

David **Watson**



# David Watson's Terror Australis

"There is a chill in the emotional heart of this country. Many of us seem disconnected from what is precious, what lies beneath our feet. Exhausted by consumerism, too busy, or stifled by cynicism we refuse to immerse ourselves in, acknowledge or love what we have. Such a climate breeds suspicion of others and fear of ourselves.

"My vision for Australia is that by the year 2010 no child shall be without a tent and a sleeping bag. By treading more lightly upon this earth and respecting indigenous and environmental wisdom our next generation will come to know how crucial (and wonderful) it is to say 'sorry'".

David Watson, February 2004

David Watson uses photography to address, by evocation, Australia; Australian identity and the Australian landscape through atmospheric photographs. The fascination for imaging Australia came from returning to this country after a decade of living in the UK. The return is a shock, and a revelation of the kind that can come to us after a period of forgetting, then suddenly confronting the complexities of an unexpected reality.

Intentional or not, forgetting the extreme-focus of the real can result from being engaged in something else. Watson is now making up for this immersion with another place, even though it was Thatcher's Britain. By contrast, what a joy to be here, but how much better it could be!

Unlike David Watson's response to the multifaceted visual reality of this part of the world, his photographs are neither specific as to their source nor in sharp focus. He has instead allowed himself the freedom to exploit the undeniable potential for beauty of colour photography, with all that it may suggest.

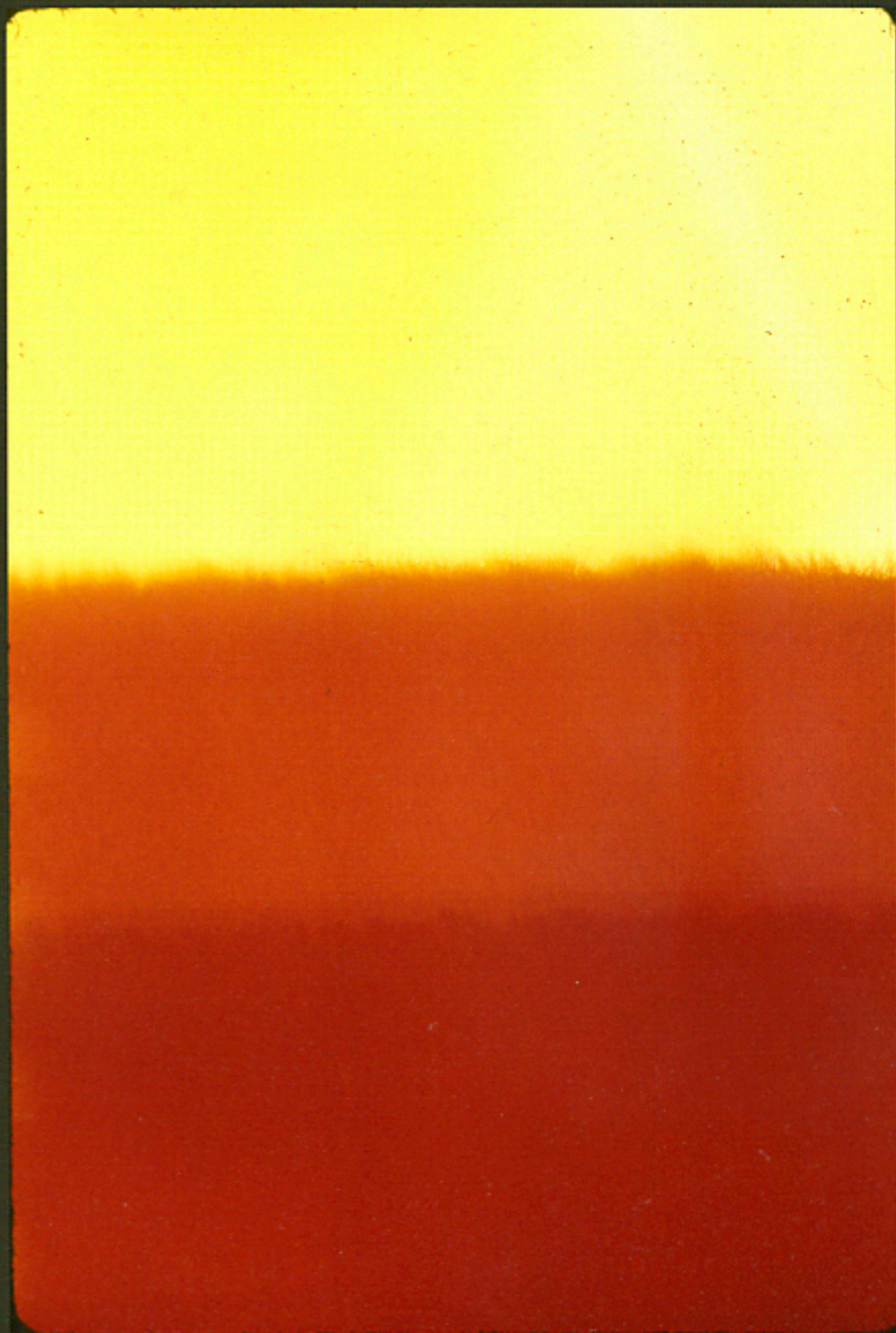
David Watson's work belies something at odds with this beauty. He makes use of a singularly astonishing environment to create ordinariness and, vice versa, creates from ordinariness singularly beautiful images. The landscape to which David Watson's photographs are addressed is as diverse as the land and as its history is complex. He is,

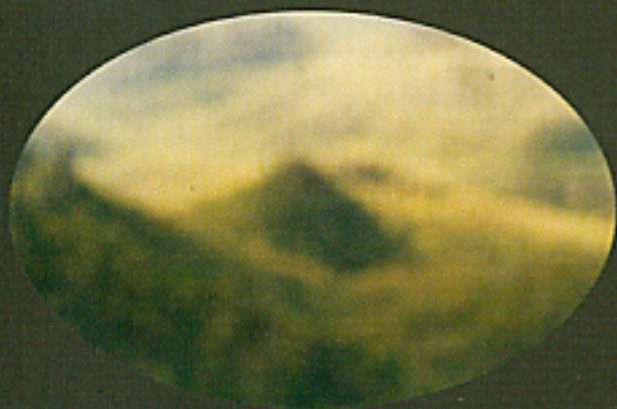
after all, a traveler and observer who brings back images that he would undoubtedly wish us to experience first hand. He would probably have us all camping out in the bush to marvel at the actual beauty of the five-dimensional world. In our cities we would be with him, resisting the growth of secure mini-towns that limit our world-view and engagement with our fellows.

His immersion is not only with the physicality of place, but in its idea and 'memory'. It is from this mental landscape as from the real that result his out-of-focus prints or the camera-less 'images' in this exhibition. As if trying to remember the details or specific images from a dream, Watson creates approximations; images that hint at their subject rather than nail it down. One could assume that these images are for the artist himself an approximation - a gathering - of what he 'sees', of something remembered, not as images directed towards the viewer alone. In this sense these photographs are poetic evocations that describe a deep attachment with a place.

This view may be underscored by the accidental landscapes that arise from the exposure of the end of film rolls in the development process. These 'sunsets' and 'sunrises' are as true, or as false, as any other photographic image. They were for the expatriate David Watson specific reminders or markers for a place - their gloriously saturated colour evoking the grand space and high skies of Australia. Their degree of veracity is in the eye of the viewer who sees at once an abstract effect of chemical photography, and a spectacular and immersing landscape with prominent horizon. In this process of transferring the domain of poetic imagery from himself to the viewer, Watson is obliged to consider the extreme ambiguity of the photographic image, its scale and installation. This is a matter not only for the studio but for the gallery and it is here that the work can be tested in the minds of others - for this work is as much about playing with mental processes in the viewing situation as it is aesthetic. It is also quite specifically within the present discourse of photographic practice.

Richard Dunn 2004





Front & inside: Horizons – digital prints from 35mm  
slide roll-ends 705mm x 470mm on aluminium  
Above: Ellipses – C-type photographs 242mm x  
375mm on aluminium  
Top right: Koala – digital photograph 600mm x  
400mm (framed)

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