Tracings - a photographic investigation into being in the land

by

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Submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

My primary motivation for this project has been to find a photographic language that communicates the experience of being in the land.

The conventions of landscape photography are largely based on the concept of looking at the landscape rather than being in the land. These conventions rely on the monocular lens of the camera, linear perspective and, by implication, produce a distancing, totalising view.

My investigation led me to abandon the use of the photographic camera and find methods and techniques that required my physical engagement with the environment and a touch-dependant manner for making images. I combined the old technology of the photogram and the relatively new technology of the digital scanner. Both image making processes rely on the physical contact of an object with the surface that produces the image. In both cases, the resulting image represents a trace of the object and a fragment or detail from the larger environment. The added component of text, also refers to experienced time and place.

I chose Maria Island, off the East Coast of Tasmania, as the exclusive location for my project and conducted extended field trips there. Remnants of flora and fauna and journal notes collected on the island became the source material for the making of my photograms, digital prints and text.

Searching for an appropriate format of presentation resulted in the development of the frieze as an open visual device. The frieze invites physical movement and imagining beyond the material borders of the images.

The theoretical context of my project is based on a comparison between a Cartesian perspectival representation of landscape, and a phenomenological approach to communicating experience.

The visual field I have identified for my project comprises works by artists Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, David Stephenson, Tokihiro Sato, Nikolaus Lang, John Wolseley, Karl Blossfeldt, Harry Nankin and Susan Derges as well as a reference to drawings from the Baudin expedition. I have discussed the works in regard to issues that are relevant for my own project; how they deal with land, fragment and detail, the awareness of being in time, the trace and the format of the frieze.

My original contribution to the field consists in how I have employed the two seemingly disparate technologies of the photogram and the digital image to materially engage with the land and to transfer this into a coherent expressive body of work. My investigation has resulted in an interpretation of the environment of Maria Island that resonates with my experience of being in the land and provides one model for a viable phenomenological approach to landscape representation.
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## Contents

**PART 1**  
Introduction to the project 1  
Why Maria Island 2  
The question of terminology 3  
The central aim 4

**PART 2 – The theoretical context**  
Introduction 7  
Aspects of Cartesian perspectivalism 8  
Aspects of phenomenology 11

**PART 3 – The visual context**  
Introduction 15  
**Section 1**  
The pictorialised view 15  
The Legacy of Ansel Adams 16  
Peter Dombrovskis 18  
**Section 2**  
A phenomenological approach 19  
Detail: Lesueur on Maria Island, John Wolseley, Karl Blossfeldt 20  
Time: David Stephenson and Tokihiro Sato 27  
Hamish Fulton and Richard Long 30  
Trace: Richard Long, Nikolaus Lang 34  
The photogram as trace, Susan Derges, Harry Nankin 38  
The frieze 43  
Conclusion 44

**PART 4 – The development of the project**  
Introduction 45  
Relevant past work 45  
Phase One 48  
Phase Two 54  
Phase Three 63  
Conclusion 69

**PART 5 – The conclusion of the project**  
Introduction 72  
Resolution of the project in exhibition format 72  
Successes and shortcomings of the project and its contribution to the field 74  
Bibliography 76  
List of illustrations 80

**Appendixes**  
CV 83  
Exhibition documentation 86