

GALERIE PAVLOVA

Michael Dooney

It is an interesting situation, that I imagine many long term travelers, migrants and expatriates have found themselves in at some stage, when you feel as though you are the unofficial cultural ambassador of your home land. I must admit that before leaving Australia I'd never felt a strong connection to my country, and it was only after a number of years living in Germany that I started to appreciate my Australian-ness and cultural heritage. This renewed bond with Australia, together with my interest and involvement with photography, inspired the establishing of Galerie Pavlova as a platform for Australian and New Zealand contemporary photography within Europe.

dream of the vast untouched, expansive landscape, devoid of any development or obvious traces of human presence. It was with this appetite for wonder that Polish artists, Marek Kucharski and Diana Lelonek set out on a journey, in the spirit of explorers of the past, to document their travels throughout Australia. Their project *There is nothing there, anyway*, which I discovered at the Greenroom Gallery during the 2014 Photography Month in Krakow, encapsulates much of how Australia is often perceived from afar. As exotic land, for the most part uninhabitable, with our cities concentrated around the few forgiving areas of the country. The open space and the perceived lack of protection from nature stirs up questions about our human presence in the world. What is an accepted reality of where we live, most European's cannot imagine what it must be like to drive for hours, where the road itself is the only sign of civilisation. Marek and Diana wanted to explore this unique phenomenon in an attempt to understand it and experience it for themselves.



Boris Eldagsen *Safety by numbers* 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

German visual artist Boris Eldagsen had a different experience during his extended visit to Australia. Traveling not as a tourist or a modern day explorer, he simply fell in love with an Australian artist and consequently spent most of his time

from 2003 to 2010 living there. Witnessing the abundance of rules and increased regulations transforming Australia into the nanny state that it's regarded as, Boris became obsessed with these restrictions which he collected and catalogued, forming the basis of his work *Safety by Numbers*. This project combined photographic documentation of Australia together with his Safety Bible, which contains over 700 rules, warnings and public notices which serve to constantly remind us to do the right thing and protect us from danger. It is interesting speaking about this work with Boris because as an Australian living in Germany, comparing each others experiences of our respective cultures, we were both surprised by how our expectations didn't match up with the reality. Germany is generally perceived as being very orderly, regimented and rule bound, however after years of living here, in Berlin especially, the way of life does feel much less restricted than in Australia. Given that Australia is viewed as a laidback, relaxed and easy going place, you do have to wonder why we're restricted with so many rules and regulations.



Polixeni Papapetrou *The Whimera 1864 #1* 2006. Courtesy of the artist.

Living away has naturally impacted on how I personally view the Australian habitat and so it was interesting for me to discover that Polixeni Papapetrou's perception of Australia was also influenced following her time abroad. Although the Australian landscape has had a strong presence in her work over the past ten years, the Melbourne based artist had avoided the landscape since a traumatic childhood experience when she got



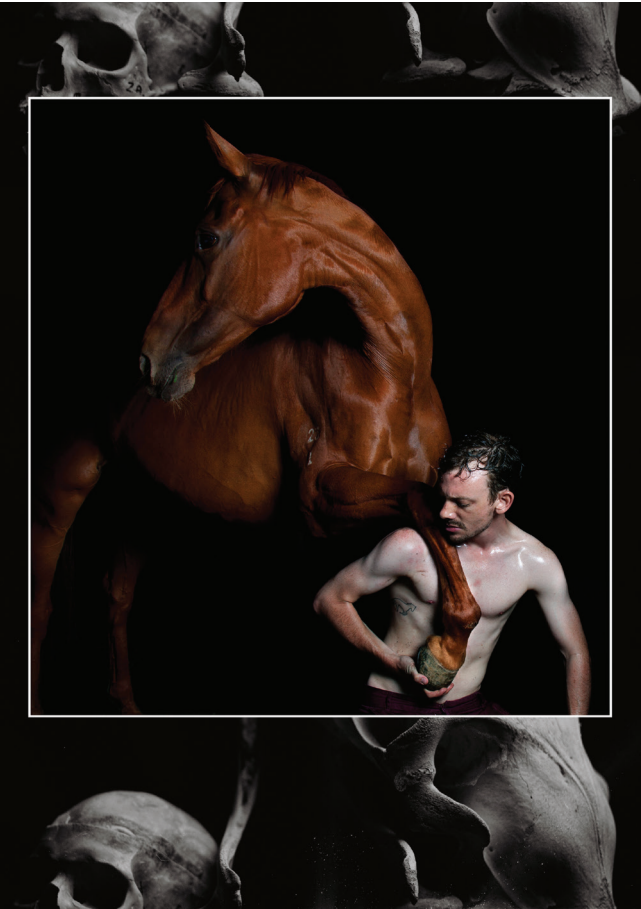
Polixeni Papapetrou *Salt Man* 2013. Courtesy of the artist.

lost in the bush during a family trip in 1977. It wasn't until an overseas trip in 2004 and the exposure to a completely foreign culture which allowed her to reconnect with the Australian landscape. In her series *Haunted Country*, she explores the colonial mythology of the Australian bush, beautiful and serene but simultaneously wild and unforgiving. Stories like



Polixeni Papapetrou *Miles from nowhere* 2008. Courtesy of the artist.

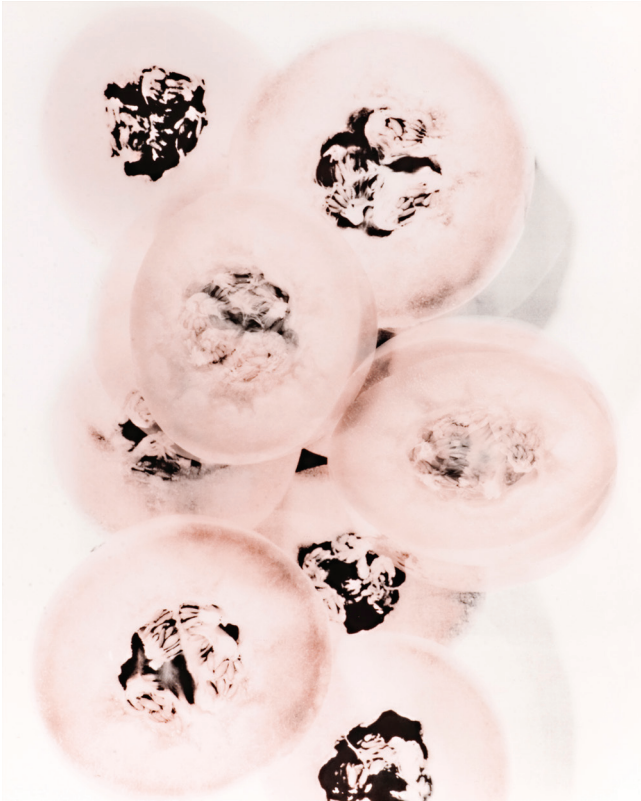
Picnic at Hanging Rock and news reports of children who wandered from the safety of their urban habitat never to be seen again, reinforce the danger of the Australian wilderness. Playing into the culture of fear that Boris documented and the division between the natural and man-made habitat Marek & Diana were curious to explore. For Polixeni, photographing the Australian landscape could be considered part of the healing process, reconnecting with the landscape and overcoming the initial trauma. *Games of Consequence* depicts narratives with her own children in the Australian landscape which echo family outings that so many of us would have experienced as children ourselves.



David Charles Collins *Amygdala* 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

The Australian natural habitat now comfortably features throughout Polixeni's work, utilised for their staging and theatrical qualities and as well as characters in their own right. All artists to some extent incorporate their immediate surroundings within their work, whether directly as cultural commentary or simply because this is the environment in which they live. William Eggleston photographed ordinary suburban

Memphis, Larry Clark his drug taking friends in Tulsa and Nan Goldin the Drag Queens she grew up with. Sydney based artist David Charles Collins grew up on a semi-rural property in the Perth hills and his imagery often incorporates elements of this surrounding habitat. Making the most of the resources available to him, it is not usual for his horses to appear in his work. In this way he is not actively featuring the elements of the Australian landscape within his work, they are naturally included as part of his life and surroundings.



Kate Robertson *Melon Sun* 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

Kate Robertson's work takes a less conventional approach in how it explores the Australian connection to the landscape, who we are and who we're perceived to be. When we consider the concept of a habitat, community and the human relationship with nature it conjures up specific imagery. Much in the same way that there are certain expectations of the viewer when presented with a photographic document. Spending time with healing communities that embrace an alternative lifestyle, Kate utilises the tactile artisan aspects of the darkroom to create abstract documents of the experience. Because her work explores different ways of living, it's fitting that the execution is also a different way of using photography. Presenting the

different ideas and ideologies, the way the work itself is almost a direct response to how it is experienced.

Through the prism of the gallery and the artists that we've collaborated with the Australian habitat has revealed itself in a myriad of ways; the romanticised undiscovered continent; the restrictive political landscape that juxtaposes our easy going lifestyle; the colonial mythology about the Australian bush and its inherent dangers; the permeation of the Australian habitat through personal experience; and contemporary ways of exploring alternative lifestyles. Living away from Australia, I've come to appreciate this diversity, becoming more sensitive to the different interpretations of our identity, and how the Australian landscape and habitat play such a large role in who we are.



Kate Robertson *Pinhead Mercury* (detail) 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

Marek Kucharski (Poland) is currently working on his doctorate studies at the University of Art in Poznan, Faculty of Multimedia Communication. He has exhibited in Poland, Australia and Germany, and is the recipient of a number of grants.
marekkucharski.wix.com/prace

Diana Lelonek (Poland) has a MA from the University of Art in Poznan, Faculty of Multimedia Communication, and has exhibited in Poland, Switzerland, Slovakia, United Kingdom, China and Lithuania.
dianalelonek.tumblr.com

Boris Eldagsen (Germany) studied photography and visual arts at the Art Academy of Mainz (Vladimir Spacek & Klaus Vogelgesang), conceptual art and intermedia at the Academy of Fine Arts, Prague (Miloš Šejn & Milan Knížák) and fine art the Sarojini Naidu School of Arts & Communication Hyderabad, India (Laxma Goud). He has exhibited in Germany, Australia, Scotland, Greece, Russia, Poland and France.
www.eldagsen.com

Polixeni Papapetrou's (Australia) work has featured in over 50 solo exhibitions, and over 90 group exhibitions in Australia, Germany, USA, Colombia, Greece, Slovakia, The Netherlands, France, New Zealand, Canada, Switzerland, UK, Taipei, China, Japan, Singapore, Spain and Belgium.
www.polixenipapapetrou.net

David Charles Collins (Australia) studied at Curtin University and has exhibited in Australia and China.
davidcharlescollins.com

Kate Robertson (Australia) is currently undertaking her PhD at RMIT, and has exhibited in Australia, United Kingdom, USA, and New Zealand.
kate-robertson.com

Michael Dooney is a Gallery Director; Photographer; Lighting Designer, Consultant & Educator. Originally from Perth, he has been living and working in Germany since 2008. Michael holds an MA in Architectural Lighting Design and is a design member of the Illuminating Engineering Society IES and BerufsverbandBildenderKünstler Berlins E.V. (Association of Visual Artists Berlin). Michael's photography and light installation's have been exhibited in Australia and Germany. He is a commissioned judge for the Reminders Project Grant and lecturer with the NODE Center for Curatorial Studies.
www.michaeldooney.net

Galerie Pavlova was established in Berlin in 2013 by Michael Dooney as the first and only art gallery in Europe with a focus on contemporary photography from Australia and New Zealand. Inspired by his own experiences as an Australian living in Europe, the gallery acts as a point of cultural exchange and connection to photographic artists associated with Oceania. Showcasing the work of both established and emerging artists alike, the thematic curatorial programme presents varied perspectives and challenges the audiences expectations of both photography and culture.
www.galeriepavlova.com