

Humanities

**The road to Jigalong: an exploration into the effect of altered
landscapes in the Pilbara on place-identity**

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The road to Jigalong: an exploration into the effect of altered landscapes in the Pilbara on place-identity.

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Human Ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated 2018.

The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262).

Approval Number # HRE2020-01

Signature:

Date: 1 December 2021

Abstract

This thesis investigates the significance of place, focusing on Pilbara landscapes that have been altered by European post-colonial pastoralism and human-induced climate changes. Altered landscapes and place-identity are the major unifying themes of this practice-led research project, and the focus of this research is Ethel Creek Station, a working cattle station situated on approximately 400,000 hectares, in the East Pilbara region of Western Australia. Through creative practice in the visual arts my research examines the effect of these altered landscapes on place-identity. For the purposes of my research, I conducted three field trips on Ethel Creek Station, and have used the embodied experiences of these field trips to inform my practice-led research methodology.

During the first field trip a fourteen-day quarantine period, due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, added an unexpected dimension to the research through the restrictions associated with border closures and the metaphysical isolation experienced during quarantine. The second field trip included experiencing the landscape from the ground during a cattle muster, and viewing the terrain from a helicopter, where I was able to clearly see the impact of humans on the land. The ‘bird’s-eye view’ enabled me to experience the expansive vista from a different perspective, whilst on the ground, I walked along animal tracks, immersed in the landscape. The third field trip consolidated my practice-led research in tandem with my exegetical writing. I found that through drawing, painting, and using a medium format film camera, in conjunction with digital cameras, I was able to convey the unsettling emotions associated with altered landscapes and place-identity.

Key words: place-identity, place attachment, altered landscapes, pastoralism, creative practice.

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Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the people of the Martu language groups of the eastern Pilbara Nation on whose unceded lands I conduct my research.

I pay my respects to their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

I also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of these lands.

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This thesis has had the benefit of professional editorial advice, restricted to Standard D and Standard E, from Dr Dean Chan, in accordance with *Australian Standards for Editing Practice*.

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Notes on images in the exegesis

Many photographs are included in this exegesis, and I distinguish between photographic records used for the purposes of documentation, and photographic artworks, to clearly differentiate between the images. The photographs used for documentation are referred to as ‘documentation photographs by the artist’, and photographs of artworks contain the name of the artist, artwork title, date, medium and dimensions.

Example of documentation of research process.



Figure A. Late afternoon, Ethel Creek Station, 2021.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

Example of a photographic artwork.

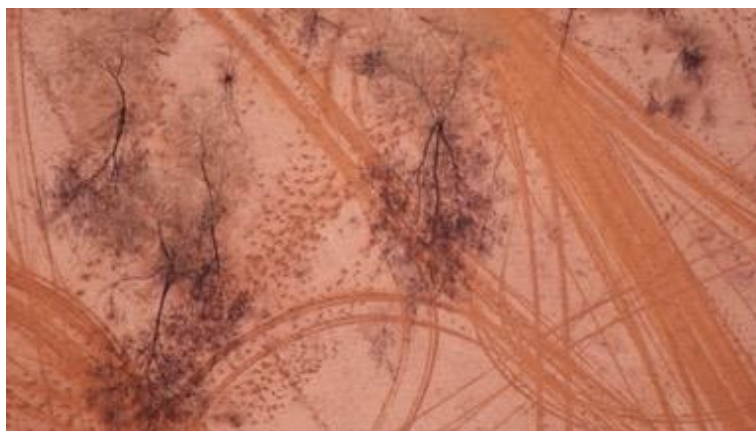


Figure B. Fiona Rafferty. *Landcruisers and Droughtmasters*. 2021.

Archival pigment print. 120 x 67.5 cm.

Introduction

British historian Simon Schama writes in his seminal book *Landscape and Memory*, “Before it can ever be the repose of the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock” (Schama, 1995, p.6). Schama’s concept of landscape is multi-layered with past histories embedded in the physical topography; it is not just a scene depicting the visual environment but one with cultural implications that can change how a landscape is viewed. British cultural geographer John Wylie (2007) posits that landscape is ‘tension’, emanating from philosophical, cultural, political, anthropological and creative positions. He agrees with French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002) that being emplaced in the world is inextricably intertwined with self and landscape.

There is, however, another view of landscape, based on scientific logic by Welsh academic Raymond Williams who sees the landscape objectively, from a distance. It is modern and rational, and represents the epistemological idea of an external reality experienced by a detached observer (Wylie, 2007, p.3). Schama, Wylie, Merleau-Ponty, and Williams each present different perspectives, and during the research for my project, I have at times experienced these distinct perceptions of landscape, which have informed my creative practice.

The purpose of my project was to explore through practice-led research and a written exegesis, how landscapes altered by human intervention affect place-identity. I conducted three field trips on Ethel Creek Station, located in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, with my research focusing on the effects of pastoralism on the land. Human ethics approval was required prior to commencement and qualitative research conducted with residents on the station included visual diary observations, photographic stills and a questionnaire. The questionnaire is included in the exegesis appendix.

My connection to the Pilbara landscape began in 1997 when I travelled with an artist along the Canning Stock Route¹ from Wiluna, at the southern end of the stock route, to Georgia Bore in the East Pilbara region of Western Australia. This was my first visit to the Pilbara and there were a lot of firsts in the journey, not least of all the feeling of vulnerability and awe for the vastness of the outback terrain. It was not pretty, in the picture postcard, bucolic sense, but its appeal for me was linked to my perception of the

¹ The Canning Stock Route runs from Halls Creek to Wiluna in Western Australia. It was created between 1906 and 1910 comprising a total distance of 1,850 kilometres, and is the longest historic stock route in the world.

harshness of the country. From a distance the spinifex appeared enticingly soft, but it was actually sharp and prickly – a warning perhaps that all is not quite what it seems.

We had travelled from Wiluna and negotiated fifteen-metre-high sand dunes, corrugations that jolted every bone in our bodies, narrow gorges, and sheer cliffs on the way to Well 23, also known as Georgia Bore. Our party grew to four with the inclusion of a journalist and a photographer whose vehicle had broken down on the Talawana Track² en route to Georgia Bore to meet us. We towed their vehicle to the Jigalong Community³ and all four returned to the Canning Stock Route to complete our assignment on Lake Disappointment. This project is not about the Canning Stock Route, or my companions at that time. Instead, that journey was my introduction to Jigalong and Ethel Creek Station, and the start of an ongoing connection to the Pilbara landscape that keeps luring me back.

After spending eighteen gruelling days negotiating sand dunes along the Canning Stock Route, Ethel Creek Station was a welcome oasis in the desert, and my attachment to this place was formed. Over the ensuing years I have questioned whether this place attachment evolved because of my tired, emotional state upon arriving at the station, where the kindness and warmth of the people living there, and the wide, green lawns provided respite from the isolation, dust and corrugated tracks experienced on the stock route. The wide, green lawns are human alterations to the natural topography, planted to provide relief from the heat, and tended by the pastoralists, Barry and Bella Gratte, who have managed Ethel Creek Station for more than three decades.

During my first visit to Ethel Creek Station in 1997, I was introduced to Muddy and Karinya, Martu people from Jigalong, who were the last remaining Indigenous workers on the station. Since that initial visit, I have observed many changes to the geographical and cultural landscape on Ethel Creek Station that have impacted on place-identity. It is salient to reflect on this environment in the context of the present-day relationship between the Indigenous Martu people in Jigalong and the pastoralists on Ethel Creek Station, where station workers assist the Martu people when needed, and the Gratte family are included in many private ceremonial occasions usually attended only by Indigenous peoples. From my perspective the two communities respectfully

² The Talawana Track intersects with the Canning Stock Route at Wells 23 and 24.

³ Jigalong was established in 1907 for the workers during the construction of the rabbit-proof fence. In 1947 the land was granted to the Apostolic Church which set up an Indigenous community and in 1969 the land was returned to the Australian government which set up an Indigenous reserve. In 1974 the land was granted to the traditional owners of the land, the Martu people.

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acknowledge each other, and this relationship developed over the past thirty years is built on trust and mutual respect.



Figure 1. East Pilbara region showing the proximity of Ethel Creek Station, Jigalong and Well 23 on the Canning Stock Route.

The landscape specific to this project, includes the Jigalong Indigenous Community, situated within the Nyiyaparli⁴ region on the Jigalong Road, approximately ninety kilometres from Ethel Creek Station (Fig. 1). It is the place where the intertwined Indigenous and pastoral histories connected in 1947 and are contained within this region. The pastoralist perception of landscape is based on Western concepts of ownership and commodification (Seddon, 2005) whereas Indigenous peoples talk about ‘Country’ with love and longing, and they believe that the relationship is reciprocal. They care for Country and Country cares for them (Bradley, 2011, p.50).

I acknowledge that the uninterrupted Indigenous connection to the landscape has evolved for over sixty thousand years until the dispossession of Country by the occupation of European colonisers, whilst the European post-colonial, pastoralist relationship to the same place has developed over one hundred and fifty years (Rose, 1996; Seddon, 2001). In both the Indigenous and pastoralist communities, which have a multi-generational relationship with this landscape, there is a deeply felt attachment to place (Mahood, 2017). British cultural geographer, Tim Ingold recognises this and says, “Landscape is constituted as an enduring record of - and testament to - the lives and works

⁴ Nyiyaparli, which means ‘this is me, my people my country’, comprises 36,684 square kilometres of land and waters in the East Pilbara region, including the mining town of Newman, and is owned by the Traditional Owners, the Nyiyaparli Peoples.

of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in doing so have left something of themselves” (1993, p. 153). For the Martu people living in Jigalong, who have a deep connection to their Country, evidence of their past presence in the landscape is found in sand drawings, earth sculptures, rock art and body painting using ochres taken from the landscape (Rose, 1996).

Australian archaeologists and academics Josephine McDonald and Peter Veth (2013, p.368) describe the Martu’s engraved art created during the Dreamtime and the ochre art created by humans as re-affirmative, signifying the human agency that the Martu have as custodians of their ‘Country’. According to Chinese-American geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan, this attachment to Country or ‘place’ for Indigenous peoples is not necessarily based on the locality of physical land markers, such as billabongs, but on the places where their ancestors have wandered (1991, p.685).

For the Australian Indigenous peoples, the loss of a sense of place is their loss of homeland and connection to the natural world. Indigenous Australian academic, Marcia Langton, suggests that there is also a loss of a sense of place for Europeans, where they are caught between two worlds, the old and the new. Langton (2000) notes the differences between the empty, wild landscape viewed by settlers, and the spiritual landscape filled with visions of ancestral beings and is home to Indigenous peoples.

For me the ‘feel’ of a place takes time, and that knowledge of place then becomes sub-conscious. It is made up of repeated experiences, over extended periods of time, which include sensory responses to inform a sense of place that includes sight, sound and smell (Tuan, 1977). My understanding of the Pilbara, and in particular Ethel Creek Station, has developed over twenty-four years, and it is important to consider the sense of place in the context of my project, in both Indigenous and post-colonial pastoral communities, as a temporal concept (Evans, 2004).

In this exegesis I refer to ‘place’ in different ways, and clarify my interpretation of place by utilising the following terms: ‘altered landscape’, ‘place-identity’⁵ and ‘place attachment’. The ‘altered landscape’ is defined as a landscape altered by the effect of human interventions (Hulbert, 2011). These interventions include the structural changes made to the topography by humans, such as fences, dams and buildings, and the effect of human-induced climate change on the terrain. The Pilbara landscape is subject to extremes of temperature and precipitation weather conditions that lead to drought and

⁵ This term is written in the research literature as either ‘place identity’ or ‘place-identity’. In this exegesis the term will be referred to as place-identity.

flooding. These meteorological conditions have increased in intensity in recent years, and the extreme conditions impact on the environment and alter the structure and surface of the landscape, changing the physical appearance of the topography that in turn impacts on place-identity. A human altered landscape disrupts the topography of the natural environment, and these human constructs impact on the social and the physical, negatively or positively, and affect place-identity (Casey, 1997).

‘Place-identity’ is defined in this exegesis as the relationship formed from a sense of place, providing a feeling of belonging and meaningfulness that affects human perception and informs attitudes towards the experience of place (Dixon & Durrheim 2000; Proshansky et al., 1983). According to British academic John Dixon and South African academic John Durrheim, “the ideological structuring of place-identity has a practical implication for how the topic is investigated. It forces researchers to become reflexive about their own positions in the world” (2000, p. 39). Place-identity is fluid and ever changing, and is influenced by cultural, psychological and environmental factors. ‘Place attachment’ is defined as the human connection to place that provides a sense of well-being, and emotional security, and includes the interaction between individuals or groups of people that contributes to place-identity (Giuliani, 2003).

I rely on philosopher Yi Fu-Tuan (1977, 1979, 1991, 2001), cultural geographers Tim Ingold (1993, 2005, 2010, 2014), John Malpas (2011, 2018) and John Wylie (2005, 2007), and academics Lucy Lippard (1997) and George Seddon (2001, 2005) to inform my exegetical writing. In the context of my creative practice I discuss the work of photographers Edward Burtynsky (2009), Rebecca Dagnall (2017), Sally Mann (2015), and Richard Woldendorp (2008), and visual artists Kim Mahood (2017), and John Wolseley (2021). I include Indigenous artists from the Martumili Art Centre and my practice-led research methodology is informed by the writings of Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2010), Harriet Hawkins (2013), Kyna Leski (2015), and Graeme Sullivan (2014).

This project involved three field trips to Ethel Creek Station in 2020 and 2021. Chapter One of this exegesis examines my first field trip to Ethel Creek Station conducted between 20 March and 18 April 2020, using an autoethnographic approach. The chapter references the writings of Tim Ingold and John Wylie and the philosophies of Yi-Fu Tuan through the emplaced experience of the field trip. The first section of the chapter discusses the impact of drought on the station landscape and its inhabitants, and explores how meteorological changes alter landscapes and affect place-identity. The second part of the

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chapter reflects on the impact of the Coronavirus⁶ on my creative practice, discusses the work of John Wolseley and Martumili artists, and examines the effect of border closures and quarantine on my creative practice and place-identity.

Chapter Two discusses the second field trip conducted during a cattle muster on Ethel Creek Station between 17 July and 3 August 2020, and focuses on the Pilbara landscape and how it has been altered by European post-colonial settlers (Rose, 1997; Seddon 2001). The first section of this chapter discusses the impact of pastoralist interventions on the land, and explores the ways that the topography has been altered by permanent, and temporary intrusions through walking and driving in and through the landscape. The second section considers the Pilbara landscape from the air, flying over the terrain in a helicopter, and reflects on the aerial photography of Edward Burtynsky and Richard Woldendorp, and Martu Indigenous paintings.

The synthesis of this exegesis occurs in Chapter Three with the consideration of the third and final field trip conducted on Ethel Creek Station between 12-24 March 2021. The first section discusses the impact of rainfall on the landscape and how rainfall affects place-identity. The second section explores the photographic methods used in my creative practice, and the influence of Sally Mann and Rebecca Dagnall. The third section examines the outcomes of my investigations, within the context of my practice-led methodology informed by Estelle Barrett, Barbara Bolt, Harriet Hawkins, and Kyna Leski.

My relationship with this ancient Pilbara landscape commenced in 1997, and since then I have visited and re-visited Ethel Creek Station on multiple occasions. I would periodically travel there to stay with the station managers who, since our unplanned meeting in 1997, have become my friends, and then from 2009 I became their employee and worked as the station cook for six months. This change in our relationship, from friend to employee, impacted on my personal life, and when my youngest daughter arrived from Perth to stay with me during the hot, summer season, when the air temperatures rose to 50 degrees Celsius, and birds were falling from the sky, another change occurred. This time the relationship changed from employee to family member, when my daughter and the station managers' son fell in love. I am now connected in a familial sense to Ethel Creek Station through my daughter Kate's marriage to Richard Gratte, and my three grandchildren Olivia, Charlie and James, who have been living on

⁶ Throughout this exegesis the term 'Coronavirus' will be referred to as Covid-19.

the station for the past eight years. My relationship with Bella and Barry Gratte has also changed, and we are now conjoined through our children and grandchildren.

This project has been enabled because of my enduring association with friends, who are now my family, and the trust built between us over many years that has assisted me in sensitive areas of my research which would have been difficult to pursue without their support. For these reasons my visits to the station have become more frequent, and my relationship to Ethel Creek Station and the Pilbara landscape has altered and this has affected my place attachment and place-identity.

Previously I had visited the station with a sense of detachment, and I would come and go without feeling a heartfelt connection to the place. Ethel Creek Station held many memories for me, and they were embedded through the bodily experiences of being there at different times over almost two decades of arriving and then leaving. However, for the past eight years Ethel Creek Station has become home to my daughter and her family, and this has affected my relationship to the station and the Pilbara landscape.

I no longer feel like an outsider, arriving for a time and then leaving, not knowing when I would return to this outback space. I have now become part of the Ethel Creek Station cultural landscape and this has enriched my attachment to this place. When I leave the bitumised Marble Bar Road and travel along the corrugations on the Jigalong Road, which signify that I have left one world and I am about to enter another, I know that I am coming back to a place where I belong.

Chapter One

Emplacement in the landscape

For places are places *for* experiences of every actual or imaginable sort. Conversely, experiences are nothing if not emplaced: without a place in which to be present and to be situated, an experience would evaporate into thin air - thus would not be the experience of the experiencer, a sensing or thinking or feeling subject, and thus no experience at all (Casey, as cited in Malpas, 2018, p. xii, emphasis in the original).

Field Trip One: 20 March - 18 April 2020

American philosopher Edward Casey writes about the experience of being present and emplaced. The aim of this chapter is to critically reflect on the impact of drought on the Pilbara⁷ landscape and its effect on place-identity, through the emplaced experience of the first of three field trips conducted on Ethel Creek Station in 2020 and 2021. My experiences of the Pilbara have provided a source of inspiration for my creative practice since my first visit to the region in 1997, and this vividly coloured, ancient landscape, altered by pastoralism and mining, comprises expansive, flat, artesian desert plains, deep gorges, and inter-connecting river systems.



Figure 2. Aerial view towards the Ophthalmia Range in the Pilbara, 2017.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

⁷‘Pilbara’ is the Aboriginal word meaning ‘mullet’, and Pilbara Creek was the first place named ‘Pilbara’ after the number of fish found in the creek.

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The scale of the expansive landscape is impressive (Fig. 2) and the far-reaching, distant horizons always imbue a sense of adventure in me when I leave the city buildings behind and travel north.

For over twenty years the lure of this panoramic landscape draws me back, and I keep returning to the Pilbara. Within this expanded geographic space there are rocky outcrops, monolithic termite mounds, seductive grasses, and mulga trees, which allow me to pause and consider their presence in the context of this outback landscape. These observations are supported by Chinese-American human geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan who states “As we look at a panoramic scene our eyes pause at points of interest. Each pause is time enough to create an image of place that looms large momentarily in our view” (1977, p. 161). In this case the termite mounds appear disproportionately large, and the spinifex grasses appear to be enticingly soft within the parameters of the expansive scene.

In March 2020, I drove 1,350 kilometres from Mandurah, situated south of Perth in Western Australia, to Ethel Creek Station in the far north-eastern Pilbara, for my first field trip. This road is familiar to me, and I anticipate places in the landscape through past and present experiences (Tuan, 1979) along the route, which accentuate the remoteness and distance of the journey that takes me to the station. I can relate my experiences to those of Australian writer and artist, Kim Mahood who encounters this sense of familiarity with the remote Western Australian desert of her childhood. She uses her experiences to inform her writing and her creative practice through the many road trips that map her connection to place (2013; 2017). Since 1997 I have travelled to Ethel Creek Station on ten road trips, and each journey presents a set of coordinates that map my repeated journey to a place that is familiar.

Ethel Creek Station is a remote, BHP owned, working cattle station in the Pilbara, established in 1880 and situated approximately 68 kilometres north-east of the mining town of Newman. This vast pastoral lease comprises approximately 400,000 hectares of mostly alluvial grasslands, and supports 15,000 head of droughtmaster cattle. Access to the station is via the bitumised Marble Bar Road from Newman, to the sign-posted, corrugated, gravel road leading to the Jigalong Indigenous Community. Indigenous and post-colonial histories are linked by the Jigalong Road. During the past two years I have conducted three field trips on Ethel Creek Station for my project research.

The field trips are an important component of my practice-led research, and through the implementation of qualitative methods that include observations, interviews, journal writing and photographic documentation, I can personally experience the social,

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cultural, and topographical landscape of the station and its residents. According to American academics John Cresswell and David Cresswell (2018) qualitative methods require self-reflection on past experiences and how they shape interpretation. I use the embodied knowledge gained through my experiences on Ethel Creek Station to inform my creative practice and I draw on these field trips using an ethnographic approach to understand, evaluate, and describe my personal experiences (Barrett & Bolt, 2010).



Figure 3. Signpost to Ethel Creek Station Homestead on the Jigalong Road, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

American academic Carl Sauer stressed the importance of field trips to geographers in 1963 when he stated that “Being afoot, sleeping out, sitting about camp in the evening, seeing the land in all its seasons are proper ways to intensify the experience, of developing impression into larger appreciation and judgement” (Sauer, 1963, p.400). Sauer believed that observation and contemplation in the field were crucial for gaining an intuitive understanding in landscape studies and human geography.

Over the past two years, during my research for this project, I have experienced landscapes altered by changing weather conditions, walked along animal tracks, slept under the stars and flown over the terrain to gain insight into the landscape from different perspectives. I needed to personally experience the Pilbara landscape, and to interact with the station residents, to understand how changes to the landscape affect place-identity. These experiences have informed my creative practice and resulted in photographic artworks that include *Landcruisers and Droughtmasters* (Fig. 31) and *The Camp* (Fig. 34).

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The first section of this chapter seeks to address the impact of drought conditions on the Pilbara landscape, experienced during the first field trip, and their effect on place-identity. The second section critically examines a sense of place in the context of the first field trip, conducted during the Covid-19 travel restrictions, in relation to my previous experiences on Ethel Creek Station, and reflects on the fourteen-day quarantine period that affected my place-identity. It discusses my perception of place post-quarantine and examines the experience of moving freely and unencumbered in the landscape.

1.1 Weathering place: Drought

According to British anthropologist and cultural geographer Tim Ingold (2010), humans are subjected to the fluctuating forces of the weather, and these forces determine how we feel and therefore how we act. On Ethel Creek Station the effect of the weather has economic implications which impact on the well-being of the human residents. Changes in the weather also affect the vegetation and the native animals and during the past two years of my research and field trips, I have experienced both extreme drought conditions and mass flooding on the station and these were explored using photographic methods. According to Richard Gratte, who has lived on Ethel Creek Station for over thirty years, the weather patterns have changed and become more severe during the past decade, mainly due to the impact of climate change on the landscape and these changes have affected the station residents. Ingold states, “The *experience of weather* lies at the root of our moods and motivations; indeed it is the very temperament of our being” (2010, p. 122, emphasis in the original). I suggest that weather can influence place-identity depending on the severity of the human-induced meteorological conditions that have an impact on place.

As I drove along the Jigalong Road, en route to my first field trip in March 2020, the sky was a deep shade of Payne’s grey, and the sound of cracking thunder alternated with lightning bolts that lit up the landscape. There was an ominous feeling caused by the drama of the thunderstorms dancing in the landscape around me. I could see the rain on the horizon and felt a sense of anticipation as I drove along the red ochre gravel road which was dry and dusty, indicating that the rain had probably not reached Ethel Creek Station (Fig. 4). In fact, it had not rained significantly on the station for almost three years, and the effect of sustained drought conditions noticeably affected the appearance of the landscape, the number of pastoral animals and native wildlife, and the morale and well-being of the station inhabitants.



Figure 4. The Jigalong Road en route to the first field trip on Ethel Creek Station, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

It is difficult to discern when a drought has started and when it has ended. Drought creeps up gradually and changes can be observed in the landscape in the first instance (Aslin & Russell, 2008). The moisture disappears and the once over-flowing river systems and tributaries, dams, and natural waterholes dry up. The grasses turn from sap green to yellow ochre and then shrivel up and die leaving only the clumps of spinifex holding the pasture together and the earth's crust begins to crack (Fig. 5). Ingold proposes that the earth's surface has a fractal quality to it that is made up of composite interwoven materials that are continually undergoing regeneration (2010, p. 125). Ingold's view is confirmed by the cracking of the earth's surface during drought, where the composition of the soil changes with the absence of water, and regenerates with rainfall.

The rainfall is collected in water tanks created by pastoralists to retain and conserve water, but these are drying up too, and water is transported to the station from the town of Newman in oversized plastic bottles for human consumption. During the summer months, the unforgiving heat reaches in the high 40 degrees Celsius for months on end, and the only respite from the unforgiving heat, for the human residents, is found in the air-conditioned dwellings.



Figure 5. Drought conditions on Ethel Creek Station, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

It is understandable that the well-being of pastoralists and station inhabitants is affected by the extreme weather conditions found in the Pilbara. This understanding is supported by a review of the social impacts of drought in regional Australia by Australian scientist Heather Aslin, with Jacqui Russell as co-author, for the Australian Department of Agriculture in 2008. They found that prolonged drought conditions caused chronic stress giving rise to feelings of “loss of control and mastery, fear, helplessness and futility, as well as concerns for their future viability” (Sartore et al., as cited in Aslin and Russell, 2008, p. 38). Not only do pastoralists feel concern for their economic losses in times of drought, but they are also deeply saddened by their loss of livestock, and this systemic and prolonged sense of loss, related to the condition of the landscape, affects their place-identity. They are at the mercy of the weather, and in times of drought they live in hope that it will rain, and with the rain comes hope that the pastures will be greener, the livestock will be fed, and their livelihoods will continue.

The cattle lose weight and the pastoralists desperately try to find new markets to allow them to destock their landholdings, to minimise the loss of animal life and potential financial ruin (Edwards et al., 2011). Human-made water troughs, and adjacent pumps powered by the latest solar powered technology, are checked by the station boreman to ensure that water is available for the remaining animal stock and native wildlife. Every day the boreman returns to the homestead after his station circuit, recounting poignant stories of desperate cattle drinking from water troughs falling prey to submerged reptiles, and other cattle, too weak to support their body weight, falling into the troughs and

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drowning. Wild dogs and dingoes wait patiently for their next weak victim (Fig. 6). The kangaroos are malnourished and weak, and they move closer to the green lawns of the station homestead in search of food and moisture. Birds of prey circle the homestead and the water troughs, waiting, while the budgerigars and tiny finches cover the homestead fence lines where they find a continuous supply of bore water sprinklers.



Figure 6. Cattle remains during drought conditions, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

The silence of the drought is broken by the sound of beating wings. Locusts and grasshoppers move across the landscape in plague proportions, devouring tender leaves on vegetation introduced into the landscape, and the once green lawns surrounding the station homestead are decimated. These insects are from the Order Orthoptera, meaning ‘straight wings’, and they produce sound by stridulation causing the acoustics to rise to a level of sound that is deafening. These insects vary in shape, size and colour, and they create a surface cover for the flywire screens on the windows and doors of dwellings, and then they die (Fig. 7). Their destruction of the landscape is immediate and visible to the human eye, and their sudden mass deaths cover the ground with a carpet of crunchy bodies. In March 2020, I experienced a grasshopper plague on Ethel Creek Station where the hot air became suffocating and thick with them. Conceptually I found it interesting to contemplate these winged insects moving across the landscape in the air, surveying the landscape below them in search of food sources, such as green lawns and introduced flora, then decimating and altering these places before slowly dying on the ground. These

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encounters with insects have informed my creative practice and during the quarantine period in the first field trip, I investigated them further through drawings and watercolour paintings. These investigations are explored later in this chapter.



Figure 7. Grasshopper plague on Ethel Creek Station, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

The experience of weather can affect the mental health of humans, particularly in extreme drought and flood conditions (Aslin & Russell, 2008; Edwards et al., 2011). During the first field trip I interviewed Kate Gratte, the assistant manager's wife on Ethel Creek Station, who has lived on the station for eight years and has experienced the effect of the impact of weather conditions on her health. She describes her experience during prolonged drought as a place where "Tension builds up then there is a release. When it does rain you wouldn't want to be anywhere else. After the rains it is beautiful. But in drought everything is dead" (K. Gratte, interview, 2020). The tension created by the effect of weather conditions has, at times, affected Kate's well-being and her response to the withering landscape is deeply felt, creating a visceral response to the dramatic, meteorological changes that affect her place-identity. During my periodic visits to the

station over the past twenty-four years, I have also felt the impact of the extreme changes in the Pilbara weather that alter the physical landscape, however I am able to leave, and do not have the relentless feeling of hopelessness that is experienced during prolonged drought conditions.

Finally, it rains, and the parched, cracked earth turns to mud. Immediately there is a sense of joyous optimism amongst the station residents, who shout to be heard above the deafening sound of heavy, soaking rain. Frogs croak and are visible on walls, in drainpipes and toilet bowls. The air is no longer filled with a sense of oppression. It is fresh, and the children and adults let the rain soak into them. The rainfall heralds the end of the drought conditions and with the rain there is a renewed sense of well-being that has an uplifting effect on the residents. Once again there is hope and an overwhelming feeling of optimism for the future.

In this section of Chapter One, I have referred to the effects of weather on the landscape and its inhabitants however, Ingold makes this distinction between the landscape and weather, “Perceiving the landscape, then, is a mode of *observation*, perceiving the weather is a mode of *being*” (2005, p. 102, emphasis in the original). In other words, I see the landscape, but I embody the weather. If, as Ingold suggests, this is true, then it follows that dramatic and prolonged changes in the weather that alter the landscape may have a positive or negative effect on humans’ physical and emotional health and their place-identity. According to Ingold (2005), weather is multisensory when experienced outdoors, and it is only through sight, sound, hearing and feeling, that we can decide whether it is cold, wet, or dry. He asks:

Is weather part of the landscape or is it not? If it is not, does it swirl around *above* the landscape, or does it actually *encompass* the landscape, as the earth is encompassed by the great sphere of the sky? If the weather is not part of the landscape, is the landscape part of the weather? (p. 100, emphasis in the original).

Ingold questions the nature of the relationship between the weather and the landscape, and it is my view that they are intertwined. Prolonged drought alters the physical structure of the landscape by shrinking the earth’s surface until it cracks. In contrast, continued rainfall produces flooding that can alter the landscape by breaking down river banks and turning the earth’s surface into mud. I have observed the impact weather has on altering the landscape of Ethel Creek Station and how it may influence place-identity depending on the severity of the meteorological conditions.

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Over the past decade the landscape, altered by more frequent extremes of weather such as drought, flooding and insect plagues resulting from these meteorological changes, influences the place-identity of the station residents. Through my practice-led research I aimed to explore visual methods that portray the emotions that are revealed when landscapes are altered, and how they impact on place-identity.

In the next section of this chapter, I assess the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on place-identity and discuss my creative practice during quarantine on Ethel Creek Station. I discuss my perception of place post-quarantine and examine the experience of moving freely and unencumbered in the landscape.

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1.2. The Covid-19 effect

The first field trip was affected by Covid-19 entering Australia in late January 2020. Protective measures were put in place by the Western Australian State Government Premier Mark McGowan to restrict the spread of Covid-19, and included state and regional border closures. These measures included restrictions to and from remote and vulnerable Indigenous communities, such as Jigalong on the Jigalong Road, where a single road sign in the middle of the gravel road indicated that the area was restricted. Access to Ethel Creek Station via the Jigalong Road required special passes to enable entry to and from the station, and my aim in *Border Control* (Fig. 8), was to convey a sense of isolation and the incongruity of the “Road Closed” signage in the middle of the gravel road to Jigalong.



Figure 8. Fiona Rafferty. *Border Control*. 2020. Archival pigment print. 60 x 40 cm.

The original intention of this field trip was to experience the Pilbara landscape, conduct interviews with station residents⁸ and explore aspects of my creative practice through the prism of the effect of altered landscapes on the residents’ place-identity. Instead, the unexpected restrictions of Covid-19 took the project to a different space that led to other experiences and discoveries. This section will address the impact of these restrictions on my perception of place and my creative practice.

As Italian scholar Maria Giuliani (2003) maintains, “It is the emotional significance that geographic spaces are able to take on in human experience that

⁸ Due to the remoteness of the field trip and the proposed interviews, risk assessments and human ethics approvals were required prior to travel.

transforms them into ‘places’” (p. 146). If, as Giuliani suggests, the geographic space of Ethel Creek Station has become a place of emotional significance that compels me to keep returning to this outback place, then why, during Covid-19, did my sense of place change?

On arrival at the station, as per Covid-19 national health guidelines, I was placed into quarantine for fourteen days, and visible and invisible borders were defined to restrict my movement. Prior to Covid-19 border restrictions, Australian human geographers, Kate Lloyd, Samantha Muller, Emma Power, Sandra Suchet-Pearson and Sarah Wright, investigated how borders are formed in relationship to quarantine measures in northern Australia, and they found that “The practices of quarantine and quarantining are a key way in which borders are constructed as exclusionary markers” (Lloyd et al., 2009, p. 782). Their research was informed by the Australian and Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) through the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) and the researchers investigated the way that borders were formed and reformed. In my quarantine experience, the borders or exclusionary markers restricting my movement in and out of the quarantine area on the station were marked by fixed buildings, a donga and an old schoolroom, connected by the open space between the buildings.

My immediate surroundings became my world for the duration of the quarantine period, and there was an unsettling paradox between the vast landscape beyond these spaces, and the constricted living and studio space. This feeling of confinement and isolation, despite the geographical scale of the station, compounded with movement restricted to a ten-square-metre section of land, affected the way that I approached my creative practice and altered how I viewed the landscape. American academic and artist, Kyna Leski observes,

A creative project grows out of the conditions, content, and forces of its situation. And a creative work meant to serve one purpose may transform into serving an entirely different purpose, each shaping the other. One creative work grows out of the other, and they are reciprocal. (2015, p. 3)

I agree with Leski that conditions can be transformative, and it is my view that the enforced quarantine conditions placed on me during the first field trip impacted on my creative practice and transformed my working methodology. At the beginning of this project I had imagined that I would work towards a series of large, landscape paintings, as I had done during previous visits to Ethel Creek Station however, the experience of

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restrictive conditions forced upon me during the first field trip changed the intent of my creative work.

Instead of working on landscape sketches and studies en plein air, I was confined to a rectangular space, and this confinement altered my ability to pursue my normal working practice of going out into the landscape and working with the materiality of the site. This enforced fourteen-day quarantine period affected how I felt about this place and I could see the landscape stretching endlessly from my window, but I was unable to venture out into the landscape. My movement was restricted, and my perception of space was limited by my inability to venture further than the allocated quarantine space. Therefore, my creative practice developed solely within the confines of the old station schoolroom (Figs. 9 & 10).

The old station schoolroom became my studio space, and I worked methodically on watercolour charts, investigating the colours of the Pilbara that I was able to see as I walked between my donga and the old schoolroom. I experimented with watercolour and ink washes on a variety of paper sizes and types, and found dead beetles, dragonflies, praying mantises, grasshoppers and butterflies to be an endless source of investigation. A selection of dead insects were carefully carried to the old schoolroom and left outside my door by my grandchildren every day during quarantine. This daily offering became a conduit between the external world and my quarantine space.



Figure 9. Quarantine space and donga, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.



Figure 10. Quarantine space, donga and old station schoolroom, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

I have always been interested in entomology and the insects were easy to acquire. They varied in species, and the focus of my creative work whilst in quarantine became the rendering of these lifeless, insect forms. I formed an interest in the scale of the insects in relation to the vast landscape beyond my restricted, quarantine space. I was interested in the idea of proportion, specifically in relation to the size of the grasshoppers and the great expanse of space in the external landscape. Individually, the grasshoppers were miniscule however, in their plague-like proportions, the relational aspect changed with the increased volume of grasshoppers compared to the landscape. I aimed to convey this altered landscape space through my creative practice and chose to draw the grasshoppers with fineliner pens on paper. My drawings of the dead grasshoppers were tiny and detailed, and I placed them strategically on the paper to create a sense of the scale of the insects within the vast Pilbara landscape (Fig. 11). Other insect works took up the entire picture plane dominating the paper surface (Fig. 12). They became oversized and took on an unprecedented importance in the context of my creative practice.



Figure 11. Fiona Rafferty. *Plague proportions*. 2021.
Pen and ink on Arches paper. 77 x 58 cm.



Figure 12. *Grasshopper sketch*. 2020.
Watercolour and ink on Arches paper. 77 x 58cm

I was reminded of the work of Australian artist John Wolseley who has been an inspiration for my creative practice for many years. Since his arrival in Australia in 1994, Wolseley has ventured out into the landscape, setting up camp and working with nature, for weeks and sometimes months at a time. Australian academic Sasha Grishin writes that for Wolseley, working in the field “is one of his deliberate strategies for breaking down the conceptual and physical barrier between the artist and his subject, between the artist and nature” (2006, p12). By immersing himself in the landscape and carefully observing his environment, Wolseley is able to break down, as Grishin suggests, the divide between the self and the landscape. In his intricately rendered observations of nature, Wolseley takes the viewer on a journey into nature with him, and the barriers dissolve. During quarantine, I reflected on his exhibition titled *One Hundred and One Insect Life Stories* and his approach to drawing provided the necessary impetus I needed for my own creative practice.

In *Windblown insects on the salt – Lake Tyrrell* (for JC) (Fig.13) Wolseley used mixed media to convey the sense of salt on the surface of Lake Tyrrell. His layering of drawing, etching, and Chine-collé over watercolour creates a depth in the artwork where the insects are not rendered in detail but give the fleeting impression of their recorded presence. Wolseley (2021) says that by “Using techniques of watercolour, collage,

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frottage, nature printing and other methods of direct physical or kinetic contact I am finding ways of collaborating with the actual plants, birds, trees, rocks and earth of a particular place”. There is a tangible connection between Wolseley, who clearly identifies with nature, and the places where his work is created.



Figure 13. John Wolseley. *Windblown insects on the salt – Lake Tyrrell (for JC)*. 2019. Etching Chine-collé over watercolour. 35.5 x 47.5 cm.

My approach to representing the insect life on Ethel Creek Station is different to Wolseley’s. The scale of the insects in relation to the material surface of Wolseley’s *Windblown insects on the salt – Lake Tyrrell (for JC)* is proportional and differs from my representation of the insects as disproportionately over-sized, filling up the picture plane, or portraying them as tiny images seemingly lost in a vast space. Conceptually, the tiny images reflect my feeling of being emotionally lost and disconnected whilst contained within the old schoolroom situated in the vast, open landscape.

Prior to this restricted field trip, my creative practice was conducted on site, out in the landscape, and like Wolseley, evidence of my interest in the natural environment can be found in the journals that travel with me. However, my diary entries during quarantine suggest a sense of place that is frustrating, and the restricted, confined space turned my thinking inwards. My diary entry of 30 March conveys a sense of this frustration: “intermittent phone and internet means that communication is difficult. Frustrating. Lots of watercolours...working out ideas for large paintings. Still trying to

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find the essence of place up here. Hot, dry, dusty, relentless, repetitive, 38C". The lack of reliable telephone and internet communication meant that I was unable to access the internet for research purposes and because of the intermittent internet connection my studio space was quiet, and I was unable to listen to music, podcasts, and audio books, which is a common practice when I work. This change in my usual working methodology influenced my creative practice, and within the constricted space my work became tighter, smaller, and more detailed, reflecting the constraints placed upon me by my restricted space. The scale of the quarantine space, in relation to the vast landscape that I could see but was unable to venture out into, affected my perception of place.

American academics David Creswell and John Creswell (2018) maintain that it is through reflection on past experiences and how they shape interpretation that new knowledge is discovered. During quarantine, time became open-ended, and I had unencumbered mental space to reflect on my past experiences at Ethel Creek Station over two decades. Some years prior to this project during a visit to the station, I was seeking to find a way to embed the feeling of place through experimental paint pouring on site. Canvases were buried in the red dirt, reclaimed, and reworked later, on my return to my city studio.



Figure 14. Fiona Rafferty. *Pilbara I*. 2010. Mixed media and hand-stitching on canvas. 40 x 40 cm.

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This phenomenological experience is further supported by Tuan who states, “Art makes images of feeling so that feeling is accessible to contemplation and thought” (1997, p. 148). ‘*Pilbara 1*’ (Fig. 14), completed in 2010, is not a traditional landscape painting, but one that supports Tuan’s proposition. It is an image of how I felt about the Pilbara landscape, and I aimed to create the feeling of place through abstraction and the visceral rendering of ochres and shellac on the support surface, using bright, strong colours to represent the strong, iron ore-rich Pilbara landscape.

This fluid, intuitive way of working with the landscape a decade ago contrasts starkly with the tight, detailed, focused and meditative way of working during quarantine in 2020. The soft watercolour painting executed with pointillist detail while in quarantine (Fig. 15), reflects the contained situation that was imposed on me and how I felt detached from the landscape. Despite the intimate level of dots or pixels in the work, I chose to paint an elevated landscape view from memory and altered the traditional landscape picture plane by eliminating the horizon line.



Figure 15. Fiona Rafferty. *Pilbara study*. 2020. Watercolour on Arches paper. 60 x 50 cm.

There is a scale in this work that hints at the vastness of the landscape that is not present in the earlier work that situates the viewer *in* the landscape. As I reflected on the landscape, I was reminded of the Martu peoples’ ‘dot’ paintings, such as *Martumili Ngarra* (Fig. 16), that represents their view of Country. Nagalangka Nola Taylor describes what you see: “When you look at this painting, don’t read it like a whitefella map. It’s a Martu map: this is how we see the Country, this is how we use a painting to

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tell stories about our Country” (cited in National Museum of Australia, 2009, p.179)⁹. Herein lies the difference between my anglicised view of the Pilbara landscape, which uses pointillism to convey a sense of the undulating landscape, and the Martu painting of Country that tells a story of the landscape that is informative for future generations (Mahood, 2017).



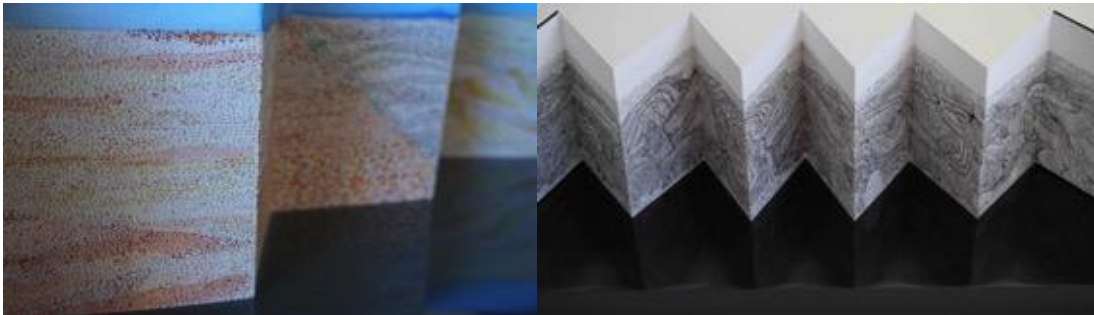
Figure 16. Martumili Artists, Kumpaya Girgaba, Jakayu Biljabu, Ngamaru Bidu, Thelma Judson, Nola Taylor and Jane Girgaba. *Martumili Ngurra*. 2009. Acrylic on linen. 324 x 508 cm.

Upon reflection, it is not surprising to note the differences between the fluid way of working during creative practice experiences in the past, such as *Pilbara 1*, and the tightly constricted way of working during Covid-19 restrictions. In 2010, I experienced a sense of positive freedom, where my movement on Ethel Creek Station was unrestricted and I was able to exercise my free will. A decade later, in 2020, the lack of freedom experienced during quarantine impacted on my ability to work freely out in the landscape. However, the restrictions did not limit my conceptual freedom, and I had time to think and to explore my drawing and watercolour paintings, taking them in a different direction to my usual creative practice. My working methods during the Covid-19 quarantine period included working simultaneously on two small concertina books.

⁹ This image is a section taken from the original painting. The image and the quotation are from the publication produced by the National Museum of Australia to accompany the touring Indigenous art exhibition *Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route*.

These small concertina books begin and end with black material covers and expand and contract as the need arises. These mini books travel with me, fitting neatly into jacket pockets and camera bags. They are passports to places and experiences, can be stored easily, and shared as others pick them up, turn them over and handle their concertina form. I draw in them at different times of the day. They are unobtrusive yet they fulfill my need to capture my thought processes with an immediacy that cannot be recorded by any other method. I make marks in them with permanent fineliner ink pens, and I do not need to think about stabilising the marks with a fixative.

I chose to use pen and ink in one book and watercolours in the second book. The marks are records of my being there, in that place, during quarantine. The repetitive marks were comforting during this enforced, uncertain time, and working meditatively helped me work through this unexpected time. The selection of very fine pens allowed me to alter the weight of the marks to emphasise shadow lines, grooves or furrows found in the landscape. I worked intuitively, from memory, and this familiar way of working, whilst experiencing extenuating circumstances, gave me some comfort. I had not used colour in previous concertina books, however I experimented with watercolours in one book while in quarantine. Ultimately, I found that the pen and ink drawings were more engaging than the books with colour. The lines were finer and more definite, creating a rhythm on the paper that was not present in the watercolour marks (Figs. 17 & 18).



Figures 17 & 18. Artist books, 2020. Documentation photographs by the artist.

These two concertina books were developed further into an exhibition artwork back in my city studio. In *Landmarks* (Fig. 19), I concentrated on drawing patterns and tracks that altered the landscape ephemerally, and fixed intrusions that changed the landscape through the introduction of boundaries and fence lines, that I experienced during my second field trip in July/August 2020. My pen and ink drawings in six concertina books were then conjoined to make up a single artwork. The form of *Landmarks* is elongated and encourages the viewer to walk along the length of the work with the reading of the work changing once the viewer alters the direction of seeing. My

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aim was to show the viewer how a landscape changes depending on the placement of the viewer in relation to the landscape. In this case the landscape presents as an artwork and there is a distance between the viewer and the artwork that creates a sense of objectivity that is not present when situating the body in the landscape.

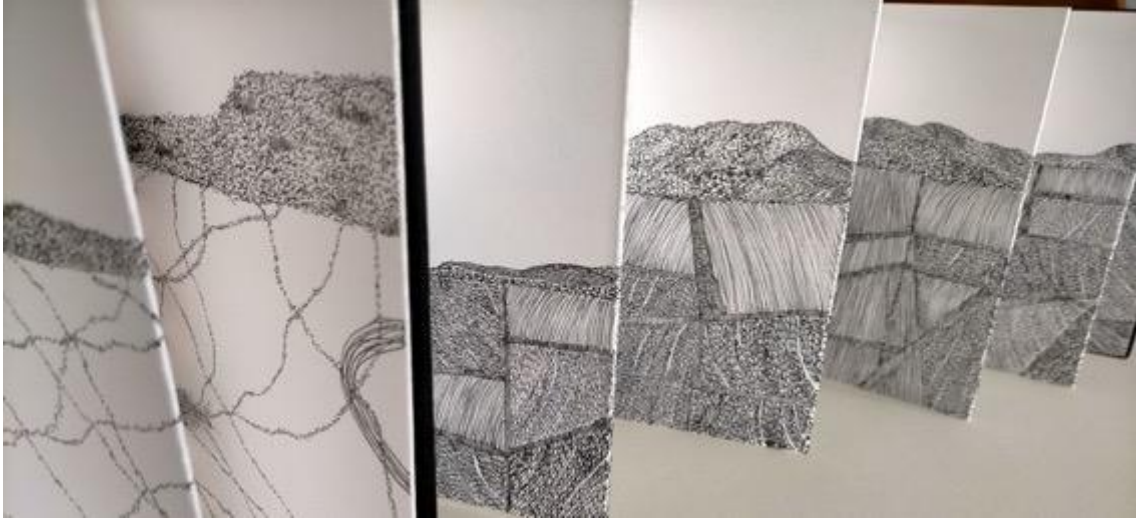


Figure 19. Fiona Rafferty. *Landmarks*. 2020 - 2021. Pen and ink on 6 artist books. Dimensions variable

Initially, I was disappointed to have my physical freedom on Ethel Creek Station curtailed by the Covid-19 enforced restrictions however, my attitude towards these restrictions changed as time passed, and I became more accepting of the situation. British cultural geographer Harriet Hawkins understands the creative process and argues, More broadly, it is to point to the importance of appreciating the processes of creative practices, and what it might mean to think of these as sites of knowing and thinking, rather than only as a means of production leading to an output. (2013, p. 264)

While reflecting on Hawkins's reasoning, and with the slowing down of time, came the realisation that I had been given an extended temporal gift. The studio as a site became a place for thinking and knowing. My physical space was small and confined within the greater landscape. Conceptually I wrestled with the notion that I was contained within a rectangular box but unable to venture out into the landscape, and I reflected upon my previous working methodology that had taken me out into the landscape seeking a more expressive way of working. This experience was exacerbated by the fact that my family could see me, but we were unable to touch. The situation was challenging, particularly for my grandchildren who found it difficult to understand why we were unable to hug.

During this very early awareness of Covid-19 in March 2020, there were a lot of misinformed opinions about what should and could not be done regarding public safety. Now, more than twelve months on from this experience, artists around the world have

been working in isolation under strict quarantine and lockdown conditions. When my experience occurred, very few artists were in lockdown and even fewer were conducting field trips. The impact that Covid-19 has had on artists, is articulated by Australian artist Megan Seres who experienced isolation and a subsequent change in her work. She says “The disjunction between desire, hope and the harsh realities of ecological perils, social histories, women’s inequities and COVID-19 isolation powerfully altered the way I perceived the world. What once was vast had paradoxically become claustrophobic” (Seres, 2021). Like Seres, my experience during quarantine was claustrophobic, and it was not until I was able to leave my restricted space and venture out into the landscape, that I was able to situate my newly experienced sense of place into context within the greater landscape.

Finally, after fourteen days, the quarantine period ended, and I felt a profound sense of liberation as I left the restricted space and moved back into the landscape and re-connected with my family and members of Ethel Creek Station. Not surprisingly the prospect of impending release from the enforced, contained place into the greater landscape created a series of mixed emotions, and I reflected on the comparison between the anticipation experienced by me before the end of quarantine, and the build up of tension prior to a drought breaking. There was a feeling of vulnerability as I contemplated the impending release into the vast open spaces, and the prospect of venturing out into the landscape, was challenging. This created a sense of hesitancy when taking my first step out of the quarantined space. However, this feeling was short-lived post-liberation, as I was eager to maximise the time remaining on the field trip, and I felt an overwhelming sense of freedom and renewal as I took my first steps into the landscape (Fig 20).

The experience of moving out of quarantine, and into the landscape, affected my perception of place and space, and heightened my awareness of the physical topography of the landscape. University of Sydney doctoral candidate Giselle Bader states, the “Experience of any space begins with the body’s perception through the senses of smell, taste, touch, hearing, and sight” (2020, p. 2). In this case, a super additive effect of multi-sensory integration where the colours appeared brighter, the grasses softer, the sky more expansive and I could smell the heat. Where the raw data is processed and a narrative is created in reaction to the experience (Ingold, 1992; Tuan, 2001).

As I walked in the landscape, my emotional reaction to this new place of freedom was elevated. The detail in the scenery became more obvious to me than on previous

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visits, and the red dirt pitted with tracks emerged as traces of the pastoral history this landscape held in trust (Fig. 20).



Figure 20. Ethel Creek Station landscape post quarantine, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

They had all passed this way horses, cattle, camels, wild dogs, dingoes, snakes, goannas, guineafowl, and the odd assortment of vehicles. On scanning the horizon, further evidence of human intervention is evidenced by the decommissioned windmills, water tanks and solar panels, with inert car wrecks littering the landscape, teetering on the edges of dirt roads in the red dust and spinifex (Fig. 21).



Figure 21. Vehicle tracks, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

John Wylie recognises that landscape is never static and muses that, “A ‘spacing of displacement’ is the incessant force and life of landscape – something spatial, something temporal, something never quite itself” (2012, p.375). This feeling of ‘displacement’ is ever-present in the Pilbara landscape and through this project I aim to articulate this apparent contradiction of being displaced whilst also feeling a sense of belonging to this place.

The border restrictions were implemented as a protective and precautionary measure however, borders limit freedom and form barriers creating spaces for insiders and outsiders, and according to cultural geographer John Agnew, they are “...impositions on the world” (2008, p. 181). The effect of borders greatly influenced the way that I approached my creative practice, and the isolation and limitations imposed on my freedom, as defined by Covid-19, also challenged my perception of place. Remembering that Ethel Creek Station was a place of familiarity, visited by me on many occasions for extended periods of time and always with a sense of belonging (Proshansky et al., 1983; Tuan, 1977), the feeling of disassociation on this field trip, I propose, is directly attributed to the parameters surrounding Covid-19.

Analogies can be drawn between the restrictive borders, emplaced during quarantine, and the fence lines and temporary cattle yards that contain the cattle prior to and during mustering providing clear boundaries within the landscape. In Chapter Two, which focuses on my second field trip conducted on Ethel Creek Station, I examine the impact of pastoralism on the landscape, through walking along animal tracks and riding in vehicles, and discuss the landscape viewed from an aerial perspective in a helicopter, during a seasonal cattle muster.

Chapter Two

Mustering the view

The altered landscape is different from the landscape: it is the impact that separates the two terms, the impact of change being made to the landscape, the evidence of human intervention on the land. (Hulbert, 2011, p. 139)

Field Trip Two: 17 July – 3 August 2020

Australian academic and photographer Shane Hulbert's assertion is particularly relevant to my project, and in this chapter I aim to critically examine my second field trip conducted on Ethel Creek Station during the mustering season in July/August 2020, and to explore the evidence of human intervention on the land. The intention of this field trip was to build on my existing practice-led research knowledge gained during the first field trip by participating in a cattle muster, and through viewing the Pilbara landscape from various perspectives; on foot, in vehicles and from the air.

This chapter focuses on the Pilbara landscape and how it has been altered by European post-colonial settlers (Seddon, 2001). The first section of this chapter examines the effect of pastoralist interventions on the land and explores the ways that the landscape has been altered by permanent and temporary intrusions. The second section discusses the Pilbara landscape encountered during the mustering season, and this experiential aerial perspective gives an account of the 'bird's-eye view'¹⁰.

Unlike the previous field trip impacted by Covid-19, there was no period of quarantine throughout the second field trip, and I was able to move freely around the station and surrounding landscape. I walked along cattle tracks, followed a cattle muster in a buggy, slept under the moonlit night sky in a swag, and flew across the landscape by helicopter. The overriding feeling of containment experienced during the first field trip was replaced by an elevated sense of liberation during the second field trip.

Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas (2018) asserts

Containment involves the establishing of a certain differentiated form of spatiality, and an associated directionality, that can be expressed in terms of

¹⁰ Russian artist, writer and philosopher Kazimir Malevich (1878 -1935) identified the aerial perspective, or 'bird's eye view', from the vantage point of looking down as distinct from an oblique angle. This was a radical paradigm created through the rise of air travel that led to a change in consciousness.

‘within’, ‘without’, ‘internal’ and ‘external’ and that is incompatible with space understood as an extended and homogenous field. (p. 170)

Malpas describes containment as a “differentiated form of spatiality” and it is my understanding that this feeling of a sense of space, associated within the quarantined containment experienced during the first field trip, was emphasised retrospectively by the extended, external, spatiality and freedom observed during the second field trip while mustering.

The mustering season on Ethel Creek Station occurs annually over a period of three months, and approximately ten thousand head of cattle are mustered into holding yards at different sites on the station. A team of seasonal contractors increase the number of station workers required to muster and process the cattle, and they have a transitory way of working, staying in one place for a few months, then moving from station to station around Australia following work opportunities.

American writer Lucy Lippard makes a distinction between a lived-in landscape that becomes a place, implying intimacy, and “a once lived-in landscape that can become a place, if explored, or remain a landscape if simply observed” (1997, p. 8). This is evidenced by the attachment to place observed in previous years amongst the Australian seasonal workers, who returned to Ethel Creek Station annually, and were therefore able to build an ongoing relationship with the landscape. In contrast, in recent years, many temporary visa holders from Argentina, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland and the United Kingdom, visit Ethel Creek Station for one season only. They pass through the landscape, and some workers do not have time to forge a deep connection to the landscape. Through my observations of the various ways in which temporary workers pass through the landscape, I have recognised their scale of engagement as a measurement of time spent in the landscape and how this may affect their attachment to place. Whether it is of sufficient temporal length, as Lippard suggests, to enable the transient workers to forge a relationship with the landscape, where it becomes a place, or not, is unclear.

Due to the changing nature of Covid-19 regulations regarding working status in Australia, the international workers contracted for the muster were uncertain about their futures and concerned about the rising pandemic numbers in their home countries. This uncertainty may have affected their ability to fully engage with the landscape, even for a short period of time, and many returned to their home countries when the mustering season ended. It is interesting to observe that twelve months later, during the mustering season in July 2021, all the contractors were from Australia and New Zealand.

My research included interviews and I selected Ethel Creek Station boreman Joshua Margulis¹¹, originally from Argentina, to be interviewed as he is an exception to the transient international worker consigned to the station for one season only. He is a temporary visa holder who worked on Ethel Creek Station for three years and developed a deep attachment to place. His understanding of the Pilbara landscape evolved over an extended period, with much of his spare time spent exploring remote landscapes in the region. During an interview I asked him, “How would you describe the Pilbara landscape?” Margulis answered,

At first it looks dry, hostile, and red, but after taking a more detailed look it is possible to identify areas with water, green holes full of life, there is a high presence of minerals, and it is obvious to the eye in some areas. Also, there’s a lot of contrast between different places – spinifex flats/mulga bush/salt-clay pans and rocky hills, after all it is an amazing area of this country. (J. Margulis, interview, April, 2020)

This observation of the landscape experienced by Margulis, is an intimate description of places situated within a large space. Conceptually, a grid of points could be applied over the Ethel Creek Station landscape with each point indicating the presence of a bore. There are no maps directing you where to go, and it is only through the knowledge gained from repeated excursions around the station, following fence lines, opening gates and driving along dirt tracks, that the routes become familiar. These signifiers could be the points that enable the boreman, in this case Margulis, to navigate space.

Spatial navigation (Tyson, 2014) is not inherent knowledge, but it requires time and an experienced worker to teach the novice the location of the bores within this vast landscape. Indeed, Margulis, in his role as the station boreman, navigated the outback space daily through routinely checking the bores. It is my view that Margulis’s attachment to the Pilbara has been embodied through his detailed, daily observations of geographical locations over an extended period, and after talking to him, I felt that his place attachment was due to the length of time spent on Ethel Creek Station, his Argentinian pastoral heritage, and the similarities between the Pilbara and the landscape of his homeland.

¹¹ At the time of writing this chapter Joshua Margulis was employed on Ethel Creek Station, however his visa expired in July 2021, and he is now planning to relocate back to the United States.

2.1 Scratching the surface

This section of Chapter Two examines the effect of pastoralist interventions on the land and explores the ways that the landscape has been altered by permanent and temporary intrusions. During the second field trip I spent extended periods of solitude walking in the landscape following cattle and horse tracks, recording the experiences, and reflecting on the impact that pastoralists have had on this land. The introduction of cattle onto the country by the pastoralists necessitated the building of containment and boundary fences, the creation of dams for the provision of water, and windmills to pump the water into the tanks. Malpas asserts,

Human beings change the land around them in a way and on a scale matched, for the most part, by no other animal. The land around us is indeed a reflection, not only of our practical and technological capacities, but also of our culture and society – of our very needs, our hopes, our preoccupations, and dreams. (2018, p.1)

Malpas's assertion is evident in the pastoralist culture, established in the Pilbara region in the late 1880s, and influenced by the arid terrain that experiences long periods of extended drought, alternating with the causal effects of cyclonic activity producing flooding. These meteorological changes to the topography are seasonal and human-induced alterations, that are exacerbated by the impact of humans altering the land through pastoralism.

The weather during this second field trip in late July was a dry, cool 27 degrees Celsius, and walking along the dusty, animal tracks was comfortable, providing an ideal environment for reflection and contemplation. These animal tracks are temporary intrusions into the landscape, and my footprints, like those of the creatures that make their marks along the way, will be erased with the coming rains. Ingold (2010) writes about the effect of walking from 'place to place', and the effect of the weather on the embodied experience. There is direct bodily contact with the earth and the air while walking in the landscape and this influences place perception (Wylie, 2005). I walked alone along the animal tracks and this solitude enabled me to experience the physical act of walking in, through and on the terrain with an elevated awareness, and I gained a deeper connection to and understanding of the Pilbara landscape.

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Figure 22. Cattle and horse tracks at Karra mustering camp, 2020.
Documentation photograph by the artist.



Figure 23. Cattle and horse tracks at Ethel Creek homestead paddock, 2020.
Documentation photograph by the artist.

This singular and purposeful walking along the livestock tracks, amidst the immensity of the landscape, was imbued with contemplation, and this conjoining of vast spaces and subjectivity impacted on my place-identity (Figs. 22 & 23). According to French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, “It is through their immensity that these two kinds of space – the space of intimacy and the world-space – blend. When human solitude deepens, then the two immensities touch and become identical” (1994, p. 203). My connection to this place deepened through the physical act of walking solo along the animal tracks, and I considered the ontological nature of existence of my being in the world, in this place, contextualised beyond the parameters of my walking space. In contrast to this intimate space, the station salvage yard is a different space for contemplation.

Historically, pastoralists have occupied Ethel Creek Station since 1880 and evidence of their past existence can be found at the station salvage yard situated on over two acres of pastoral landscape. Australian scholar George Seddon (2001) argues that the Pilbara landscape experienced very little impact for over sixty thousand years of Aboriginal land use until the post-colonial pastoralists overstocked and abused the land. This land altering or abuse, according to Seddon, could have been achieved through the implementation of pastoral methods that involved land-clearing, road and fence building, dwellings, outbuildings, and the introduction of non-native animal species such as cattle and horses.

There is a dichotomy between the salvage yard that could be perceived as an indicator of the station’s destructive pastoral history, and my artist’s view of the salvage yard as a treasure trove, where windmills lay prone on the ground and mustering buggies embedded in the red dust lay bogged and broken. Their mustering days are over and now reptilian species find places to hide in their deconstructed, metal, bodies. Twisted, tortured metals, patinated with the process of weathering, and the landscape is altered by entropy, impacting on the natural environment. This experience of place is drawn from what I can see, as I gaze across the twisted vista forming its own pastoral aspect amidst the snappy gums and spinifex.

The salvage yard is an important site for my creative practice, and I spent time during each of the three field trips walking through, and working in the salvage yard. In the past I have incorrectly referred to this site as “the tip” inferring that it is a disposal place for unwanted items, however “salvage yard” conjures up images of a place where items are saved and re-used. In my practice-led research I look for signifiers amongst the

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debris that may inform my creative practice. The discarded windmills splayed across the earth signify the end of the water pumps powered by wind, and the introduction of solar panels creating energy from the sun. The salvage yard is a place where I process my understanding of the historical farming methods used by pastoralists, through photography and journal writing, and some of my time spent in the salvage yard during the second field trip is evidenced in the photographic image *Salvaged* (Fig. 24).



Figure 24. Fiona Rafferty. *Salvaged*. 2020. Digital print on aluminium. 31 x 20.5 cm.

In *Salvaged* I aimed to convey the way that humans intrude on nature, and how they have altered the landscape by discarding objects that are no longer useful. In some areas the discarded mustering buggies are placed in orderly lines, whilst in other places the overturned buggies appear to be at rest, settled in the rust-coloured earth. This juxtaposition creates a feeling of tension that increases when observing the white-trunked snappy gums beside the twisted metal. The trees and spinifex are rooted in the red earth, whilst the metals are in a constant state of entropy (Niels Nielsen, 2006). Placed in this way, the natural and the material worlds collide in the creation of a new Pilbara landscape.

In *Salvaged* I printed the photographic image onto an aluminium surface, and this choice of material added a further dimension to the work. The sharpness of the image was magnified on the metal, and later, when making decisions about which creative works to include or set aside, I felt that the work did not sit easily with the other works and decided to set it aside. Placed in context with photographs taken with a film camera, the image became more important as a documentation record of the experience rather than an artwork that necessarily conveyed a sense of place. This decision does not diminish the importance of the salvage yard in the context of my research project, and my interest in this place, and I have made many excursions to this metal graveyard over the past twenty-

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five years with the station salvage yard continuing to evolve in situ. The link between this work and the body of creative works for exhibition will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

This sense of past lives and pastoral history can also be found on the large piece of wood that dominates the main room in the century-old station coolroom. This block of wood is the station chopping block, which has been taken from the land, and fashioned into an object for human usage. It holds traces of the cattle and kangaroos that have passed through this landscape and their lives have ended here. They give this place an identity, and even the flies, immortalised in the photograph, give weight to this sense of place. There is a sinister beauty in the lines etched into the surface, made by repeated human action, and they tell a story of the past fifty years of pastoralism on the station through the poignant mark making.



Figure 25. Fiona Rafferty. *Chopping Block*. 2020.

Archival pigment print. 120 x 67.5 cm.

In *Chopping Block* (Fig. 25) I focused on a section of the chopping block that gives the viewer an intimate connection to the surface of the object. The materiality of the surface in this image is unclear, but the graded intensity of the line marking suggests a symphonic act of working. I can imagine the crescendo of sound with the thwacking of the knives, as they connected with the wooden surface and made lines in concert with repetitive movement. Some lines are etched deeper into the surface than others, with the

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weight of the human hand and the size and sharpness of the blade cutting through the deceased animal, determined by the magnitude and density of the carcass. The animal fat has seeped into a gouging wound on the surface and solidified.

This stilled photographic image represents a different landscape. It is a moment captured in time that is 'of' the landscape in the process of becoming. Conceptually this links to my experience of viewing the landscape from the air, where the fine lines become the tracings of animal and vehicular movement across the terrain, contained by fence lines, and the gouging wound becomes a deep gorge carving through the landscape. I experienced the aerial perspective of the landscape during the second field trip, while mustering on Ethel Creek Station, and this elevated view is discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

2.2 Up in the air

Karra and Kalgan's (Fig. 26) are the geographical locations for cattle mustering conducted on Ethel Creek Station during my second field trip. The landscape at the first site, Karra, was flat and heavily wooded with views to the distant hills, and made accessible by crossing the Great Northern Highway, southwest of the town of Newman. At this camp the cattle had already been mustered and were waiting in the temporary cattle yards to be loaded onto the cattle trucks bound for Perth. The second mustering site was held at Kalgan's, inland to the east from the Marble Bar road, where the landscape was rich with flowing rivers and waterfalls, deep gorges, flat spinifex plains, and mulga trees. I actively participated in this muster, riding in a buggy behind the cattle, pushing them up from behind towards the temporary yards, and following the stockmen on horseback (Fig. 27).



Figure 26. Pilbara map showing the mustering sites, Karra and Kalgan's.

The sheer size of the mustering operation reflects the magnitude of the vast Pilbara landscape, where each day approximately seven hundred head of cattle are mustered from the expansive vista into the cattle yards (Fig. 28). The equipment required for an operation of this scale included two helicopters, eleven mustering buggies, two cattle trucks, three caravans, a water tank, a petrol tank, two horse floats, one horse truck, four working horses and thirty working dogs. By introducing this transient, large scale conglomerate

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of humans, animals and machinery onto the land, their presence impacts on the vegetation, native animals, birdlife, and the landscape surface.



Figure 27. Cattle mustering at Kalgan's camp, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.



Figure 28. Cattle mustering at Kalgan's camp, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

During mustering at Karra camp, I was invited to fly in a mustering helicopter to view the scene from the air, and this experience led to a series of works that are included in the final exhibition. A mustering helicopter cockpit is open to the elements, and an experienced mustering pilot can seek out and herd unpredictable cattle by ducking and weaving in and through the landscape. Despite my previous experience as a small aircraft

pilot, the open cockpit was unsettling, and the euphoric elation felt while flying was tempered with just a little trepidation when the reality of the situation revoked the sensate experience of being airborne. This view, soaring over the topography, snaking through the green gorges, over powerlines and flowing rivers, gave me the perspective that I had been seeking. In contrast to the intimate encounter with the landscape I had experienced while grounded, the view from the air accentuated the vast scale of the outback vista and the impact of human intervention.

The large Martu painting *Yarrkalpa – Hunting Ground* (Fig. 29), depicts the topography near the Indigenous community of Parnngurr from an aerial perspective, featuring creeks, waterholes and ranges. It is a collaborative work by eight Martu women who each painted a section of the painting from their embodied knowledge of place, and the stories sung into existence by their ancestors, which can be read as a cultural document depicting memories, seasons, hunting, burning, and plant life. (Collingwood-Whittick, 2008; MacDonald & Veth, 2013; Rose, 1996). To find your way in a painting you need to have already been there and in *Yarrkalpa – Hunting Ground* the artists paint what they know and what they do (Mahood, 2017). This painting has not been influenced by the experience of flying in a helicopter over the landscape, like Burtynsky, Woldendorp and myself, it is a pictorial account of the knowledge gleaned through the generational passing down of stories. It comes from thousands of years of nomadic walking across, in and through Country (Rose, 1996; Mahood, 2017).

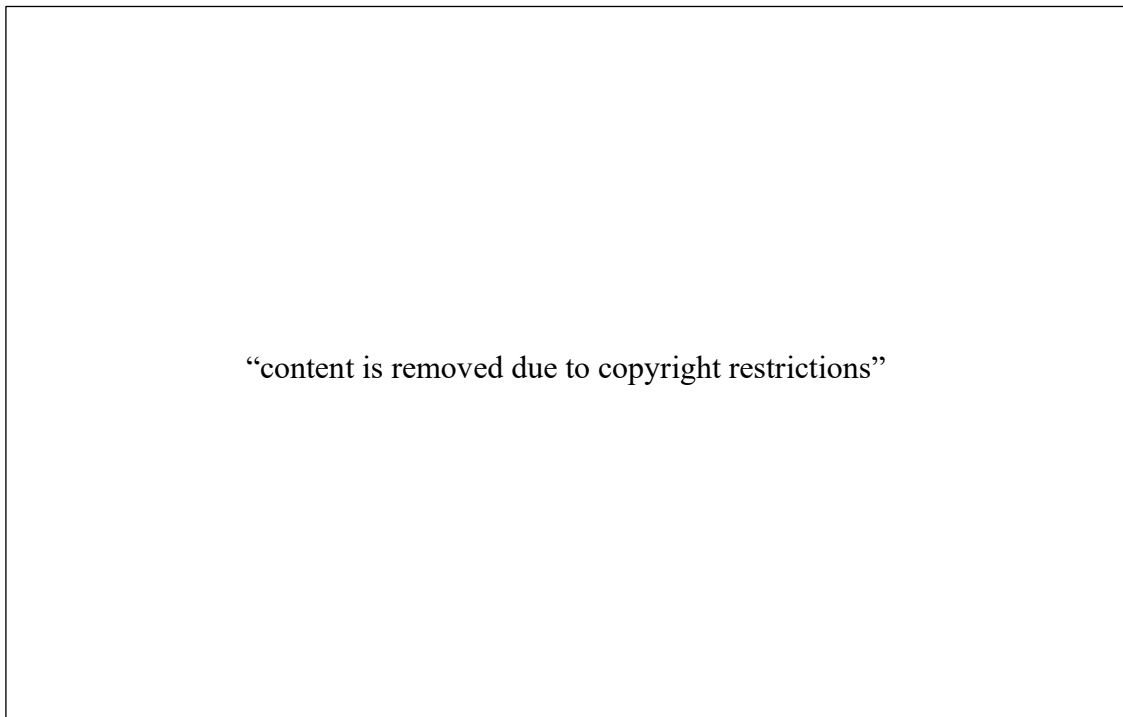


Figure 29. Martu collective. *Yarrkalpa – Hunting Ground*. (2013). Acrylic on canvas. 500 x 300 cm.

This Martu Indigenous approach contrasts with Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky, who has utilised the helicopter as a photographic device to shoot aerial photographs since 2003. His description of the elevated view resonates with my experience flying over the Pilbara landscape, where the helicopter is used as a tool to expand the existing knowledge of the landscape to incorporate elements that can only be seen from a bird's eye view vantage point. The field of view changes with elevation and the scale and perspective of the landscape alters in the process (Burtynsky, 2009).

Burtynsky's aerial photographs depict patterns in the landscape that portray the impact of human interventions on the landscape in a seductive way. The landscape is flattened out in *Dryland Farming #24, Monegros County, Aragon, Spain* (Fig. 30) and the lack of a visible horizon line provides the viewer with an intimate encounter with the altered landscape, despite the aerial vantage point.

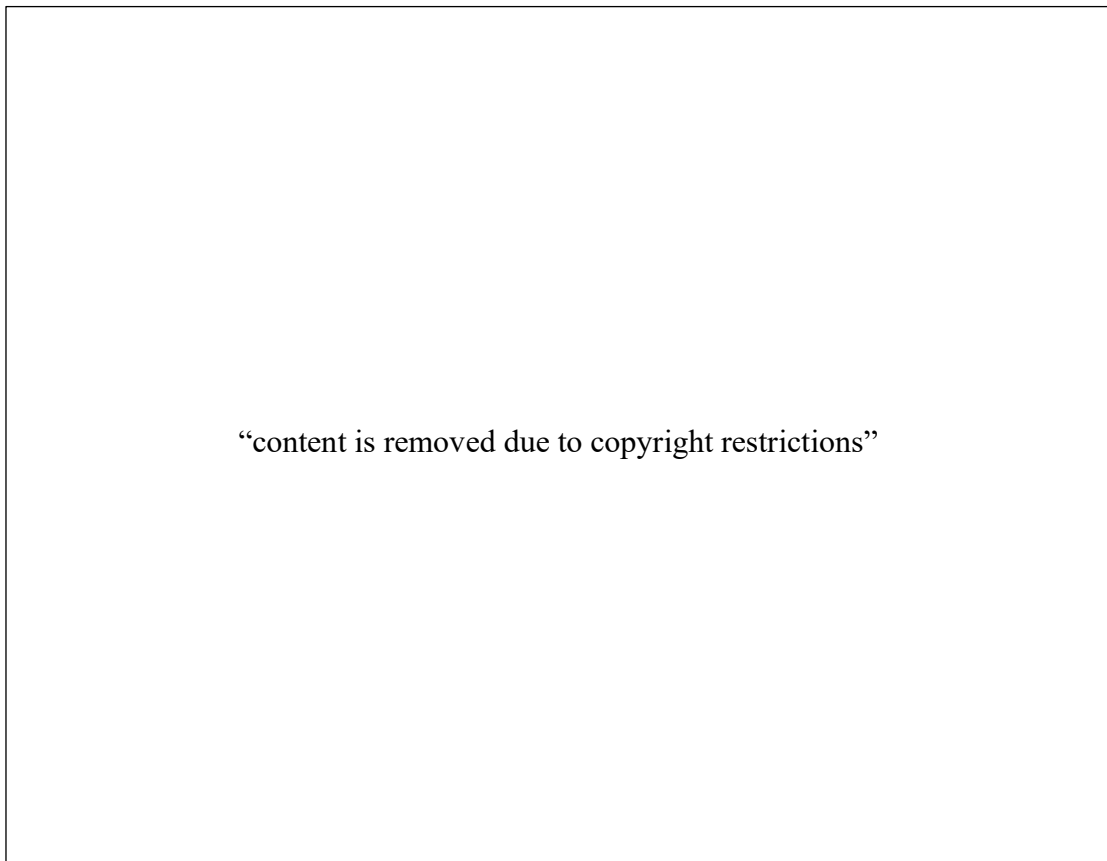


Figure 30. Edward Burtynsky. *Dryland Farming #24, Monegros County, Aragon, Spain*, 2010.

Chromogenic print. 121.9 x 162.6 cm.

In William Ewing's essay in *Burtynsky: Essential Elements* he writes that "for Burtynsky what is happening in the corners of the picture, or up front, or far off, has just as much importance as what is happening in the centre" (Ewing, 2016, p. 12). This is evidenced in Burtynsky's *Dryland Farming #24, Monegros County, Aragon, Spain* where the aerial image takes up the entire picture plane. Another photographer exploring

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landscape themes from an aerial perspective is Australian Richard Woldendorp, however he was trained initially as a painter and this former training has influenced his photographs (Fig 31). Burtynsky's photographs are executed with precision and order, containing elements of geometry incorporated in his landscape views. In contrast, Woldendorp's photographs are painterly and appear as organic landscape constructs.

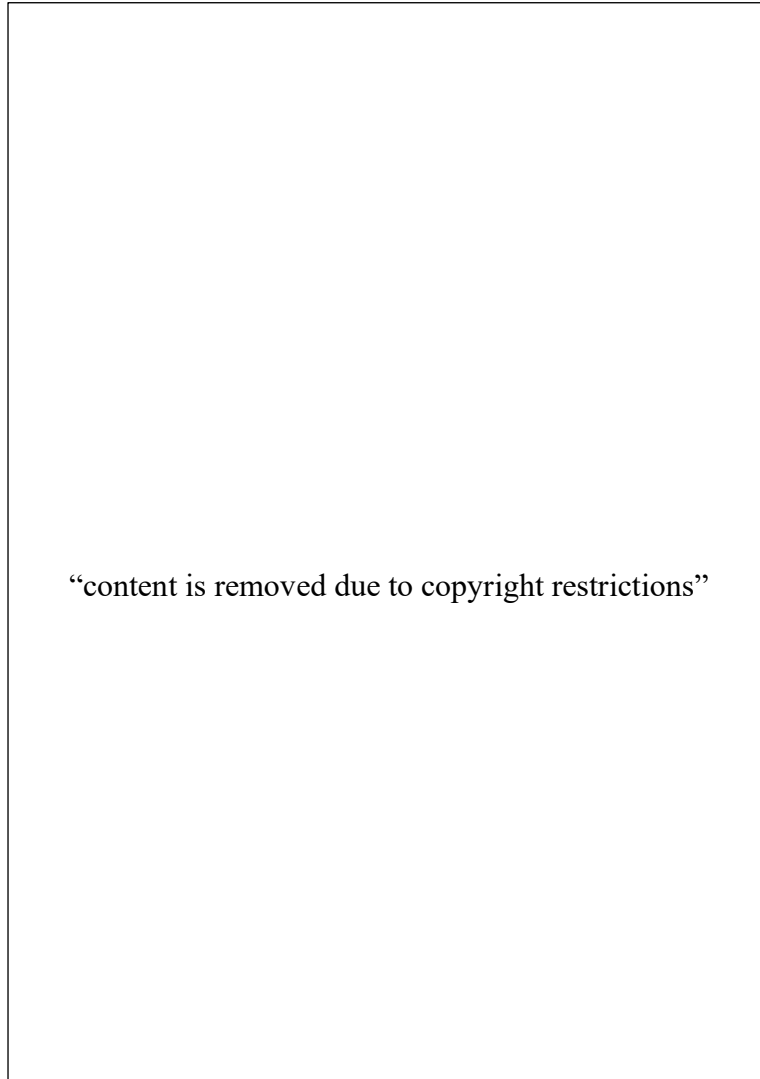


Figure 31. Richard Woldendorp. *Spinifex, Pilbara, Western Australia*¹²

As Seddon (2001) observes, "The Pilbara from the air is a vastly different place from a camel's back – the field of view creates a quite different context, and satellite imagery and remote sensing again create a different place" (p. 8). I have not traversed the Pilbara from a camel's back however, parallels can be drawn between the field of view from horseback or in a vehicle, and the landscape viewed from a camel's back by the

¹² The dimensions of Woldendorp's photograph are not listed in *Abstract earth: A view from above* (2008, p.75).

early explorers. I have travelled across the terrain by horseback and Landcruiser, and flown above the landscape in a helicopter, and I agree with Seddon's Western observation that the field of view is contextually different. Burtynsky and Woldendorp exemplify the view from the air in their photographs, where the landscape perspective is altered, the distant horizon clearly separates the surface of the land from the sky, and the scale of the landscape is evidenced in the panoramic vista. This expanded aerial view is different to the immersive view of being *in* the landscape that is experienced in a vehicle or on horseback.

The scale of the Pilbara is grand indeed, and the patterns created by the movement of the vehicles during mustering, and the contrasting cattle footprints drawn in the dust, create a narrative that can only be viewed from the air. In the artwork *Landcruisers and Droughtmasters* there is a feeling of uneasy tension between the trees and their shadows, and it is not clear which is which (Fig. 32).



Figure 32. Fiona Rafferty. *Landcruisers and Droughtmasters*. 2020.

Archival pigment print. 120 x 67.5 cm.

Like Burtynsky's *Dryland Farming #24, Monegros County, Aragon, Spain* there is a seductive element to the image, in this case derived from the marks made by humans and animals. In my photograph, I have captured a moment in time where there is an absence of the physical presence of the mark makers, and the marks are ephemeral imprints of their existence. Again, like Burtynsky, the horizon line is not in view and the landscape has been flattened out. However, this aerial viewpoint does not have the sensory connection to the land that is felt while walking immersed in the landscape on foot. Woldendorp's *Wheeltracks on Lake Lefroy* (Fig. 33), depicts wheel tracks on a salt pan

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that are circular. This has the effect of creating a sense of movement across the land. The circles are larger in the foreground and diminish in size as they recede into the distance, and Woldendorp had used this photographic device to suggest to the viewer that he is passing over the landscape. Like Burtynsky's *Dryland Farming #24, Monegros County, Aragon, Spain*, and my *Landcruisers and Droughtmasters*, Woldendorp has eliminated the horizon line and in doing so has created a view from the air that appears deceptively close to the viewer.

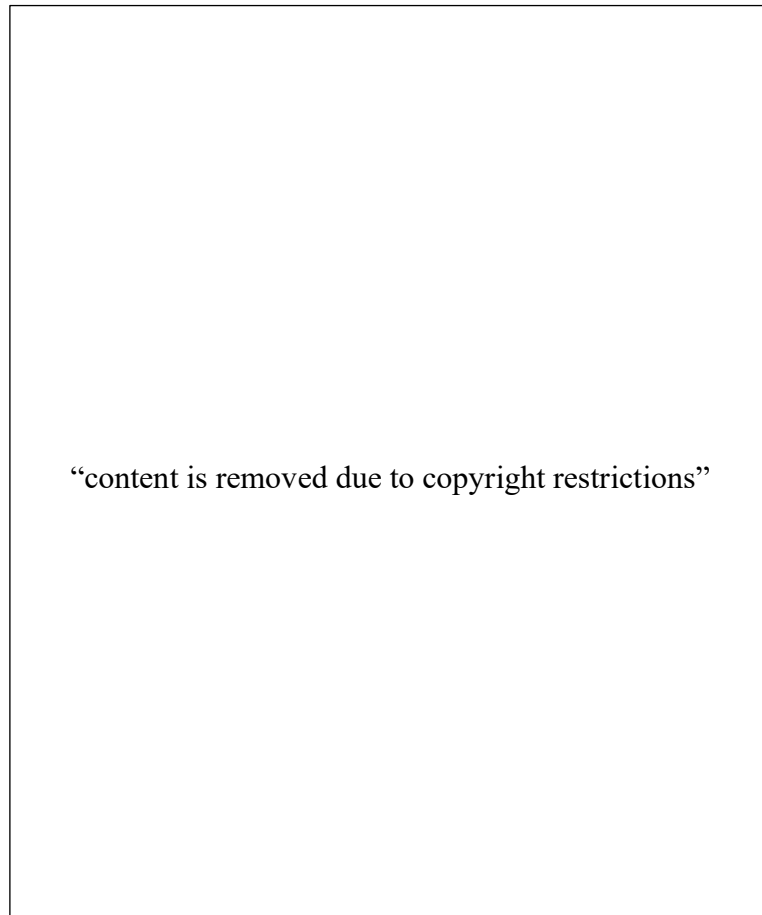


Figure. 33. Richard Woldendorp. *Wheel tracks on Lake Lefroy*¹³.

From the air, the scene below is miniscule, condensed and distant. There is a clarity to the landscape that transcends the intimate knowledge gained from being in close proximity to the ground. Tuan (1977) suggests "Seeing has the effect of putting a distance between self and object" (p. 146). If, as Tuan states, that seeing creates distance, then the distance must be expanded, between the self and the landscape, when viewed from the air. Lori Pauli, Curator of Photographs at the National Gallery of Canada, evocatively

¹³ The dimensions of Woldendorp's photograph are not listed in *Abstract earth: A view from above* (2008, p.93).

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describes the aerial view of landscape depicted by Burtynsky, and this resonates with my own experience while soaring above the ground in a helicopter:

...the foreground begins quite far away and the scene unfolds as the eye moves into mid-aspect and onto infinity. That hovering – looking out across the great expanse...turns the space into...a mythic space, an archetypal sense of the landscape. (Pauli, 2003, p. 55)



Figure 34. Aerial view of the Pilbara landscape, 2020.

Documentation photo by the artist.

In Figure 34, the land meets the sky and divides the picture plane, creating a sense of the earth as a globe, by the camber of the horizon. The river replenished by the recent rains is full, and the ochre and sap green landscape, under the cerulean blue sky, suggests a sense of renewal. The only visible indication of a human presence on the topography is the eddying smoke on the horizon, but this too could have been caused by spontaneous combustion, not necessarily by human-made ignition. There are elements in this landscape that give it a structure from the air that is difficult to comprehend on level ground. Meanwhile in another vista, the buggies and mustering camp take on the appearance of Dinky toys. It would be difficult to assess the size of the camp and the vehicles without having first experienced them on the ground. By placing the physical body in a vehicle, a frame of reference is created, and the size of the vehicle can then be measured in relation to the body.

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Viewed from an aerial perspective in *The Camp* (Fig. 35), there is a synergy between the hard lines of the vehicles and the organic marks created by vehicular movement in the red ochre. The vehicles are impermanent structures in the landscape and the transient traces of their existence are left behind on their departure. They are essential for everyday use on Ethel Creek Station, particularly during the mustering season, and when they are no longer viable station assets, they end up on the scrap heap at the salvage yard; a record of the cause and effect of pastoral interventions on the land for over seventy years. It is interesting to observe the disparity between the circular alignment of vehicles and caravans in *The Camp*, and the abstract order to the placement of vehicles at the salvage yard, where the decommissioned vehicles lay inert and stilled.



Figure 35. Fiona Rafferty. *The Camp*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 120 x 67.5 cm. .

The positioning of the inward-facing vehicles around the central focal point in *The Camp* denotes a sense of community that creates a sense of place, whilst the vehicles in the salvage yard are lined up, in a literal sense, at the end of the road.

If a sense of place derives its ambience from the sights, smells and sounds experienced (Bader, 2020; Ingold, 1993; Tuan, 1977), then how can a sense of place be found while traversing the sky? The experiencing of landscape, though walking and aerial encounters, are very different, and these differences impact on the way that I have documented and interpreted these experiences. In the Pilbara the earth's surface is not paved or bitumised, and the basic human connection to the earth is felt through contact with the red soil. Walking in the landscape is bodily movement across the grounded surface, where observations of the world in close contact take place and become

embodied experiences of place (Ingold, 2010). While walking there is time to pause, reflect, touch the vegetation and, at times, to be still in nature.

This contrasts with the experience of viewing the landscape from the air. There is a distance between the earth's surface encountered through the elevated experience of flying. The earth is viewed from a great height, and it therefore follows that there will be a lack of intimacy associated with the experience. This lack of intimacy is compensated by a feeling of awe and wonder as the landscape is viewed from an expansive perspective.

An example of the difference between an aerial perspective and a close encounter with the landscape can be contextualised through the physical act of spinifex burning that I experienced on the ground, and from the air. During the muster at Kalgan's, permits had been granted by the East Pilbara Shire to burn the spinifex with spot fires, and usually the spinifex is set alight during the winter months, when it is cooler and the risk of out of control fires is minimised. These fires, lit by the workers, were ferocious and immediately altered the landscape, changing the drought-stricken yellow spinifex to scarred and blackened, smoking charcoal (Fig. 36). This fire-lighting spectacle created a sense of excitement in the mustering workers, as they darted from place to place setting the spinifex alight. In contrast, the gentle traditional methods used by Indigenous peoples include smoking the fire and walking with it, enabling the creatures living in the spinifex to move out of their natural habitat to safety.



Figures 36. Spinifex burning in the Pilbara, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

Indigenous peoples have been systematically burning the grasslands and undergrowth for thousands of years and their traditional methods are considered to be

best practice in the management of the Australian landscape (Rose, 1996; Steffensen, 2020). The time spent walking in the landscape, paying attention to the minutiae of animal life in the vegetation and gently approaching the act of burning the spinifex, has come from an attachment to place that has developed over sixty thousand years. Indigenous peoples have a respect and love for their Country that has developed over a long and sustained period. They burn their Country to heal it (Collingwood-Whittick, 2008). This Indigenous relationship to Country contrasts with the transient workers' relationship to the landscape. They do not have a deeply felt attachment to place developed over thousands of years that informs their actions and behaviour, and as they race across the landscape in the mustering buggies, yelling out, throwing fire on static clumps of spinifex, they show little regard, or respect, for the native wildlife habitat.

Woldendorp has observed the Indigenous use of fire as a tool to manage the landscape and he has witnessed old and new fire patterns during flights across the landscape. He is aware that lightning strikes also cause spontaneous fires in the outback landscape and these fires can facilitate slow regeneration of the vegetation already affected by low rainfall and poor soil conditions (Woldendorp, 2008, p.33). Fire has an immediate impact on the landscape transforming it dramatically.

According to British artists Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, "A landscape is the land transformed, whether through the physical act of inhabitation or enclosure, clearance or cultivation, or through human perception" (2005, p. 13). On Ethel Creek Station, evidence of the physical transformation of the land by humans can be found in the spinifex burning, land clearing, roads, cattle-tracks, fencing, buildings, vehicle marks, windmills, water tanks, contouring and dams that have been purpose-built by humans. This land transformation has been compounded by the human introduction of animal species into the landscape, including, cattle, horses, cats, dogs, camels, and foxes, which has altered the landscape by their impact on native species fauna and flora. Dean and Millar (2005) state that a landscape is the land transformed through "human perception", and it is my view that the Indigenous connection to landscape, portrayed in their paintings from an aerial perspective, is derived from a deep connection to place viewed through their intergenerational stories of ancestral beings, and songlines (Collingwood-Whittick, 2008; MacDonald & Veth, 2013; Rose, 1996).

In this chapter I have discussed the second field trip where I actively participated in a cattle muster, flew above the landscape in a mustering helicopter, examined the landscape on foot, and in the air, and expanded on my existing knowledge of place-

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identity. In Chapter Three I examine my creative practice in the context of engaging with the landscape through the camera lens, and review the practice-led methodology and research outcomes resulting from this investigation.

Chapter Three

Making sense of place

The influence of the natural world upon our sense of identity – both national and personal – and upon the production of art is well acknowledged; however, it must also be acknowledged that both the sense of identity and the art produced does, in turn, influence our relationship with and understanding of the natural world, thereby creating a rich area for exploration (Dean & Millar, 2005, p.50).

Field Trip Three: 12 - 24 March 2021

An important consideration in my creative practice for this research project was my own relationship to the Pilbara landscape, and how I could process the experiences on Ethel Creek Station and present my findings in an exhibition to be experienced by the viewer. Being in the landscape provided an opportunity for me to be physically and emotionally present at that moment in time. Australian artist Lesley Duxbury (2008) writes about knowing and being in the world through her awareness of her surroundings and changing atmospheric conditions during walking expeditions. During my third field trip in March 2021, I spent two weeks walking around Ethel Creek Station in the early morning and late afternoon, and reflexively contemplated my engagement with place through my three field trip experiences.

Duxbury approaches her work “as a metaphor of the experience of a walk” (2008, p. 22). Like Duxbury, my walking experiences were sensory and I was aware that my feet were grounded and the rest of my body was exposed to the changing atmospheric conditions (Ingold, 2010). Walking in and through the landscape was a way for me to engage with the flora, fauna and birdlife that constitute place. It was important for me to understand the elements of this environment that contribute to place-identity, and I used the time to think about the methods for my creative practice that would best encapsulate my response to altered landscapes and place-identity.

Australian academic Estelle Barrett and Australian artist and academic, Barbara Bolt state, “Creative arts research is motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge” (Barrett & Bolt, 2010, p. 4). The motivation behind my practice-led research project is based on my relationship to the Pilbara landscape, and I started this project by drawing, painting, and making artist books with my research documented in

journal writing and photography. The tacit knowledge that Barrett and Bolt (2010) refer to has accumulated through embodied landscape experiences during my time spent on Ethel Creek Station and through experiential knowledge acquired over many years, and supported by the explicit knowledge gained through the researched theoretical understanding of place and landscape (Casey, 1997; Malpas, 2018; Tuan, 1977).

As my research progressed and my circumstances changed due to Covid-19 restrictions, I decided to concentrate on photography, which became a major part of my creative process. Initially I used it for the purposes of documentation but as my research progressed it became the focus of my creative practice and during my second field trip I began to consciously seek out locations and areas of interest to create a series of photographic artworks. In the third and final field trip I spent time in landscapes that I had experienced during the previous field trips, with the intention of creating specific photographic artworks.

In Chapter One I discussed my creative practice during quarantine. The methods utilised during the first field trip included watercolour paintings, drawings, journal writing and photography used solely for documentation purposes. During the second field trip, discussed in Chapter Two, the methods changed and I focused on photography not only to document my experiences, but also to create a series of photographic artworks. Barrett and Bolt recognise that “As a result of this reflexive process, methodologies in artistic research are *necessarily* emergent and subject to repeated adjustment, rather than remaining fixed throughout the process of enquiry” (p.6, 2010, p. 6, emphasis in the original). There have been many adjustments and decisions made throughout the duration of my research project, where I have chosen to include or exclude some creative methods. Rubbings were unsuccessful as artworks but useful for working through my ideas about place-identity. I chose to make an impression of the station chopping block by rubbing graphite over the surface, however I was not able to capture the detail and fine lines in the rubbing that I was hoping to achieve (Fig.37).



Figure 37. Rubbing of station chopping block, 2021.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

The third and final field trip was conducted on Ethel Creek Station between 12 - 24 March 2021, twelve months since the first field trip in March 2020. I had travelled to the station by car on each of the previous field trips however, I wanted to experience the landscape from the air one more time and I chose to travel to Newman by aeroplane for the final field trip. This trip was vastly different from the first. When I arrived at the station over two hundred millimetres of rain had fallen and the drought was broken, transforming the country into lush, green pastures, flooded arid plains, and over-flowing rivers. The landscape was refreshed, and on my arrival on Ethel Creek Station, the attitude and feeling amongst the station inhabitants was buoyant. The landscape was lush, and the cattle were fat and healthy. The atmosphere at the station was different too. There was a sense of joy amongst the station workers, and there was a feeling of acceptance regarding Covid-19.

During the first field trip I was surrounded by an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, and this feeling was compounded by the extended drought conditions that had decimated the land and reduced the cattle numbers. Twelve months on, the cattle prices had stabilised, vaccinations were being delivered globally to reduce the impact of Covid-19, and there had been steady rainfall. Daily news bulletins, routine lockdowns,

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border closures, mask wearing and the introduction of approved vaccinations, had a pacifying effect on the station residents who had little time to think about Covid-19. The fear experienced during the first field trip was replaced by complacency during the third field trip and it is important to reflect on the previous twelve months in the context of my project.

The impact of increasing human-induced climate change producing drought conditions, combined with Covid-19, had a compounding negative effect on the station residents' place-identity during my first field trip. However, during my third field trip, this had changed, and there was a positive re-evaluation of the residents' place-identity in the context of the more favourable conditions they were experiencing. The landscape had transformed from a hot, dry, parched desert to a lush, cool pastoral landscape. The landscape was refreshed and I wanted to capture this sense of relief from the drought and subsequent renewal, on film. My focus on photography had expanded, and I took a photographic kit with me on this field trip, that included my seventeen-year old DSLR camera, my new digital camera, my phone and a medium format film camera.

3.1 Looking through a lens

Landscape has been a recurring theme in Australian photography since the first daguerreotype photograph was taken of Bridge Street, Sydney, in 1841. This urban landscape was taken by French Sea Captain Augustin Lucas when he was visiting Sydney but the original photograph can no longer be found (Ennis, 2007, p.13). Since that time, photography has continued to develop in Australia, and in the twenty-first century the ability to travel freely to explore and experience the landscape as a tourist, combined with the facilitation of technology-enabled photographic devices, such as the mobile phone and compact digital cameras, has provided an opportunity for photographic images to be distributed instantly.

Contemporary landscape photography is concerned with ideas of place, identity and belonging, and artists have responded to changes and alterations in the country and urban landscapes through their interpretations (Giblett & Tolonen, 2012; Hulbert, 2013). Some images are large, detailed and panoramic in scope, reflecting the scale of the Australian landscape, and these depictions of landscape and place provide an experience for the viewer that transcends the ‘picture postcard’ view and allow the viewer to experience what it means to be human in a place, and being in the world through the photographic images (Dagnall, 2017; Hulbert, 2013).

In *Old bones rest here* (Fig. 38), I used a medium format film camera with a colour negative film and I walked through the long grass, carrying my camera, tripod and camera bag, immersed in the landscape. This previously open space had been transformed by the sustained rainfall, and as I turned 360 degrees I was surrounded by the sap green colour of the grasses, and the white-trunked mulga trees. The air was still and the sensory experience of being back in this place was heightened by the renewed, vibrant colour of the landscape and the knowledge that this was going to be a good year for the pastoralists and the workers, and their future was secure for now. This engagement with the landscape was emotional and I wanted to capture the experience that I felt while being there in that place at that time in a stilled image. French philosopher Roland Barthes states, “The photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only for certain *what has been*” (Barthes 1980, p. 103, emphasis in the original). Barthes illuminates this paradoxical nature of photography that occurs from the instant that the camera shutter is released, and the present moment in time becomes the past as soon as it has been captured.



Figure 38. Fiona Rafferty. *Old bones rest here*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 110 x 90 cm.

The moment in time captured in the photograph *Old bones rest here*, taken late in the afternoon, has not been digitally altered post-production back in the studio. It captures the image that I draw from my memory of being in that place at that time and depicts my intimate experience of the landscape with the foreshortened foreground and the picture plane filled. The space at the top of the trees moves through the picture plane and beyond. But all is not quite what it seems. Burtynsky observes the truth, or not, in a photograph and writes,

Much has been said about the clarity of photography, but little has been said about its obscurity. And yet it is photography that has taught us to see from the unexpected vantage point, and has shown us pictures that give the sense of the scene, while withholding its narrative meaning. (2016, p. 11)

Burtynsky's claim is manifested in *Old bones rest here*, where the intent of the image was to evoke a feeling of well-being in the viewer and affirm a positive connection to this place through the recognition of a bucolic scene depicting lush growth, trees and blue sky. This 'sense of a scene' obscures the true nature of this place. It is a place where the carcasses of slaughtered cattle are left to be picked clean by carrion birds of prey and their bones are bleached dry in the searing sunlight of prolonged summer heat. The long grass

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in *'Old bones rest here'* conceals the disturbing and uncomfortable remains of the cattle in this overgrown graveyard.

This sense of concealment, where the truth behind the image is unstated, allows viewers to interpret images from a personal perspective, bringing with them personal histories and narratives that alter the way the photograph is experienced. A photograph does not tell the whole story (Barthes, 1980; Mann, 2015; Schama, 1995; Sontag, 1997). It tells us that the photographer was present at that time in that place, but it does not tell us whether that place continues to exist as depicted in the image or whether it is immortalised in the eye of the beholder. The view that is framed by the camera viewfinder represents a place that only the photographer, observing the scene through the viewfinder, is privy to see.

I found that my digital cameras and mobile phone were not fulfilling my intention to capture the impact on place-identity resulting from the altered landscapes. Unlike the previous field trips, where I had taken drawing and painting equipment with me, on this trip I decided to focus on photography. I chose to take a medium format camera with me on my final field trip to see whether I could find the sense and feel of place that I had been seeking (Ingold, 1993; Mann, 2015; Tuan, 1977). Analog photography encourages thoughtfulness, and every shot needs to be considered carefully. Overexposures, fogging and flares can be deliberately created using photo editing software however, it is my view that some of these, at times, unplanned effects are more genuine than the calculated ones. It takes time to shoot analog photography, and the resulting photographic images capture time stilled by the shutter release that is of the moment. It is a valuable record of that time in that place that can never be repeated (Evans, 2004; Barthes, 1980).

Contemporary photography is not simply a point and shoot exercise however, with the advances in technology that have made the latest mobile phones into sophisticated compact cameras, and the ease with which that these phone cameras can be used by anyone who owns a phone, the quantity of images released into the world is phenomenal. Taking a photograph that conveys meaning to the viewer in a single image is not easy, and choices are made regarding subject, composition, film, lighting, printing medium and perspective, which are all important aspects of how the final image will be read (Burtynsky, 2016; Hulbert, 2011). In the next section of this chapter, these choices will be examined through the photography of Sally Mann and Rebecca Dagnall, and the discussion of some of my creative works for exhibition.

3.2 Altering the Image

American photographer Sally Mann consciously includes overexposures and light leaks in her photography. She uses an 8 x 10 inch view camera with aged lenses on location, and in choosing her landscape subjects she is drawn to places of natural beauty. At times, these places are banal landscapes, transformed by the time of day and the weather conditions that create atmospheric suggestions of other places and other worlds (Fig. 39). Mann revisits landscapes from her childhood and writes about her creative process. She states,

Certain moments in the creative process, moments when I am really seeing, are weirdly expansive, and I develop a hyperattuned visual awareness, like the aura-ringed optical field before a migraine. Radiance coalesces about the landscape, rich in possibility, supercharges with something electric, insistent. Time slows down, becomes ecstatic. (2015, p. 212)

This experience of the creative process articulated by Mann is captured in her temporal, ambiguous, photographic images, that reference her personal narrative and the dark history of the deep southern states of America. Mann's approach to her work resonates with my practice-led research where we both visit and re-visit places that change seasonally, however my methods differ from Mann's. Writing and photography are the methods she uses to record her experiences while my methods vary, and I draw, paint, photograph, and write in journals.

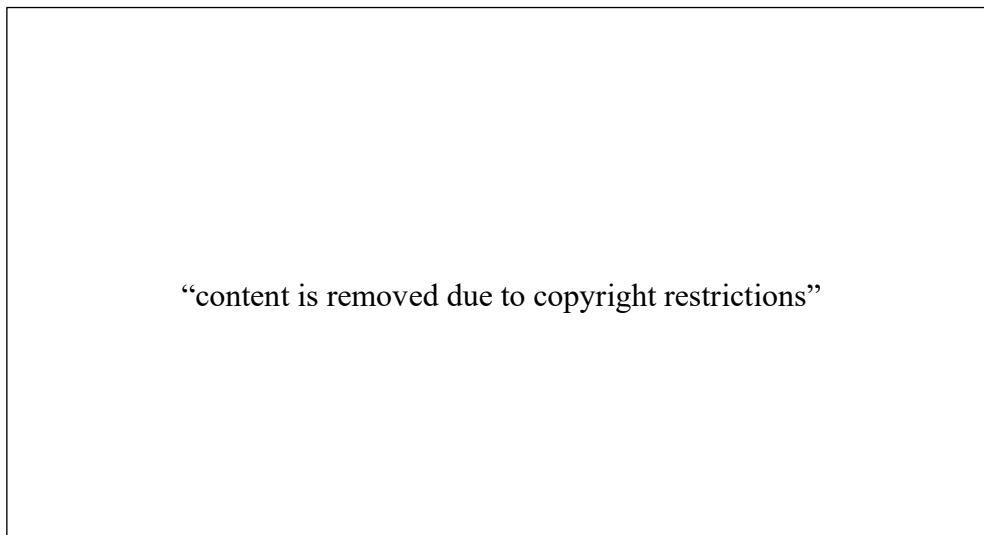


Figure 39. Sally Mann. Photograph from *Georgia*.¹⁴

¹⁴ Sally Mann image taken from, *Hold Still* (2015, pp. 222). The dimensions and date of the image are not listed on the website.

Like Mann, Australian photographer Rebecca Dagnall also refers to a photograph as a “proof of a scene” (2017, p. 96) and her work explores the Australian Gothic landscape through a presence in the landscape that is threatening and “interpreted as a ghost that speaks through the darkness and the narrative of the past and the future” (p. 88). Dagnall’s dark, sinister landscapes are photographed and then digitally reworked back in the studio.

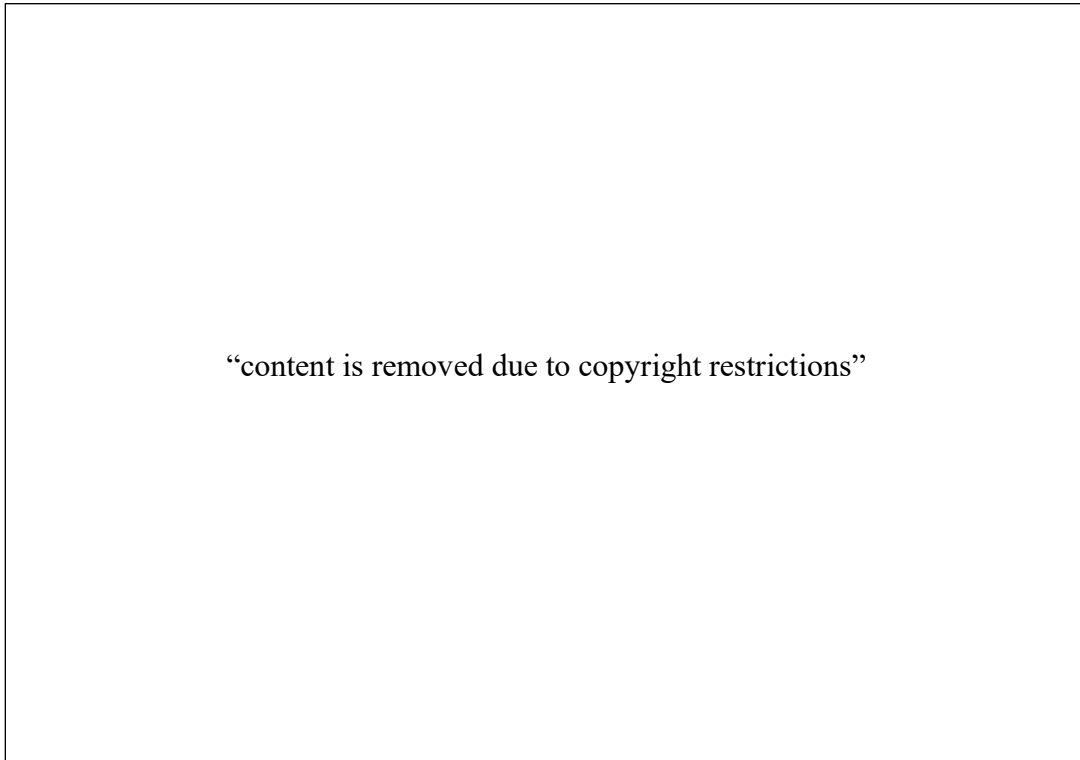


Figure 40. Rebecca Dagnall. *The Gorge*. 2015. Archival pigment print. 80 x 120 cm.

She utilises specific technological techniques such as cloning, cropping and layering to create a sense of place that is “familiar yet unfamiliar” (Dagnall, 2017, p. 92). In contrast, most of Mann’s photographs are black and white, and processed using a wet-plate collodion process. Dagnall’s use of dark colour tones in her work references the Australian gothic landscape and Australia’s post-colonial past (Fig 40). Mann also seeks to address the past issues of slavery and dispossession in the American southern landscape through her photography. My works in this project, in contrast to the work of Mann and Dagnall, have a lighter tonal range, influenced by the light in the Australian landscape.

The idea of temporality in the landscape is explored in *Solarized* (Fig. 41), which contrasts the old with the new, with the suggestion of movement and the passing of time. The old, tin, water tank is positioned high above the newly fabricated plastic tank, with the solar panel placed in the foreground. When shooting the image I chose to hold the film camera, rather than use a tripod, so that it would not be steady. Additional film was

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shot with the camera placed on a tripod. Back in my studio I found that the photographs shot when the camera was hand-held were more interesting than the ones shot on the tripod.

In *Solarized* the image appears to vibrate and these vibrations are unsettling and suggest the transference of energy from the sun through the solar panels used to power the water pump. It signifies change, in the way that the pastoralists manage their water supplies for their livestock, and how they have changed their pastoral methods towards greater land management sustainability. The fence line in the foreground runs into a corner where a gate is closed. This exclusionary marker creates a sense of division between the outsider or viewer, and the objects within the confines of the fenceline. It was my intention for *Solarized* to be interesting to the viewer and encourage contemplation about contemporary farming methods and their impact on the topography.



Figure 41. Fiona Rafferty. *Solarized*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 124 x 110 cm.

The Ethel Creek Station salvage yard is a place that has held my interest for over two decades and I visited the salvage yard daily during my second field trip to the station, and took digital photographs with my phone camera, my compact digital camera, and an old digital single lens reflex camera. Photos were taken at dawn, at dusk, and in the middle of the day when the sun was directly overhead (Fig 42). The digital photos were crisp

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renditions of the salvage yard landscape however, I felt that the sharpness of the images, reflecting the metal resting place amidst the organic lines of nature, detracted from the sense of place I was seeking in spite of the clarity.



Figure 42. Ethel Creek Station salvage yard, 2020.

Documentation photograph by the artist.

It was useful to have the series of digital images available for reference purposes and to situate the experience of being there within the context of my project research. I had intended to build up a bank of images during the field trips to be used for documentation purposes, and also to select images that contained views that I aimed to explore further with the medium format film camera during my third and final field trip. Back in my studio I found one digital image that I chose to focus on as an exhibition artwork (Fig. 43). Not surprisingly the image comprising two upturned, wheel-less vans was taken at the station salvage yard. I found that by altering the way the image was viewed, the meaning changed too. I chose to invert the image to create the appearance, when viewed briefly, that the vehicles were upright without wheels. I aimed to create an uneasiness where the image was open to interpretation.

The picture plane is divided into three, with the vehicles placed through the centre of the image bordered by the red earth above and the trees and scrub in the foreground. The sky is not in view and this lack of a horizon line contributes to the disorientation experienced by the viewer. The trees have become roots sprouting from the vehicle wheel cavities, and the earth is the sky in this flipped image of metal becoming an organic altered, landscape.



Figure 43. Fiona Rafferty. *Entropic Pastoral*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 110 x 90 cm.

Burtynsky maintains, “A successful photograph suggests more than what it shows...it must stand alone (2016, p.47). *Entropic Pastoral* (Fig. 43) fits Burtynsky’s criteria and within the context of my exhibition it is a photograph that is different and able to ‘stand alone’.

It was important to consider my own relationship to the landscape during my third field trip when I walked to the salvage yard daily and spent time at dawn and dusk waiting for the right light to shoot the film. During this time spent alone, I was able to contemplate the effects of human intrusions on the landscape that I had experienced previously, and to consider the methods that I could use to represent how I felt about the alterations. There is a great element of faith when using film, and it is not until the negatives are developed and the images are revealed during the printing process, that the experience of being in that place is stilled in a photograph. Some are successful, many are not however, unlike the digital experience of shooting hundreds of images that can be deleted as soon as they are taken and edited just minutes later, film has a serendipitous quality and there is always a sense of trepidation and excitement once the film has been shot, wound off the spool and packed into containers ready for processing back in the photographic studio.

When the films taken at the salvage yard were developed, I selected two images, that were taken at dawn, on site and in succession, and digitally fused them together to

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create a panoramic view of the salvage yard. In *Post-pastoral* (Fig. 44) the expanded landscape view encapsulates an ‘other world’ landscape. Its elongated linear format alters the size and shape of the salvage yard, with car wrecks resting organically amongst the spinifex and snappy gums. Repetition occurs in nature but there is never an exact replication. There is always variation. I aimed to emulate the effect of repetition in nature through the digital stitching of two different images that appeared to be the same, therefore creating an unsettling effect for the viewer. Through my creative practice I hoped that viewers would be encouraged to think about the Australian pastoral industry and how it has altered the land that was occupied by Australia’s First Peoples for over sixty thousand years.



Figure 44. Fiona Rafferty. *Post-pastoral*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 220 x 100 cm.

The hard, crisp lines of the digital images are gone in *Post-pastoral*, replaced by an uncanny sense of movement, derived from the organic line-up of vehicle wrecks in the foreground. Two-thirds of the picture plane is filled with a clear dawn sky and the dark line of scrub in the background provides a boundary between the vehicles and trees embedded in the foreground. I placed specific emphasis on the foreground and in spite of the closeness to the scene that I experienced during the physical act of photographing the salvage yard, in *Post-pastoral* the viewer experiences the scene from a distance. In this image the viewer is an outsider, looking *at* an altered landscape. Reflecting on the image back in the studio, the image could also be viewed as a geological encounter with the world, with the vehicles becoming granite structures in the landscape and the white-trunked trees growing out and through the rocky outcrops

This was an unexpected outcome of capturing the scene that was only realised upon considered reflection of the image. My intention was to focus on the time of day in that place, when taking the photograph, and still the moment in time in a photographic image. However, being back in the space, making the work, and then reflecting on it back

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in the studio, I understood the reason why I had chosen to photograph that particular place. Photography can present to the viewer a different way of seeing that may not have previously been considered. It challenges the viewer to ask questions of the work and of themselves during the viewer process while looking at the work. This mode of engagement could only have been achieved through creative practice. This sense of place is explored further in *Golden Summer, Pilbara* (Fig. 45), where the image of the landscape has altered to the point of abstraction.

Taken at the salvage yard with the hand-held Mamiya film camera late in the afternoon during the third field trip, I chose to consciously shoot various views without winding on the film. This technique has resulted in a layering of images that suggest an altered landscape. The unintentional blurring in this image has an unsettling effect.



Figure 45. Fiona Rafferty. *Golden Summer, Pilbara*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 170 x 140 cm.

It has created a mirage-like image that shimmers under the viewer's gaze, and the title, *Golden Summer, Pilbara*, references the 1889 painting, *Golden Summer, Eaglemont* (Fig. 46), by Arthur Streeton. Streeton's seminal work *Golden Summer, Eaglemont* was painted during a long period of drought. It is a large painting that romanticises the pastoral idyll of the Australian landscape in the late afternoon, golden light.

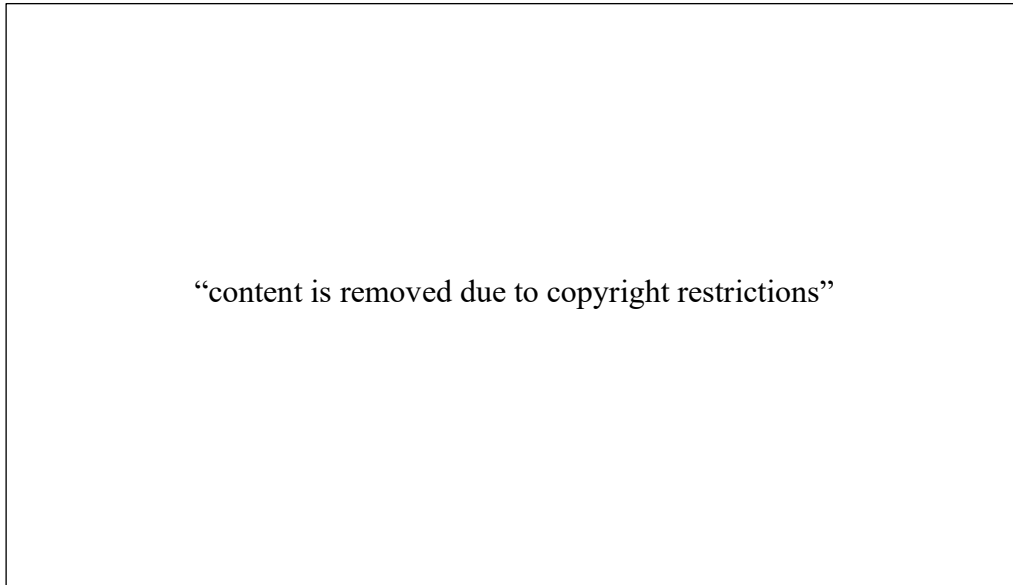


Figure 46. Arthur Streeton *Golden Summer, Eaglemont*. 1889. Oil on canvas. 81 x 152 cm.

My *Golden Summer, Pilbara* could easily be interpreted as a romantic landscape referencing a nostalgic sense of the Australian pastoral. However, it was not my intention to present this landscape as a romantic vision. It is my view that despite the pleasing colour palette and the suggestion of a pastoral scene imbued with romance, this is an apocalyptic vision of a landscape pushed to its limits and imploding under the weight of human interventions.

At around the same time that Streeton was painting *Golden Summer, Eaglemont* on his Heidelberg property in Victoria, Ethel Creek Station was established in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. The distance between the two places is 3,940 kilometres and it is interesting to compare and contrast the painting made by Streeton en plein air and my photograph taken on site one hundred and thirty-two years later. This connection to Streeton's impressionist painting was discovered on my return to the studio after my work had been made, and some new links and comparisons were made between the works that would not otherwise have been found.

Streeton places particular emphasis on the foreground in his painting, while my photograph fills three quarters of the picture plane with an expansive and cloud-filled sky. Streeton has created a sentimental presence in his painting with the introduction of the young boy, the sheep and even a magpie placed in the foreground, while my photograph is overlaid with images of abandoned vehicles reclaimed by the landscape and the spinifex grasses. Shadowy trees rise above the vehicles and provide a ghostly presence in the sky, with the image bearing little resemblance to the station salvage yard where the entropic disintegration of metals are left to rust and corrode in the Pilbara landscape. There is an absence of humans emplaced in the landscape and I wanted the viewer to feel

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uncomfortable and unsure about the sense of place depicted in my *Golden Summer, Pilbara*. This sense of place is explored further in *The Road to Jigalong* (Fig. 47) where the long, straight, corrugated, gravel road in and out of Ethel Creek Station en route to the Jigalong community is captured in a ten minute film.



Figure 47. Fiona Rafferty. *The Road to Jigalong*. 2021. Film still. Dimensions variable.

There is always a sense of anticipation when I leave the bitumen road that leads to Marble Bar and I turn right off the highway, at the Jigalong Road signpost, indicating that I am almost there, and Ethel Creek Station is not too far away. The road alters from a smooth, hard covering to a dusty, bumpy, red gravel and this change of surface, where the former has been built up and sealed with an impenetrable covering, and the latter is an organic structure that is constantly changing. Both roads have been built by humans who have altered the topography in the process. I have travelled along this road many times. It carries me from one place to another and represents the external boundary that I leave when I finally arrive at my destination, and takes me away from the place that I identify with. In *The road to Jigalong* I wanted to convey an extended temporal view of time and space in the altered landscape that impacts on place-identity and focuses on the importance of the Jigalong Road in the context of my project.

A photograph is an image stilled by capturing a moment in time, and I found that I was able to expand this concept of time using moving film. By placing my mobile phone on the dashboard of my vehicle I was able to record this liminal space and explore it back in my studio. I discovered that I could slow down the recording so that the movement in the film became so imperceptible that it appeared to the viewer as a stilled image. Emphasis was placed on time in this work, representing the time it took to travel along

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the Jigalong Road, the slowing down of time perceived in the Australian outback landscape, the time it took to make the film, the time it takes to view the completed artwork, and the time it takes to form an identity to place.¹⁵

In this chapter I have discussed my third and final field trip on Ethel Creek Station, and examined my creative practice methodology and practice-led research outcomes resulting from this research. The final exhibition includes photographic prints, artist books, pen and ink drawings and a video, which together demonstrates my engagement with the altered Pilbara landscape, and the effect on place-identity.

¹⁵ According to American professors Lisa and Jeffrey Smith, the mean time it took for a visitor to look at a work of art in a museum in 2001 was 27.2 seconds (Kaplan, I. 2017).

Conclusion

‘The Road to Jigalong: an exploration into the effect of altered landscapes in the Pilbara on place-identity’ was a practice-led research project, situated on Ethel Creek Station, in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. I engaged with the Pilbara landscape through three field trips conducted on Ethel Creek Station in 2020 and 2021, and the research outcome was an exhibition of creative works that explored the impact of pastoralism on the landscape, in conjunction with a supporting exegesis.

Field Trip One in my exegesis discussed the impact of human-induced climate change on the Pilbara topography and the effect of drought on the place-identity of the station residents. This field trip, conducted during Covid-19, explored the impact of the fourteen-day quarantine period on my practice-led research, and the metaphysical isolation experienced during quarantine. It described the methods used in my creative practice that included drawing, painting, and photography, and also discussed the intertwined histories of the Martu Indigenous people in Jigalong and the pastoralists on Ethel Creek Station.

Field Trip Two included experiencing the landscape from the ground during a cattle muster and through viewing the vista from the air in a helicopter, where I was able to clearly see the impact of humans on the land. The ‘bird’s-eye view’ enabled me to experience the expansive landscape from a different perspective, whilst on the ground, I walked along animal tracks, immersed in the landscape. During this second field trip the practice-led methods changed, and I focused on photography to document my experiences, and also to create a series of photographic artworks.

Field Trip Three was consolidated in tandem with my exegesis writing. The outcomes of my creative practice were examined, and I found that by using a medium format film camera, in conjunction with digital cameras, I was able to convey the unsettling emotions associated with altered landscapes and place-identity that I was seeking, through photography.

I found that through my practice-led investigations during the three field trips I had unexpected results that could only be discovered through creative practice. During the first field trip Covid-19 quarantine period, my creative practice was driven by drawing and painting the physical objects brought to my restricted space. I was unable to venture out of my space into the landscape so the entomology of the landscape was brought to me. This was unexpected. The quarantine was unexpected and it forced me to re-evaluate

my practice-led research intentions for this project. The decision to focus on photography came from my altered circumstances during quarantine.

Covid-19 also affected my research journey in unexpected ways. From March 2020 until August 2021, my research was conducted in parallel with the Covid-19 pandemic that altered people's ways of living and changed their perceptions of life and death, the ease of travel and the uncertainty of everyday living. Being in the world as we knew it changed forever. Places of learning closed, and my university campus was closed periodically. Prepping became more pertinent than ever before, and regional closures, mask wearing and acceptance of political decisions became the norm in this new Covid-altered landscape.

Another change will occur in September 2021, when Ethel Creek Station managers Bella and Barry Gratte leave the station that has been their home for more than three decades. The station will be managed by Richard and Kate Gratte under the new leasehold awarded by the station owners, mining company BHP, to Karlka Nyiyaparli Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC.¹⁶ There is an irony in this new cultural landscape where more than a century ago the Ethel Creek Station land was taken from the Indigenous people, who in turn came to the station to work. The return of the Indigenous Country, that was taken from them by the early settlers, to their people is a conciliatory act by BHP, in spite of the conditional leasehold arrangement. It will be interesting to observe the continued management of the station by the Gratte family, who are descended from European post-colonialists, under the new Indigenous leasehold.

Being emplaced in the landscape periodically for the past two years provided me with an opportunity to observe the cultural and physical topography on Ethel Creek Station, and to explore my station experiences in the Pilbara in conjunction with theoretical discourse, which has informed both my exegetical writing and my creative practice. My project focused on the effect of altered landscapes on place-identity and initially I expected to find that the human-made alterations to the land would have the greatest impact on place-identity and attachment to place. Through my creative practice I discovered that the seasonal and human-induced climactic weather conditions also had an impact on altering the physical landscape and the emotional attachment to place.

These findings were unexpected, and despite the many years and visits to Ethel Creek Station over more than two decades, it was only through my research that I

¹⁶ Karlka (KNAC) is the native title group established in 2012, comprising more than three hundred members from the Nyiyaparli Indigenous People.

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discovered and understood more fully, the increasing impact of human-induced climate change, such as prolonged drought conditions that altered the landscape and negatively affected the station residents' place-identity and attachment to place, as well as their well-being. It may be useful to conduct further research on the psychological effect that altered landscapes can have on people, within the context of the impact of human-induced climate changes that are occurring more frequently and with greater intensity, which alter the physical topography and affect the place-identity of the inhabitants.

This practice-led research project is significant due to the specific focus on Ethel Creek Station, the Pilbara landscape, and the original creative practice outcomes resulting from the research. It contributes to the emerging knowledge surrounding the impact of Covid-19 on creative practice, and the effect of quarantine conditions imposed during regional field trips.

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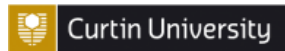
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Figure 47. Fiona Rafferty. *The Road to Jigalong.* 2021. Film still.

Dimensions variable.

Appendix

Questionnaire



Research Questions

- 1 How would you describe the Pilbara landscape?
- 2 In what way do you feel a connection to the Pilbara landscape?
- 3 Has the landscape changed during the time that you have lived in the Pilbara?
- 4 How do extreme conditions ie drought and flooding affect the way that you feel about the landscape?
- 5 Do these extreme conditions affect your emotional well-being?
- 6 Do you think that pastoralism will continue in the Pilbara?
- 7 How have you maintained your relationship with the Indigenous peoples in the region?
- 8 Did you feel that there was more of a connection to the landscape when the Indigenous workers were living at Ethel Creek Station?
- 9 You have been managing Ethel Creek Station for over thirty years. When you retire from management will you return to the Pilbara? Why?
- 10 Where do you feel most at home?

Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved this study (HREC number 2020/0120). Should you wish to discuss the study with someone not directly involved, in particular, any matters concerning the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, or you wish to make a confidential complaint, you may contact the Ethics Officer on (08) 9266 9223 or the Manager, Research Integrity on (08) 9266 7093 or email hrec@curtin.edu.au.

Exhibition Catalogue

The road to Jigalong: an exploration into the effect of altered landscapes in the Pilbara on place-identity.

Project Research Space,
Curtin University, Bentley, WA.

20 – 27 September 2021



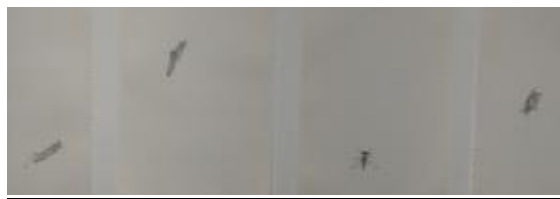
1. *Border Control*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 60 x 40 cm.



2. *The Road to Jigalong*. 2021. Projected video.

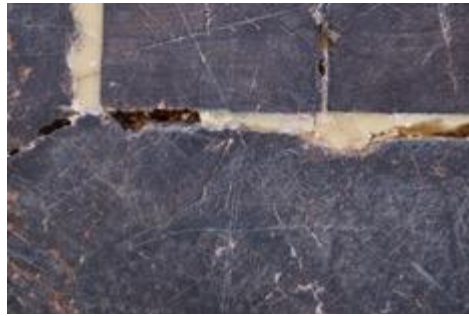


3. *Landmarks*. 2020-2021. Pen and ink on 6 artist books.

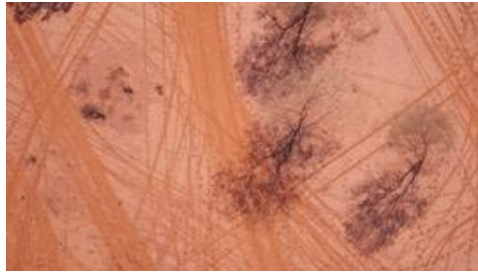


4. *Plague Proportions*. 2021. Pen and ink on 4 sheets of Arches paper. Each 77 x 58 cm.

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5. *Chopping Block*. 2020. Archival pigment print. 120 x 67.5 cm.



6. *Landcruisers and Droughtmasters*. 2020. Archival pigment print. 120 x 67.5 cm.



7. *Bowsers*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 150 x 180 cm.



8. *The Trucks*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 120 x 67.5 cm.



9. *The Yards*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 120 x 67.5 cm.



10. *The Camp*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 120 x 67.5 cm.



11. *Solarized*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 124 x 110 cm.



12. *Post-pastoral*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 220 x 100 cm.

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13. *Golden Summer, Pilbara*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 170 x 140 cm.



14. *Old bones rest here*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 144 x 120 cm.



15. *Entropic Pastoral*. 2021. Archival pigment print. 144 x 120 cm.

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The road to Jigalong: an exploration into the effect of altered landscapes in the Pilbara on place-identity.

Project Research Space, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia.



Figure. 1. Installation image of video projection in examination exhibition in Project Research Space. September 2021.

The road to Jigalong: an exploration into the effect of altered landscapes in the Pilbara on place-identity.

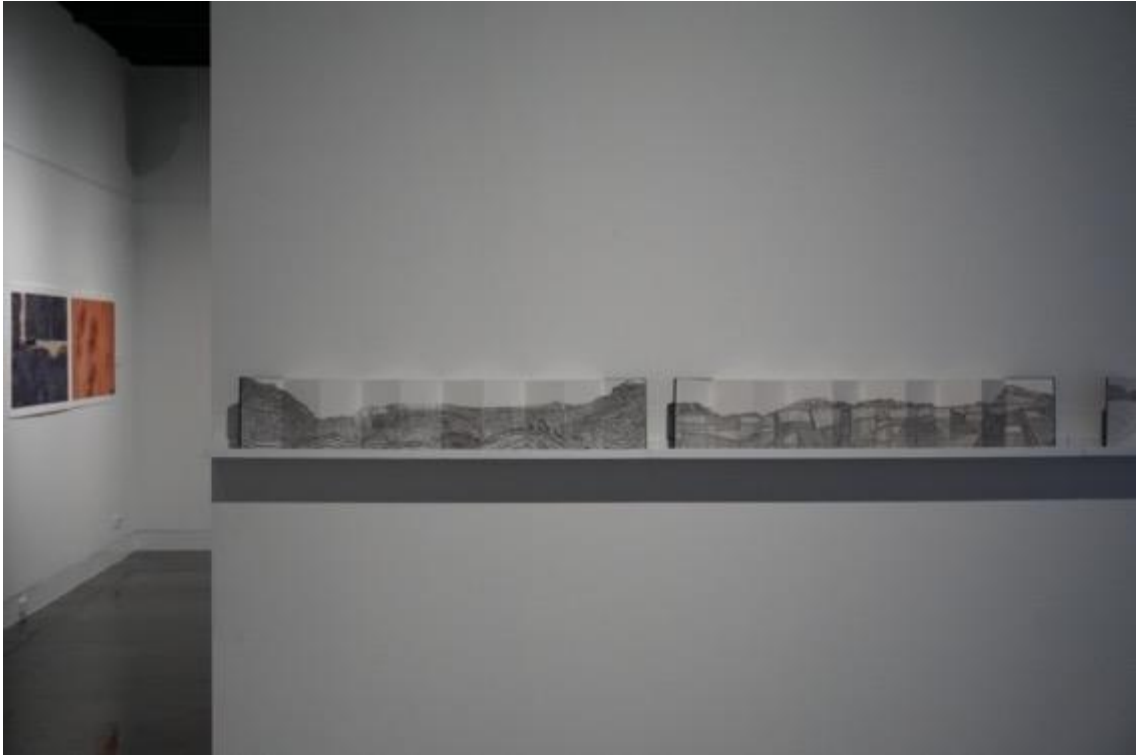


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Figure. 3. Installation image of examination exhibition in Project Research Space. September 2021.

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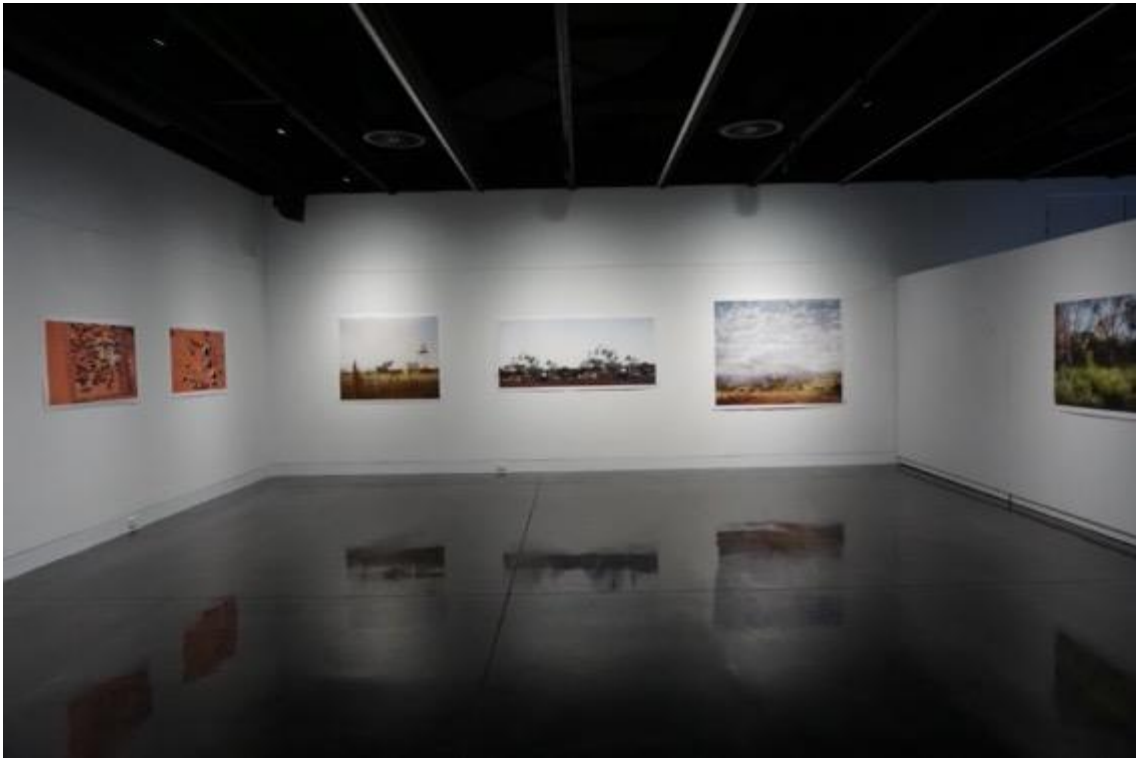


Figure. 4. Installation image of examination exhibition in Project Research Space. September 2021.

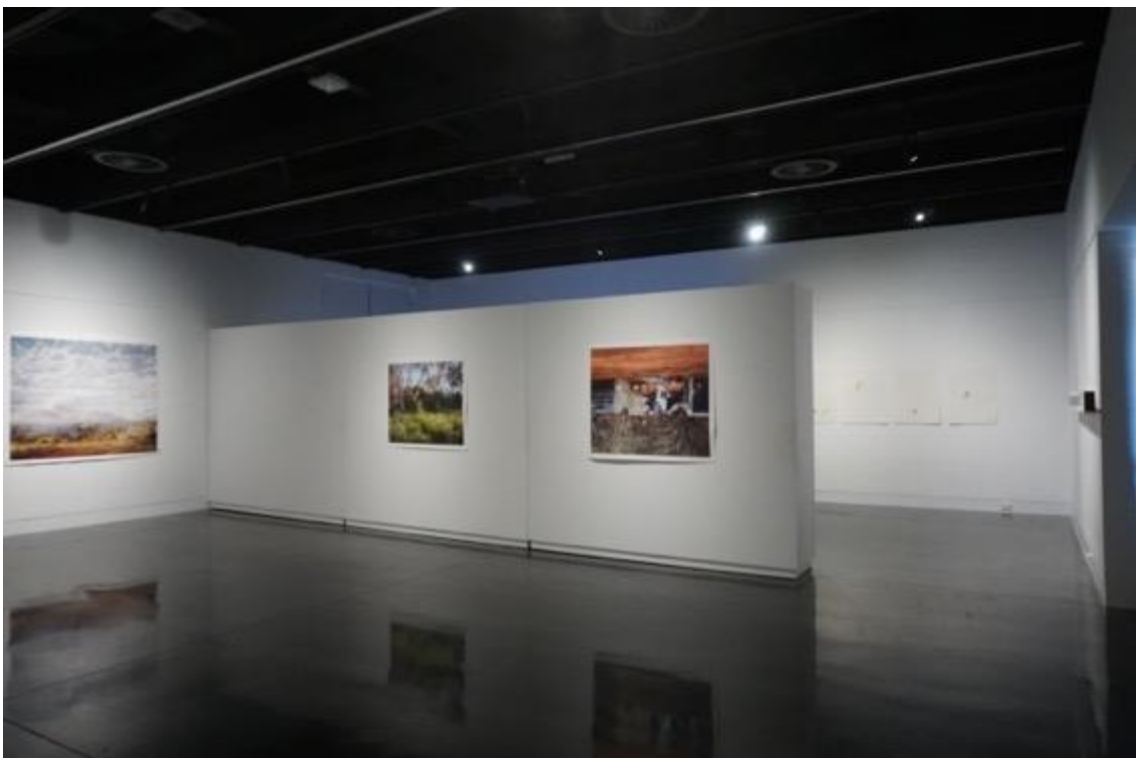


Figure. 5. Installation image of examination exhibition in Project Research Space. September 2021.

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Figure. 6. Installation image of examination exhibition in Project Research Space. September 2021.



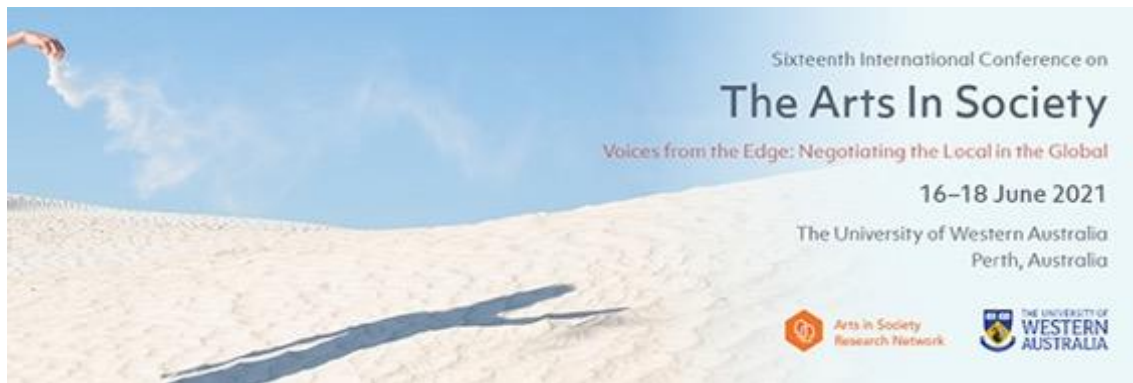
Figure. 7. Installation image of examination exhibition in Project Research Space. September 2021.

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Research Outputs 2020 - 2021

2021 Presenter

International Arts in Society Conference, University of Western Australia.



2021 Finalist

Art Now, Southwest Survey, Bunbury Regional Art Gallery, WA.

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2020 Finalist

National Libris Awards – Artspace, Mackay Regional Art Gallery, Qld.



JOIN US LIVE on Facebook as we stream the official proceedings and announcement of category winners for the

2020 Libris Awards

The Australian Artists' Book Prize

4:30pm (AEST) Monday 13 July 2020. www.facebook.com/artspacemackay
Winners will also be published to our website directly after this announcement at www.artspacemackay.com.au, and www.instagram.com/artspacemackay

Exhibition dates: 27 June to 13 September 2020

To view the 2020 Libris Awards Illustrated catalogue of finalists and take a 3D virtual tour of the exhibition, visit www.artspacemackay.com.au

CATEGORY 1 Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal National Artists' Book Awards

Overall Winner \$7,000 (acquisitive) | Highly Commended \$3,000 (acquisitive)

CATEGORY 2 Mackay Regional Council Regional Artists' Book Award \$2,500 (non-acquisitive)

CATEGORY 3 Artspace Mackay Foundation Tertiary Artists' Book Award \$2,000 (non-acquisitive)



IMAGES: Selected finalist' works from the 2020 Libris Awards: Helen MUELLER (Once upon a mountain) [detail] 2020, woodblock print and ink wash, 58 x 27 x 5.8 cm. Image courtesy the artist; Megan TSIM (Interjection) 2020, ink and monochrome, 28 x 23 x 2 cm (dimensions variable). Image courtesy the artist; Linda SPORNANT (Merbarluve) [detail] 2020, watercolour and mixed media, 21.7 x 25.7 x 1.5 cm. Image courtesy the artist; Glen SEEN (CRISCT ACRES: Mallow + IV) 2020, photography, handwriten text, 18 x 21 x 1 cm. Image courtesy the artist; Matthew MAYER (Small talk) [detail] 2020, conceptual printing, 11 x 25 x 0.5 cm. Image courtesy the artist; Grace WATY and Louise JENNISON (A hush of life, forest, and water through circles) [detail] 2020, set of three unopened artist' books, edition 75/75, 28.7 x 12.2 x 1.4 cm. Image courtesy the artist; Diana POWELL (Jefiro) [detail] 2020, linocut, woodcut, and burnt drawings, 70.5 x 27.5 x 3 cm. Image courtesy the artist; Andy BARRAN (10 Minutes) [detail] 2020, match-box book with various media and Perspex shelving, 64 x 58 x 85 cm. Image courtesy the artist; Iain NICOLA (Equatorial Triangle) [detail] 2020, etched acrylic, printed pages of text, and mixed media, 7 x 7 x 80 cm. Image courtesy the artist; Karl MAGUIA (Edwards to Billy's Australia) [detail] 2020, pigment ink, Magnani and Ippani paper, and book cloth, edition 1/1, 26.4 x 21.5 x 5 cm. Image courtesy the artist; Doug SPORNANT (Mare) [detail] 2020, digital print, edition: first state, 21 x 14.5 x 1.5 cm. Sydney: Mareetho. Image courtesy the artist; Michelle BLACK (The Big one) (detail) 2018, Fricoy River mud, Indigo, cotton rag paper, kochu, waxed card, spatted gum (tiber), and rusted wire, 130 x 15 x 36 cm. Image courtesy the artist

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2020 Presenter

UNSW Arts and Social Sciences Conference, *Arts & Social Sciences Research: Relevance, Responsiveness and Impact*, on September 16-17.



Arts and Social Sciences Research: Relevance, Responsiveness and Impact is the 8th annual UNSW Arts and Social Sciences Postgraduate Student Conference co-organised by the A&SS Higher Degree Research Student Committee and UNSW Arts and Social Sciences.

The conference is an interdisciplinary event open to Higher Degree Research and Honours Arts and Social Sciences students from UNSW and other universities. This year's conference will be held online on the 16th and 17th of September 2020.

Relevance, Responsiveness and Impact aims to highlight the critical role, flexibility and contribution of Arts and Social Sciences Research by showcasing the diverse and high-quality work of Arts and Social Sciences research students. *Relevance, Responsiveness and Impact* provides a platform for students to present their work and emphasise the significance of their research to a diverse audience, engage with fellow Arts and Social Sciences researchers, and potentially reflect on any changes that had or will have to be made due to COVID-19.

Higher Degree Research and Honours Arts and Social Sciences students at all stages of their candidature are invited to submit papers in any of the areas below:

2020 THEMES

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Education | 5. Communication and media studies |
| 2. Language studies, linguistics, translation & interpreting | 6. Creative/performing arts & literary studies |
| 3. Policy, governance and ethics | 7. Social health & well-being |
| 4. Human society & culture | 8. History, philosophy & the natural environment |
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APPLICATION PROCESS

This year, we have one type of presentation (7-minute presentation followed by 3 minutes Q&A).

We welcome abstracts of **no more than 200 words**. In addition, please include:

- A title;
- Bibliography; and
- Up to 3 key themes from the list above that reflect your paper.

Submit your abstracts to Arts.PGConference@unsw.edu.au no later than **14th August 2020**.

The road to Jigalong: an exploration into the effect of altered landscapes in the Pilbara on place-identity.

2020 Abstract

Curtin University *Directions and Destinations*, HDR Conference.



2020 HDR Exhibition

The Quarter Gallery, Curtin University, Perth, WA.



The road to Jigalong: an exploration into the effect of altered landscapes in the Pilbara on place-identity.

The road to Jigalong: an exploration into the effect of altered landscapes in the Pilbara on place-identity.