums, including soft sculpture, performance, film, and collaborative projects. Reciprocally, his pursuit of surfing flows back into the artistic process.

Salt Fruit surveys a range of important and pivotal works from Walker's career and includes a number of new experimental pieces including Floater (Form 2: Blue Lake Cinematic Canopy), a womb-like canopy on which a video work Seaford Proem is projected through a window in the patchwork. Commissioned by Adelaide Contemporary Experimental Gallery, this performance video work sees Walker clad in a kelp-like wetsuit, submitting to the sea to connect with the salt and the ocean.

Apart from the material itself, surf culture plays a big part in how Walker approaches his artmaking. Intuitive decision-making, adaption, speed and experimentation are all key elements in his practice that align closely with board riding. As such, there is a fearlessness and playfulness inherent in his art, more concerned with following the energy than controlling the direction of the wave.

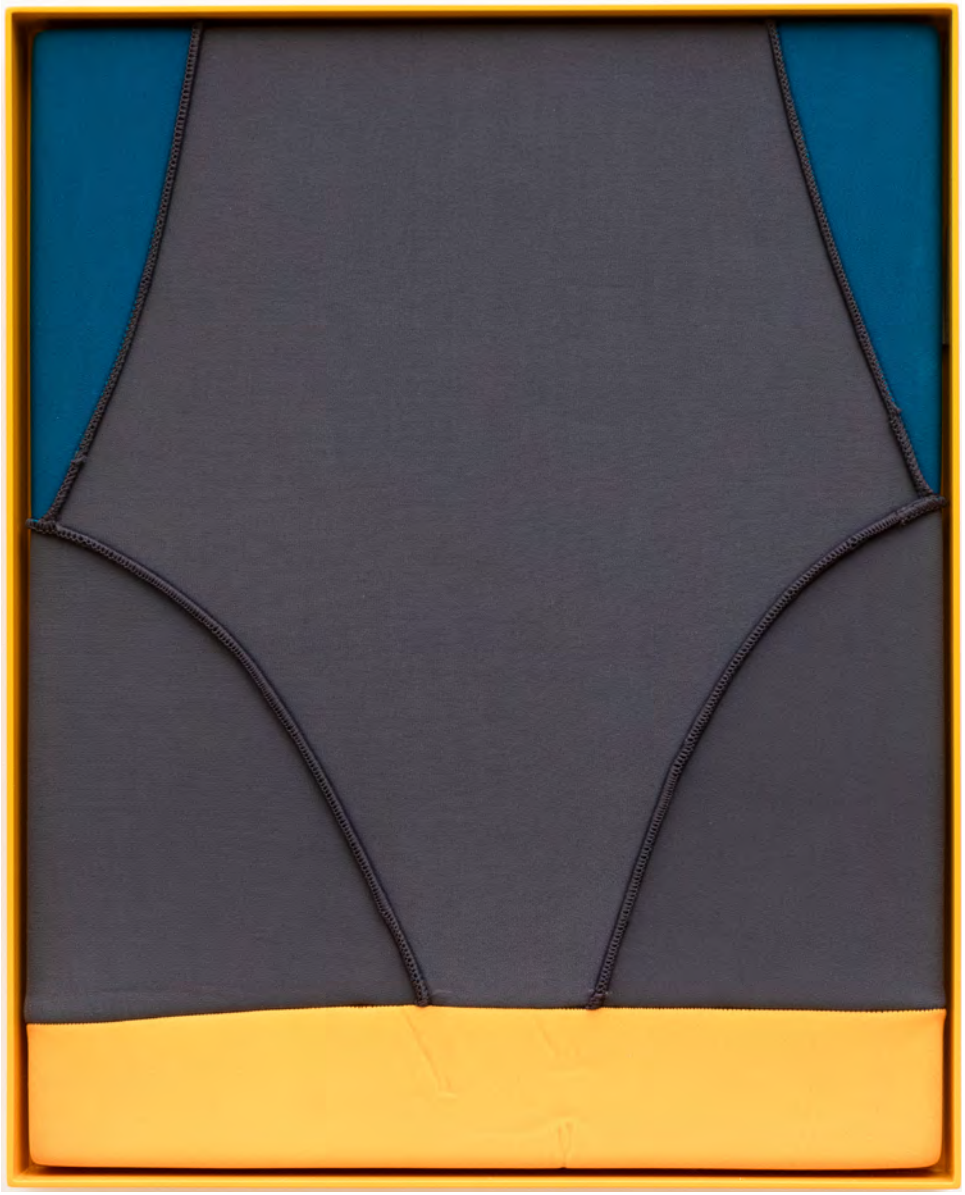
Henry Jock Walker was born in Keith and grew up on a farm in Willalooka, where his parents later bought and ran the local pub and general store. His family were keen on community sports, and his childhood was immersed in tennis competitions and summers on

the beach, riding motorbikes and swimming in the ocean. Walker attributes much of the adventurous energy he brings to his art as being rooted in his childhood, full of passion for the outdoors and a sense of wonder at the natural world.

Studying at the Art School of South Australia (2006-2008), Walker completed an honours year at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne before taking his practice on the road. Turning his van into an open studio, he embarked on a lap of Australia, making art in public spaces and meeting collaborators and building rapport with local artists on the way. His infectious DIY approach to artmaking and collectivism continued through involvement with groups such as Good Bank Gallery and The Bait Fridge, and has developed into a core part of his practice.

Walker works with found and repurposed wetsuits, cutting, splicing, collaging and sewing them into pieces that pulse with vivid colour, line and shape. The way the rubber quality of neoprene clusters and folds draws a naturalistic line on the surface where the fabrics meet. Where Paul Klee's thinking line forges its own path across the paper, apprehending every juncture, Walker's quilted lines are a natural product of the picture's surface tension. Like clothing, the pieces rely on the texture and intersection of the fabric to make their own drawing. Compositionally, Walker is freestyling; he uses rubber to play with geometric abstraction, pushing and pulling colour polygons, triangles and curvilinear shapes to miraculously settle on a resolved composition.

Here, it is natural to draw parallels to fashion both in design and process: Walker standing at the cutting table, inspecting fabrics, assessing the bias, the weight, the stitch and critically the colour and stretch. The wetsuit's own design history is brought to the table for surgery, the synthetic rubber providing a smooth, fast cut and even texture to work with. And the wetsuit brings not only the memory of whoever wore it- the sweat, sea, urine and sand- but sports its





seasonal colours and eras, loud and clear. Walker revels in the style of each vintage garment, the earthy browns and orange of the 70s, the clean pastel blocks of 80s or hot pinks and electric blues of the 90s all chatter together like old friends reunited.

Walker's practice is joyful, leading the viewer to revel with a sense of optimism and fun while centering on the weightier themes around the environment and our impact on it. Walker increasingly sees his practice as a social transaction that has grown from his background running an art space (Good Bank Gallery) and working with art Collective (The Bait Fridge) to run festivals and art projects. All these interactions outside of the studio inform a holistic practice that is as much about the doing in the world as it is about the artwork on the gallery wall.

Henry Jock Walker is currently studying through the Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship.

—Chris Clements (Curator)

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Henry Jock Walker, *Seamstream*, 2024, stretched found neoprene with powder-coated aluminum frame, 102 x 77 x 4 cm (framed). Photograph: Silversalt Photography.

Henry Jock Walker, *Mary*, 2024, stretched found neoprene with powder-coated aluminum frame, 50 x 40 x 4 cm (framed). Photograph: Silversalt Photography.

Henry Jock Walker, *Seaford Proem (Let's get metaphysical)*, (still), 2021, single channel video, cinematographer Mark Tipple. Image courtesy of the artist.

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Acknowledgements
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