



Landscape

Architecture **L** Australia



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Lake Eyre

CAMPING IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS REMOTE LAKE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH AN EMPTY MIND AND AN EMPTY SPACE.

WORDS MURRAY FREDERICKS

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MURRAY FREDERICKS,
SALT 300.



EACH YEAR FOR THE LAST SEVEN YEARS I HAVE been alone on Lake Eyre. On each visit I camp in the middle of the lake for up to five weeks at a time. I choose to engage with a landscape that is a remote whiteness, devoid of features – an “information-less” landscape. It is an opportunity to work with an empty mind and an empty space.

Lake Eyre is an infinite space with none of the usual signposts the mind uses to navigate its environment. Unable to orientate itself, and confronted by a reality it can’t “contain” or rationalize, in time the self undergoes a kind of dissolution into the space and experiences a loss of significance. What is left is the sensation of the mind existing, almost floating, in a void. It’s a kind of surrender; a recognition that “I” am not in control. For a time my whole life is given over to a single aim and the realization that the ends are not dictated only by me. There is a sense of being given permission to complete the work.

As a child I felt comfortable being alone for long periods in the bush. During my teens and twenties my engagement with the landscape became more and more adventurous. Challenging myself, as would a mountain climber, was never the purpose. I was searching for places to be alone and immersed in remote landscapes for long periods of time. I decided on photography as a vocation as it provided a platform for deeper engagement with the landscape and a reason to maintain that engagement over long periods of time. The subject of my photography is my experience of the landscape rather than the landscape itself. The challenge is to make the work relevant to a contemporary audience while maintaining its authenticity.

Historically, landscape photography has been about place. From the mid nineteenth century

through to the late twentieth century, the appeal or success of the imagery relied on the shock of what had been “unseen” by the intended audience. From new lands shown to the colonizers of the American West in the 1800s, to photographers such as Ansel Adams and Peter Dombrovskis, who provided evidence of wild country that requires protection, the success of the imagery relied upon “the shock of the new.” The mere representation alone was enough to make an impact.

By the end of the last millennium, however, National Geographic and the ubiquitous calendar and coffee table books were received by audiences that had become immune to the intended messages. Every square inch of the planet has been documented in some form. There are now legions of photographers producing millions of landscape images every year but with meaning not far removed from the pioneers of the genre. Far from connecting viewers with a deeper understanding of natural history, postcard perfection has transformed landscape into commodity. Pop culture has branded our landscape into the “wilderness experience.”

Fortunately for me, our contemporary response to place-orientated imagery is not the end of the story. On the contrary, it provides me with a point of departure. Engagement with landscape can still achieve connection on a deep, possibly genetic level, with the basics of life. To reach a contemporary audience, however, a new, more subjective language is required – an approach that recognizes the existing knowledge of the viewer.

Our longing for nature probably began soon after we migrated to cities. Nature’s appeal becomes more potent, and perhaps even more important, as contemporary life accelerates.

Urban life, and now to a degree rural life, floods us with information, which forces the conscious mind into survival mode. To stay sane and be able to function, the conscious mind acts as a filter, allowing through only what we need to know. Unfortunately the casualties of this filtering mechanism are our subtle impulses, which emanate from the subconscious, the seat of creativity. Getting away from it all is our way of stemming the relentless flow of information and distraction. When the mind is given space, it becomes more sensitive and receptive to nuance. Ideas that would usually be shoved aside in the race to succeed can be recognized, given shape and pass into a more concrete reality.

I am sceptical of a spirituality in which suffering and the banalities of life are escaped or transcended. I find meaning when life is stripped back to the bare essentials of food, water, warmth and having your routines dictated by the natural daily cycles. If there is a metaphysical element to my process, it doesn’t happen as I gaze at stars in the heavens. My moments of realization are found in mundane routine and watching what happens to the mind as it demands results and reason and order from an unpredictable environment.

My images represent a personal relationship to the landscape. However, this relationship is not unique to me. I believe we all possess a genetic memory of our origins. I hope to provide the viewer of my photographs with a means to recall and reconnect.

Murray Fredericks is a photographer and artist who works in the fields of architecture, landscape and portraiture. His work has been exhibited extensively around Australia and in London, Shanghai and Paris.