



TRAVELLING LIGHT

Spowart+Cooper

NUMBER FOUR

ISSN 1832-2638

Published by Photographers of the Great Divide

"... pausing to take photographs was not enough. Instead they 'became' a camera. ... The resulting images are simultaneous interiors and exteriors, landscapes and portraits."

Gordon Craig (writer and curator, QUT Art Museum)

An exhibition of photo book works by Victoria Cooper and Doug Spowart

Whilst the Spowart and Cooper partnership nears its seventeenth year their interest in the landscape goes well back into their respective childhoods. From their first beginnings they have intensely immersed themselves in the landscape and then photographed it. In travels in the landscape, in search of locations to experience and photograph, they have criss-crossed the Australian continent and overseas. Spowart and Cooper have explored the not only the geophysical landscape but also the landscape of photography. Their work can encompass heritage processes like pinhole and handmade emulsions to large format cameras, 10"x8" platinum/palladium contact prints and infrared, as well as pioneer work in the emergent digital technologies of the mid nineteen-nineties.

As an affirmation of their deep affinity with the landscape in 2005 they embarked upon an adventure to travel the length of the Stuart Highway from Adelaide to Darwin imaging the journey using a range of concepts and digital capture technology. This work deals with their personal experience of the landscape and more. They state, "Our primal connection with the landscape is as artist, tourist and traveller. It is with this in mind that we then transform our observations and experiences into a collection of sequences – not to depict – but to express contemporary society's strong, almost palpable, preoccupation for a nomadic carefree lifestyle, the essential travel experience and the urge to conquer the destination."



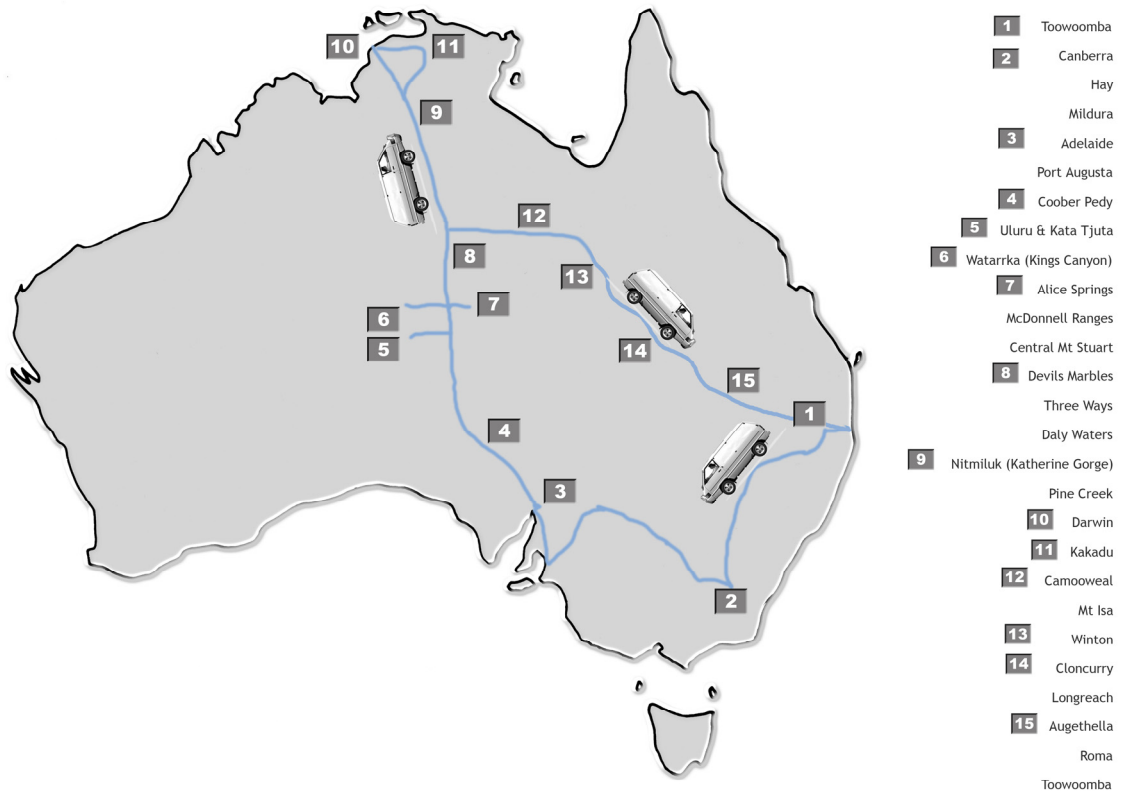
To achieve this objective a major component of the work was made with the camera obscura, a device that they have experimented with for over fourteen years. Early this decade they converted their car into a travelling camera obscura. For them, "The camera obscura afforded us the space and time to reflect on, and image our position in the landscape. Within our converted car the passing landscape, as we seen through the windscreen, reappears as a simulacrum, engulfing the darkened space inside the car. In this space and time collapses, as both the view ahead and its image inside the car exist simultaneously. Space is inverted and reversed as these surreal apparitions form on the screen and are then captured. These photographs of the car camera obscura projections are made of the performance and ritual of our travel."

During the last eight years the incorporation of digital capture, software enhancement and document design has moved their practice towards artists' books as an extended conceptual space for their photo-imaging work. Whilst Doug Spowart has been making artists' books since the late nineteen-eighties, both have become solid practitioners of this discipline. Although their expedition focus was the CarCamera Obscura, along the way they also made side trips into the familiar territory of the tourist digital photographic record to weave into their travel narratives.

In the first showing of this work at the Queensland Centre for Photography in May 2006, we see that Spowart and Cooper have expanded the digital space to encompass the image, text in narrative and prose form, as well as the design of the communication device – the book. In doing this they inform us of an alternate view of the landscape to that which we are familiar. With some books Spowart and Cooper employ the form of the concertina book which places the books in context of tourist paraphernalia 'folder card', where sequential folding presents their experience of the Journey to the viewer. Their books are not just about pictures but also about the story, so these works not only examine, but also simultaneously celebrate, the contemporary romance of the artists in the landscape, the Road Trip and the Australian Outback.

Gene Owens

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Hitting the Skids

A flipbook by Doug Spowart, February, 2006

Putting together a flipbook seems, at first, a simple task. Get together the images, sequence them, print them, bind and then . . . flick!!! However, first of all the concept of the flipbook needs to be appreciated. Essentially a flipbook is an animation sequence – one in which minute differences in each image page enable a simple story to be created. Most flipbooks only have 30~40 pages which tends to be the physical limit for the design to function.

As each flip story is conveyed in a few seconds, many flipbooks employ simple line, stick figures or shapes. Noreen Grahame's *The happy gallerist* is a series of pages depicting the shape of the red dot, the type commonly used as a marker indicating a sale of a work within an exhibition. As the book is flipped the dots grow and multiply indicating the successfulness of the gallerist's show.

The photographic image is employed as animated sequences – movies and videos are in effect automated flips. Photos can work well in flipbooks, as part of an image can operate as a reference and certain elements be moved to tell a story. Ron McBurnie's *toungey* is an exemplar of this technique. In this work the base image is a tightly cropped portrait of a be-spectacled male – the mouth is open and a tongue extends from it. As the book is flipped the tongue rotates windmill-like around the mouth until . . . well, you need to flip it yourself for the final twist. The humorous conclusion in McBurnie's *toungey* is representative of what I believe to be at the core of a successful flip.

In my work "Hitting the skids" the device of the unexpected ending is utilised to reward the viewer for their connection with the work. The idea of the book is to portray an ever-increasing profusion of rubber tyre skid marks on an outback highway – the humorous endpoint is something you need to see yourself.

Size: 210x80x10mm

Printed with Epson Ultrachrome pigment inks on Epson Archival Matte paper. Japanese stab binding with waxed linen thread



Profiles

A pamphlet 3 hole stitch book by Doug Spowart, March, 2006

The images in this book are made by the photogram process using silver gelatine paper. The exposure is made in the field by contacting the subject on the paper under the bright sun. In these direct exposure situations sufficient metallic silver is produced to form an image without the usual wet darkroom development.

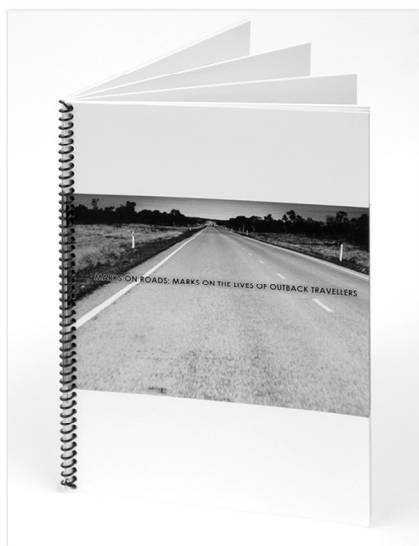
This process dates from the origins of photography with experiments in 'profile making' by Humphry Davy and Thomas Wedgwood in the late 1700s. At that time Davy and Wedgwood were not aware of a chemical to 'fix' the image, as such, even the act of observing their *profiles* resulted in additional exposure that caused the image to disappear before their very eyes.

I have employed this process to make contemporary *profiles* of found objects during an outback journey. While the convenience of the process was part of the motivation I also felt that using this process paid homage to the fugitive and transient images made by early photography experimenters.

Unlike the earliest dry photograms I have been able to 'fix' these images from further change by digital documentation via a flat-bed scanner - a method which gave an extended life to the faint purplish smudge whilst at the same time fogged its chemically delicate image to oblivion.

Size: 210x145x10mm

Printed with Epson Ultrachrome pigment inks on Epson Archival Matte paper, silver gelatine print and Fabriano and Optimax papers, waxed linen thread bound by the artist



Marks on roads; Marks on the lives of outback travellers

By Doug Spowart, March, 2006

From the book's introduction:

As we travel on outback roads the skid marks that we drive over lie as a silent testimony to the tragic underlying dangers of the journey.

A survey of local newspapers reveals the stories behind each black blot on the road.

Contemplate the circumstances and the consequences of each skid on the life.



Size: 21x29.7x10mm

Commercial spiral binding. Printed with Epson Ultrachrome pigment inks on Epson Archival Matte paper



Beyond the Containment of the Track

A loose leaf boxed book by Doug Spowart, March, 2006

From the book's introduction:

Once, only a few lifetimes ago, the wilderness was at our back doors or within a few minutes travel. Even as a child in a small country town in northern Victoria the wilderness of the Broken Creek and the Murray River were accessible for me even by push bike. Now to reach true wilderness requires a journey through an ever-diminishing myriad of highways, roads, tracks, paths and trails.

A part of my existence relies on connection with the land and as an artist I have documented this bond in all forms of photo imaging and presentations. In this latest work I describe the journey, both physical and metaphorical, which leads from home to places where my quest for wilderness meets with its resolution.

This body of work is about the idiosyncratic experience of the artist's journey through landscape and the ability of the camera to transcribe a light-made facsimile of colour, form and the spatial relationships within the subject.

Photographs of landscape by themselves, or in collected groups, usually deal with representation of atmosphere and beauty. While I have employed the device of the colour image and the stylistic design of the genre of the coffee table book, this photo-book-work is about the depiction of the personal experience of the landscape and car travel within the context of the life, and the work of the artist.

Size: 504x230x20mm.

Printed with Epson Ultrachrome pigment inks on Epson Archival Matte paper Handmade acrylic box with Fabriano paper lining by Doug Spowart



Size: 315x320x20mm. Printed with Epson Ultrachrome pigment inks on Epson Archival Matte paper. Commercial wire binding and handmade cover in Canson and Fabriano papers by Doug Spowart

The Hunted and the Haunted Prose and images by Victoria Cooper, March, 2006

There are places within the landscape that have a metaphysical resonance. This mysterious state may have its origins in a notorious past or just through a heightened awareness of the natural world. Koolunga, a sleepy village in South Australia has such a place - the River Walk. Although the greeting sign as you enter the outskirts proudly promotes the town's resident Bunyip, it was not always as welcome. Koolunga has a past where a fear of the unknown led to violence against the apparent malevolent beast. The now happy association between man and creature was once one of the feared monster and the hunter.

Now in the silence and stillness of this place the past mysteries become echoes, reverberating in the surrounding trees, rocks and river.

This book is the interaction of words and images in their unique roles of a narrative. When reading, the turning of translucent worded pages reveals images that continue a narrative that words alone are unable to define. The book touches on how fear can act as a motivation for violence and serves to imbue an ordinary landscape with mythical stature by its suggestion of the continued existence of the Bunyip.

Size: 90x120x15mm, can be displayed as a concertina extending to 1000mm. Printed with Epson Ultrachrome pigment inks on Epson Archival Matte paper. Supplied with handmade acrylic box by Doug Spowart

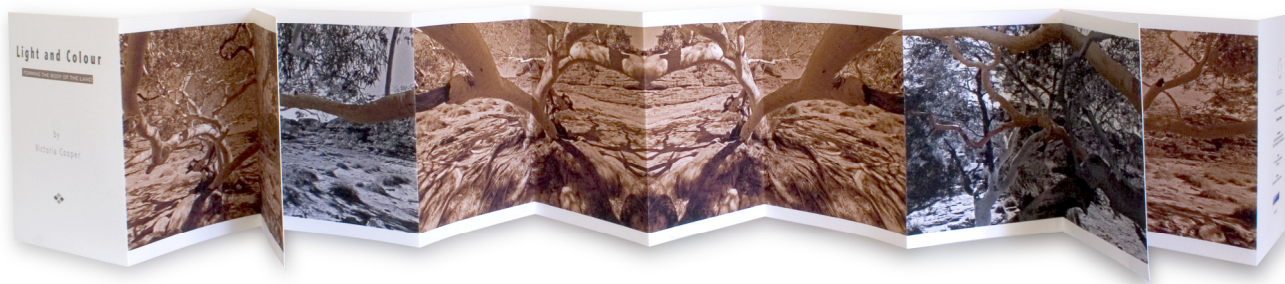


Presence A snake book by Victoria Cooper, March, 2006

Uluru is indisputably a place of profound spiritual significance to the indigenous community, the custodians of this land. This unique landform has also made a deep impression on the wider human psyche that extends to include the greater Australian community and reaches to international proportions.

As a result this region is visited by thousands of tourists (pilgrims) from all parts of the world to behold and experience the great icon. However, the ancient geological history and indigenous stories connected with this place reveal insights beyond the just the pictorial view and Uluru's physical state.

Presence references this history and reflects on what the tourist sees and what lies beyond their vision.



About the structure of these books

In March 2006, Doug and I attended a workshop on the nature of the structure of the visual book lead by Keith Smith and Scott McCarney. Many concepts regarding the photo-bookworks we were currently working on were discussed. One concept was the construction of a book from one large sheet by folding and cutting to form a concertina style construction. Another single sheet was cut and folded differently to produce a 'snake' book.

In both structures, a whole or singular flat sheet, constructed of smaller parts or sections, was folded and wound into new forms which could then be opened and read as either a codex, opened fully or outstretched as a concertina book. These forms of the book: the snake book in *Presence* and the other in *Light and Colour*, inter-relate with the themes presented and perform as tactile physical poetry.

Light and Colour forming the body of the land By Victoria Cooper, March, 2006

*Light surrounds
Colour from within
Extended arms reach out
As faces form
Minds engage
Colour connects
Light surrounds*

Size: 130x150x15mm, can be displayed as a concertina extending to 1000mm. Printed with Epson Ultrachrome pigment inks on Epson Radiant White Watercolour paper



Water Babies

Collaborative work by Doug Spowart and Victoria Cooper, January, 2006

What do two people do when, hot from a long drive in the tropics, they are confronted with a cool deep calm pool within idyllic surroundings?

Waterbabies is not an intellectual representation or reinterpretation of the landscape in the form of an artists' book. It is a tribute by the artists as it was they that were transformed by the landscape.


The creation of this book arises from the partnership between the two artists and two methodologies united to form a collaborative view. Through this alliance a visual story was formed into considered associations of words and images to convey the sensations and thoughts of this very simple but sublime experience.

Size: 300x120x10mm. Printed with Epson Ultrachrome pigment inks on Epson Archival Matte paper. Handmade cover in Canson and Fabriano papers and handmade acrylic slip case by Doug Spowart.








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