

EXHIBITION RELEASE 11/08

David Watson
WALKING WITH CARS

Brush Farm House
19 Lawson Street
Eastwood

22 November - 30 November 2008

11am - 5pm daily

12pp catalogue with essay by artist Anne Ferran downloadable at
www.ryde.nsw.gov.au



SALON CALLAN

David Watson
02 9810 1402
bombora@bigpond.net.au

'I'd been *driving* down Sydney's Victoria Road for 50 years. I decided to walk it.'

In March 2006 Sydney artist David Watson donned his Dunlop Volleys and, stepping expectantly over the deep sandstone gutter outside his home in Rozelle, hit the bitumen. Lightly equipped – a curious eye, a pen, an old 35mm Olympus camera and a couple of apples – over two years (and 19 walks) his steps traced a slowly observant, meandering route west along the Parramatta River corridor. *Walking With Cars*, an exhibition of his photomedia work at Eastwood's newly refurbished Brush Farm House gallery in November, explores his 'findings'. Concerned by what is being lost, erased, overwritten – Watson deploys low-tech means (eg his home scanner) to photographically resuscitate and re-mind.

A lyrical late-19th century Australian travel diary – *Landlopers*, by the largely forgotten poet/walker John Le Gay Brereton (bohemian, literary confrère and first professor of English at Sydney University) – provided the catalyst for Watson's walk. Brereton's delightful tale

charts a journey on foot from his family home (on what is today Victoria Road) in Gladesville to Jenolan Caves in 1899.

Watson's project (which includes a 50,000-word thesis) forms part of a PhD at Sydney College of the Arts. In part it is an ode to the seemingly unremarkable suburbia through which he 'has beetled without so much as a second glance' for much of his life. More broadly it is a snapshot of 'how we're travelling' at a time of spiraling oil prices and over-consumption. Watson grew up across the road from Brush Farm - with a pet wombat named Binya, and views to the Blue Mountains. His elderly parents – amateur ornithologists and bush lovers, still cling on there... besieged by four furious lanes of commuter and long-haul traffic. Since the 1960s they've kept lists of the indigenous bird species which frequent their garden – 40% no longer visit. Remember the Eastern Whipbird, the Grey Fantail, the Spinebill, the Dollar Bird?

As a child Watson built dams with sticks and played in the (un-kerbed) gutters of Marsden Road. Occasionally a car or two would trundle past. Today, alarmed by the collateral damage of Sydney's sprawl, he helps regenerate remnant bushland in Rozelle, and he walks...

On his walk to Brush Farm, Watson has been drawn by echoes of Ryde municipality's indigenous and early settler history, its industrial legacy, and its creative spirits – having learnt next to nothing about the Wallumedegal, or the area's poets, writers and artists at Eastwood Primary in the 1960s. In 2007 he witnessed the area's changing demographic and political complexion as his route traversed the litmus Federal seat of Bennelong.

Walking With Cars is a curious and eclectic project – an artistic response to home, to place, to one's 'country' at a time of intense global flows and virtual communication - which both revels in and recoils from the local. Watson's 'research material' is gleaned as often by a chance meeting, an overheard conversation or a discarded object as by conventional means. The photo-works in his exhibition are similarly, delightfully, tinged with loss, serendipity, hope and beauty. In 2009 Watson will complete a return journey to his home in Rozelle by canoe.

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