

Amanda Williams, *Nichols Gorge Walk, Kosciuszko National Park, 2021*

artist statement:

Thematically and in terms of research, this work engages with the history of photography and the natural and built environment. By using expired film and vintage, fogged papers that leave a visible trace in the final works. I expose present and past historical contexts within the same frame, highlighting the afterlife of photography in our present, contemporary context. In addition to the material experimentation – thematically, I was especially interested in the symbolism of the mountain and the cave in European modernist (and Romantic) discourse and how this relates to the contemporary conversation around 'landscape' in Australia. Landscape in the Australian imagination was critically explored in an inspirational book I return to frequently called *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition* by Kay Schaffer 1989. Here Schaffer points to the culture of masculinity that permeates all aspects of Australian society especially the 'bush', a space where women marginalised, invisible in many ways. The bush, often portrayed as a man's place in colonial literature and art work of the 19th century, ironically figures and characterises the landscape as feminine, something 'wild' that needed to be tamed.

I am interested in countering these cliched and outmoded views of landscape in my work by directly addressing the concept of time and history and focusing on the material properties of photographic practice. This work involved multiple long (6+ hour) walks along the Nichols Gorge Track, alone in the landscape with my camera.

I hope the work addresses the unboundedness of photography and representation, its double condition of reverberation and entropy.

This series captures my physical encounter with a particular site, the *Nichols Walking Track* in the High Plains area in Kosciuszko National Park. The grade 4 track is approximately 7km long, a 6-hour loop, that follows a dry creek bed, taking you deep into the gorge, passing 3 limestone karst caves and opening out onto the high, broad, grassy and rocky plains. My photographs of this walk encompass this movement and capture these key geological features.

Part of my interest in photographing landscape includes being immersed in the space not simply passing through. In this way, I develop research that covers the history of the site, speaking with local community, Local Aboriginal Land Council and Elders where possible, National parks rangers and in, with this body of work, speaking with geologists about karst history, conservation plans and protection of this endangered landscape.

The photographs in this series were taken on my 1957 Yashica-Mat Twin Lens Reflex camera. A small easy to handle medium format camera, I walked the length of the track with this camera in hand. The 6x6inch, 120 film negatives were then printed on expired silver gelatin photographic paper – in this case vintage Agfa Brovira Speed RC, 8x10inch circa 1980's. Due to the age of the paper, severe fogging was present in the final photographic prints.

Fogging is the slow incidental exposure of the paper over time – this fogging can occur despite the boxes of paper being ‘new’ old stock and never having been opened. I love this idea that light has penetrated a dark, enclosed space, slowly over time. Like light reaching into the depths of a cave via the narrow opening.

This fits with my interest in the materiality of photography and its history. I like to think that the idea of photography wasn’t the exclusive expression of a 19th century male mind. The ‘idea’ of photography is I believe much older, ancient even. The conceptual framework, the philosophy, and the social use of photography is perhaps as old as the incredible geological land formations I choose to photograph.

Theresa Mikuriya in her 2016 publication, *A History of Light: The Idea of Photography*, makes this connection between caves and photography when she writes, ‘the inundation of light into the cave resonates very well with certain technical aspects of photography’. It is noted in the description of the book, “If we depart from the technologically oriented accounts and consider photography as a philosophical discourse an alternative history appears, one which examines the human impulse to reconstruct the photographic or ‘the evoking of light’”.

Werner Herzog too seems to suggest throughout his narration in the 2010 film, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, that the charcoal cave drawings found in pre-historic caves might just be the first representations, still frames of the world captured as movement, like cinema itself; hand drawn on the walls of the cave, multiple renderings of the bison outside the cave; drawings repeated one on top of the other ... perhaps tracing, attempting to capture the shadows that were dancing across the walls of the cave at the time. A true ‘pencil of nature’ to take Henry Fox Talbot’s phrase.

Reading List:

Dark Emu by Bruce Pascoe

Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition by Kay Schaffer

A History of Light: The Idea of Photography by Theresa Mikuriya

The Miracle of Analogy: Or The History of Photography, Part 1 by Kaja Silverman

Failed Images: Photography and its counter practices by Ernst van Alphen

Singular Images Failed Copies: William Henry Fox Talbot and the Early Photograph by Vared Maimon