



There is a time

Ruth Maddison

Huw Davies Gallery

24 September – 11 October 2009

There is a time

When taking a journey by road our experience is generally of the wide view. On the road between Eden and Canberra, a road much travelled by Ruth Maddison in recent years, the geographical zones alter dramatically, from commercial fishing port, to dense forest, and into rolling dairy farms. From there up to the bleak and boulder-strewn Monaro High Plains. A dip into Cooma (gateway to the snowfields), then on to the nation's 2-spired capital.

If travelling alone, we tend to a reflective state of mind. The windscreen-framed views take on a cinematic quality, a kind of mesmeric unfolding that can make it hard to pull over and break the rhythm. The landscape is also inevitably imbued with the emotional baggage we carry with us wherever we go: a stand of trees lit by late sun might seem merry or mocking, frost covered gullies promising or foreboding. But the wide view swiftly alters if we stop the car and step out. Immediately the scene changes. What had seemed smooth and homogenous is all bumps and tufts and roughness. The wind hits us, we smell the animals, the plants and the earth. The noise and rush of passing traffic is a confrontation.

In Ruth Maddison's regular trips across the Monaro she stopped frequently to take photographs. She is drawn to the expansiveness of this unencumbered landscape, the way it opens up and seems to encourage something similar in ourselves.

"I drive across the Monaro and look at the sweep of the land and think about what was there and what has gone – time and time again. Stopping at small cemeteries scattered across the Monaro, passing through the dying towns, collecting bird and animal bones scattered all along the way, watching grass seeds blowing across the road. I am conscious of layers of history held beneath the surface of the land."

As she built up a collection of images themes emerged. As time passed these themes subtly shifted and changed. What had been a general feel for the past came into sharp focus as a reverie on mortality. Her forensic scrutiny of the carcasses that adorn the roadsides continued with the micrographia of hapless insects carried



home on radiator grills, or those found, as if waiting for her, on the studio floor. In *There is a time* (2009) you will see flora and fauna common to Eden and Canberra that, like the artist, 'cross the Monaro'.

Ruth Maddison's attention helps us remember what we also may have noticed. Just as the microscope revealed a world formerly hidden to the naked eye in the 17th century, the artist can make us alert to things we do not consciously record. Having stopped her car Ruth Maddison looked death in the eye. She smelt the decay, heard the flies at work. She entered the abandoned cemeteries where the stone even crumbles, the statues tumble, and picked up pastel petals from the fabric flowers that –despite their dollar-shop foreverness – fade and scatter like the flowers they mimic.

History is writ large on this route. Small towns attest to times of brief plenty: the promise of gold, the economy of fleece. They are established at distances determined in an era when horses paced the daily work. Where rail provided a short-lived reprise. They are now towns that compete for us to "Stop Revive Survive" or to which some retire. In these empty places, Ruth Maddison finds comfort in quiet corners. She trains her camera on fine craftsmanship that has lasted the distance and the make-do that soon collapses.

"This new body of work is a departure from the people-focused documentary/portrait-based work that has informed my public practice for 30 years. This departure is the outcome of my social and professional isolation [in Eden], which I sought and have embraced. Yet I consider this work a documentary piece – I am documenting the passage of my life through a place and a time via photography and the problem solving processes it presents to me. I am documenting what it is that makes me want to go on and on with the work."

One day, called to her hometown Melbourne, she collected every flower in bloom in her Eden garden. They formed an album of pressed flowers in counterpoint to the family album: a family

There is a time
Ruth Maddison

List of works

Untitled 2009
Inkjet print on cotton/silk fabric
204 x 130 cm

Highway 23 2009
Type C print from digital file
76.5 x 112.5 cm

There is a time 2009
Archival pigment prints on 100% cotton rag
9 @ 41 x 60.29 cm

Thousands of years feasting on the Bogong moths 2009
Inkjet prints on cotton/silk fabric
4 @ approx. 119 x 55.4 cm

All along the way 2009
Archival pigment prints on fibre-based paper
5 @ 40 x 40 cm (image)

The day I left my garden #1 & #2 2009
perspex, glass, wood, neon light, with pressed and dried flowers on paper
11.5 x 125 x 17 cm

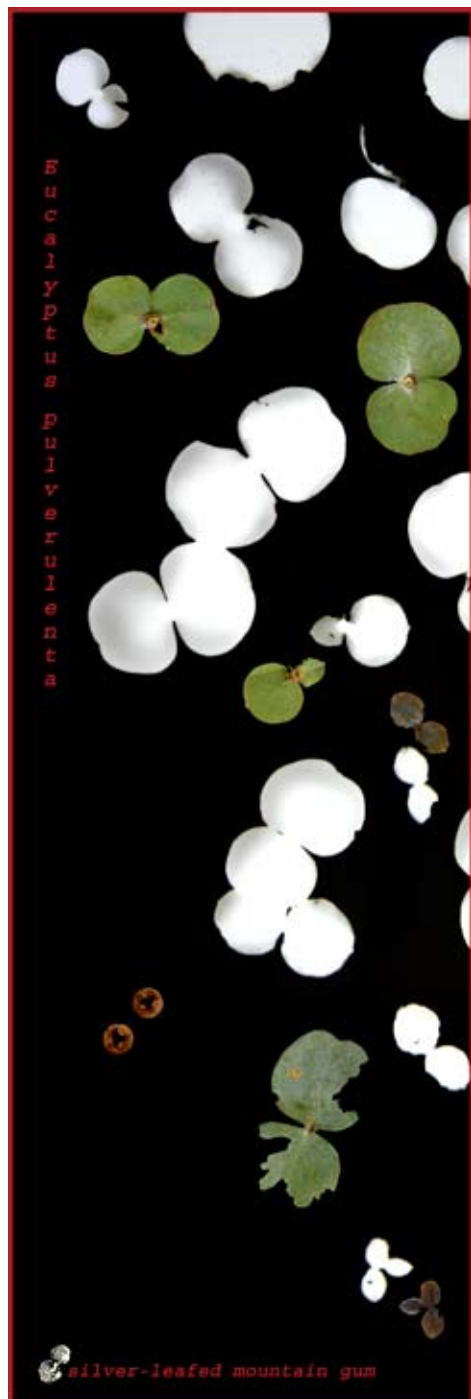
Untitled 2009
perspex, glass, wood, neon light, with dried skeleton leaves on paper
11.5 x 65 x 17 cm
illustrated over

Vulnerable 2009
Archival pigment prints on fibre-based paper
from a series of 12 images of plants from the Snowy-Monaro region on the NSW or Commonwealth vulnerable or threatened species lists
8 @ 90 x 30 cm (image)
1 of 8 illustrated right

Dead to the world 2009
Inkjet print on cotton/silk fabric, found fabric flowers sewn with cotton thread
approx. 130 x 371.4 cm, unique print

Coming to the Monaro 2009
silent video loop
dur. 3:59 minutes

Huw Davies Gallery
PhotoAccess
Manuka Arts Centre
Manuka ACT
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RUTH MADDISON Born Melbourne. Moved to Eden, far south coast of NSW, in 1996. Self taught. Began taking photographs 1976.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2009 *There is a time*, PhotoAccess, Canberra
 2008 *Now You See Us*, Jindabyne National Park Visitors Centre
 2008 /09 *Girt By Sea*, Cowra Regional Art Gallery; Eden Killer Whale Museum, NSW
 2003 *Response*, Photoaccess, Canberra
 2002 /03 *Now A River Went Out Of Eden*, Bega Valley Regional Gallery, NSW; Stills Gallery, Sydney
 1998 *Jewish Families*, Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne
 1995 *Single Mothers*, Access Gallery, National Gallery of Victoria; Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne; National Wool Museum, Geelong, Victoria
 1993 /94 *Blanche Street 1985–1993: Extracts From a Photo Diary*, Linden, St. Kilda Arts Centre, Melbourne; Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney
 1991 /92 /94 *Women Over 60*, Victorian Centre for Photography; Artspace, Sydney; Darwin Performing Arts Centre
 1988 *Street Photography from Australia*, Artists for Peace Gallery, Moscow
 1983 *Some Men*, Watters Gallery, Sydney
 1980 *When A Girl Marries*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
 1979 *Christmas Holiday With Bob's Family*, Ewing Gallery, University of Melbourne

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2008 *Home Truths*, State Library of NSW
 2007 *City of Hobart Art Prize*, (Winner) Tasmanian Museum and Gallery, Hobart
Reveries: Photography and Mortality, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra; University of Queensland Art Gallery; Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, VIC
Josephine Ulrick/Win Shubert Photography Award, (Finalist) Gold Coast City Art Gallery
Raised By Wolves, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
 2005 *Face to Face*, National Trust S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney
In A New Light: Australian Photography 1930s–2000, National Library of Australia
 2004 *Look – Hunter Art 1*, Newcastle Regional Art Gallery
 2003 *Second Site*, Ian Potter Centre, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
First Impressions, Ian Potter Centre, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 2002 *Other Views*, Griffith University Queensland College of Art
Josephine Ulrick National Photography Prize, (Winner) Tweed River Regional Art Gallery
 1998 *The 29th Alice Prize*, Araluen Centre for Arts, Alice Springs

Close Relations, Australian Centre For Photography, Sydney
 1997 *A Face in the Crowd*, Australian Portrait Gallery, Canberra
 1996 *The Power to Move: Aspects of Australian Photography*, Queensland Art Gallery
 1994 *All In The Family*, National Library of Australia, Canberra
The Full Spectrum: Colour and Photography in Australia 1860s to 1990s, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Aspects of Australian Portraiture, Australian Portrait Gallery, Canberra
 1993 *10th Anniversary of Kodak Acquisitions Fund*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra
Contemporary Jewish Artists in Australia, Westpac Gallery, Melbourne
 1992 *Sites of the Imagination*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 1989 *Portrait Photography*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra
 1988 *Australian Photography: the 1980s*, Australian National Gallery and State Galleries
The Thousand Mile Stare, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
Art and Working Life: More Than a Document, Australian Council of Trade Unions, Melbourne
Jewish Life in Australia Today, Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne
 1987 *Living in the 70s*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra
 1986 *Events*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 1985 *And So...We Joined the Union*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne
 1983 *A Critical Distance*, Artspace, Sydney
 1982 *Women's Work*, Monash Gallery, Melbourne, Developed Image, Adelaide
 1980 *Four French and Australian Photographers From the Collection*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

COLLECTIONS include

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Tasmanian Museum and Gallery, Hobart; Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne; National Library of Australia Picture Collection, Canberra; State Library of Victoria Picture Collection, Melbourne; State Library of NSW Picture Collection, Sydney; Tweed River Regional Art Gallery, QLD; Griffith Artworks, Griffith University, Queensland; Charles Sturt University, NSW; ACT Community Health Care, Belconnen; Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne; Albury Regional Art Centre, VIC; Trades Hall Council, Melbourne; Australian Council of Trade Unions, Melbourne; Performing Arts Museum, Melbourne; Artists for Peace Gallery, Moscow.

that was about to experience loss, the album becoming more heavily laden with memory. She knew this as she walked the garden of the place she had made her home. In *The day I left my garden* (2009) the flowers keep their material presence on the photographer's light box. They somehow defied representation, so they stay in this workshop place.

"Dried and pressed flowers become transparent. I thought of how I examine transparencies on a light box. Using a light box, an integral part of photographic history, strengthens the sense of presence and absence."

Elsewhere in the exhibition, the region's iconic Bogong moth flutters. On a soft sheer fabric commonplace, petals write 'dead to the world'. Ruth Maddison has taken the opportunity of this exhibition to push the boundaries of her photographic practice in content and in technique: sculpture, using fabric, etc. The digital darkroom has allowed her to extend her interest in camera-less photography as in *All along the way* (2009). The direct scans of flattened insects give an extraordinary clarity of detail in the resulting glowing prints.

The very movement of journeying has been captured in the video *Crossing the Monaro* (2009). This contemplative 'land map' linking Eden and Canberra across the Monaro reflects on her experience of slowly becoming familiar with an unknown landscape.

Merryn Gates
September 2009

All quotes, artist's statements 2008–9



Cover: *There is a time* 2009, Archival pigment print on 100% cotton rag, 1 of 9, 41 x 60.29 cm

Opposite: *Highway 23* 2009, Type C print from digital file, 76.5 x 112.5 cm

Above: *Thousands of years feasting on the Bogong moths* 2009 (detail)
Digital print on cotton/silk fabric, 1 of 4 approx. 119 x 55.4 cm

Below: *Dead to the world* 2009 Digital print on cotton/silk fabric, found fabric flowers sewn with cotton thread, approx. 130 x 371.4 cm

Back cover: *All along the way* 2009 Archival pigment print on fibre-based paper, 1 of 5, 40 x 40 cm





PhotoAccess was pleased to have the opportunity to assist artists from the region under the 2008 Regional Arts Fund (RAF). Ruth Maddison was one of a number of regional artists and organisations who contacted PhotoAccess seeking our support as an ACT Key Arts Organisation partner.

RAF and the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council supported Ruth's project, and PhotoAccess assisted her as an artist-in-residence.

Ruth Maddison's *There is a time* is the culmination of a project involving a great deal of time and creative energy. PhotoAccess is pleased to have helped in its development and delighted to present the work of this important artist to a Canberra audience in the Huw Davies Gallery at the Manuka Arts Centre.

David Chalker
Director, PhotoAccess

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Merryn Gates for curatorial collaboration, friendship and steady faith. Also to Robert Daly for the construction of three light-boxes, and for everything else.

Grateful acknowledgement and appreciation to PhotoAccess for assistance and support throughout the lengthy journey of this project. The project would not have been possible without the support of grants from the Australia Council and the Regional Arts Fund. This funding allowed for the involvement of Merryn Gates and for the production of this catalogue.

Fabric prints made by Anna Madeleine at the ANU Inkjet Research Facility. *Highway 23* Type C print made at Colour Factory, Melbourne. All other prints by Ruth Maddison.

Images © Ruth Maddison
Text © Merryn Gates

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at the Manuka Arts Centre

