

## Fifth Fleurieu Biennale, 2006 - Community Program Events

### Artist Talk: Gavin Malone

Fleurieu Visitor Information Centre, McLaren Vale, Saturday, 11 November, 2006

#### ***The Fleurieu: Landscape or Habitat?***

#### ***A Discussion on Landscapes, Art Practice and Sustainability***

(This essay is an expanded version of the talk given)

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## Introduction

Language helps define who we are and the way we understand and interact with our world, as do visual representations, the visual language, particularly in terms of symbolic value. Over the last decade the word ecology is more so being used rather than environment in understanding our relationship with the bio physical world, it has a different meaning and provides a more complex and interconnected way of understanding our place in our place.

In the same way that 'environment' is no longer adequate I am proposing that landscape is no longer a sufficient or appropriate word to express or describe the places we live in, the habitats we construct. I'll discuss this in the context of the current global and local ecological and social sustainability challenges. I include social sustainability as no culture can live beyond the capacity of the ecologies that support it, and

what we as a species are basically being challenged about is the medium to long term continuation of human cultures in a form recognisable to the way they currently exist.

I'll discuss 'landscape' as:

1. A biophysical reality
2. A construction, perception or design
3. Its role in art, in particular; is contemporary Australian art practice lacking an engaged and insightful ecological and social discourse?

Let's question the fundamental 'picture of landscape', the Fleurieu Biennale 'the world's richest landscape painting prize'.

## Landscape: The Biophysical Reality

Basically the planet, our world, is biophysical stuff to which we ascribe meaning;

- . Concept of nature and the natural world (I avoid use of the word 'nature', it creates binaries, nature/culture, it separates humans from the bio physical. My 'natural' world is concrete, steel, glass and bitumen)
- . Fields of knowledge under our Western scientific paradigm; topography, geology etc (from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism).
- . Resource or bio physical capital (renewable and non-renewable), out of which social capital, and economic capital is built. Remember, all human material wealth is created from the harvesting, cultivation and extraction of the Earth's bio physical resources.

## The Biophysical Reality and Global Challenges

The human impact on global bio physical systems is clearly evident and long term consequences becoming even clearer. Science has made it abundantly clear that humanity faces an enormous challenge in realigning its ecological relationships towards sustainability. This raises The Big Three Sustainability Issues:



Eco Druids-State of the World 1994 Gavin Malone

### Issue 1. Global Warming

Whilst a few sceptics linger, fuelled by economic and self-interest (or foolishness), the debate is essentially over. Tim Flannery's 2005 book *The Weather Makers* succinctly sets out the global science and some of the ominous global scenarios of the very near future, our children's era if not our own.

Australia has 0.033% of the world's population yet emits about 1.5 – 2.0% of global greenhouse gases, mainly carbon dioxide. It is the highest per person of all industrial nations, 27.2t per person (Hal Turton 2004:6) (Aust Institute). This is 27% higher than USA (21.4t), and more than double the average for industrialised countries. The recently released (31.10.06) 700 page *Stern Review*<sup>1</sup> on the costs of climate change, commissioned by the Blair Government, is stern by both name and nature. It outlines that humanity faces disease, starvation, death and economic collapse worse than the combined effects of two world wars and the Depression if we do nothing about greenhouse gas emissions.

Even under the conventional economic paradigm the dollar cost of doing nothing is five to twenty times greater than the cost of coordinated early global actions to cut emissions. Climate change could shrink the global economy by up to 20%. The report is now under attack, and I use attack rather than scrutiny and informed debate. (Shanahan, D.; Warren, M. Weekend Aust 4-5<sup>th</sup> Nov. p 19). It is disappointing but telling

<sup>1</sup> Sir Nicholas Stern (Head, British Government Economic Service, former Chief Economist of the World Bank.

that no social impact reports have been commissioned, too scary. The South Australian scenario is well documented; warmer and less rainfall with changing patterns of rainfall and more severe weather events.

### Issue 2. Population Growth

Our species population now in excess of 6 billion with predictions to 9 billion by latter half of this century. We have an extraordinary ruthlessness and ingenuity in exploiting and consuming resources which brings out notions that we may be 'living in the shadow of our own annihilation'. But does it really matter if our species does not survive, many other species have disappeared? This prompts the question: what gives rise to an expectation, or even the sense of a right, for us to survive?

### Issue 3. Resource Consumption & Ecological Footprint



*I Will Not Be* Forestville 1994 Gavin Malone

Linked to the above issues is profligate consumption in the developed nations in a finite world. The clearly unsustainable levels of consumption can be measured through Ecological Footprint Accounting. We've had this tool since the early 1990s, created by William Rees and Mathis Wackernagel, to 'measure the extent to which the ecological demand of human economies stays within or exceeds the capacity of the bio sphere to supply goods and services.' (<http://org.eea.europa.eu/news> Accessed 20.07.06). The Ecological Footprint of a population is 'the total amount of biologically productive land and water area that the population needs to produce the resources it consumes and absorb the waste it generates, using current technology'.

Put simply there are 11.2 billion global hectares to support the existing human population, or 1.8 hectares of bio capacity per person. And this assumes that no capacity is set aside for wild species. It is alarming to note that in 2002 (the latest figures) humanity's footprint exceeded bio-capacity by approximately 25%.

Put bluntly, we are living well beyond our ecological means. As Australians, our footprint is up there with the 'best' at 7 ha per person in a global range of 0.1 (Afghanistan) to 10.5 (United Arab Emirates). Australia does though have a bio-capacity surplus which we export.

The need to address these challenges, in particular global climate change and profligate consumption, is now well beyond the time of rhetoric and unresolved discussion. Continued 'growth' is not possible, a redistribution of resources within and between nations is required. This won't just be through political or technological solutions, sustainability will be about social behaviour and beliefs, at communal and individual levels. Actions and outcomes at these levels are also required.

### Cultural Maladaptation

In Australia, the global issues are compounded by the problem of cultural maladaptation as outlined by Flannery in *The Future Eaters* (1995). That is, our colonising cultural practices have not sufficiently adapted to suit the indigenous ecological capacity. He proposes that it is essential Australians evolve a culture that will help us survive long term on this continent, and in doing so we *adopt laws, values, artefacts and ceremonies* to both symbolise and facilitate this (my italics). He further said:

*Australia still has so much to offer, and so much can be done to ensure that the country provides the very best of life to its people. This, however, cannot happen while we imagine that we are people from another place. A series of changes needs to occur both in government policy and in the hearts and minds of all Australians, before we can think of ourselves as having a secure future here* (Flannery, 2003:171).



*Look Don't Look* North Terrace, Adelaide, 1995, Gavin Malone

### Social Sustainability

Whilst there has been much recent debate about ecological sustainability, little has been said about the notion of sustainable societies. Social sustainability though is not as well understood or discussed. According to University of SA social scientist Stephen McKenzie it is a somewhat different conundrum to ecological sustainability in that rather than seeking to maintain a system in equilibrium, it is about the need for change as the existing structure is inherently unsustainable (McKenzie 2004, 2005).

McKenzie argues that social sustainability discourse begins with the basic premise that our current social mode of action is flawed, witnessed by large imbalances in the distribution of wealth and power and by the extent of social exclusion. He states 'Our notion of social sustainability is currently determined by our perception of its absence; indeed, if we lived in a sustainable society, we would probably have no need for the concept of one.'

In essence our cultural tradition, our society, in its present form, is unsustainable. This is a sombre, if not frightening thought. He proposes that we are faced with the challenge and difficulty of '*imagining a positive situation that does not currently exist, in order to attempt to find solutions for current and everyday problems*' (his italics).

Part of this challenge is the production and symbolic value of our cultural artefacts, of our art.

### The Role of Art Practice and Sustainability

Art practice is not isolated from ecological challenges, it is very much part of it. It is well understood that art reflects the culture from which it emanates and it is used as part of understanding or measuring a culture's achievements. All human activity, including the arts or 'arts industry', must now be measured against the critical issues of sustainability, both ecological and social. Whilst there are notions of 'good' art, be it sculpture or painting or whatever media, I suggest that art cannot now be isolated from the greater human imperatives, social and ecological. I contend it is not enough just to be 'good' art; there is a need to consider the social and ecological utility beyond the inherent values and qualities the artefact may have in terms of 'art'. This also relates to the speculative aspects of art as commodity, part of the market and profligate consumption.

### Landscape - Construction, Perception, Design: Defining Meaning in the Bio Physical Stuff

#### Landscape

'Landscape' what is it? It is a construct of the mind as well as a physical and measurable entity. It is defined by and a product of culture, same way 'nature' is defined by culture. 'Landscape' as a term has been used since the seventeenth century. According to the Macquarie Dictionary it is:

*A view or prospect of rural scenery, more or less extensive, such as is comprehended within the scope or range of vision from a single point of view. 2. a piece of such scenery 3. a picture representing natural inland or coastal scenery*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ian Grant, the 2004 Fleurieu Biennale winner, has also referred to this definition in his 2006 Biennale catalogue essay.



Maslin Beach

We landscape our gardens and our countryside. Another clue is in the definition of the profession of Landscape Architect 'one whose profession it is to adapt an area of land to give a particular visual effect.' Perhaps dated but gives the historical context. But landscape has other meanings: 'Landscape is used broadly to mean a built, cultural or physical environment (and even the human body) which can be 'read' and interpreted' (Flinders University: Geography Course Glossary). Note the words 'read' and 'interpreted' which implies that landscape's meaning is constructed and can be deconstructed. Some other interpretations are:

- . Cultural landscape; intellectual landscape; social landscape, corporate landscape
- . Landscape of memory; landscape of destruction; landscape of fear (refers to both psychological states and to tangible environments' (Tuan, 1979:6).

### **Landscape and Art: Recording and Expressing our Relationship with the Bio Physical**

Humans have recorded their relationship with the land, fauna and flora for tens of thousands of years. We have the cave painting and petroglyphs of our European ancestors and rock art and petroglyphs in Australia. But this activity was more so expressing a symbiotic relationship, not just a representation. Is this why we have landscape representations in our homes, triggered from a primordial association with the land?

However, Declan McGonagle, Director, Irish Museum of Contemporary Art, (1997:23) points out

*The Anglo-Saxon preoccupation in art with land and landscape comes directly from the idea of ownership which emphasises exchange value over use value. It originated in a moment when the patronage of the visual arts in the English and therefore British context passed from the Church to the landed gentry after the destruction of the monasteries by Henry VIII. The landed gentry were concerned with confirming their ownership and control of the landscape which contained the individual. Their landscape, their individuals.*

McGonagle notes (1997:23) that the nations colonised by England to form Great Britain 'have a qualitatively different relationship to the actuality and the reading of land and landscape ... These should be understood in psychological rather than geographical terms'. This links into Australian Aboriginal beliefs, cultural practices and art which I'll briefly refer to later.

Another way to approach and understand art and landscape is through what I define as the three main 'landscape' phases in Western art history since the Renaissance:

- . Art & Nature
- . Art & Environment
- . Art & Ecology

The following is a brief synopsis (and there are exceptions).

#### **Art and Nature (Renaissance to 1960s)**

- . Concepts of nature fundamental in representation since Renaissance
- . Nature/landscape as inspiration, as subject matter, as belief, as ownership
- . The Romantic school - world is wild, untamed place
- . The Sublime - extraordinary power, impact of nature. Humans insignificant, impressing the mind with a sense of grandeur of power; inspiring awe, veneration or even terror
- . The Arcadian - pastoral (charm of country scenery and life), rustic, simple, innocence
- . Industrial Revolution - nature disrupted by culture, parts of nature conquered by culture, i.e. bridges to cross rivers, canals to irrigate agriculture and move goods and people, railways to travel quickly and easily through landscape, clipper ships to travel quickly over oceans.

### **Art and the Environment (1960s to end of 20th C)**

'Environmental Art/Land Art' emerged in the 1960s, part of post-modernist social change. Initially this was taking art out of the gallery space as part of an arts debate but with no real credence of 'environmental' sustainability issues, it was 'man' manipulating and dominating the landscape. Works by artists such as Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Nancy Holt and Christo were within an environment or place. They were about changing perceptions of art and primarily concerned with the aesthetics and discourse of art, nothing to do with ecology. It was a notable step in the change of the structure of art relationships, understanding what we mean as art, shifting concept and content out of the gallery. 'They were not depicting the landscape, but engaging in it; their art was not simply *of the landscape*, but *in it* as well' (Beardsley, 1998).

There were other artists/works more in tandem with the concept of 'environmentalism' which developed circa 1960s. The seminal book 'Silent Spring' by Rachel Carson was published in 1962. Later exemplars are Andy Goldsworthy & Richard Long, softer engagements with the land (but still a touch of the Romantic and Sublime and Goldsworthy's art practice still has a high carbon footprint).

### **Australian Context**

Australian art practice has mirrored these developments but this is perhaps not as well understood or publicised (cultural cringe). Exemplars are:

- . 1970-1988 *Mildura Sculpture Triennial* (1973 *Sculpturescape*. For first time environment central theme)
- . 1995-1996 *Environmenta* International Ecological Art Event, Townsville
- . 1998-2003 *Mildura Palimpsest*
- . 2001-xxxx *Floating Land* 'engage in nature and the community', Noosa Regional Gallery
- . 2006-xxxx *Murray Darling Palimpsest* Mildura and elsewhere

Art was also part of Green political campaigns, a confluence of agendas. Campaign in the early 70s to save Lake Pedder (lost 1972) and Franklin River, Tasmania (saved 1983). It was a successful and curious combination of the conservative 'art' of photography with green/ecological social and political action.

### **Art and Ecology or Ecologically Sustainable Art (for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century)**

Shift to art and ecology – a respect for bio diversity, humans are just one organism in an interconnected system or habitat, recognising the need for reduction of human impact on bio systems, the need for remediation (to also be part of art practice). The difference? It is not just recording or mediating but seeking change in values and beneficial ecological outcome. It is also about art practice becoming conscious of its own footprint and greenhouse contribution. When will the Art Gallery of South Australia include carbon and ecological footprint accounting with the 'blockbuster' attendance numbers and economics figures? Art and ecology requires a different way of thinking, and other ways of 'representation'. An exemplar is the Murray Darling Palimpsest, 2006, which facilitated an art and science discourse throughout the Basin. It is concerned with issues of ecological and social sustainability (see [www.mwaf.com.au/palimpsest/index.html](http://www.mwaf.com.au/palimpsest/index.html)). The Palmer Project was a participant with the exhibition *Winter Landscape*, curated by me and Greg Johns.



*Chthonic Voices* Gavin Malone 2004  
earth spirit softly erodes ego



*Chthonic Spirits* Gavin Malone 2006  
Palmer Sculpture Biennial

## Landscape: Representation as Signifier of National Identity

In Australia landscape representation has been strongly aligned with aspects of national identity, with whom we think we are or how we attempt to portray ourselves. Is this because of the distinctiveness of our landscape, our uneasy relationship with it, and that to capture on canvas is also to tame? Anne Willis discusses 'nation as landscape' in her book *Illusions of identity: The art of a Nation* (1993) and suggests that landscape has been the most pervasive theme in Australian high culture. There have been various phases and interpretations of Australian landscape, from colonising objectives being served to notions of cultural adaptation. Willis states (1993: 64):

*The production and circulation of visual imagery then is closely bound up with the psychological occupation of the land. Landscape painting has historically been connected to nationalism, it has also been claimed as national culture; the two are of course closely connected. Being tied to the particularities of place, it can be seen as unique and home grown rather than as foreign and externally imposed. And it can be projected outwards as a sign of local achievement and distinctiveness. Landscape as a foundation for national identity promises an essence grounded in place, a revealed truth. Yet this cannot be, for landscape exists only as a series of signs within a complex tapestry of cultural constructions of place.*

A particular irony of landscape depiction as identity is that since the 1890's Australia has been one of the world's most urbanised cultures, also clinging to the coast (Willis, 1993: 64, 65. Metropolitan cultures set the rural and wilderness in opposition to themselves, the 19<sup>th</sup> century obsessions with rural life very much nostalgic responses to rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. As Australian historian Donald Horne has said (1989:77):

*Insofar as Australians went in for defining themselves, the forms in which this expressed itself were much the same as those used by other peoples over this period. Throughout Europe nationality was defined in landscape painting: the same techniques were used in the bush landscapes of Australia. Throughout Europe the true national virtues were found in the rural types: so, alas in Australia.*

However, it can also be argued that Australian arts practice abandoned the landscape in the 1960's at the end of Modernism, the last major figures being Williams, Nolan and Olsen as arts practice entered post modernity and deconstruction. Whilst there are notable exceptions (Storrier, Robinson etc.), landscape representation was left to Aboriginal peoples as Aboriginal painting emerged from the deserts of Central Australia, initially through the Papunya movement (1970s). Aboriginal art introduced a new way of seeing, new visual codes, into the dominant Western culture and quickly became the pre-eminent or dominant form of contemporary national landscape representation. It has also become an international signifier.

## Landscape: The Fleurieu Peninsula



Aldinga Scrub & Southern Fleurieu Coast

Since my early twenties I have had a great fondness for the Fleurieu. In the mid-1970s I attempted to gain work in the wine industry and then live here. I have spent much time there over the years; the hills, the coast, and in particular the Willunga Basin, which was opened to white settlement soon after colonisation (contrary to initial principle of concentrated settlement). The Basin was the 'grain bowl' for the eastern colonies mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century gold rushes. In the 1870s larger scale wine making emerged and in 1915 the Willunga rail line helped access to markets etc. There were diverse agricultural and horticultural activities for most of 20<sup>th</sup> Century; cereal crops, dairy, beef, wine grapes, almonds. Over the last decade a mono culture of wine production, a 'wine factory', has emerged. The golden yellows and browns of pastures, grain crops and fields, the speckled green of almonds and soft white-pink of their blossom has almost disappeared, replaced with

structured lines of lime green, blue green and skeletal brown. I'm concerned about what happens here in terms of viability; ecological, social and economic. I have made works about it, the artist statements below explain.



*The Val(u)es* March 2002, Gavin Malone  
Bella Cosa Sculpture Park



*Mistletoe* August 2002, Gavin Malone  
Bella Cosa Sculpture Park

#### **The Val(u)es** (Artist Statement: March 2002)

*The harvesting and cultivation of the earth's resources impacts upon both our physical and cultural landscapes. The Willunga Basin, as with other wine growing districts, is undergoing dramatic change with the unbridled expansion of wine production. The Basin's ground water has been fully utilised, viticultural expansion now enabled through the 'purple pipeline' providing sewerage grey water for irrigation, in itself not a bad thing.*

*The Southern Vales is rich in natural and human history, the landscape ever changing since European settlement, a place of cultivated and natural wonder. However, is there the danger of the Vales becoming mono-cultural, lacking diversity, cultural and biological, studded with purple vines, beautiful but haunting?*

#### **Mistletoe** (Artist Statement: August 2002)

*The harvesting and cultivation of the earth's resources both impacts upon and predicates our physical and cultural landscapes. The Willunga Basin, as with other wine growing districts, is undergoing dramatic change with the unbridled expansion of wine production.*

*A particular paradigm can persuade all in its path, other perspectives overlooked. It is therefore reasonable to raise issues of sustainability and best viticultural practice in this new gold rush, as all too often there are penalties to pay from unthinking booms. One aspect is the land itself, its flora and fauna; can the land exist in its own right outside conventional economic paradigms and concepts of production?*

*The vineyard expansion grows out of old resources that cannot be replaced in the short term, cycles of renewal are broken, life's fluids sucked upon. Palimpsest patterns overlay the old, the familiar fades, some of our old landscape friends disappear. The ancient River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) from which this slab is cut was felled for vineyard expansion in the Langhorne Creek district.*

### **Landscape: Aboriginal Country**

The Fleurieu is Kaurna and Ramindjeri country (and also Peramangk and Ngarrangerri depending on where the peninsula boundaries are defined). Aboriginal people had different notions of land, place and nation which provides another 'landscape' understanding altogether. The people and the land cannot be separated. Discussion on the Aboriginal landscape requires another presentation but as an introduction the Tjilbruke/Tjirbruki Dreaming is mentioned. This is the most well-known Kaurna narrative of the region with a number of significant sites on the Peninsula, Karkungga being one of them.



Karkungga – place of red ochre (Red Ochre Cove)



*Tjirbruki Narna arra' Tjirbruki Gateway*, 1997, Warriparinga (Malone, Rankine, Worth)

Like many place names of the Fleurieu, Willunga is a Kaurna name. Linguist Rob Amery (2002:174) gives possible etymologies:

willia 'dust' + ngga 'place'  
 willi 'chest of kangaroo' + ngga 'place'  
 wilya 'foliage' + ngga 'place'

He suggests willia 'dust' is more likely but it might be none of the above.

Australian lexicographer Jay Arthur<sup>3</sup> in speaking of the colonisers' lack of language to both describe and understand place states (2003:61):

*This [lack of language] is a version of the emptiness of colonial association and knowledge of the place. An alternative way of appreciation is through memory and association. But the language of social memory, of sacred landscape, belonged to the dispossessed population. For them the landscape was full of names, of stories, of information about the flora and fauna, about direction, about soil and wind and rain, about interactions between humans and the environment.*

## To Conclude

'about interactions between humans and the environment', is the essence of ecological relationships. Which brings me to conclude this discussion: 'Landscape Representation' is it just linguistics?

'Before the name: what was the place like before it was named? (Carter 1987 p xiii)

Language is an important part of constructing landscape and identity, of describing what it is and who we are. I believe there is an impoverishment in the colonising language, written and visual, to represent the

<sup>3</sup> A researcher for ten years with the Australian National Dictionary Centre at the ANU, and an exhibition curator at the National Archives of Australia in Canberra.

indigenous nature of this place. In many ways our language is inadequate, just as 'landscape' is an inadequate all-encompassing term to describe or define the bio physical stuff.

## So What About Habitat?

According to the Macquarie, habitat is:

*The native environment or kind of place where a given animal or plant naturally lives or grows, as in warm seas, mountain tops, fresh waters, etc. 2. place of abode; habitation*



A natural habitat?

To understand place as habitat, and not just landscape, place humans within, not just looking at, a system. It recognises humanity's bio physical or animal species nature. It is also to be interconnected, rather than alienated from and observing from the outside. It also provides for an ecological identity, that is identification with the bio-physical realm. In that sense I suggest non-Aboriginal Australians still have little identification with the indigenous nature of this place. As a part of our cultural maladaption the 'skin' of the landscape in settled areas has been replaced with one that is Eurocentric, both physically and culturally, denying access to, or obliterating, an inherent indigenous landscape or habitat.

### Awaiting

Skinned of its own coat  
The land has been obscured  
With the fur of the fox  
Other parts laid bare  
Like a carcass  
Its skeletal form and blood red skin  
Laying breathless  
Under the glare of a tanning sun  
Comatose  
But not dead  
Awaiting the removal of the fur stole  
The return of the possum skin cloak

Gavin Malone, August 2005

The term 'environment' had largely been used as an all-encompassing word to describe the worlds we live in. I suggest that this positions humans as somehow once removed from the bio physical stuff, that if we can construct and control our environment we can also control its effects on our lives. The notion of ecology is somewhat different. It looks at the interactions of all living organisms and their environment, it places human activity into a broader bio physical world. Comprehending ecology infers holistic approaches and that the non-human world is also of relevance in understanding, and potentially managing, interactions and outcomes.

Landscape also implies the notion that we look in at and are not part of, similar to the 'ownership of the gaze' as implied in the looking at of the naked female body by the male. Thus as using the word ecology rather than environment, using habitat rather than landscape gives other, and I suggest more relevant, insights which can be manifested in both symbolic and practical ways.

Australian archaeologist and scientist David Horton (2000: 144) illuminates the difference between understanding place as landscape or habitat:

*The idea that the human race is the only important thing on a planet with billions of years of history and millions of other organisms is collective egocentrism gone mad. Instead of learning to live with other organisms, thereby maintaining the diversity that is so crucial to the survival of the world, there is a strong strand of human thinking that says that anything that causes the slightest problem, or even a mild inconvenience must be removed. When we are developing, nothing must get in the way. This is a kind of ethnic cleansing on a worldwide scale - cleansing the world of everything non-human.*

### **Exhibition: The French Connection-Landscape, Colonisation, Degradation**

Following is an outline of the exhibition I have organised at Bella Cosa Sculpture Park, McLaren Flat, as part of this Biennale. It is a low embodied energy exhibition in terms of cost of presentation etc. It is a high synergy exhibition in terms of media, working together, and a cooperative approach:

*The River Redgum, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, is perhaps the most iconic gum tree of the Fleurieu Peninsula and probably the most typical of all Australian trees. There is a curious story as to how it received its botanical name. It was named from a specimen growing in the Camalduli Gardens in the hills above Naples, Italy in the 1820's, well before South Australia was even colonised. The seed is thought to have been collected on one of the early French voyages of discovery to Australia and then found its way to Italy.*

*There is a strong French legacy in terms of place names along the southern coast of Australia and it was unclear for a time as to whether the French or the English would take full possession of New Holland. No matter which European power eventually staked its claim, colonisation brought European belief systems and attitudes to these shores, previously occupied by cultures of the hunter gatherer tradition.*

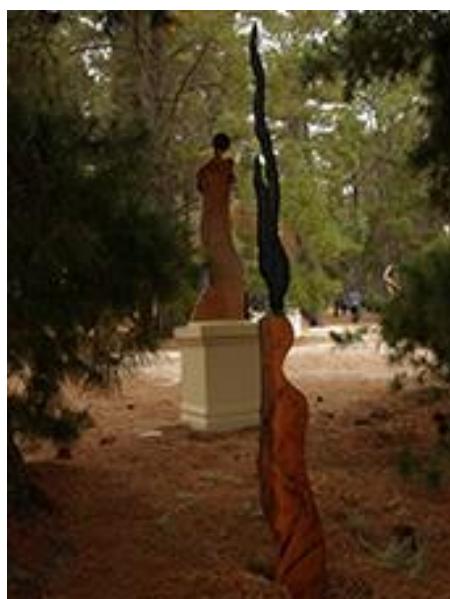
*The landscape of the Fleurieu Peninsula can be understood as a 'remnant colonial landscape' interspersed with remnant indigenous vegetation. It also incorporates remnant ideas and thinking from social, ecological and economic structures that are proving to be unsustainable in this place. A change in social attitudes and understandings will as much as, if not more so, determine our future here than any scientific solutions.*

*To that end the exhibition explores our relationship with landscape, our ways of understanding who we are in this place: past present and future. The exhibition provides a range of voices beyond the notions of the romanticised or aestheticised landscape with the works engaging aspects of history, sustainability, custodianship and mythology.*

*The exhibition features fifteen high calibre contemporary South Australian artists with diverse practice styles, including two Kaurna culture bearers, and includes 2D and 3D artworks located in the landscape and the gallery.*

Gavin Malone, November, 2006

**Artists:** Gavan Card, Steve Davidson, John Foubister, Siv Grava, Ian Hamilton, Greg Johns, David Kerr, Pamela Kouwenhoven, Gavin Malone, Ann Newmarch, Lee Salomone, Karl Winda Telfer, Ronda Wallis, Georgina Yambo Williams, Laura Wills



*Venus di Milo The French Connection: Landscape, Colonisation, Degradation 2006, Gavin Malone*

## The Fleurieu Biennale

I emphasise that I am not arguing against the genre of painting per se, nor am I arguing for landscape representation through painting to be a pivotal part of revising a pan continental national identity, an affiliation with the nation state. Beside who would want to identify with a state where the leader, and I use that word advisedly, fiddles whilst the planet burns and expects us to eat money and to build dykes of dollar bills as sea levels rise. We do not have political ecological leadership in this country at state or federal levels. There is a belated and inadequate response emerging which is well behind the vanguard of thinking.

Rather I'm advocating a way in which we as individuals and as ecological communities better live interconnected lives with each other and our supporting ecologies. Part of this is through a lived attention to local context and utilising the potential of the human imagination to bring about social change and our understanding of self through arts practice. Although artists have portrayed and reflected on landscape, patterns of settlement and evolving identities they have not necessarily embraced an implicit understanding of Australian ecologies. For instance, the portrayal of drought<sup>4</sup> and bushfire has reflected the fear and anxiety about both. These phenomena are normal but little imagery of them as normal, let alone as beauty or sublime, has evolved. It is pleasing to see two in the Landscape Prize; Philip Davey, Vic, *After the Fire* and Margaret Norman, WA, *Bushfire Manifestation*.



Regeneration after fire, Deep Creek Conservation Park

I'm unsure of the Biennale's function. On one hand it:

- . Provides a beacon in the revival of contemporary landscape painting
- . Provides an important career opportunity for artists and in particular the prize winners
- . Provides an extended audience for the genre of landscape painting

On the other it:

- . Provides a promotional and marketing campaign for the wine and tourism industries for an (overly) affluent middle, upper middle class
- . Supports the 'nationalist' and representational landscape painting tradition
- . Advances an art medium that has a strong relationship to the commodity market and profligate consumption
- . Supports the 'arts industry' which can also be said to be unsustainable to the extent it reflects an ailing, if not failing, paradigm. It is broadly accepted that the arts reflect the culture or society from which they emanate and as such, much contemporary art practice can be questioned in terms of sustainability.

Or could it be supporting contemporary Australian arts practice, beyond painting, in attempting to come to terms with notions of ecology, interconnectedness and sustainability, and with a more profound contact with our bio physical world, beyond land as economic resource to land as life force?

In terms of the art museum/institution McGonagle (1997:24) argues that if the function of the 19<sup>th</sup> C model was to fix value, then the function of the late twentieth (now early 21<sup>st</sup>) century model must be to unfix some of those values. If the Fleurieu Biennale is to provide leadership and be sustainable in the medium to long term, I suggest it needs to reconsider what it is and does in terms of ecological and social sustainability, that it must also 'unfix' some remnant values.

<sup>4</sup> Drought is an inadequate word or inappropriate word as there has always been cyclical dry periods. We have constructed drought as an act of God.

What could The Fleurieu Art Prize for Australian Landscape Painting also be?

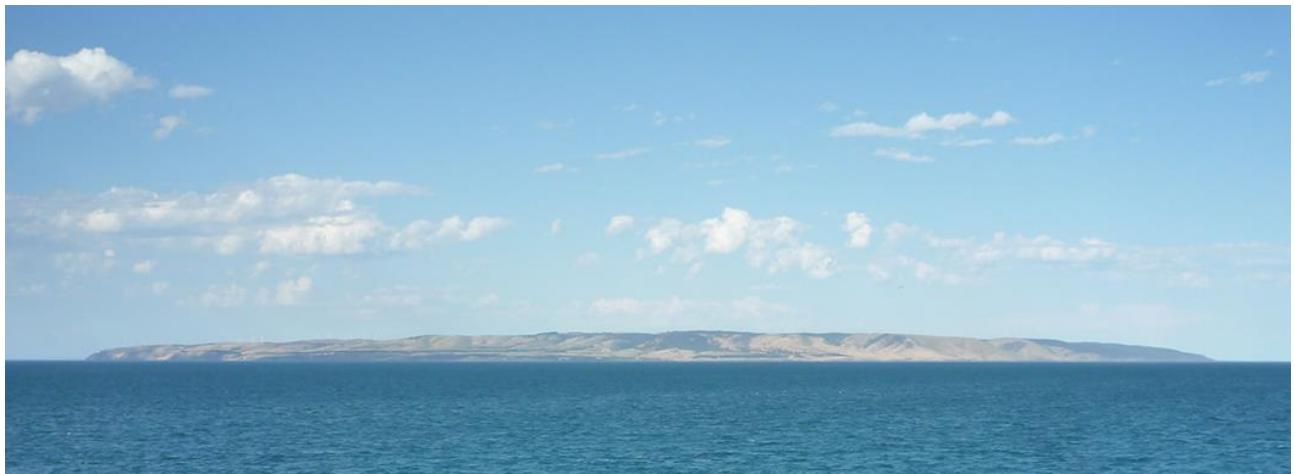
- . The Fleurieu Art Prize for Australian Habitat Painting (sounds strange)
- . The Fleurieu Art Prize for Australian Habitat Representation (ditto)
- . The Fleurieu Art Prize for a Sustainable Australia (sounds jingoistic)
- . The Fleurieu Art Prize: Place: Landscape and Habitat

I haven't got the catchcry phrase but more so I am seeking to introduce a way of thinking. No matter, I'm putting my foot in my mouth or my money where my mouth is and predict that this is the third last Biennale in its current Biennale form, it will not continue to exist with the current format and emphasis, broader sustainability and wine industry challenges will alter it.

The Fleurieu is more than landscape, vistas, food and wine; it is also habitat to our own and many other species.



There are many forward thinking and concerned people associated with, and with a vested interest in, the Fleurieu and the Biennale. Like all segments of the community, the Biennale must respond to the challenges.



'All Australia extends from here' Cape Jervis and the Fleurieu Peninsula

Web Version Updated June, 2013

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