Ideas of landscape: Finding an uneasy peace

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Ideas of landscape: Finding an Uneasy Peace

By

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Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts), Master of Arts (Marketing)

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of BA (Visual Arts) Honours

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ABSTRACT

Landscape, both the actual and the representational, "is a work of the mind" (Schama, 1995, p. 7) it encompasses ideas of difference, arcadia, commodification, nationalism and many others. How does one negotiate the physical and the representational when trying to reach beyond the traditions of the sublime? Anchoring my research in the physical landscape of Kings Park, Perth, Australia whilst looking at looking this paper explores the manifestation of ideas about land in both forms. Central to my research approach is W.J.T. Mitchell's theses on landscape number eight, which states: "landscape is an exhausted medium, no longer viable as a mode of artistic expression" (1994, p. 5). Countered immediately by his next, tongue in cheek, sentence: "like life, landscape is boring; we must not say so" (1994, p. 5). I agree, and this written and visual investigation explores the possibility of rupture to the accepted and traditional Western forms for landscape as a means of creating new conceptualisations.

The Australian landscape genre's seminal nature in articulating and circulating national character and identity is central to the need to reapproach it as a valid form for interrogation. This paper examines the place for oppositional voices through the medium to the prevailing nationalistic rhetoric and uses the actual landscape of Kings Park as a physical and represented site to investigate the manifestations of such.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any situation of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by a person except where due reference is made in the text. I also grant permission for the library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.

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INDEX:

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................. i
INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1
THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME ............................................................................ 4
RE-DRAWING THE LAND ...................................................................................... 9
TAKING IN THE VIEW ........................................................................................... 22
BUYING THE IDEA ............................................................................................... 26
CONCLUSION: FINDING AN UNEASY PEACE ...................................................... 32
REFERENCES ....................................................................................................... 36

LIST OF FIGURES:

Figure 1, ROSEMARY LAING, GROUNDSPEED #03, (2001) 128 X 85CM C-PRINT .................. 12
Figure 2, IRIS KOORNSTRA, IDEA OF LANDSCAPE #2 ("LOST" IN KINGS PARK), (2006) 60 X 45CM INKJET PRINT .................. 13
Figure 3, DARREN SIWES, TRAINED MAN, (2001) 100 X 120CM CIBACHROME .................. 15
Figure 4, IRIS KOORNSTRA, IDEA OF LANDSCAPE #3 (POSTCARD-A) (2006) 17 X 12CMS INKJET PRINT .................. 18
Figure 5, IRIS KOORNSTRA, IDEA OF LANDSCAPE #1 (HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH SHELLS – KINGS PARK) (2006), 90 X 70CM INKJET PRINT .................. 21
Figure 6, ANNE ZAHALKA, OPEN AIR CINEMA (1999) 115 X 242CM TYPE C PHOTOGRAPH .................. 33
INTRODUCTION

The urban parkland landscape of Kings Park, Perth is the departure point for my investigation into the “idea of landscape”, Ian Burn cited by Ann Stephen (2006, p. 13). The malleable term landscape encompasses physical, temporal and represented forms as well as being complicated by the respective histories and traditions attached to these forms. This shift between the physical context and the genre is a key part of the research with its purpose being a repositioning of these tropes by interrogation of the space and its contemporary connotations.

By limiting the geographic location of the investigation and applying a structured research framework I hope to explore its layered signification and represent anomalies within the site, locating myself in the wider view of discovering the complexity of meaning embedded within this landscape and views of it. Whilst always remembering that Kings Park is a landscaped space organised for an experience of nature, and that this investigation privileges site specific differences, it also means to act as a proxy for ways of looking at, and engaging with, a variety of landscapes, not just specifically urban parklands like Kings Park.

The contemporary terms of engagement with the physical space of Kings Park include the various activities of conservation: leisure (sport, cinema, theatre, shopping, picnics/BBQs, botany); tourism, which is arguably part of leisure coupled with a more specific interest in the panoramic view and local history; and nationalism manifest in memorials and civic ceremony (ANZAC Day). These activities frame the complex dialogue of what the space currently serves but must be cross-sectioned with the discourse of colonialism, which is at the core of its inception. The act of representing it places it within the aesthetic landscape tradition, recognised today as a tradition of “potent cultural symbol” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 15).
The genre of landscape is a critical reference point for this investigation precisely because of this potency, which as Ian Burn describes, functions as a mapping of “landscape into imagination” creating “visual metaphors” for society (1990, p. 8). My visual investigation consciously engages with the Western tropes of landscape form, interrogating them and asking; can the resulting imagery provoke a reassessment and opportunity for re-interpretation of the landscape through the genre, and provide a means of engaging with this visual metaphor?

I have chosen to virtually exclude discussion of Indigenous landscape art within the Australian landscape tradition not because I don’t see it as such but because it is still categorised as other, traditional or aboriginal. I think Richard Bell’s fundamental point in his theorem on aboriginal art is key to understanding this categorising. His argument is that the question of difference must be confronted as constructed: “aboriginality’ is not innate and natural to indigenous Australians, but a kind of projection on to them by white Australians” (Butler, 2006, p. 137). As such the complexities and comparisons between traditions of Indigenous and European forms of landscape art warrant a whole paper alone. In this analysis I am predominantly interested in Western tropes, because they form the majority of imagery in popular circulation.

This is not a thesis with one simple line of argument. It is an investigation that raises many pertinent questions about the complexities of one specific place and the challenge for today’s visual artists in using the landscape medium.

Many of the issues at the heart of the investigation, stem directly from the colonisation of Australia.

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1 Using both the traditional and digital photographic form.
2 In interrogating I employ the tool of rupture, the deliberate breaking or twisting of accepted conventions, to open new possibilities of engagement. In the four series of works that form the body of my creative investigation, rupture takes differing forms; the introduction of an impossible character into the imperial Western landscape trope (Idea of Landscape #2); the denial of the view in the postcards (Idea of Landscape #3); disruption to scale and repositioning of the tourist persona and lens (Idea of Landscape #1 and #4) respectively.
As a recent immigrant to Australia my position is necessarily compromised, as described by Jacobs, by being a “non-innocent” European, arriving into a thriving world of post-colonial imperialism (cited in Rousi, 2004, p. 2). As such I cannot represent the voices of Indigenous peoples but this personal diaspora does form a platform from which to explore the schisms within the landscape. A space for multiple viewpoints to exist is created. According to Ann Stephen, landscape painting is traditionally a means of confirming a relationship to place (2006, p. 14) and in trying to find my own sense of place in my displacement, I am forced to negotiate the complexities of post-colonial debate in a local and meaningful way.

With the aim of retaining fluidity and coherence in the written work, I have employed the use of footnotes to contextualise my own practice against the analysis, using reflexivity to interrogate the ideas raised by my work. I have also employed footnotes to elaborate as well as authenticate specific terms, statistics or points.
THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

The inception of Kings Park is not unusual in and of itself but when placed into its geographic and historical contexts it assumes a dimension of extra-ordinariness. In 1900 just under 180,000 people occupied The Swan River Colony (Sondalini, 2001, p. 4), having been founded on June 1st 1829 and floundering until the influx of the first convict ship in 1850. By 1872 the first land had already been gazetted for Kings Park, which was enlarged in 1890 to reach 406ha and officially opened in 1897 (Webb, 2006, pp. 3-6).

The same size as New York's Central Park, set in the vast and isolated wilderness of what is now known as Western Australia, what exactly was the function of this gazetted space? Perth was hardly the sprawling urbanised, overcrowded industrial scape that warranted the radical ideological town planning solutions flourishing in Britain at the time. Neither did it have the legacy of defence grounds, city boundaries, royal, common or hunting grounds that were to be converted into public parks for the moral fortification of society, these conditions being tightly bound up with eruptions of industrial growth in British cities. As Kostof points out "the public park proper... is a story linked to the industrial era" (1992, p. 166).

"Australian cities, however, began as facsimiles, metaphorical semblances of places elsewhere that they did not really resemble" (Conrad, 2003, p. 129). Although no doubt the park's inception has its roots in mimicry of these progressions in the mother country it is also possible, if not likely in my view, that the park fulfilled a role of proxy defensive citadel, which "obviously poised for defence; it occupies high ground where it can, and overlooks the town proper" (Kostof, 1992, p. 15). Defensive citadel against what though? Here where "the larger frame of nature ... made defence unnecessary" (Kostof, 1992, p.26).

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3 The fact that in 1862 "convicts built a rifle range along the crest of Mt Eliza overlooking Perth for use by the Perth & Fremantle Volunteer Rifles" (Botanic Gardens & Parks Authority, n.d) could add credence to this perspective.
Conrad writes that, “traditionally, the centre of a city is occupied by a mound on which a symbol of power and communal ideology is erected” (2003, p. 127). Perhaps the symbol of power and communal ideology was the civilising of this tract of land? A space in which familiarity was carved out so that the new constituents could stand with their backs to the wilderness from which Kings Park was excised, and look down on the burgeoning colonial city.

Many of the surviving colonial impressions of the Perth landscape in fact represent exactly this view. When looking at this imagery it is important to recognise that they are, as W. J. T. Mitchell describes, not only a unique medium that provides access “to ways of seeing landscape” but also “a representation of something that is already a representation in its own right” (1994, p. 14).

His point is that outside of the genre of landscape painting, landscape exists as a medium itself (1994, p. 5), the shaping of which in this instance is directly implicated in the discourse of imperialism. The representational form of which is another European imperialistic device despite the obvious fact that such art acts simultaneously as document, containing a record of “frontier moments and the process of colonisation” (Peers, 2006, p. 30).

These early images were a means of understanding and engaging with a foreign landscape, manipulating and transcribing the country. Ann-Marie Willis contextualises this process within the history of Australian landscape painting as “not one of progressive discovery, the building up of an ever more accurate picture, but a series of changing conceptualisations” where cultural constructions play off one another (1993, p. 62). What one looks at when regarding these and all landscapes then has multiple frames; the tradition of an imperialistic form, a record of activity, a reading of place and mind and a subscript within the meta-narrative of art history.

4 Including such artists/settlers as Frank Allum, George Nash, Edith Aide, Horace Samson, J. Walsh, C. D. Wittenoom, J. Campbell and many unknown artists whose works are in the collection of the Art Gallery of Western Australia.
I am mindful of the fact that my cultural production is a continuation within this context and is by default also a conceptualisation.

Willis also proposes that “landscape is the most pervasive theme in Australian high culture” and calls it “an enduring mythology in which significant slippage occurs between nation and geography” (1993, p. 61). She recognises the critical role that landscapes have played in creating a national Australian identity, mutating over time, forming a lexicon of images representing Australia and Australians to themselves, and others. The transitional narrative from colonial document to the climatic discovery of the “real” Australia (Burn, 1990, Radford & Hylton, n.d., Clark & Whitelaw, 1985) by the Heidelberg School of artists neatly reflects the colonisation of the landscape. Initially the task was to reconcile settlers to the space and encourage an attachment to place, later when artists suddenly discovered the real Australia the metaphor fitted well with national liberation and the “taking possession of a new land” (Willis, 1993, p. 64).

Landscape artists of the late 1800s and early 1900s, driven by events that imbued artwork with a newfound sense of nationalism (the centenary, Federation and WWI), became the authors of contrived perspectives of Australia and Australians. Some of these works have since entered the canon of Australian art history as icons but by the next centenary the mythology in these works was recognised as such, creating a “consequent wariness of ‘narcissistic identification’ with an idealised Australia” (Hoffie, 1997, p. 69).

This shift has created a real opportunity to reassess and interpret landscape, to view it as a liminal space, a threshold between cultures, not just those of settler and Indigenous people but of nature and culture also.

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5 Including the artists: Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton, Charles Condor.
6 Particularly the Heidelberg group of artists.
8 The Heidelberg school still has iconic status in mainstream culture, framing ideas of national identity, invoked in the school curriculum and advertising.
Virginia Madsen writes about the "possibility of a resonant critical space" (1999, p. 36) within this interplay. Though writing specifically about the border zone between culture and nature her point is about this space being able to give voice to "material forces", as opposed to "givens or constructions" (Madsen, 1999, p. 36) and is relevant to the whole question about reading contemporary landscape.

The artist Ian Burn also saw the landscape genre, precisely because of its enduring and "peculiar vitality within the Australian culture" (1990, p. 7), as an innovative and crucial site of conflict despite its conservative appearance (Burn, 1990, p. 9). In this context in his own works such as Value Added Landscapes (1992) he tried to defy the single viewpoint and create a "space between cultures without assimilating them" (Stephen, 2006, p. 31). His recognition of Albert Namatjira's landscape watercolours as a defiance of assimilation, a kind of "disruptive naturalism, because of its mimicry of Western art" (Stephen, 2006, p. 27), invert the typical response and support his recognition of the genre as a "crucial site of conflict" (Burn, 1990, p. 9).\(^9\)

According to Peter Conrad "the task of culture in Australia has always been acclimatization to a threatening or unintelligible nature" (2003, p. 74) and Australia, with its 200 year history of colonisation, has virulently employed the landscape genre to map the landscape into the imagination, continuing to shape the geography "as much by imagination as by reality" (Burn, 1990, p. 8). The form seeking continually to fashion a sense of home in Australia and what that might mean. Aside from framing nature with Western conceptions of it as something to be explored, revered, possessed, romanticised, exploited, represented as beauty, femininity or freedom, it has been used to "symbolise a cultural possession of the land" (Burn, 1990, p. 8) displacing and dispossessing all that went before it.

\(^9\) The conceptualisation of this is integral to my practice, manifested in the objective of deliberately conflicting the viewer by a lack of easy resolution in the imagery. The possibility of critically resonant space is created by this conflict. By appropriating recognisable tropes of landscape form, the link between the genre and conflicting landscape issues is reflexively established.
This artistic expression of *cultural possession* is equally true of Indigenous art (where its subject is land or connection to land). The modern proliferation of Western mediums such as canvas and acrylic and the increasing popularity of *aboriginal* art have extended Indigenous artist's voices into the larger market (both geographical and economic). However, the voices are mitigated by accompanying complexities and controversies; the predominantly ‘white’ management of the market, the obligatory ethnic categorisation of the producer, the ‘spiritualisation’\(^{10}\) of the cultural output and finally the issues around provenance and unscrupulous dealers. As the artist Richard Bell writes: “aboriginal art has become a product of the times. A commodity” (2003) and as such, one that I see offers simultaneous possibilities for inclusion and exclusion: possession and dispossesssion.

\(^{10}\) Richard Bell, winner of the 2003 Indigenous Art Award, sees this as an attribute that “consigns the art to ethnography” and as an “exploitative tactic” that assumes that spirituality is up for sale (Bell, 2003). He writes that the combination of Western dissatisfaction with Christianity and the proliferation of white experts has created this perspective and argues that the form of art would be best seen as a form of Western construct and that marketed as such it would be seen as the “world’s best example of Abstract Expressionism” (Bell, 2003).
RE-DRAWING THE LAND

Given the cultural weight that is given to landscape in Australia and the complexity of the history of the land itself, how can today’s artists engage critically with the tradition?

Geoff Levitus suggests it can only be possible if “the tradition itself is reassessed” (1997, p. 13). In my view he is saying the same thing as Pat Hoffie, when she makes the artist responsible for finding a new means of engaging with landscape that re-interprets through “post-colonial frames” and multiple viewpoints, retrieving meaning and value for the genre (1997, p. 98).

The problematic shift from the constructed landscape of parkland to the context of landscape here is relevant as there is a central interchangeable commonality between them and that is the idea that humans are other to nature, the idea of difference. It is this social construct of difference that Burn refers to when he talks about the “idea of landscape” becoming more important than the “landscape itself” as it declares “an idea of place, constantly redefining difference in a changing world” cited by Ann Stephen (2005, p. 13). And it is the idea of difference that was finally so important in cementing a unique Australian identity with the distinctiveness of Australian flora and fauna becoming the “basis for claims to a cultural individuality” (Burn, 1990, p. 9). In landscape art these differences are presented to form the social hieroglyph that Marx saw as an “emblem of the social relations it conceals” (cited in Mitchell, 1994, p. 15).

Recognising the common point of difference and that “nature is part of culture” (Wilson, 1992, p. 17) is a necessary step to reapproaching relationships both to the physical landscape and represented forms. Kings Park is an excellent platform for this precisely because it is much more readily visible as a constructed environment and provides a frame with which to view these accumulated and blurred meanings and all their associated problems.
Geoff Levitus recommends finding a relationship of “uneasy peace” with Australian landscape (1997, p. 11). I have used his expression to title this research because I believe it encapsulates articulately, yet simply, the difficulty of reconciling European presence to the land as well as recommending that lack of resolution must be accepted as it will always be inherently compromised. Attempts to find this “uneasy peace” are being made by contemporary artists, some of whom employ photography to find this new means of engaging with landscape. Artists such as Fiona Hall, Anne Zahalka and Rosemary Laing have all pointed the camera at Australia with a view to investigating its inherent complexities.

The use of a camera is, for me, an entirely appropriate form. The quintessential tool of modernity and the weapon of the tourist, the camera was also employed in the effort to domesticate Australia and make it "knowable" (Conrad, 2003, p. 11). Like the genesis in colonial art it too surveyed, inventoried and documented Australia before being recognised as a tool where ultimately the veracity of the photograph could be used against itself and photographers were exposed as "autuers" creating images in "directorial mode" (Crimp, 1993, pp. 119-122). Photographs of the landscape are not merely documents, they too are contemporised constructions in the same way that earlier painted landscapes were. However, in this instance, where the "picturesque template" of landscape has almost exhausted itself (Smith, 1997, p. 32), today's artists are, I think, obliged to negotiate the complexities of this landscape and allow its construction to be revealed not concealed.

Anne Zahalka's manipulated and montaged works *The Landscape Re-presented* (1982-85) series recognise both the genre and reality of Australian landscape within the Australian meta narrative of art history and its potential for conflict. Questions of history and identity are provoked with her insertion of her own migrant heritage into the iconic landscape works of McCubbin and Heysen directly confronting the "mythic notions of the bush" and I add, bushman, and its codification in iconic art (O' Hehir, 2004, p. 413).
If, as Conrad suggests, photography is about relating background to human foreground and we feel at home if the "equation is balanced" (2003, p. 18) then unbalancing the relationship acts as a means of exposing the fracture between them.

Where Zahalka in this instance unbalances the relationships by intervening with an image to create a new image, effectively colonising it with new meaning, Rosemary Laing is an artist that uses intervention in the landscape to create fractures. She investigates the "relationships between people and place ... informed by post colonial perspectives on the occupation and ownership of the land" speculating on how "the past intersects with the present" (Webb, 2005, p. 6). In the 2001 series, *Groundspeed* (see figure 1, page 12), by carpeting the forest floors she deliberately sets out to "redesign nature itself" (Meacham, 2005) the Axminster carpets acting as "remnants of the past that persist in contemporary culture" (Webb, 2005, p. 11). Laing notes a painting of John Glover's (*A view of the artist's house and garden, Mills Plains, Van Dieman's land - 1835*) as a significant influence on the series. The "array of European species laid out between the artist's house and the native landscape" creating a "'comfort zone of familiarity'" (Laing cited in Webb, 2005, p. 11). The images also "parallel the domestication and familiarisation of place" that resulted by the absorption of Australian landscape images into homes and museums (Webb, 2005, p. 11).

To me Laing's works question European presence in the landscape, acknowledging that it is a site of contestation literally and ideologically. It resonates with Pat Hoffie's view of landscape emerging "in a pivotal position as the shared environment and contested site for constructions of cultural identity" (1997, p. 98).

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11 The fact that Laing actually physically inserted the carpet onto the forest floors amplifies the issues of domesticity and domestication that are residual in the Australian landscape narrative and physical landscape. This intervention in the landscape is a form of rupture that I have employed in my work, using the physical form of a human scale rabbit (see figure 2, page 13). In this exegesis it is possible to allow this form to carry multiple meanings including allusions to Alice in Wonderland, the incursion of exotic species to the Australian landscape or Disney-fication of nature, all relevant to the discourse of landscape.
Figure 1, ROSEMARY LAING, GROUNDSPEED #03, (2001) 128 x 85CM C-PRINT
Figure 2, Iris Koornstra, Idea of Landscape #2 ("Lost in Kings Park), (2006) 60 x 45cm Inkjet Print
This contestation is also sharply brought into focus in the urban landscape photography of Darren Siwes by his insertion of ghostly Indigenous figures into images of South Australian landmarks, his "stubbornly repeated image can be read as a haunting figure of resilience, of survival despite the erasures of history" (Smith, 2002). See figure 3, page 15\textsuperscript{12}.

\textsuperscript{12} Within my own practice I have consciously limited the appearance of the rabbit so that the presence and its ability to disrupt a straightforward singular reading of landscape, would not be eroded. Though the gaze of the rabbit engages the viewer directly raising immediate questions, it is extremely important to me that the narrative of the rabbit itself is not the focal point, but rather that the presence itself is. The nomenclature of the image deliberately refers to McCubbin’s iconic painting \textit{Lost} of 1886. Unlike the new works by Polixeni Papatrou, \textit{Haunted Country} (2006) I am not exploring the “poignant” theme of a lost bush child so much as its location within “Australia’s cultural remembrance” (Foley Gallery, n.d.).
Figure 3, DARREN SIWES, TRAINED MAN, (2001) 100 X 120CM CIBACHROME
There is little left of the sublime in these transactions, references to it seem ironic in that their seductive elements can only further open the space in which to view the conflict within the landscape. Rather than symbolising Burn's cultural possession of the land they determinedly invert it and deny easy attachment to place. I propose that this inversion can be used as a tool for interrogating landscape and adopt it for this purpose.¹³

The question of identity in Kings Park seems to me largely uncontested, its proliferation of monuments, memorials and signs attesting to a process of colonisation in both the literal and symbolic sense. Kings Park lays claim to being the most memorialised park in Australia (Kings Park & Botanic Gardens, n.d.). These monuments result from the same events that led to nationalism being imbued into Australian landscape painting. The events, referred to earlier, were seminal in providing some lived history for the non-Indigenous people of Australia. As Inglis points out, "Australian history before 1915 could not supply that theme of divine national purpose" (1998, p. 461). The flurry of monuments erected in Australia in commemoration of these events is seen by both Inglis and Conrad as a form of erasure of the brutal history of the colonisation, a filling of a hitherto "empty" landscape which signified a new society waiting for triumphs to be fulfilled (Inglis, 1998, p. 16), a raising of crosses to "sanctify" the land (Conrad, 2003, p. 63).

What does it mean to concentrate over 50 memorials to conflict and disaster in public parkland such as Kings Park? In one sense the mimicry engendered in the creation of the space has been continued, albeit exaggerated, with the placing of monuments in Kings Park. Personally, I read it as an extension of the expression of Conrad's "symbol of power and communal ideology" (2003, p. 127).

¹³ Having consciously engaged with the trope of late 19th century Heidelberg landscape painters McCubbin and Buvelot, by framing and titling in the series Idea of Landscape #2, I subvert, in the instance of figure 2, p. 13, the potentially easy and nostalgic attachment to the scene by making the rabbit the protagonist, the direct gaze of which inverts the question of belonging in the landscape back to the viewer.
Certainly it is clear from the position of the Perth State War Memorial, on Mount Eliza in Kings Park overlooking the city (almost the same position as those early colonial portrayals), that there is no question about to whom the power belongs: the newcomer. Here the "revelation of the panorama is a political gesture of grace and favour" (Warnke, 1994, p. 20) and imposes "a political message on a whole region" (1994, p. 18).

Integral to memorialisation within the park is the ritual of ANZAC day. Intrinsically complicit with identity and hegemony, this day rather than Australia Day (26th January) or Wattle Day (7th September) is the ongoing focus for ceremony. Ken Inglis sees the ANZAC ceremony and its increasing popularity as a deeply embedded ritual in Australia. The "heroic act of self sacrifice" made by Australia "upon the altar of the world" (Inglis, 1998, p. 16) in WWI led to the legend of the digger being born and the establishment of a virtual "national cult" (Conrad, 2003, p. 170) around ANZAC day. It was a decisive point at which Australia was seen by many (Burn, 1990, Willis, 1993, Conrad, 2003, Inglis, 1998) to have matured into a nation, that "symbolic form" presented by the state that "commands an emotional resonance" (Willis, 1993, p. 19) and is employed to "name the collective self" and provide a sense of community (Willis, 1993, p.22).

An important part of that coming of age was "to have a significant body or art and literature" that could be seen as distinctive which Willis notes "has become one of the requirements of modern nationhood" (1993, p. 27). This significant body of art and literature had as its focus the need to assert an independent identity from the motherland which until the event of WWI had been problematic as Australia was founded on that which was brought from there.

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14 Using the form of a tourist postcard my work takes this vantage point and ruptures it both by denying the outlook and offering the open space to be overwritten – see figure 4, p. 18. The series Idea of Landscape #3 were a later manifestation of my creative ideas, which began with using the format with the visual. After exploring ideas of bought versus made, and altered tags, I concluded that excluding the image was the most powerful means of expressing politicisation.

15 One of the early National Days, which used native flora as symbols around which to celebrate and reflect on nation in schools and communities, instigated around the time of federation – (Robin, 2002).
View from Mt Eliza, Kings Park, Perth, 2006

**Figure 4, Iris Koornstra, Idea of Landscape #3 (Postcard-A) (2006) 17 x 12cms Inkjet Print**
The beginning stages of Kings Park land management also reflect this difficult transition. The original honour avenue Oaks propagated from English stock failed in the local climate, and were soon replaced with eucalypts that through the passage of time, in representation of landscape art and cemented by this act, became a symbol of white Australian identity (Roberts, 1999, p. 126). It is arguable that this continues to be problematic with ongoing importations of cultural icons such as the bells of St Martins in the Fields, parish church of Buckingham Palace, in the Perth Bell Tower (Crouch, 2002, p. 1).

I believe these truths about the landscape can only be manifested in the genre if artists do as Sue Rowley recommends and displace conventions with other conventions for organizing and perceiving landscape (1997, p. 25). In particular she talks about adopting “Brechtian strategies to render the ‘familiar’ strange” enabling not only a new means of representing the environment but also engaging with the representations (1997, p. 16). The idea of this type of rupture is to allow alternative perspectives to emerge and contest the neatly packaged and lineally progressive, historically convenient narratives that abound in simplification of a national story.

The shells featured in figure 5, page 21, came from the battleship HMS Queen Elizabeth, which helped to cover operations of the Australian Imperial Forces at ANZAC Cove, presented to Kings Park by the Admiral of the British Fleet from 1916-1919. There is “some little history attaching (sic) to this valuable Park trophy” (Lovekin, 1925, p. 27). It was sought as a gift for King’s Park at the behest of the President of the Park Board after having seen some similar shells mounted for exhibition in a Glasgow railway station. Lovekin proudly describes the main shell as a “monster” that possesses a range of 25 miles in fine weather (1925, p. 27). This then is the machinery of war, carefully and aesthetically placed into the park, but to commemorate what?
Lovekin notes that "it was the famous admiral's association with the gift that was wanted as much as the actual shell" (1925, p. 27) and in a sense this is its only surviving but buried significance. The shells don't attract thousands in commemoration of war dead. They're simply not imposing enough to muster this kind of attention and in fact go easily unnoticed, but when the object becomes the focus of attention it has to somehow stand for something archetypal. The confusion over what it is standing in for created by the narrative of the colonised space.

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16 The focal treatment in the image Idea of Landscape #1 (HMS Queen Elizabeth Shells – Kings Park) – figure, 5, p. 21, has been manipulated to achieve this effect, exaggerating scale and giving a surreal sense of object placed into a man made set. Not only is this designed to rupture the typical view of a war memorial (and its accompanying collusion in construction of Australian identity) but it is an allusion to the force used in colonisation of the land.
**Figure 5,** Iris Koornstra, *Idea of Landscape #1 (HMS Queen Elizabeth Shells – Kings Park)* (2006), 90 x 70cm inkjet print
TAKING IN THE VIEW

The increasing popularity of the ANZAC ceremony could be argued as being part of the current government's nationalism push, instigated perhaps by the 1994 Federal programme "Australia Remembers" and "Operation Restoration" (Inglis, 1998, p. 412), in a bid to keep the ANZAC legend alive for the 1995 50th anniversary of VP day. Intricately bound up in this and currently manifesting in public debate is the rhetoric about Australian values and the idea of being un-Australian. Recognised values such as "mateship" and "fairgo" originating in part in the "digger" legend (Business Council of Australia, n.d.) are combined with the masculine referents as "diverse as the bushman and the lifesaver" (Willis, 1993, p. 25) and recast into enduring characters both fictional and real such as Crocodile Dundee and Steve Irwin.

Australian archetypes and ideas of difference are also integral to tourism and it does not, in hindsight, seem coincidental that the word tourist "came into use at the very time that the British were establishing themselves in this country" (Australia) (Davidson & Spearritt, 2000, p. xvii). Eric J. Leed cited in Davidson & Spearritt's book argues that "'travel is the neglected dynamic of Western civilisation'" having "helped, through the refinement of observation to sustain the scientific revolution" and established a "'new sense of centrality'" for Northern Europe (2000, p. xxi). As Julia Horne points out this exploration was central to the process of colonisation and it wasn't long before "the colonisers were travelling ... in order to collect data, make observations and learn something about the land and its people" (2005, p. 31). These views of travel clarify its imperialistic permutation that has perhaps long since been buried but nevertheless connects implicitly with tourism's culturally voyeuristic aspect.

Today tourism is big business, with 5.2 million visitors to Australia contributing $73 billion to consumption in 2004 (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, n.d.), making it a major Australian industry, albeit one that has only recently "come to occupy a central place in the national consciousness" (Davidson &
Spearritt, 2000, p. xvii). Yet the contemporary conceptualisation of tourism as travel for pleasure, is only recent, stemming from the increased availability of leisure time and wealth resulting from the industrial revolution\textsuperscript{17}. Alexander Wilson sees this same rise of the industrial age as the point of schism between man and nature (1992, pp 24-25). If you combine these ideas with the contemporaneous ideology of the restorative powers of nature it is easy to see how nature and the natural have become central to modern tourism in turn making them commodities to be consumed.

Nature as commodity is one dimension of the tourism discourse that is relevant to this research but before moving to explore it I want to revisit the idea of difference within the discourse of tourism. For me tourism is another manifestation of this idea of other, and this difference is elegantly articulated by the figure of the tourist through Dean MacCannell’s eyes as “an early postmodern figure, alienated but seeking fulfilment in his own alienation” (cited in Davidson & Spearritt, 2000 p. xxiv). Eric Leed sums up this position when he argues travel can no longer afford distinction because in the end “the common identity we all share... is that of a stranger” (cited in Davidson & Spearritt, 2000, p. xxi). This other/stranger has particular resonance in a colonised landscape where the 19th century touristic search was for the familiar where today the other, Indigenous culture, has been appropriated by tourism as “one of the markers of the distinctiveness of Australia” (Willis, 1993, p. 108).

The success of the appropriation is reflected in the fiscal contribution that Indigenous artefacts and art make to the Australian economy. In 1997 sales of Indigenous art were close to A$200 million (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Trade & Affairs, n.d.). In February 1993 The Australia Council found that international visitors spent $46 million per year on purchase of Indigenous arts and souvenirs, a previous report from 1989 found that only $7 million of this found its way to the Indigenous communities (Reconciliation and Social Justice Library, n.d.).

\textsuperscript{17} Texts by (Wilson, 1993, Horne 2005, Davidson & Spearritt, 2000) refer to this origination.
Not only is the appropriation economically inequitable but it misrepresents and erases the plight of Indigenous peoples, completely erasing their sublimation through colonisation which resulted not only in "cultural rupture and fragmentation" but also in some cases, partial or total "annihilation of indigenous traditions" (Willis, 1993, p. 21). The complexity of aboriginality and cultural tourism is not entirely relevant to this discussion outside of instances where it is simplified to that of sign or "appearance of tradition" (Willis, 1993, p. 112). I believe that within the physical space of Kings Park this is what has happened. For example contrast the visible presence of Indigenous art and artefacts for sale with the distinct lack of monuments or commemorative sites for Indigenous people.

Where those sites do exist as for example with the Kaarta Gar-up Lookout they are inherently compromised. The lookout usurping what would have been a traditional sitting place for Indigenous people now framing the typical colonial view overlooking Perth and used to sell Indigenous artefacts and host weddings. This "disappearance of a sense of history" (Jameson, 1982, p. 125), in this case outside of the colonial frame, is an illustration of Frederic Jameson's "perpetual present" (1982, p. 125) where society obliterates traditions by a state of perpetual change.

Similarly with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial (erected in 2001 to people who "gave their lives serving with the Australian armed forces ... in all conflicts since the Boer War") (Kings Park & Botanic Garden, n.d.), important questions are raised in terms of its scale; in comparison to the State War Memorial and its positioning; overlooking the controversial Swan Brewery Development, built on sacred ground. There is virtually no trace, other than that which has been placed into the landscape by the colonisers, of the Indigenous people who had occupied it for over 40,000 years. This erasure is part of the narrative of progress, only significantly ruptured by events such as Justice Wilcox's recent native title award to the Nyoongar community in recognition of the ongoing connection of Nyoongar people to the land.
The predominantly negative public reaction to this and the planned state and federal appeals against the decision, once again illustrate the contentious nature of giving visibility to conflicting views of the land, which disallow any comfortable narrative resolution.

These reconstructive narrative processes are reflected in micro scale in Kings Park where Indigenous history is re-inserted into the frame by means of signage. The irony of which is made sharper by the knowledge that early on in its history local aboriginal people were moved on from the park. According to a statement made by Reggie Wallam, Nyungah Elder in 1989 (cited in Ansara, 1989, p. 68):

"You wasn't allowed to camp round there at Kings Park by the river on our Homegrounds. Police would shift you even if you sat on their seats... They only wanted bridiahs (upper class white people) there. You wasn't allowed to lay around there at Kings Park".
BUYING THE IDEA

The question is, is Kings Park another temporal sales-point for the consumption of nature?

Julia Horne writes about landscape art’s integral part in the framing of expectations of 19th century tourists who, familiar with the picturesque\textsuperscript{18}, set out to find it in popular destinations such as Tasmania. These “depictions and descriptions of nature by travellers ... helped to shape what people saw”, (Horne, 2005, p. 300). Today, photography’s centrality creates a different, but nevertheless powerful simulacra of nature and Australia, which imaged and branded for marketing, has become “such a beguiling, illusory image” (Conrad, 2003, p. 247). Belying the complexity of discourse about what it actually is.

Jean Baudrillard states that to take photographs “is not to take the world for an object, but to make it an object” (cited in Weibel 1999, p. 132). The landscape in which the tourist seeks to place him/herself becomes the locus of what Mitchell calls “fetishistic practices”, “the limitless repetition of identical photographs taken on identical spots by tourists with interchangeable emotions” (1994, p. 15). This not only commodifies the landscape but also functions on the same level as the more formalised genre of landscape in its aims to suture the subject into representations of the country (Muecke, 1999, p. 47) and I might add suture the country and experience of it into memory.

Postcards are both an expression of this fetishistic practice, commodification and suturing. The social history of the form derives from the Paris Exhibition of 1889 and was well established by the early 1900s (Wollaeger, 2001, p. 43).

\textsuperscript{18} Described by Horne as “a gently winding stream through a landscape of naturally clumped trees and grassy meadows, perhaps passing by a crumbling ruin covered in vines, set to a background of hills, sky and clouds” (2006, p. 39).
This new cultural form was used to contribute debate to contemporary issues including women's suffrage, tariff rates and imperial policy. In this context they can be seen to have been "a new agent of propaganda" (Wollaeger, 2001, p. 45). In fact early British cards had no specific message place, by directive of the Postmaster General, they had only an address directive on the stamp side, indicating perhaps that the message was contained in the imagery employed front and back.

The postcard was also complicit in the advance of empire, bringing images from far flung colonies to the British Empire, exoticising and making primitive, reinforcing colonial stereotypes (Calder et al., 2006, pp. 11-12). With this framework of reference it seems logical that to subvert the form would enable an engagement with it precisely as a medium of landscape that is employed with commercial and colonising practices.

Symbols taken from nature are used to particularise Australia; the kangaroo, the emu, the Great Barrier Reef, native flora, Anne-Marie Willis sees these signs as "over determined" (1993, p. 16) but their appropriation has in large part been down to the business of tourism and nationalism. She notes it is not the state alone that "takes up national stereotypes, reworks them and presents them to populations of consumers" but that increasingly it is the province of the multinational corporate sector that performs this task (Willis, 1993, p. 21). This systematic representation of sign is not limited to the preserve of paraphernalia (including postcards) and marketing campaigns but is also manifest in the landscape, mediating our experience of the natural world (Wilson, 1992, p. 12).

19 The four postcards in Idea of Landscape #3 (2006) work with these ideas of politicisation, colonialism, empire and commodity. In each instance they represent a 'view' of landscape constructed through words, symbols and the postcard form. The denial of the image, conflicts expectation and forces the viewer to imagine the scene. They are rendered useless in their typical sense as well as by being re-contextualised by being displayed in the gallery context. The form has many possibilities to extend my practice into the future. An example of practice based almost entirely in this form is The Leeds Postcards cooperative a "radical satirical press since 1979" (Leeds Postcards, n.d.). They have used the postcard form for over 20 years to challenge the accepted hegemony of media. Not only have the cards been used in specific political issues (e.g. the miner's strike of 1984) but they are currently in a world travelling exhibition, titled Up Front & Personal; Three decades of British Political Art, sponsored by the British Council (Leeds Postcards, n.d).
Nature proliferates in a "repertoire of images" produced by tourist culture, extending the commodity from both "out into the natural world and back into our imaginations" (Wilson, 1992, p. 19).

Whilst "nature can't really be said to be sacred in this culture" Wilson notes that, "nature appreciation comes close to being a sacred activity" (1992, p. 23). This idea of the "sacrilisation" (Davidson & Spearritt, 2000, p. xxvi) is transparent in tourism as sites are identified and packaged for consumption. MacCannell cited in Davidson & Spearritt (2000, pp xxv-xxvi) describes the process: "first, the site is marked off from similar objects as worthy of preservation", then it or the object is framed or elevated by being "displayed". The site is then "enhanced" by mechanical reproduction ie postcards, prints etc and finally may undergo some social reproduction with "groups, cities and regions" naming themselves after the famous attraction (2000, pp xxv-xxvi). The authors point out that there is another dimension in the process, where "mediation may come to confront mediation" and "enshrinement" can occur (2000, p. xxvi). Large-scale ANZAC monuments frequently fit into this mould, and that this may be the case with the State War Memorial in Kings Park is a clear contributor to the increasing popularity of ANZAC day; underscored by an increasing nationalistic rhetoric of state and federal governments.

Kings Park displays a proliferation of signage within it, implying an innate stewardship of the landscape by man, a manifestation of nature being "a machine built and repaired by men" (Carolyn Merchants cited in Wilson, 2000, p. 61). The experience of place is highly organised by interpretive signs, pathways, restricted uses, shops, guided tours, activities and interpretive centres. Wilson sees this type of activity as necessary to a degree "because parks are by definition a limited resource, managers must predict and control their use by humans" (1992, p. 59). But he also sees it as a logical extension of the schism between man and nature now needing to be explained to its human inhabitants (Wilson, 1992, p. 53).
He points out the disparity in types of information available about nature to people claiming much readily available information "is promotional on the other hand, we often find it difficult to gain access to vital data for example, success rates of reforestation programs, or locations of toxic waste dumps" (Wilson, 1992, p. 53). This disparity of information is, I believe, extremely relevant to Kings Park, which has as its primary stated objective conservation\(^{20}\) (Botanic Gardens & Parks Authority, 2004), evidenced in situ with respective interpretive panels and research facilities.

One potential political interpretation of this proliferation might, I believe accurately, see this as the face of a proactive land management strategy, presented to an essentially urbanised population, which upon looking at Kings Park might be forgiven for thinking that all was well with land under crown care. Evidence then possibly of the "significant disjunction" between "the actual relation of city to country and how we think about and reproduce that relation in working landscapes?" (Wilson, 1992, p. 195). Conservation in this instance is made all the more ironic because of the systematic eradication of nature in Western Australia (to make way for agriculture). The managed and constructed nature of the park, make it an ideal place to explore the nature/culture dialectic\(^{21}\).

The fact that some people\(^{22}\) view Kings Park today as an act of foresight and conservation that resulted in pristine bushland being preserved ignores its chequered history, including being the source of the first export from the Swan River Colony.

\(^{20}\) The Kings Park & Botanic Gardens (BGPA) Management Plan 2004-2009 states BGPA plan to "undertake world class, research-based ecological restoration to conserve and enhance the native biological diversity of Kings Park and Botanic Garden’s Bushland".

\(^{21}\) The final series in my work: *Idea of Landscape #4* (2006), investigates the trope of tourist in the landscape both in the literal sense and in the sense of Other. The experience always mediated by information. The park becomes a place with which to engage with nature in its knowable and classifiable forms. So called wild flowers are collected, cut and placed into shot glasses, to inform us about species variety and beauty in a landscape that in reality is endangered by human activity. It is these nuances that inform my investigation and practice.

\(^{22}\) Based only on my personal and informal experience in conversation with local people about Kings Park.
The Kings Park website notes 5 tons of Jarrah were logged from Mt Eliza in 1836, after Surveyor General John Septimus Roe had already refused permission to cut timber from there in 1830 (Kings Park & Botanic Gardens, n.d.). In fact the area was “extensively logged and jarrah from the park was used for many public buildings, including Government House and the Town Hall” and “until the late 1800s, colonists also quarried limestone from the Scarp to provide much needed building materials for the town of Perth” (Government of Western Australia, n.d.).

The leisure-oriented use of the space today glosses over these realities. Tourists come to admire the views over the city and discover the unique flora, fiancés come to exchange vows against the picturesque backdrop, families come to picnic, bbq, walk and play sport. All forming a mise en scène that enacts the deeply entrenched Western idea of nature as a lost garden, and the more modern conceptualisation of nature as freedom. An idea that as Wilson points out “would be meaningless in a time or culture other than this one” (1992, p. 32).

Anne Zahalka’s photographic series Leisureland (1998-2001) and Natural Wonders (2004) investigate directly the commodification and consumption of nature, the pursuit of leisure within the landscape and its connection to contemporary Australian identity. These ideas culminate in the hyper-real aspect of engagement with landscape as spectacle. The surreal flavour of these works have, for me, their heart in the question of Western culture’s arcadian views of nature.

Arcadia with its two faces, “shaggy and smooth; dark and light; a place of bucolic leisure and a place of primitive panic” (Schama, 1995, p. 517), lies at the heart of Western fantasies of the idyllic and wild. Schama calls them “mutually sustaining”, each defined against the other but both essentially “landscapes of the urban imagination” (1995, p. 525). Each encouraged to exist side by side in the managed landscape of Kings Park.

23 I have used this type of scene, again modelled on a trope of European 19th century landscape form (Louis Buvelot’s St Kilda Park c.1880), as a companion piece to Idea of Landscape #1 ("Lost" in Kings Park).
Are these views, implicitly present in a parkland space such as Kings Park, obscuring the less palatable notions of inter-cultural relations between coloniser and colonised? The concept of wilderness, in the sense of country being untouched or pristine, is problematic in this country where it keeps alive the notion of terra nullius (Flannery cited in Lines, 2006, p. 21).
CONCLUSION: FINDING AN UNEASY PEACE

So, how does visual art help to understand Australia now, or "guess at its future?" (Conrad, 2003, p. 240). I conclude from my investigation that landscape and representations of it have been, and continue to be, seminal in the construction of national identity. Yet whilst commitment to a national culture is stronger than ever before; "structurally and spiritually, the nation has less substance than ever before" (Cochrane & Goodman, 1992, p. 175). Popular mainstream imagery rarely confronts the complexities inherent in this discourse with an increasing tendency to over simplification and lightness, a rhetoric that is increasingly "superficial and frenetic" (Williams cited in Cochrane & Goodman, 1992, p. 176).

In this context visual artists have a major contribution to make in providing oppositional voices or multiple views in this debate, specifically through investigating relationships to the land. These voices are critical to defeating an oversimplified, one-dimensional narrative on national character, and sense of place in the land. Works like Zahalka's *Open Air Cinema* (1999) (see figure 6, p. 33) from the *Leisureland* series, prompt important questions in this debate. As Conrad, looking at this work asks, exactly what is Australia "when it is at home, and allowed to be itself? No longer a remote tropical imitation of Britain, surely not a facsimile of America either" (2003, p. 249).

Artists like Fiona Hall also make fertile ground of this territory, eloquently exploring the "changing conjunctions that human beings fashion between themselves and the natural world – through culture" (Ewington, 2005, p. 27). Her exploration of commodification through colonialism through the frame of botany, in the series *Leaf Litter* (1999-2003), cuts right to the heart of imperial power. She acknowledges the powerful role plants have played in the history of colonisation, not just in their facilitation of wealth but also in their own colonisation of the landscape as exotic imports.
FIGURE 6, ANNE ZAHALKA, OPEN AIR CINEMA (1999) 115 X 242CM TYPE C PHOTOGRAPH
Wilson writes about what we see in looking at the landscaping work of the late 20th century: “residues of many traditions: romantic, modernist, environmentalist, pastoral, counter cultural, regionalist, agrarian, and, now, restorationist” (1992, p. 115). These changing lenses are a reminder of Western culture’s ability to see nature in abstract terms, which in turn, underpins the “capacity of Western culture to reconfigure nature’s reality” (Bartram, 2005, p. 13), communicated through cultural constructions such as visual arts.

By creating four different sets of images of Kings Park I hope to introduce the particular compromises that are present in that landscape and magnified in the tradition of landscape art in Australia. The postcards, ‘paintings’, and images in Idea of Landscape #1 - #4 (2006) are an attempt to apply Rowley’s “Brechtian strategies” (1997, p. 16), to find a way to interrogate both the form and the space, looking for ways to re-interpret and find new visual metaphors.

Yes, I believe that deeply embedded Western arcadian views of landscape interfere with engaging honestly with the land. The truths about Australian landscape (and the mythologies presented in the genre) are much less palatable than the fantasies afforded by the continuing commodification of land and nature and our increasing insatiable desire to connect with it. Landscape in the contemporary world is inherently conflicted in its economic value versus its seemingly inexhaustible spiritual value (Mitchell, 1994, p. 15).

So I concur with Mitchell when he repositions it as a "medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other" (1994, p. 5). Agreeing with his provocative statement that though the medium is “exhausted”, “like life landscape is boring; we must not say so” (my italics) (1994, p. 5). The possibility of conflict that Burn saw in the genre is precisely what makes it so relevant.
Whilst conventional forms of the genre have much potential to obscure the realities of the physical landscape, layering meaning against its contents, to create attachments to place and shape national character, the possibility of rupturing these representations has much to offer in terms of questioning the validity of the assumptions.

Finally, though my assumptions are just as much a conceptualisation, which still encompass ideas of difference, they are my attempt to find an "uneasy peace" (Levitus, 1997, p. 11). As such my ideas about representing landscape are open to defeat by nature and culture themselves with only one possible conclusion; that "time is the only successful colonist" (Conrad, 2003, p. 39) and that in the final instance these cultural constructs are relativised when one acknowledges that "nature is not different to us" but indifferent to us (Bartram, 2005, p. 3).
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