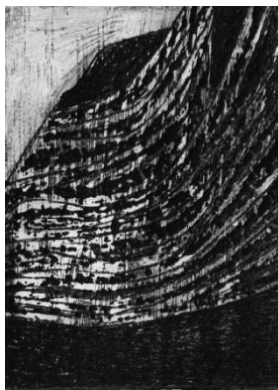


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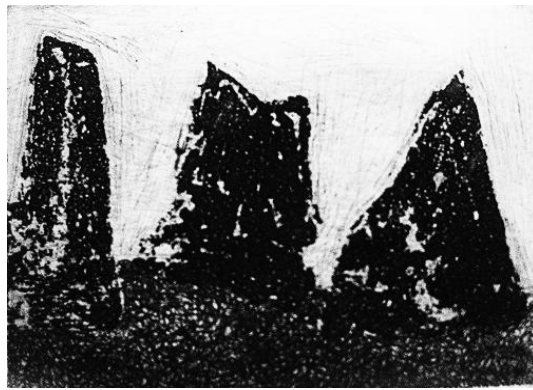
## Mother Earth, Father Sky the flow of time and Heraclitus's river called reality

In relation to many of the Australian landscape and coastal images the influence of the Aboriginal concept of the land is evident although in a subtle way. Speaking generally, in the Aboriginal view of the world the land is envisaged as 'mother' and is treated respectfully as such. Taking this spiritual observation on board I have inversely adopted the view that the sky above (including the night sky with its constellations) could be seen as 'father.' The union of 'mother' land and 'father' sky could be read as union between 'spirit' and the 'physical' leading to *life* and the union of life between both *mortality* (earthly decay) and *eternity* (cosmic sustainability); all things on earth die but life also continually regenerates and so it can also be 'eternalized' when one considers the possibility that the physical can be transformed to become spiritual: invisible afterlife as an 'afterthought' of visual reality; with this conceptual context 'in mind' many of the etchings do relate to such notions as 'cosmos' and 'time' (as can be viewed in their titles).

The notion of sky and earth metamorphosed as mother and father is a universal idea throughout world culture which I am conscious of and acknowledge when doing particular prints of '*terra australias*'.

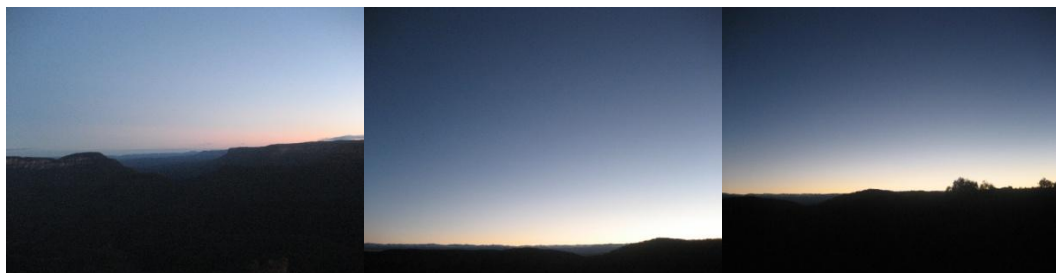


'The Flow of Time.'  
B&W. 10cm X 7cm. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate<sup>8</sup>

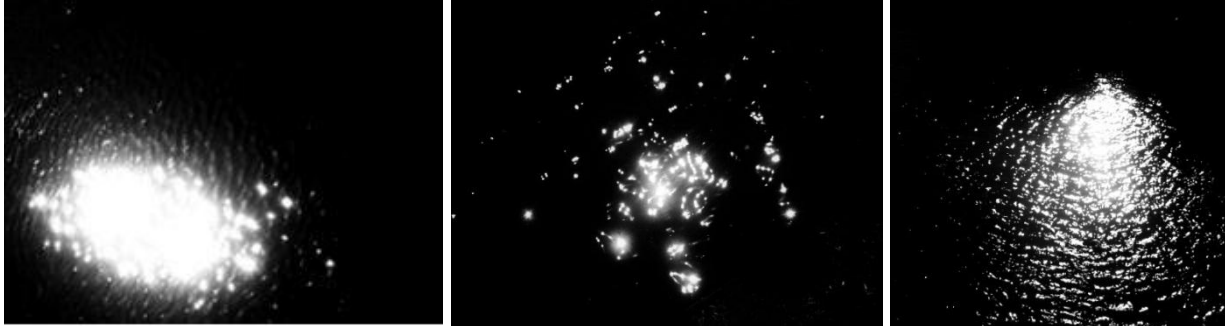


Dance of the Pinnacles.'  
B&W. 10cm X 7cm. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate<sup>9</sup>

The geological evolution of the Earth's surface is for us very slow and therefore difficult for us to conceptualize except when we witness a sudden spectacular natural event like a tsunami, volcanic eruption or earthquake; only then do we gain some idea as to the fluid swirling movements that are occurring within the geographical features of this planet. Its terrain is constantly shifting - often without us realizing - and so the topographical contours around us are gradually and ceaselessly being reshaped. Nothing is really as it seems; what appears stable is not necessarily so in much the same way - as we already know - that what seems physically solid is really an 'apparition' of billions of bustling particles undulating on a microscopic quantum level. Eventually it brings into question our perception of reality and of life itself; perhaps leading us to discern between what is real and what is metaphysical.



Blue Mountains  
sunset. Katoomba



Cooks River as cosmos with sunlight reflected as stars of Heaven's Paradise. One may also wish to consider the idea that stars and galaxies are the fireworks of the universe.

Our perception of reality is reflected in our art which in turn reinforces our accepted perception. Thus as we continue to represent nature in a certain way then that perception is considered to be true. What is subjective becomes accepted as objective. Thus artistic conventions and traditions 'cultivate' what is 'seen' as 'truth'.

One may assume that what goes on in my mind re: the conceptual labels that I hold to be valid, significant or important has a direct effect on my visual perception of the world. As I walk beside a river I can appreciate the elements for what they are: vegetation, water, grass, sun and so forth. I can rely on my own physical senses to have some sort of emotional response re: 'enjoying a walk by the river on a sunny day' or I may involve my intellect (or rather my imagination) to perceive my walk in a different way so, for example, I may place what I see in a mythological context e.g. I may mindfully make reference to the river as a waterway of an ancient underworld and so forth. I engage my mind to transform within me what I see with my eyes. I see the Sun and although I know it is a stellar gaseous furnace I may also choose to see it as an instrument of the Christian God to provide life to this world and to reflect a Divine Glory; a rather internal spiritual response in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century but in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century this may have been a more common societal vision of the Sun. I may see some validity in this notion and so choose to adopt it for my own personal enlightenment although I still also strongly accept the scientist's interpretation of what the Sun really is: a ball of flaming gas. Yet, a theological interpretation aids my mind to 'see' that there are different social, cultural and individual ways by which I can mentally view the world around me. Thus I may choose to see the Sun as the 'light of God' and also adopt the persona of the pilgrim Dante so as to then go on and view my surroundings as if I was on his excursion through the Divine Comedy. I may also agree with Heraclitus who said:

*'The sun is new everyday.'*

Also as I walk along the river and appreciate the warmth of the Sun on my body I can I can also consider Heraclitus's popularised remark which is:

*'You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you.'*

The river looks the same every day but every day the particular body of water of what it *is* is actually different. Thus the truth before me is of a waterway that is nominally a stable thing but I may also see it as a feature of the natural world that has an ever changing contour - as well as changing elements.

Geography teaches us that the river is in the process of change but in my lifetime the change will be so slight that I can live with the 'absolute idea' that the contours of the river will remain static. Nevertheless, each day is new and the light – or even the lack of it – on the river makes it eternally 'new.' The basic philosophical precept of Heraclitus that everything changes and nothing stays still helps me to understand the world around me especially when that change does not seem very obvious; this 'truth' seems to belie the basis of his Logos which deals with the basic ever transforming structure of the whole universe:

*'Everything flows, nothing stands still.'*

My acceptance of this remark affects the way I see, even though what I may see makes me realise that this 'flow' is invisible on a surface level. Yet, I also accept that what appears solid is actually on a microscopic level a buzzing, fluctuating mass of trillions of atoms which according to quantum theory may even be flowing into other micro-dimensions; in much the same way a human being experiences different moods, feelings and emotional states - which all affect the essential personality of that human being (from day to day we outwardly look the same – it takes many years for our physical appearance to be imperceptibly transformed - but inside we could become very different from moment to moment).

Nature displays to us on a daily basis a wide range of 'presentations' – showing itself to us as being calm and peaceful through to swirling and violent. Nature can 'reflect us' - in much the same way we see ourselves age over time – for we 'erode' gradually like nature. Nature can be a metaphor of us and through such a conscious identification of nature with ourselves we see another life enhancing value in choosing to view, study and portray it. (An artist as 'shaman' can perhaps culturally influence others in their 'way of seeing',<sup>10</sup> the world around them and over time, perhaps, interact in a different way to it – hopefully always positively). Nature can be one of the entry points into our own minds or even into our souls. Though we accept norms or evidence as truth we should be flexible enough to realise that truth can be 'malleable' as we ourselves and nature are also changeable. After all, the 'river of Heraclitus' tells us that - despite appearances - reality doesn't stay the same. We exist; nature exists but at different times we may exist differently.

What should also be considered is how the large color field paintings of Mark Rothko which it is said have a religious quality to them and whose harmonious surfaces have been compared to clouds. Clouds as part of the natural realm and which are produced by a natural cycle that takes into account what happens on the surface of the Earth take on a transcendental realm when it has to be considered how the God of the Old Testament never revealed himself directly to His people but rather disguised as a pillar of fire or hidden by a cloud. Clouds – despite being so far above us – have a relationship with our world through being formed by the water that has evaporated upwards from sources around us (re: rivers, lakes, seas) and thus like the God of the Old Testament also spoke directly to his wandering followers whose prayers and petitions also rose skywards. Mark Rothko's work indirectly and in a contemplative way intimates to a spiritual translucence in the fabric of nature and with that said this hidden immaterial aspect of nature is something which I also consider as one is led to comprehend deeper inner dimensions beyond those we immediately sight on the physical plane bounded around us.



When I go for a walk by Cooks River - which is close to where I live in inner south-west Sydney - I find it is interesting to see how the sunlight takes on a variety of hues at different times of the day; its strength or softness has a physical effect on the trees along the riverbank in the way they sometimes look very sharply defined and glisten with a golden hue while on other days the vegetation appears soft and mellow. I am also fascinated with how the water reflects on the tree trunks with the sunlight dancing about; the 'shades' of moving light on the trees is somewhat spiritual and each day the light is different; making one to consider to the nth degree how every moment of the eternity that abounds around us is essentially the same but also on a miniscule level is very different. Life is unique and the 'light of God' ceaselessly reflects upon such uniqueness. The likes of the American Transcendentalists also comes to mind who - according to Evelyn Toynton in her book about Jackson Pollock<sup>+</sup> - took on board the Romanticism of Wordsworth to perceive a 'Universal Spirit' in Nature. I can well understand the sentiment.

\* The Mark Rothko observations come from reading *An Art Of Our Own The Spiritual In Twentieth Century Art* by Roger Lipsey. (Shambhala. Boston & Shaftesbury. 1988). In relation to more general comments made in this section one could consider Thomas McEvilley's *Art & Discontent. Theory at the Millennium*. (DOCUMENTEXT. McPherson & Company. 1991). The reference to the noted art critic John Berger on the previous page is to his ground breaking TV series and accompanying book *Ways of Seeing*. <sup>+</sup> *JACKSON POLLOCK* by Evelyn Tpynton. Yale University Press. 2012.