

In their own words: Five women artists on their work in *The National*

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by Amanda Williams



Amanda Williams, *Kosciuszko Lookout*, Kosciuszko National Park, Ngarigo Country (4681/9), 2023, gelatin silver print, hand printed on fibre-based paper, 108 x 136 cm, 110 x 138 x 6 cm. Courtesy of the artist and The Commercial, Sydney.

My interest in the mountain peaks and high plains of Australia is scientific and symbolic. The landscapes depicted in *The National* are the adjoining Alpine National Park and Kosciuszko National Park. They are threatened ecological communities protected with the museum-like aura of national park status, registered as ‘endangered’ under law. And yet these landscapes continue to suffer from climate change, postcolonialism, proximity to recreational spaces, and industrial demands. Since 1999, the number of threatened species and ecosystems has grown by over a third. Australia is clearly amid an extinction crisis.

Paradoxically, there are symbolic connections between the conservation movement, the rise of national parks and the history of landscape photography in settler colonies—all a product of the 19th century. How can conservation, recreation and industry demands sit comfortably together? Is it possible to suspend or ‘fix’ a landscape in time, protect it from human and environmental pressure, and, importantly, offer a response that reckons with contested histories and incorporates the views and land management practices of the original landowners?

I use a medium format camera and hand print my photographs in the darkroom. They are big and slow. They take time. The photograph above adds to my ongoing series *Alpine Bogs and Associated Fens*, 2020-2023. Walking to the summit of Mt Kosciuszko, the view is a portrait of the alpine vegetation that sits atop layers of peat, decayed and compacted moss; an archive—essential to that ecosystem—of all that has passed before.