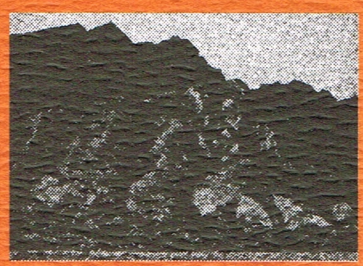
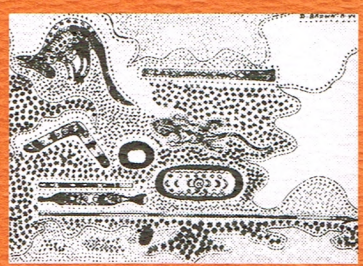
Country

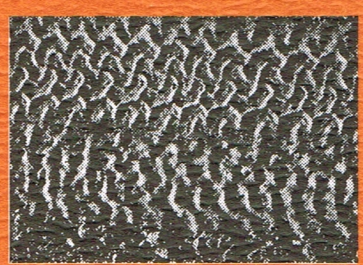
South Australian Living Artists Week Exhibition

PORT PIRIE REGIONAL ART GALLERY

5 AUGUST - 3 SEPTEMBER 2000







Ian Arcus
Bobby Brown
Jill Foster

LUCIA PICHLER

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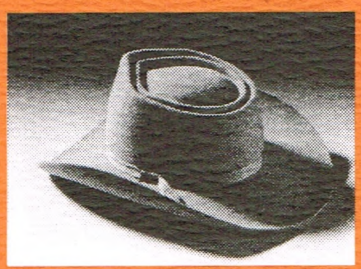


Land, country, we cannot see it through the rods and cones of vision unencumbered, we see in land reflections of belief systems: myths, romantic visions, spirituality, economic opportunity, dreams, home. Like real estate and its legal encumbrances, land too is bound by other encumbrances, a level of sentiment pervades our judgement, values and interpretations.

Our understanding of the concept of land and country is inter linked and wide ranging. Country as in nation, country as in the place of one's birth, country as in not the city or town, country as in the land itself, the ground on which we exist. Its character, quality or use. Duties and values are ascribed, country service for teachers or doctors, country quotas in political matters, country life - a myth of idyllic existence, compared to an often harsh reality.

Economic considerations though are normally the first values ascribed to land: its fecundity, its carrying capacity, its mineral wealth, its worth as 'real estate', ascribed in dollars a unit, scrubland at a hundred dollars a hectare, townhouse sites at thousands of dollars a square metre. It also has sexual status: virgin territory, a man's country, a woman's world. Can the land be masculine and / or feminine?

Our Western attitudes to land are evolving continually. At one stage we sought refuge in the cities and were cast out into the wilderness for our sins. Now we seek to escape the sins of the city to experience the wilderness, to find something of ourselves and our soul. Thus the concept of wilderness changes, from somewhere to be lost in, to somewhere to find something, something intangible which conventional value systems, particularly economic, cannot readily quantify.

As a community we are reevaluating and hopefully learning of other values to the biophysical stuff we call land, perhaps an intrinsic value and right to exist outside of anthropocentric preoccupations. But can we see or understand anything outside of human terms ? As a species we humans have adopted the dominant stance, prosecuted our predominanatly Judeo Christian belief with a hierarchical structure.

I cannot express with confidence other values and attachments to land such as that of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, I cannot pretend to fully know and understand. I can understand the concept of 'my country, my place' but it is through a DNA of European origin and centuries of city dwellers. However, indigenous and non indigenous alike, we do seek to understand the concept of where we come from, our place, be it defined by dreaming, nation, country or street address. It is an intricate part of identity and existence, of attachment and self location.

Artists contribute varying perspectives in this pursuit, from traditional to avant-garde as we seek another level of Australian identity. Reconciliation with the Aboriginal peoples of this land is part of this pursuit. To reconcile with the indigenous peoples we need to also develop a better understanding of the indigenous landscape. An 'ecology of place', the unique interaction between all living organisms and the environment, is a complex series of inter-dependencies and creation of niche positions to enable survival, including that of humankind. By questioning and re-presenting perspectives, aesthetic and social, artists participate in the redefining of social lore and systems.

Our political systems are laid over geographical space, often quite arbitrarily to create 'country'. In the Australian context there is an arbitrary division of a continental land mass to create our State, the left over from other colonising processes. But the land, the ground, still provides the basis for the building of cultural indentity such as the Festival State, the Croweaters. As a society, culture or community we develop an attachment, even parochialism to the place and guard and defend our identity be it South Australian, Port Pirie or Timbucktoo.

The ability to read land, to understand its intricacies, has established dynasties and made fortunes as colonisers, conquerors or speculators claimed lands over time. The great pastoral empires of Australia established a new gentry for the colonised lands, enormous prestige and fortunes were to be had. At the same time others lost, the traditional owners lost their land and dreaming, the unsuccessful settler lost their land and dreams as they settled beyond the fecund, they did not understand the new land.

George Goyder, Surveyor-General from 1861 to 1864, had the ability to read the land, the vegetation types, the soils, the permanent water courses. This gave him insight into viability, defining the limit of sustainable agricultural production in South Australia. Known as Goyder's Line, his particular topographic vision of land, drawn in the mid 1860's, has stood the test of time.

The great expansion beyond Goyder's Line into the semi arid areas to the north and east of Port Pirie in the 1870's led to tragedy. A belief that the rain would follow the plough existed among some, a few abnormally good seasons gave credence and much human energy and capital was invested. But the rains did not follow and three years of severe drought from 1880 to 1882 devastated the pioneer settler. The ruined dreams are scattered through the northern landscape.

Colonel William Light, the colony's first Surveyor-General, also had that unique ability to read land. He had the responsibility of determining the site of settlement for the new Province of South Australia and he chose well. There is speculation as to how much he was able to readily interpret the indigenous use of the land, that the Kaurna people's long established knowledge was quickly assessed, interpreted and overlaid by Light. It is also rumoured Light was a Rosacrucian, an ancient sect with spiritual / meta physical attachment to and understanding of land.

Contemporary art has drifted from the land as did the settlers of the past. The buzz and hype of the cities, the decline of the landscape painter, the stigma of the 'gum tree artist', development of conceptual art have contributed to a remoteness or lack of contemporaneous landscape interpretation. However, there is a need to maintain contact and cultural interpretation.

This exhibition presents various approaches to land, vision of country, by a diverse group of artists. It ranges through varying perspectives: the 'artist's eye', an aesthetic perspective of colour and form, the emotional, the interpretation of the social history of place, the sacred, and the conceptual exploration of cultural and political practices.

The Australian landscape is an old and wise entity, it knows itself, we are the ephemeral interloper, the new kid on the block. There is optimism that we are on a journey towards more harmonious interactions and understandings. A long way to go, we have destroyed or damaged much in ignorance and greed but can learn or ignore at our peril. The artist pursues multi- faceted relationships and interpretations of land. These artworks are part of that endeavour.

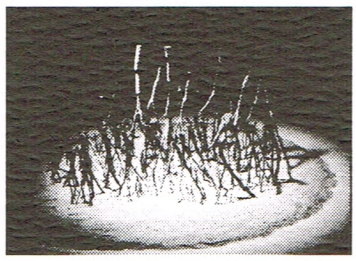
Gavin Malone

SA LIVING ARTISTS SALA WEEK

country arts sa

Port Pirie Regional Council

Australia Council for the Arts



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ALEXANDER IAN ARCUS

Ian Arcus was born in New Zealand where he studied Industrial Design. He lives and works in Adelaide. Since 1986, he has worked as a professional textile artist. From 1982 to 1994 he lectured in Textiles at the School of Art, Newcastle College of Advanced Education, and then at the South Australian School of Art, University of SA. Arcus has had numerous one-person exhibitions and participated in major exhibitions in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, USA and Canada. His work is represented in many collections in New Zealand and Australia.

"Drawing and painting from direct observation is a useful discipline. It is an active physical process of relating to, and seeking an understanding of, the world around one. The process of focusing intently on some small aspect of landscape for several hours and observing the constantly shifting patterns and forms emerge and dissolve with the changing light, often provide unexpected emphases to the process of interpretation and comprehension."

BOBBY BROWN

Bobby Brown is an Antikirinya man who was born south of Coober Pedy at Ingomar sometime near the end of the war. He was born into his country and raised in the traditional ways of his people until he was almost a teenager, when he was taken, along with his brother and sister, by station owners to work on a farm in the south east of South Australia. When reunited with his family years later he was no longer recommended to go through 'the rule'(an initiation process) as he had been away too long. However he still maintains his ties to his family, people and country despite this. He has worked as a station hand, on the railways, as an interstate truckdriver, and as a significant resource person in Adelaide for the study of song, stories and cultural practices. He works presently as a cultural teacher and an artist.

JILLIAN CAROL FOSTER

Jill Foster lives and works in Hamley Bridge, a rural township north of Adelaide. She has been running a full time pottery business for 15 years. She produces a range of functional ware for distribution across Australia, presents workshops, coordinates country based art and crafts groups and is engaged in occasional relief teaching. She most recently produced bowls for the Burra Plenty event, which was held as part of the 2000 Adelaide Festival of Arts.

"I respond to the 'rural' and vastness of the Australian landscape. I see in a brushstroke, the whoosh of the wind and translate it to a platter ...sights, smells and sounds flow in and are transformed... "

SIV GRAVA

Siv Grava graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 1982. She currently lives and works between Elliston on the Eyre Peninsula and Andamooka in the north of the state. She has participated in many group and solo exhibitions and won the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize in 1992. Grava also works on public art projects and is represented in private and public collections across Australia.

"It took me quite a few years of living at Adamooka before I became interested in painting its landscape: human spoils of mullock heaps rise out of the flat (and very silent) desert."

ANTONY HAMILTON

Antony Hamilton was born in Euroa, Victoria, and studied at the South Australian School of Art in the late 1970's. He currently lives and works in Beltana, in the northern Flinders Ranges. He has had numerous group and solo exhibitions, most recently *Anthony Hamilton: Mythology of Landscape* at the Art Gallery of South Australia. Hamilton's artwork is represented in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra and the Art Gallery of South Australia.

"Roy Rogers" double creased crown imprints the memory in Australian baby boomer childhood myths"

Acknowledgment and thank you to Adelaide Hatters, Adelaide.

JOHN LIEBELT

John Liebelt lives and works in Port Pirie. He has been an art teacher since the 1970's, except for a two years stint in the 1990's when he was the Cultural Development Officer for the Port Pirie Regional Council. He has been involved as a Board Member of the Port Pirie Regional Art Gallery since 1995.

"My artworks are usually created as a response to a stimulus of some kind. This can be visual or verbal...I generally try to create light hearted statements, which are intended to make people think about the humourous connections in them..."

GAVIN MALONE

Gavin Malone graduated from the South Australian School of Art in 1994, when he was awarded a University of South Australia Faculty Medal for Outstanding Academic Achievement. He has been involved in many exhibitions, public art and cultural interpretation projects including most recently the *Pioneer Women Walking Trail* at Hahndorf. Malone writes regularly on art and the relationship of art and sustainable ecology.

"Geologically, the Simpson is an Aeolian desert, the shape of the dunes formed by the prevailing westerly wind. Aeolus, the ruler of the winds, speaks through the desert. Listen quietly, listen slowly, listen well."

KERRY JEAN MARTIN

Kerry Martin studied art at the North Adelaide School of Art, and in 1999, completed a BA (Aboriginal Studies) from the University of South Australia. She has exhibited her work regularly in group and solo exhibitions. Her artwork has been acquired by the Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory and the Araluen Art Centre in Alice Springs.

" These are paintings from my current residential space, in the mid-north farming area of South Australia at Yongala and from a period of time spent living at Mututjulu Community in the Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park....(the former) is big sky country and the dry weather intrudes on the senses.. I (am mindful) of Uluru's power as a sacred site and have...attempted to imbue the image with my emotional response to living within it's radius."

LEE SALOMONE

Lee Salomone graduated from the South Australian School of Art in 1991. He has participated in many solo and group exhibitions, most

"...branch rationalisation is more than (a) simple arrangement of twigs, it represents change... the obsession and worship of the bottom

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