

Shown at the Jenny Port Gallery 2009.
For enquiries please contact Jenny Port Gallery
1/ 7 Albert St
Richmond
PH: (03) 9429 6006
www.jennyportgallery.com.au

JILL ORR

Southern Cross ; to bear and behold and *Faith in a Faithless Land.*

“ There is never one moment when past dissolves completely, leaving a new landscape in its wake”

From Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas Point: An Australian History of Place* p 202

Mitre Lake sits at the base of Mitre Rock that is part of Mount Arapiles in Western Central Victoria. It is the tribal home to the few remaining Djurid Balug people of the Wotjobaluk Tribe. I acknowledge their ownership.

Mitre Lake is the site of the photo- performance:
*The Southern Cross: to bear and behold.*and *Faith in a Faithless Land.*

This landscape is both an ancient theatre within which the human drama unfolds and is in reality a harsh salt lake that is a bottomless deposit of oozy black clay covered by a salty crustaceous surface. It is sulphuric and luminous and has been mined for its salt in the past. Mitre Lake does resemble hundreds of dried up salt lakes that have been caused by drought and erosion however uniquely Mitre Lake is natural with the ability to dramatically and temporally record the traces of life that are captured on its surface. This surface is like a mirror reflecting both the ancient and recent past and mirroring the potential future. It is full of presence and implicit absence.

Mitre Lake was named by pioneering explorers for its resemblance to the bishop's mitre that is reflected in the shape of the nearby Mitre Rock.

This rock stands tall above the lake echoing the opposite structure in land formation.

The constellation of the Southern Cross was the navigational guide for the early ships arriving on these shores. Missionaries were amongst the passengers guided by emphatic and faithful missionary zeal. The Southern Cross has witnessed the rise and fall of evolutionary change effecting the shape and nature of the earths land mass and creatures within it.

The Australian land as with other lands must have been alien for the missionary whose constancy was the test of their own depth and strength of faith bearing the Cross of Christian colonisation.

Mitre Lake appears to be another desert whose iconic biblical burning bushes do not even grow so the measure of epiphany resides in footprints that are washed away in the occasional storm.

The Missionary trudges through the mud bearing the Cross of Salvation and carrying the *word* to whom ever will listen or is vulnerable to bribes of sugar, flour and redemption. The Indigenous population whose lands were forcibly taken were particularly vulnerable. The missionary's struggle is that of faith in an environment that renders this action as ridiculous or mad but never the less the footprints have been indelible.

The irony is that the faithful footsteps are cultural imprints that remain, as the church structures are presently appearing to dissolve. Prayer is as it was under the stars (even though these lights cannot be perceived well in urban environments because of light pollution)

Christian colonisation is felt everywhere for better or worse it is the backbone of Western civilization with the central nervous system acting and reacting with the market forces of global capitalism. Christian values have been evoked in recent political realms reviving the authorial values of human ethics as both secular and Christian. Values and belief systems run as simultaneous threads that share the same locale both together and different, inclusive and exclusive witnessed by the light of the stars which observe as we do the

dramatic environmental consequences of our forward march towards progress and economic growth.

The land is hot, so hot that your protection bursts into flames.

Umbrella Burns: This image I used in 1989 in *Walking on Planet Earth* (photographed by Virginia Fraser) and I have re-employed it again given that the early environmental warnings of the late '70's & 80's have largely been ignored and global warming has reached global and political urgency. Mitre Lake is symbolic of this crisis. The new image has a different resonance and yet the transformative quality of fire is the energy of positive action both of the heart, body, mind and desire acting within and not only on the environment. There is both apocalypse and renewal.

To bear and behold the renewal is the task ahead.

Image details:

Jill Orr ©

Southern Cross: to bear and behold

Photographer: Naomi Herzog for Jill Orr

Stills adaption: Jill Orr