

TOWARDS A PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBLIME, 1982-2000

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Statement of originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or other diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgment is made in the text of the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Stephenson', written in a cursive style.

David Stephenson

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Abstract

From 1982 to 2000 a number of related series of artworks were developed which collectively explored both the problem of an evocation of the sublime, and questions of photographic representation. Over this nineteen year period various pictorial approaches were investigated for their potential to interrogate these issues. In the mid 1980s an academic background in nineteenth-century landscape painting and photography informed my representations of the sublime in the Tasmanian wilderness landscape, by drawing on nineteenth-century pictorial motifs such as the figure and the panorama, but reconfiguring them within a late twentieth-century constructivist mode which sought to challenge codes of transparency in the photographic culture. From the late 1980s through the early 1990s my photographs were increasingly informed by an exploration of reductive abstraction, in an attempt to expand the metaphoric possibilities of the photograph, and continue to challenge cultural assumptions of photographic veracity. Fieldwork in both the Arctic and Antarctica was conducted in a search for minimal environmental settings. Over the 1990s images of the sky led to an investigation of related architectural settings, and strategies of abstraction coupled with a rigorous seriality created by systematic visual procedures led to the development of larger scale installation works composed of many similar constituent images. These various series were published nationally and overseas through numerous individual and curated group exhibitions, with reproductions of images in associated catalogs and books, thereby making a significant contribution to the field of contemporary photography.

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