



**TRACKING / TRACING:  
CONTEMPORARY ART FROM AUSTRALIA**

**Fiona Foley**

**Nathalie Hartog-Gautier**

**Kim Lawler**



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**3<sup>14</sup>**

**Curated by Jeremy Welsh**



## FOREWORD

Foundation 3,14 is pleased to present *Tracking / Tracing: Contemporary Art from Australia*, a rare gem of an exhibition in our part of the world, featuring three artists from Australia: Fiona Foley from Queensland, Natalie Hartog-Gautier from Sydney, and Kim Lawler from Melbourne. The selection of well renowned artists frames some of the most compelling issues dealing with various aspects of colonial histories. The artists represent discursive positions interconnecting them through their focus on place, time, memory, history in relation to landscape, combining the personal with the archival.

*Tracking / Tracing: Contemporary Art from Australia* can be seen as an intricate contribution to the program of 3,14, bringing together important voices in the contemporary arts from around the world. 3,14 has visions on globality and the will to globalize.

When Jeremy Welsh, professor at Bergen National Academy of the Arts KHiB, approached us to suggest collaboration on an exhibition with a small group of artists from Australia working in the aforementioned field, we were immediately interested. 3,14 is committed to

providing ongoing opportunities for the exchange of ideas internationally and of course our ongoing work to encourage and sustain dialogs in the global field of contemporary art through production, exhibitions, catalogs and lecture series.

The seminar is also conceptualized by Jeremy Welsh and it is generously supported by Bergen National Academy of the Arts.

The e-catalog with essays by the curator Jeremy Welsh and Cathie Payne, Lecturer in Communication at the University of Newcastle, Australia, we hope will contribute to shape the international discourse and enhance the experience of the exhibition.

The exhibition and this e-catalog together with the seminar are an exceptional opportunity to get a broader understanding and experience of The Australian continent's cultural and political history, as well as part of its artistic production.

*Malin Barth, Director Foundation / Stiftelsen 3,14*

## Tracking / Tracing: Contemporary Art from Australia

Cathie Payne

*The huge earth, bigger than we can possibly imagine, held together as if by string or magic.* Luke Davies

This big earth. How do we encompass it? How can we understand it? Our earth, a great dream that we inhabit. Slipping in and out of our consciousness. We are circumnavigated by its billion textures. Night air in our nostrils. The smell of ozone before the rain comes. And leaves, their veins showing the light before they fall and decay back into the soil from where they came. Dry grasses. Night noises, the cries and whistles of bird and trains and rumble of cars and crickets all panning across the horizon at the speed of sound, to oscillate and dissipate depending on its warm or cool horizon.

### Landscape and memory

One of the great questions of our time is to begin to understand this huge earth that exists with or without us, and stretches 4.5 billion years outside of human history. What are our relationships to this time? Even our histories appear to resist the coupling between people and the depth of time: dividing time into history, a time constituted by written records; and prehistory, *everything that went before*. In *Deep History*, Shryrock and Smail have described the process of amnesia that accompanied the profound change in cultural consciousness with the discovery in the nineteenth century of deep time, an outcome of the Darwinian worldview<sup>1</sup>. The result of this shock to consciousness was the invention of the concept of prehistory, 'a conceptual innovation that functioned as a protective barrier between remote antiquity and a set of scholarly techniques that was applicable only to the recent sliver of the human past', (a past that could only be 'interpreted' by written records to be legitimised or real).<sup>2</sup> The shock waves of this 'innovation' continue to be felt today. Conceptual and relational 'gaps' opened up like chasms in the generations after this conceptual tectonic boundary, not only in our relationship to recent history in which written testimony has been lost, destroyed, or unrecorded in the west and to the many cultures whose traditions and relationships to land lie outside of written testimony, but also to our relationships to deep time. Where historians (until very recently) feared to tread, archaeologists, paleontologists, palaeoanthropologists, ecologists, palaeobotanists and climate scientists took up the work of filtering through the myriad of material evidence, markings and signs that litter above and below the surface of the earth, contained in ice cores and scattered in the composition of the great aerial ocean that surrounds us.

For contemporary artists photographing or producing works that image the earth, the problem of articulation also lies in western concepts of land, earth, time, space and their inversions. The compression of land and earth into representable conceptual units and

### Two different ways of imaging country in the Great Sandy Desert, Australia.



1. *Ngurrara*: The Great Sandy Desert Canvas. This painting, means 'home', the place that people have attachment to', and is the result of collaboration by over sixty senior traditional owners of the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia. It was presented to the National Native Title Tribunal in 1997 as evidence of ancestral, social, economic and personal connections to land as part of their Native Title claim for the Southern Kimberley community.  
© The Aboriginal Art Directory\*

packages from real estate to landscapes, and the histories of capital and comfort, violence and injustice that also underpin them. The question becomes how to fathom the continuity of our perceptions and relationships with nature without dragging in the complexities of a pictorial tradition. Or, is this a problem at all? For Simon Schama, the word landscape can provide and propose a connection to something larger, the residues and markings of our deep cultural relationships to nature; and for Jean-Francois Lyotard, landscapes are also states of mind, sensate and mental experiences of earthly life.

In *Landscape and Memory*, Schama proposes that we re-find what we already have within the layers of myth and memory that lie beneath the surface of the landscape tradition of the West. What emerges in his excavations of time and surfaces in places from the greenwoods and primeval forest of Bialowieza, to the Xlotheque, an 18th Century wooden library in the Netherlands where the books themselves were fabricated from their botanical subject matter, to the thirty foot neon cross, remains of the Holy Land, USA, built in the 60s - are a web of links to a deeper time built through a process of recognition, sometimes from one decipherable element in an landscape that 'exposes its connections to an ancient and peculiar vision', or 'bits and pieces of a cultural design that seems to elude coherent reconstitution but which leads [...] deeper into the past.'<sup>3</sup> These excavations call attention to the multiplicities of different perceptions of landscape memory. In recent times new ways of seeing have contributed to our understanding of landscape - from ecologists and post-colonial and environmental historians - and the mapping of traumatic narratives of 'land taken, exploited, exhausted', the displacement of traditional peoples, atrocities, lost and forgotten histories.<sup>4</sup> It is not surprising that the language of memory and landscape brings up the questions - whose memory, whose land, whose narrative? The larger problem and one which Schama articulates, is that whether termed land or landscape, earth or nature, these topologies of human perception and the histories that wrap around them are part of the multiple ways of seeing and are as essential to our future understanding of not only ourselves but our relationships to the earth and what it can be.

Perhaps the problem lies at present in reconciling ourselves to that moment in human thought so well articulated metaphorically by Rene Magritte in *La Condition humaine* (1933). After superimposing a painting over a view, that is itself a painting, Magritte laid out the problem of the confinement of both our inner and outer vision and its entanglement with our concept of being. Our minds are tied to representing what is outside of us as if we are separate from it. 'We see it [the world]', he says, 'as being outside ourselves even though it is only a mental representation of what we see on the inside.'<sup>5</sup> But what is interesting about what he says and what his painting shows us - is that at some point we learnt to see ourselves as no longer inside or part of, but *looking-at* the world - we have rendered what is outside of us, at least in thought, language and image making, and have placed a little frame around it, although the image itself remains connected with an interior and



2. A Landsat image of the Great Sandy Desert

mental landscape. This double movement, between eye and mind, this delay this *making-sense-after*, perhaps describes the strangeness of our encounter with all landscapes and the memories that overlay or line them. 'Estrangement (depaysement)', says Lyotard 'would appear to be a precondition of landscape'. 'There would appear', he says 'to be a landscape whenever the mind is transported from one sensible matter to another, but retains the sensorial organization appropriate to the first, or at least a memory of it'.<sup>6</sup> What Lyotard captures in this sense of the overlay, this lingering, this cut in time between our experience of a thing and the making-sense, is the type of process of fusion between different states of matter and memory.

And this is perhaps where images and landscape begin to assert themselves. Not are they only orphans of matter, they are also orphans of time. Either born out of a fusion between mind, memory and matter, compressions of time, compressions of space. Or snapped, split and separated from their source, stripped of their relationship to 'topos' (place) and hung in museums and galleries, 'where their meanings are lost'.<sup>7</sup> Yet this, separate and desolate account of the image cannot explain its rare ability that Roland Barthes discovered, as he sought through his family album for an image of his mother that could transmit to him in his longing something of who she was again, and found, that in photography, you could choose at any point in time: 'to confront in it the wakening of tractable reality.'<sup>8</sup>

And in another way just as Magritte constructed in a single image the trick, could it be both deception and perception between mind and world, he also transmitted the sense of estrangement inherent in any landscape - the distance between *looking-at* the world and *being-in-the-world* - and the shock affect that initiates a re-looking, re-seeing the world as if through different eyes, that appears to be a byproduct of this experience of estrangement. Within the same process of detachment from the outside world, this putting a little frame to create a little world, there also appears to be another movement - *the ability to re-see a place, or world anew*.

And this is where our three artists from Australia enter this reflection on landscape and memory as I write to you from the opposite end of the world to interdict between the spaces, memory and histories that these images, have been split from and to help make sense of the geography

and narratives that encircle them. Their works, each about landscape in different ways, quietly and subtly offer forward new images and metaphors for our traversals of the world. In different ways these artists' works' interact with the great questions and narratives of our time. Who are we and where are we going? What is our relationship to the earth and places we inhabit? What do we really know about where we live or what we are doing? These artists share a search, an excavation of not only spaces of memory and landscape, but provide encounters with memories - personal, social and geographic - that interact with these places. In this search, it's as if they seek as perhaps Schama, Schyrock, Serres and Lyotard do - the light of continuity lost from the Platonic to the Cartesian adventure. Tracking and tracing through a myriad of signs and spaces, contemplating the ontology of our memory, its systems of retrievals, drawing up information from the reservoirs of history, re-finding connections, textures, slippages and correspondence, lost in the shadows and drawn back into the light. These works provide a sense of a topology of consciousness, breaking out of the confinements of mental and intellectual frames of reference, they surface through the techniques of metaphor, correspondence, fusion and interchange and provide tendrils of possibilities joined and driven by the need to awaken ourselves to the very *tractable reality* of the sensory world and remind us like someone tugging at our sleeves, what it is that we are, and have, and are part of.

### Between Lines

Kim Lawler's aerial photographs *Between Lines*, recorded between 2004-2008, capture the regions in and around the Great Sandy Desert that stretch over 280, 000 square kilometers across the Pilbara and southern Kimberley Regions of Western Australia. These images appear like radio images scanned from another place, or world. They tell us of a mutable world, both ancient and fragile, where surfaces are as complex as weather systems (#2) and contain the imprints, traces and residues of human, climate and terrestrial change. These photographs appear to stand both inside and outside of time. They convey something of the immensity of time, events and happenings that imprint the surface of the earth; and also the ambiguities of seeing.

From a light aircraft we can see red sand plains, remnant rocky outcrops edged with woodland and spinifex, and lines of great sand dunes (ergs) laid down during the last 2 million years that obscure ancient

rocks underlying the surface. Unseen, beneath the desert lies the subartesian basin tapped by numerous Aboriginal wells, and from the air you can decipher the tracks and traces of movement across country, the cuts and blast points in the earth from cars and mines, as well as celestial impacts, the great flows of ephemeral rivers, erosion and weather patterns from monsoonal rains. Lawler's photographs - flattened perspectives - appear to blur and abstract topographies and capture something of the fragility, endurance and temporality of these shifting spaces. From our bird's eye view we look on these surfaces, the spiraling noise and static of trees and vegetation, red soil (#3) and olive stains and sense the immensity of space between the eye that captured the image and depth of space itself. These points of view convey something of the experience, the relief from earthboundness. The earth appears as a great voluminous dream, or painting that we fall into. Yet Lawler's photographs tending to abstraction and saturation, contrasting the geometry and straight lines of human incisions on landscape and the uncontainability of the spaces that continue without regard for the lines that interrupt them (#5, #8, #7) are far more complex on closer reading than the effortlessness and beauty in which they appear. They act as metaphors for the complex process of interwoven histories between culture, land and people. These images like the friction experienced by continental plates at subduction zones speak to something larger: of histories submerged and in the process of surfacing and re-articulation.

The title *Between Lines* provides a clue and reflection on Lawler's own re-negotiations and understanding of landscape and memory drawn from the stories she's heard and recorded while working in the Balgo, Bililuna and Mullan Aboriginal Communities and her journeys in the region. To be able to 'read between the lines' is to begin to understand something not written explicitly, or to discern what is left unsaid. The series title appears to play with the mis-perceptions of language and its use as the basis for interpretive evidence in recording history, and takes up the question though images: whose land, whose history, whose narrative? In *Between Lines*, the land itself is testimony for the Western Desert People who live in it - woven with dreaming tracks and songlines crossing territory and marking boundaries between different tribal groups - material evidence of thousands of years of continuous occupation that attach Aboriginal people such as the Martu language groups and the Pintupi, their neighbours to the east, to Country through cultural, ceremonial, art and oral traditions. The markings, *Ngurra* (meaning country and home in Western Desert languages), have meanings not visible to non-aboriginal eyes within the landscape and include water sites that sustain peoples as they travel across Country, *jila*, *yinta* (springs), *wanirri* (rockholes) and *jurnu*, *jumu* (soaks), and connections to place, an animal, a plant or natural phenomenon that define people's identities and entail specific rights and responsibilities for the ongoing management of *Ngurra*<sup>8a</sup>. Lawler's *Between Lines* points to a knowledge of land that is coded with varied levels of decipherability, where understanding of places and sites are part of the 'Ngurra' of the Western Desert People. The many and varied meanings of different landscapes for different peoples become a form of cultural cryptography.



A tempest, or giant storm - past or future?  
*Between Lines* #2 Great Sandy Desert, Kim Lawler



A division can also look like music from the air.  
*Between Lines* #5 Great Sandy Desert, Kim Lawler

Lawler's work is not only about the intertwining between landscape and memory, but also the veils and film that float over our vision, as well as the spaces where the mind rests, or floats. These photographs are ambiguous images. Like the perceptual tricks of the images of face and candlesticks on a matchbox, the images of the Great Sandy Desert could be pond algae (#11), or details of mould on a wall (#9), the great red spot on Jupiter (#16) or a war zone (#13). Here the very small and very large interchange – what appears to be a micro-climate could be the impressions of ancient seas, or recent marks from mining, traceable and detectable by both the eye and satellites, so that we see that the land itself contains its own substrate of memories imprinted indelibly on its skin. These images bring out the exchangeability, the transferability between landscape and mind. And Lawler takes us into a point where our consciousness hovers between the world of sense impressions and the world of mind and knowledge, places *in-between*, when suspended at great speed in space we become aware of the vertical world, the vastness, the sheer volume of atmosphere, and the fragile skin we walk on.

### Bliss

In Fiona Foley's video work *Bliss* (2006), we see the emergence of a new sensibility that combines metaphor, sensory signs and historical facts to give us insight into the complex topologies of conscience and consciousness that form our understanding of history, memory and landscape. In *Bliss* (2006) Foley plays with the signs of the sublime, 'the bliss of solitude', the sound of a cool wind and slow motion images of a field of poppies, capture a purple haze of waving plants 'tossing their heads in sprightly dance', evoking the nature poets Wordsworth and Coleridge of the British Romantic period, and belying the fact that these sublime images mask a terrible history of exploitation, discrimination and racism that underlies the narratives of land and earth in Australia's colonial and post-colonial histories. The result, a work of complex infinitude where beauty is overlaid with terror, and turns the sensory signs of landscape and the sublime back on itself. The field of opium poppies, filmed in Tasmania where they are now grown for medicinal purposes, act as a complex metaphor for the trade and traffic of opium in nineteenth century Queensland, and its relationship to the establishment of systems of apartheid in Australia such as the large-scale relocation and forced removal of Aboriginal people from their lands. The work reveals 'a time when Aboriginal people were often paid for their labours with opium, robbing them of their health, and in some cases, their lives.'<sup>9</sup> Foley brings together through images of beauty and a text of pain: two seemingly distinct histories – the European landscape tradition (its links to romanticism, images of arcadia, utopia, innocence and the intoxication with nature) and the social and institutional realities of our shared histories of race relationships. Her technique is to surface and state the facts drawn from government documents and written testimonies, that have been 'forgotten' or 'whited out' until recently in public education and ongoing interpretations of history, and connect these images with often tactile and aesthetic experiences. Foley cites 'facts' as a powerful emotive force, delivering a shock to



*The tactility of culture and materials, meanings and metaphors.*  
*Black Opium Artwork*, Installation at the State Library of Queensland, Australia, Fiona Foley, 2006.\*\*



*Bliss Room*, Installation at the State Library of Queensland, Fiona Foley, 2006.

our sensibilities of freedom, equality and democracy. She asks: Why is it that Australians are not aware of their own history of subjugation, terror and sadness?

Like the products of the poppies themselves, these fields remind us of the narcotic effect of forgetting the injustices of the past and how this forgetting affects the present and future for Aboriginal and all peoples. The works speak to a concept of landscape that is not about memory at all, but forgetting, and the process of tidal erosion as one people render another people silent or a witness to another's concept of what land is and will be. Foley, a Badtjala woman whose people came from K'gari (Fraser Island) in the Hervey Bay region of coastal Queensland, and whose people were dispossessed of their land as outcomes of the very process of legislation she investigates in *Bliss*. Foley describes the process of reconstructing Aboriginal History through her art, 'as a process of finding the pieces of what she calls her shattered heritage, and putting them back together.'<sup>10</sup> This work, *Bliss*, part of a larger public work, sculpture and installation called *Black Opium*, explores both personal and collective memory and the impact of legislation, such as *The Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897* and its amendments in 1901, that 'affected so many Chinese and

Aboriginal lives in Queensland.' The work *Black Opium* comprises 777 aluminum poppies arranged in an infinity symbol and installed in the ceiling of an atrium and is linked to six reading or 'mood' rooms named for their thematic content - String, Silver, Gold, Shrine, Mangrove and Slow Burn'. Each room contains a different facet and experience of impact. 'The story that unfolds, says Foley 'through the reading rooms and *Black Opium* sculpture is a hint of this history'.<sup>11</sup> The work converges Foley's ability to synthesise large scale, complex and multi-layered understandings of Aboriginal history, with sensory images and signs, material objects, 'real', recreated or drawn from the archives and personal history and merge them into aesthetic systems of communication and experience that contributes to greater understanding of the topologies of consciousness that makes up our experience of landscape and memory.

#### Traces of sense-perception

In Nathalie Hartog-Gautier's work we are reminded of the tremulous relationship between perception and memory. In *Scanning Memories*, her works drawn from the gardens and archives of the Palace of Versailles and desert areas of Lake Mungo and Lake Cawndilla in Australia sensitively raise questions not only about the systems of clas-



*Travelling II*

Gouache on digital print. Autochrome detail: General Joly, courtesy Center for Research, Palace of Versailles.  
Nathalie Hartog-Gautier

sifications and the great cataloguing projects of the British and European empires but a more human question – who were these people who carefully observed and recorded these plants? What did they feel and how did they see? We become aware of the intricate touch of the botanist, observer and collector, the passion for taxonomy that lies at the base of the origins of Natural History and the Enlightenment project to record, label and quantify the ‘known’ world.

As Hartog-Gautier retrieves the imprints of plant matter, trees and leaves pressed on to photographic plates in the archives of Versailles she paves the way for another way of perceiving matter. In the ethereal beauty of her photographs *Retracing* and *Travelling II* we can re-perceive a world of verdant trees and the delicacies of leaves with the soft shades and qualities of light made more mysterious, more delicate by the aura of plant names that fringe their shapes and hang like tendrils from the organic matter that inspired them. These verdant signs, the verdant leaves and blur of living matter as the photographer compelled by the need to record these dancing things holds his exposure long enough to allow light and silver nitrate to burn the impression of things now gone, or lost, onto his glass plate. ‘It is a question of MATTER’, says Lyotard. ‘Matter is that element in the datum which has no destiny. Forms domesticate it, make it consumable.’<sup>12</sup> And

this is what Hartog-Gautier’s work brings into question, the frailty of our perceptions of landscape, their evanescence. Their ability to escape us as ‘things’ or ‘places’ as soon as we start to get close to them. Distance is always at the heart of any landscape and the unpinable states of matter. ‘States of matter are states of mind, says Lyotard.’ ‘Suspended between two mental intrigues’.<sup>13</sup>

It is by overlaying these images of plants with the tracks of plant specimen names that fall like rain, or fringe the contours of a tree or plant, or form the lines of a leafy trail, that we can see how these two ways of perceiving the world by *seeing* and *capturing*, *naming* and *recording*, are ways of understanding these untamable forms of matter. The capture of plants or a garden through photography or the naming of plant species is what Lyotard calls ‘forms of sensibility which have come under the control of the understanding without difficulty’.<sup>14</sup> Just as Hartog-Gautier is as intrigued by these explorers of nature, botanists and collectors – their reverence and appreciation for the world of plants – she likes to mix the worlds of classification, order, mind, mapping and overlay them with the enigmatic cross-sections of photos taken from the gardens, now in the archives of the Palace of Versailles – and it is through the mixing of matter and mind that new correspondences emerge. Our senses are at work in these images. Countering



**Mapping**

Gouache on digital print. Autochrome detail: General Joly, courtesy Center for Research, Palace of Versailles.  
Nathalie Hartog-Gautier

the tendency to categorise and separate, and join together what has been separated by education, by culture, and by knowledge.

It's as if Hartog-Gautier, as she re-traces the steps of early botanists, lovingly reconnects as if through accident, through chance, the states of mind, returned in silence by these images, that were separated in the Cartesian adventure: the senses and the intellect. And through re-tracing images, magnifying cross sections, so that we see an abstraction of their forms such as in *Mapping* and the separation of the grain and reduction of plant matter to leafy shapes and shadows against the sky forming mysterious textures of earthly correspondence reminding of us of our experiences of the world, and that call forth our memories, from walking in the night, to watching plant shadows tremble and move, or the shapes and holes in lace or railings, and bring into our mind a ringing correspondence of earthly matter.

As these shadows and forms of the garden found in the archives of Versailles give way to the open spaces and grasslands and dry lakes of the South-west desert regions of Lake Cawndilla and Lake Mungo in NSW Australia, we see Hartog-Gautier find a metaphor for the experience of exchanging knowledge of spaces of memory and landscape

in France for that in Australia. In *Encounter*, floating pieces of black matter obliterates a direct view of the open horizon. A landscape barely visible behind it is in contrast to the verdant foliage tucked away in the museums of memory in Versailles, or her own childhood memory, and are replaced by the reality of desert sand and spinifex. Whatever memories or perceptions, or ideas of landscape that Hartog-Gautier took in her migration from France to Australia appear to break down as the images metaphorically map her journey between worlds and navigating systems of ideas that grid both European and non-Aboriginal perceptions of landscape. We are reminded of Michel Serres question, what are we, what do we really know?<sup>15</sup> And that finding a way of seeing the world anew requires, as our artists have shown us, the use of the senses, to navigate through the overlays of memory, history and culture that can impede our view, and remind us that nature, always nature, is not just outside us, but is the ground we tread on, the place we think and feel in, the space that wraps around us, and is the lining and the interior of our being.

Cathie Payne  
Sidney, January 2012

1 Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail; with Timothy Earle...[et al.]. *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

2 *ibid*, p21

3 Simon Schama. *Landscape and Memory*, Great Britain: Fontana Press, 1996, p16.

4 *ibid*, p13

5 *ibid*, p12

6 Jean Francois Lyotard. 'Scapeland', *The Lyotard Reader*. Edited by Andrew Benjamin, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, pp 212-219.

7 *ibid*, p213

8 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Translated by Richard Howard, London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1980, p119.

8a National Museum of Australia, Yiwarra Kuju: The canning Stock Route, National Museum Australia website. See [http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/yiwarra\\_kuju/artworks/ngurra](http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/yiwarra_kuju/artworks/ngurra) (date accessed 3 January, 2012)

9 Fiona Foley, *Black Opium*, State Library of Queensland website: see <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/whats-on/installations/blackopium> (date accessed 3 January 2012).

10 Timothy Morrell, *Collector's Dossier: Fiona Foley*, Australian Art Collector, Issue 50, 2009, pp1-4.

11 Fiona Foley, loc. cit

12 Lyotard, loc. cit

13 *ibid*, p215

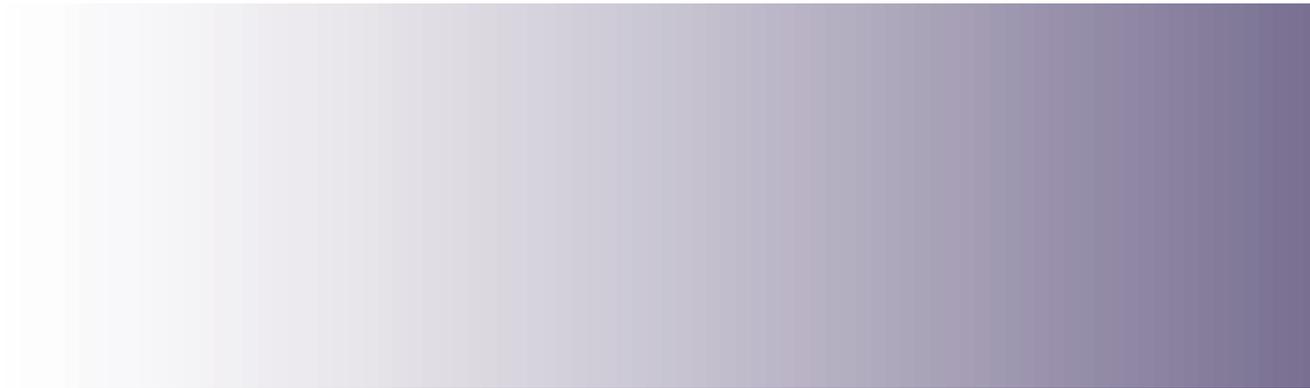
14 *ibid*, p214

15 Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, Translated by Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008.

\* See article by Larissa Behrendt <http://www.aboriginalartdirectory.com/news/feature/ngurrara-the-great-sandy-desert-canvas.php>

<http://www.aboriginalartdirectory.com/directory/legal/copyright.php>

\*\* Photograph from the State Library of Queensland's website: <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/whats-on/installations/blackopium>



**Fiona Foley**

Bliss





Dr Walter Roth publicly accused the government of directly sabotaging opium restriction provisions, finally taking his case to a federal Royal Commission on Commonwealth tariffs which prohibited all permits for opium sale from June 1906.

For many employers narcotic dependency was a far cheaper means of keeping a regular Aboriginal work force. It was common practice to entice men and women with bribes of tobacco, adulterated liquor or opium dregs.



# **Nathalie Hartog-Gautier**

Traces of sense-perception







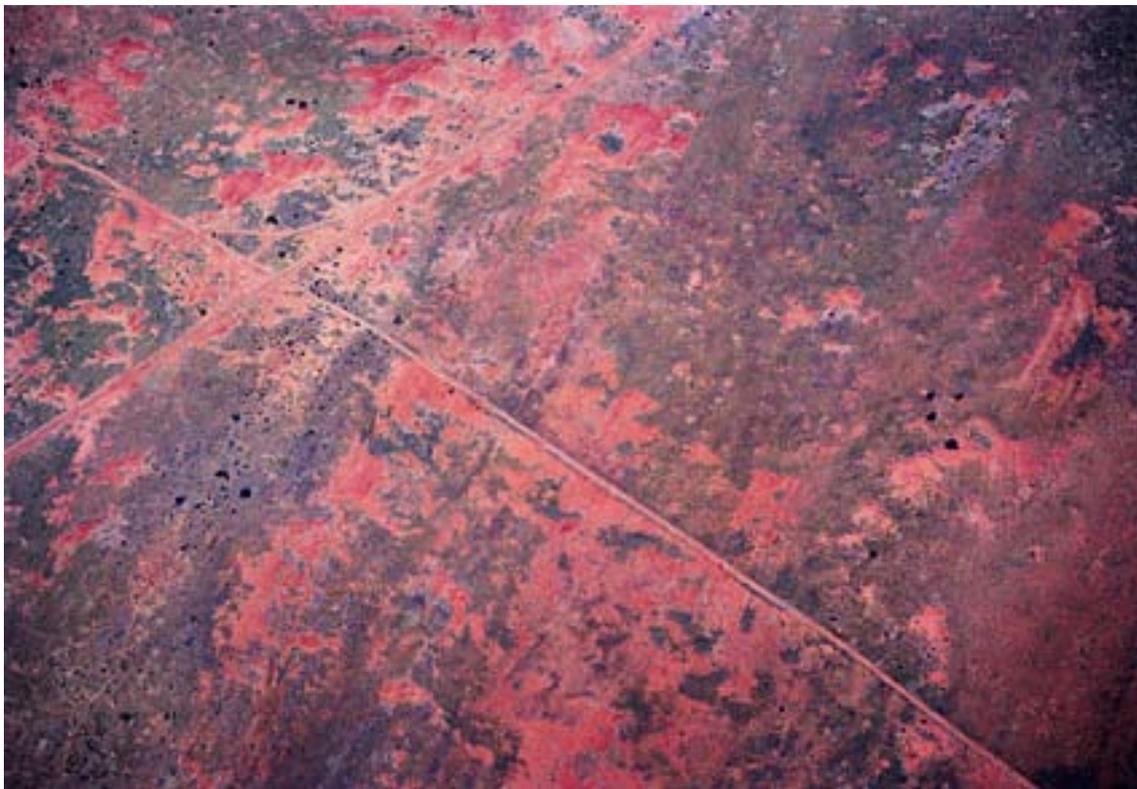




**Kim Lawler**

Between Lines





**TRACKING / TRACING: three contemporary artists from Australia**  
**Fiona Foley, Nathalie Hartog-Gautier, Kim Lawler**

The idea for this exhibition began to take form in the autumn of 2009 when I had a three month artist residency at Artspace, a gallery and contemporary arts centre in Sydney. In 2008 - 2009 I participated in a travelling exhibition entitled "*Transitions*" organised by MacQuarie University Art Gallery, Sydney, in which Nathalie Hartog-Gautier was also an exhibitor. The theme, and several works in that exhibition, provoked an investigation that ultimately led to the formulation of the ideas that are explored in this exhibition, *Tracking / Tracing*. In October 2009 Nathalie had a new exhibition at Tin Sheds Gallery in Sydney, and it is from the series of works in that exhibition I have chosen prints for *Tracking / Tracing*. Visiting Melbourne in October 2009 I saw an exhibition by Kim Lawler and, quite by chance, also met the artist. Kim's photographic series "*Between Lines*" made a strong impression on me, and I also made an immediate connection between these images and Nathalie's series "*Scanning Memories*". Later the same year, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney opened a major retrospective exhibition by Fiona Foley in which I saw the video "Bliss", a work that made a strong impression on me in the way it elegantly and eloquently balances the aesthetic and the political, combining landscape and narrative, history and observation.

During the residency period in 2009, and also on a subsequent research visit to Australia in 2011, I saw many interesting exhibitions and talked with a number of artists and curators. Both Sydney and Melbourne have lively art scenes with a large number of exhibition spaces ranging from major museums and established commercial galleries to independent artist-run spaces and temporary public art projects. I also visited art schools in Sydney and Hobart, regional gallery spaces in smaller towns in New South Wales, and I travelled to Alice Springs and Uluru to experience at first hand the vast desert landscape of central Australia - a landscape that is glimpsed here in the photographs of Kim Lawler.

The many artist-run initiatives in Australian cities, which often showcase the work of younger and emerging artists, tended to reflect inter-

national trends in contemporary art. Exhibitions often last for a short time, usually feature a group of artists, and include work that combines a diverse range of media, materials and techniques, frequently making direct reference to popular culture and often combining old and new media.

The more established commercial galleries tended to focus more on painting and object-based art and to some extent, photography. There were also, both in Sydney and Melbourne, large, temporary public art projects in which artists, architects and designers had collaborated to create interventions in the fabric of the city. The Australian Centre for The Moving Image in Melbourne showed a comprehensive survey of experimental films and kinetic sculptures by New Zealand artist Len Lye, some of whose films were shown here in Bergen at Hordaland Kunstsenter in 2011. Another artist whose work immediately held my attention was Joyce Hinterding, exhibiting at Breen Space in Sydney. She combined drawing, digital processing and electronic sound in an installation that explores the electromagnetic spectrum surrounding us. A smaller version of this work was shown as part of the EKKO festival by Lydgalleriet at Visningsrom USF in Bergen in 2011.

One work that interested me greatly was a large, immersive projection installation entitled "*Augment Me*" by Sydney artist Brad Miller, who teaches new media and design at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, in Sydney. The piece is built upon an extensive database of digital photographic images, displayed in a panoramic projection that changes continually in response to the presence of the viewer, whose bodily movements are tracked by an infra red monitoring system. The image streams, and the electronic sounds that accompany them, are constantly reconfigured according to the presence and actions of viewers, who become active participants in the realization of the work. Given greater resources and more substantial economic support, this is a work that we would very much have liked to include in *Tracking / Tracing*.

What characterizes this exhibition, apart from the simple fact that all of the works derive from camera-based practices, is the interconnectedness of themes that include place, time, memory, history, the landscape, the journey, the way that all of these meet and merge within the image. All three artists are involved in practices that investigate inscription – whether this is a tool deliberately employed by the artist as a means of interrogating her own images, as in the case of Nathalie Hartog-Gautier, or is a phenomenon that is observed or revealed. “*Scanning Memories*” is a complex and comprehensive project combining archival research and personal investigation. Nathalie Hartog-Gautier works with, in and on her images, creating fusions of image and text and syntheses of archival and contemporary material. The memory journey of her work is both deeply personal and broadly historical.

In Kim Lawler’s aerial photographs of desert landscapes we see the tracks and traces both of human intervention and of natural processes. The land is marked and can be read in a variety of ways. We know that the indigenous peoples who have inhabited this landscape for millennia have a deep understanding and an ability to mentally map its enormous, seemingly empty spaces in a way that is almost impossible to comprehend for a European understanding of space. The relationship between land, language and culture is integral to Aboriginal society, and the troubled history of the colonialist treatment of Aboriginal people and their lands is a theme dealt with by Fiona Foley. In addition to making artworks across a broad range of media including photography, video, performance, sculpture and painting, Foley has been actively involved in political campaigns to restore land rights to indigenous communities.

Kim Lawler’s photographs were made during a time when she was developing video projects with communities living in remote areas of the western desert. Recorded from an aircraft while travelling to or from this distant location, they are both a tangible trace of the journey itself, and are also somehow transitional in the sense that they point culturally in different directions. As technologically-produced images representing an overview they inevitably evoke questions of global surveillance, but at the same time, as images of a particular landscape

they reference the visual language of Aboriginal painting, a form that is simultaneously figurative and abstract and that can and will be read differently according to one’s cultural legacy.

Kim Lawler, who also teaches photography at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, is involved in an ongoing research project on the theme of Landscape and Memory, a theme that clearly resonates for all of the works shown in this exhibition. It is also a theme of great relevance for my own continuing research which will be developed further in a project where “*Place*” is the central concern. This exhibition is, for me, part of an ongoing artistic conversation. As curator I have been concerned with elaborating a space in which these works will invite the viewer to make an active reading and will stimulate discussion. I hope that both the exhibition and the seminar will provide a fruitful meeting place and will contribute to a further investigation of what a contemporary art practice is, what it does and what we can learn from it. Cathie Payne’s essay in this catalogue will provide readers with a deeper understanding of the situation out of which these artworks arise and will raise further questions that we hope to address in the seminar that accompanies this exhibition.

In conclusion I would like to thank all who have contributed to the realisation of this exhibition: Malin Barth and Stiftelsen 3,14 who enthusiastically agreed to produce and show the exhibition; Kunsthøgskolen i Bergen who provided funding for my research and support for the seminar that is happening in connection to the exhibition opening; Artspace, Sydney, for a fruitful and productive residency in 2009; Elizabeth Ann McGregor, director of The Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney for help and advice; Niagara Gallery, Melbourne, for the participation of Fiona Foley; Cathie Payne for her catalogue essay and involvement in the seminar; Rhonda Davis and Leonard Janiszewski of Macquarie University Art Gallery, Sydney, and Professor Philip Hayward, who curated the exhibition *Transitions* in 2008; and not least the artists Kim Lawler, Nathalie Hartog-Gautier and Fiona Foley for their work and the inspiration and stimulation I have derived from it.

*Jeremy Welsh*  
*Curator. Bergen, January 2012.*

## About the Curator Jeremy Welsh

Professor of Fine Art and coordinator for MA studies at KHIB (Bergen National Academy of The Arts). Formerly Professor of Intermedia at Trondheim Academy of Art, The Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim. Active as an artist, writer, lecturer and curator in Norway and internationally. During the 1980's worked as exhibitions organizer for London Video Arts, the UK's first production, distribution and exhibition centre for artists' video. IN 1988, together with film theorist Michael O'Pray, established the Film and Video Umbrella as a curatorial agency specializing in video art and artists' film.

Previous curatorial projects by Jeremy Welsh include: The British Edge, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (1986): A Thoughtful Gaze, a travelling exhibition of video works by Bill Viola (1988-89): Screens, an international festival of video and digital art at Trondheim Art Museum and other venues, within the cultural programme of the City of

Trondheim 1000 year jubilee in 1997: Magnetic North, a travelling exhibition of video art from Norway and Scotland, co-curated with Steven Bode (1998): "Vatn-Connecting People" a video art exhibition on the theme of water for the 150 year celebrations of the Telemark Canal in July-August 2011 in Kviteseid, Telemark.

In recent years works by Jeremy Welsh have been exhibited at Bergen Art Museum; Bergen Kunsthall; Stenersens Museum, Oslo; The National Museum, Oslo; Rom Kunst & Arkitektur, Oslo; Atopia, Oslo; Trondheim Art Museum; Museum of Contemporary Art Novi Sad, Serbia; Musée d'Art Contemporain, Strasbourg; The South London Art Gallery; Tate Britain. He has made several large public commissions, two of these in collaboration with painter Jon Arne Mogstad at Halden Fengsel (Halden jail) and at the main post terminal for Eastern Norway at Lørenskog.

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