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Photo Show Focuses on Wide, Open Space

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By REBECCA THURLOW [CONNECT](#)

Murray Fredericks

One of Murray Fredericks's photos. [See more](#)

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In fact, the Sydney-based photographer's work has often involved adventurous journeys to remote wilderness. He worked for about eight years on projects in the Andes, the Himalayas and Australia's Tasmania state before deciding he no longer wanted to be a traditional landscape photographer.

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How did he figure out what to do next? He laid out all of his best photographs to date. "The link was a sense of space and the feeling that came out of that. I wondered if it was possible to do a project where the subject actually was space."

Spanning 9,500 square kilometers in the desert of central Australia, Lake Eyre attracts a spectacular variety of birds in the rare times it is flooded by swollen rivers. Most of the time it is dry, the lowest area filled with a salt pan left by evaporating waters. That's what interested Mr. Fredericks, when the massive, almost featureless expanse was at its most still and meditative. "The first time I saw the lake, it was this incredibly powerful sensation and I knew it was the right location," he says.

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No motor vehicles are allowed on the lake so Mr. Fredericks pushed a bicycle loaded with about 130 kilograms of camera gear and supplies to the center of the lake. Mr. Fredericks, 41, says the hardest physical challenge was the two-to four-kilometer ring of heavy, glue-like mud around the outer edge of the lake that would jam the wheels on his bike, forcing him to spend a day or two dragging the bike like a sled. "It was literally counting steps and it was like you were in this existential nightmare. You go through waves of wondering 'Why am I doing this?' and then your body releases the endorphins and it's incredible, off into a dream state. "



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Mr. Fredericks made 16 trips over eight years to the lake to create [the series "Salt,"](#) on show at the [Australian Centre for Photography](#) in Sydney until Nov. 19. He camped in a tiny tent for up to five weeks on the desolate lake bed. "Once you have been there long enough, it's really calming in that you are just in this simple cycle of day and night."

He dealt with the loneliness by reading novels including Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Without distractions, "you get to live every bit of it", he says.

If there was any risk of a thunderstorm, he'd hurry off the lake. "I'm the highest thing with metal everywhere – tripods, bikes, tent poles – like a one-man lightning attractor." He was stuck on the lake twice in unexpected electrical storms, with lightning hitting just 50 meters away. "It was terrifying. Lightning was smashing all around. That's when you feel lonely. I crawled under a bush – like that would do anything – in my raincoat and just curled up in a ball."

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for them to calm down." Chastened, he cohabitated with the insects for two days until it was time to venture off the lake for a regular refill of drinking water.

Mr. Fredericks's work is at times a minimalist palette of subtle color changes, while other images feature brooding clouds, star trails or the repeating pattern of cracks in the salt. Some of the most magical photographs are taken with an inch of water on the lake that reflected the sky after some rain. Mr. Fredericks says the project was about stripping out meaning and associations, to leave only emotion.

Throughout the project, Mr. Fredericks's works have been exhibited internationally including at the Louvre as part of Paris Photo, in Shanghai and around Australia. He is represented by the Hamiltons Gallery in London and Arc One Gallery in Melbourne. A documentary film "Salt" he made with film producer and director Mick Angus has won 12 major international awards, played at more than 50 festivals and screened on the Australian Broadcasting Corp. in Australia and PBS in the U.S.

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On his first trip to Greenland, he got more adventure than he expected. "I had a polar bear scare and I ended up having to sit in my tent alone on the ice cap in the blizzard, awake, thinking that a polar bear was going to come through the tent at any moment. I sat there for two days in minus-20, minus-25 with my hand on the gun."

He's been on three month-long trips to Greenland so far and each has been "spectacularly unsuccessful in terms of photographic output" due to blizzards. Every night, snow would bury his tent and he'd have to dig it out in the dark. He says he says it's too dangerous to return alone. He'll go back in April with two Inuit-driven dog sleds and Mr. Angus to traverse the icecap over a two-month period.

He's also chasing lightning. To coincide with the ACP exhibition, Annandale Galleries in Sydney is previewing Mr. Fredericks's other current project "Hector," which he's shooting in the remote Tiwi Islands, between the Timor and Arafura seas north of Darwin. "I found out there is a place where the thunderstorms pretty much form in the same place every day, and they are the world's largest thunderstorms." The project is partly in response to being unable to photograph Lake Eyre's spectacular light shows. "Because it's not dead flat, you're not so exposed. There are forests and hills and other stuff to attract the lightning away from where I am."

But there are other perils. "There are crocodiles. At Lake Eyre there was nothing that could eat you."

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Salt Series Article by Rebecca Thurlow, November 14, 2011 **WALL STREET JOURNAL**

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