

Artist Statement

“Barnacles”

“I am at work on the second vol of the Cirripedia, of which creatures I am wonderfully tired: I hate a Barnacle as no man ever did before, not even a Sailor in a slow sailing ship. “

Charles Darwin letter to William Fox, 24 October 1852, Correspondence 5, p100.

Darwin’s obsession with barnacles began at the age of 24 during his 1835 voyage on the Beagle when he found a miniscule barnacle in a conch shell on a Chilean beach. The fact that this creature was anatomically a barnacle but had unaccountable deviations from the norm raised all sorts of questions about barnacle evolution and adaptation. He took it home and put it to one side, intending to return to it at a later date.

By 1844, at the age of 35, Darwin had already sketched out the ideas that would form *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*. However, before fleshing out his theory with evidence, he turned his attention back to the Chilean barnacle - expecting to finish with it in a month or two.

Instead, barnacles became his passion, his obsession. Starting in 1846 he spent eight years collecting, dissecting and classifying every known barnacle in the world – living and fossil. In 1854 he published a massive 4 volume work on Cirripedia which showed that over millions of years there had been hundreds of barnacle adaptations from a common ancestor.

The publication of this work established Darwin’s authority and he won a Royal Society Medal for it. Importantly, it paved the way for the publication and reception of his controversial and spectacular *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection* in 1859.

My own barnacle obsession began with my discovery on the NSW south coast of some tiny fascinating structures that looked like miniature volcanoes. I had never seen anything like them before. Research revealed that they were the empty shells of acorn barnacles, which belong to the family of cone shaped seashore barnacles – as opposed to the more familiar stalked barnacles that cluster on driftwood.

I selected a small group, took them back to my studio and began my own exploration through a variety of mediums; ceramics, screen printing, oil, watercolour, collage and construction.

Annabel Butler 2018