



Abstract Earth

Photography by Richard Woldendorp

An ART ON THE MOVE education resource

Acknowledgements

Education notes development and production:

Writer: Lisa Young with assistance from Richard and Lyn Woldendorp

Production: ART ON THE MOVE

Photographs: Courtesy of the Artist

ISBN

Print: 978 0 9805073 9 3

Online: 978 0 9806542 0 2

© ART ON THE MOVE 2009 The National Exhibitions Touring Structure for Western Australia. Inc.

This exhibition is presented by Richard and Lyn Woldendorp.

This exhibition has been supported by the National Exhibitions Touring Structure for Western Australia Inc. through the State Exhibition Development and Touring Funds.

The State of Western Australia has made an investment through the Department of Culture and the Arts in association with the Lotteries Commission in ART ON THE MOVE the National Exhibitions Touring Structure for Western Australia Inc.

ART ON THE MOVE is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. ART ON THE MOVE is supported by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

ART ON THE MOVE
8a Carbon Court
Osborne Park WA 6017
PO Box 1835
Osborne Park Delivery Centre
Osborne Park WA 6919
Telephone (08) 9242 7887
Facsimile (08) 9242 7878

Email: artmoves@artonthemove.com.au

Web: www.artonthemove.com.au

***Coastline between Esperance and Cape
Arid, Western Australia, 2006***

"This shows the reflection of the clouds in the lake, with the beach and ocean in the foreground."



Images in this publication are copyright and courtesy of the Artist.

Cover image: *Lake Macleod with clouds reflected, north of Carnarvon, Western Australia, 1982.*

Index

Richard Woldendorp - photographer	4, 5
About <i>Abstract Earth</i>	5
Landscape photography in Australia	6
Woldendorp's approach to photographing the landscape	7
Viewpoint	8, 9
Colour	10, 11
Abstraction	12, 13
Composition	14-17
References	18

Use of this package

This education resource has been developed to assist teachers to maximise the educational value and enjoyment of ART ON THE MOVE'S touring exhibition *Abstract Earth: Photography by Richard Woldendorp*. It is designed to be used by teachers and students in conjunction with an exhibition visit or an Education Event.

Photocopies are permitted for classroom use only.

Smarter than Smoking Education Events are sponsored by Healthway to promote the Heart Foundation's *Smarter than Smoking* message.

ART ON THE MOVE education services for primary and secondary schools:

- Smarter than Smoking ARTIST ON THE MOVE - An artist talk and tour through the exhibition OR an artist talk in your classroom.
- Smarter than Smoking ARTBUS provides subsidised transport to the gallery for your class to view the exhibition.
- Website subscription: Your school can sign up as members of Education at www.artonthemove.com.au to download all ART ON THE MOVE education resources for free.

Contact the ART ON THE MOVE Education Officer for more information.

RICHARD WOLDENDORP - PHOTOGRAPHER

Water patterns, Lake Macleod, north of Carnarvon, Western Australia, 2006.

"Salt water leaches into the lake from the ocean nearby creating an interesting biological process."



Richard Woldendorp was born in Holland in 1927 and arrived in Australia as an immigrant in 1951 at the age of 24. His first creative explorations in Australia were made in the field of painting, studying under Wim Boissevain in the mid 1950s.

In 1962 he became a professional photographer, holding his first solo exhibition in 1964. Since then, he has been involved in numerous group exhibitions and has mounted 30 solo shows both in Australia and overseas.

The subject of photography can either be concrete or intangible. In the first case the picture is basically realistic, where as in the latter case it is essentially abstract. But what makes photography so interesting is that by combining both we can introduce creativity in the subject and have the best of both worlds. (Woldendorp, 2008, p 5)

Woldendorp has received numerous awards for his work and recently, in 2004 was the recipient of the WA State Living Treasure Award. In 2005, he was named a Lotterywest 'Inspirational West Australian'. He has published 20 books on his photography and his work is in major collections across Australia and overseas.

Woldendorp became interested in the Australian landscape not long after he arrived from Holland, first travelling the country as a house painter and later as a photographer. He was inspired by the sheer size and vastness of the spaces and was taken by its unique colours and surfaces. He was also aware that the Australian landscape had not been fully exploited by photographers and painters had only captured the reality of the Australian landscape in a few isolated places.

As he travelled through Australia, Woldendorp began to change gradually from black and white to colour photography. In 1968, with bird photographer Peter Slater, he produced his first photographic book, in black and white and colour, *The Hidden Face of Australia*, in which he emphasised the uniqueness of the landscape through revealing rarely observed details.

In the 1980s, Woldendorp began making the aerial photographic landscapes for which he is best known. Photographing the landscape from above has been the feature of Woldendorp's practice since this

time. It is not only the natural landscape and its extraordinary features that have caught his eye, but also the man made aspects of the landscape such as farming, crops, mining and construction.

Woldendorp uses the camera alone to achieve his remarkable images and believes in the truth it can communicate. He is not interested in manipulating images using technology and computer software, preferring instead to “retain the optical reality of what is there” (Woldendorp, 2008, p 5)

He is very interested in abstraction and the possibilities it offers photography. Like a painter, he sees himself principally as a practitioner influenced by the subject, utilizing his creative spirit to produce aesthetically inspiring images.

ABOUT ABSTRACT EARTH

This exhibition, initially co-curated by R. Ian Lloyd and John McDonald, is a kind of retrospective of Woldendorp's work over the period 1980 to 2007. Both very familiar with the photographer and his work, the two curators conceived the idea for this exhibition whilst touring the country researching a book on Australian painters' studios, similar to Woldendorp's book *Artists in Residence* on Western Australian artists' studios.

The idea for the exhibition was built around the realisation that Woldendorp's work was at once documentary and interpretive – aerial photographs on one level and abstractions on another.

The exhibition comprises a total of 60 images, the majority taken in Western Australia, and the rest in New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory, South Australia and Victoria. They are all aerial photographs, very diverse in terms of the kinds of landscapes photographed and the resulting nature of the images.



We had a great deal of time on these trips to debate the merits of photography and art, and Richard's work often came into the discussion. (R. Ian Lloyd in Woldendorp, 2008, p4)

Lake Austin between Cue and Meekatharra, Western Australia, 1995

"The islands are part of the character of this natural salt lake."

LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY IN AUSTRALIA

Many Australian photographers, including professionals, choose the Australian landscape as the focus of their work. The incredible visual diversity of the country, coupled with its immensity and uniqueness, provides photographers with a large range of subjects and a multitude of possible images.

Photographers choose to capture iconic landmarks such as the Bungle Bungles, Uluru and the Great Barrier Reef or much photographed sunsets and red earth landscapes. None, however, photograph the landscape like Richard Woldendorp. His approach is unique and he has refined his skills and techniques in working this way over a period of more than 30 years.

Richard Woldendorp is most well known for his aerial photography. He captures aspects of the landscape from above, dispensing with horizon, thereby creating images that are abstract in nature. In making these images Woldendorp sees the landscape through artistic eyes, with the resulting photographs bearing more of a resemblance to large abstract paintings than traditional landscape photographs. His early visual arts training has perhaps contributed to his aesthetic sensibility, allowing him to create painterly visual abstractions with the click of a shutter.

**Lake Moore, central
Western Australia,
2007.**

"This is a natural salt lake showing sandbanks, the result of seasonal flooding."



Australian landscape photographers increasingly utilize digital technology in the production of their work as more and more advances are made and products become available. Digital cameras and image manipulation software such as Adobe Photoshop have opened up many more possibilities for image creation. Products such as printable canvas and archival quality printing ink allow for large scale printing and expand the possibilities of traditional photography.

Woldendorp continues to photograph the landscape using traditional 120 film cameras and has only recently moved to the new digital system with the Canon 5D Mark II, using mainly two lenses. In the air, he takes very few photographs, as flying by in the plane presents only one opportunity. Woldendorp has never been interested in altering or enhancing his digital work in any way. He sees no point in this, as he feels the images framed through the viewfinder to be complete. He believes it is hard to improve on the great diversity & beauty of the natural landscape and wants to capture it as it is and as accurately as he can.

WOLDENDORP'S APPROACH TO PHOTOGRAPHING THE LANDSCAPE

In the late 1970s, Richard Woldendorp began to photograph the landscape from the air, realising that this was the most appropriate way to capture the essence of such a vast landscape. Fascinated by the way the flatness of the Australian landscape reveals everything, Woldendorp felt that to truly capture its uniqueness, he needed to be above it. He commented:

Except for the green canopy of the rainforests, the Australian landscape reveals everything. You can see its skin and what grows out of it. It bears its ribs like a skeleton in the landscape.

(Woldendorp, 2006, p 3)

Woldendorp takes most of his photographs from a height of between 300 and 600 metres, sometimes going as high as 2000 metres. Ultimately, however, visibility determines how high above the land he photographs from. He is something of a purist in his technique and approach to photographing the landscape. Once in the air, he anticipates the image coming up, positions the plane and the result is approximately two photographs. He manages to capture remarkable images with little more than several different lenses, image stabilizers within the lenses to help overcome problems associated with turbulence in flights, and film ranging from 50 to 100 ASA.

Woldendorp is economical with the number of shots he takes in a session, opting for quality over quantity (something rarely encountered in this age of digital imagery). Once the photograph is taken, apart from the printing, the process is complete. Woldendorp chooses not to employ image manipulation software such as Adobe Photoshop to alter his images, instead allowing the camera, together with his personal aesthetic sense, to reveal the truth about the landscape.



In describing his process of selecting imagery and photographing it, Woldendorp commented:

I look for the highlights and character of a place that is representative or in contrast to the area and emphasise these with a simple, strong composition. The coast offers great aerial variations. When photographing from the air, I scrutinise and anticipate the subject matter coming up, position the plane and open the window. Generally I get only one or two images from the situation. It is great to fly over new areas. Not having been there before makes it a flight of discovery. I soak up all the images and look for the highlights.

(Woldendorp, 2006, p 4)

I decided to use the aerial approach, logical for such a flat landscape. It gives a much better overview of the landscape and unlimited access to areas not accessible by road. From the air you also get a better understanding of the evolution of the natural landscape, as well as the size and repetition... The impact is not seen from ground level. With Australia being such a flat continent, the aerial perspective adds a better dimension. (Woldendorp, 2006, p 2)

Forrest River, Kimberley, Western Australia, 2003.

"A tidal river system, north-west of Wyndham."

REFERENCES

Print

Woldendorp, R. (2008) *Abstract Earth: A View From Above*. Fremantle, Western Australia: Sandpiper Press in association with Fremantle Press.

Woldendorp, R. (2006) *Landscape*. Unpublished paper.

Web

Photographic Composition

http://photoinf.com/General/NAVY/Photographic_composition_Balance.htm

ARTSEGE at the Kennedy Centre: Analysing Photographs

<http://artsedge.kennedy-centre.org/content/3902/>

The Artist's Toolkit: Visual Elements and Principles

<http://www.artsconnected.org/toolkit/index.html>

Richard Woldendorp

<http://www.richardwoldendorp.com/>

Audio Visual

Richard Woldendorp, Sunday Arts Episode 14 [Video]. (2008). Melbourne, VIC: ABC Television TV Arts.

Aerial over Lake Moore, Western Australia, 2007

"Sand bars stand out on the natural salt lake."

