
Introduction

In the following pages is a selection of the many Australian landscape and coastal images which I have produced in the last few years all the way up to and including 2011.¹ Many of the prints have come about from a natural interest in visiting the Australian bush.

In this opening missive I simply wish to say that I am still very much in the process of comprehending the natural elements of this ancient continent. Also I wish to acknowledge that I am depicting a topography that was previously occupied by the 'first Australians' for up to 60,000 years if not longer. Aboriginal artists have a far more mature and astute understanding of a landscape which I can only still dimly perceive; their vision is very clear while I still view it through a 'glass darkly'. Within Aboriginal society there is a strong, very respectful spiritual link to the land which is seen as 'mother' and this I recognise; correspondingly, these days, I also - more often than not - see a 'cosmological link' between land and sky and thus to complete the cyclic notion of our 'parent physical world' I conveniently discern this over arching boundless realm of night and day as 'father.'²

In my local environ I am aware that the waterway which runs through it is labelled as *Cooks River* which obviously reminds one of the English discoverer of the eastern coastline which eventually led to the colonial takeover of the land and near total destruction of Aboriginal society. The actual Aboriginal name is *Goolay'yari* and if I take this name into account while walking along the river I also hope to take into account the way the original people who lived by its banks related to it.

Many years ago in 1992 in Managua while travelling through Latin America I had with me a recent copy of the Melbourne based literary magazine *MEANJIN* which focused on Aboriginal issues.³ After my eyes had wandered over the typography of countries such as Guatemala, Colombia and Cuba I was intrigued to read - after putting away my map - an article about the renaming of the Grampian mountains in Victoria to their previous Aboriginal title which is *Gariwerd*. I read of an Anglo protest and learnt of the importance of geography to a people's identity, shaped by the names given by one race and taken away by another. How lands can be conquered by the stroke of a cartographer's pen. However, blood had also been spilt, tribal blood in Australia and tribal blood in the Americas. I have to always remind myself of this historical reality as I walk along the concrete path that stretches along my local waterway. I have done a series of etchings of *Goolay'yari* but I must note that I see the river as a European, but hopefully I like to think I do try to take into account of a many thousands of years 'indigenous echo' that one can sometimes perceive while by it.⁴

In regards to the river etchings many are of a small squarish size (10cm X 7cm) and involved experimenting with aquatint and sugar lift. I think it is fair to say there is the influence of the renowned Australian painter/printmaker Fred Williams in these smaller pieces. Fred Williams is one of my favourite printmakers. There is an increasing abstraction in my landscape work (which I first became conscious of while doing the Coledale series). With this increasing abstraction and move towards the simple over the complex I should also acknowledge the influence of Aboriginal art on these recent prints; especially the flat forms of Rover Thomas that especially have also had some bearing on various coastal etchings; (an influence that lingers). My most recent etchings mainly look at Wolli Creek, Mougamarra Reserve along the Hawkesbury River in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Botany Bay National Park, the coast in the Royal National Park neighbouring Sydney as well as revisiting Gordons Bay while 'opposite' to this coastal subject matter are six etchings generally titled *Alpha and Omega* based on aerial shots that I took with my Super 8 while flying in a Cessna to see friends in Amata in Central Australia. There's also a couple of other 'universe' works based on the trees in Sydney's Royal Botanical Gardens and another tree in Blackwattle Bay at Glebe.

Overall, I wish to state that what more or less interests me is to perceive the extraordinary (or metaphysical) in the everyday and 'ordinary'. My work also reveals a fascination in such basic design

elements as the contrast between light and shade. The interplay between darkness and light continually intrigues me and thus nearly all of my work is monochrome. A 'meditative mood' is often accomplished which I hope easily allows the spectator to mindfully 'move into' the work with his or her imagination. It is only in recent years that the Australian bush has become a major theme and I see this interest as reinforcing a firming belief of how culture to me – on one level - is an artistic expression of a human desire to connect to eternity. (After all, our comprehension of Nature has always had a 'spiritual leaning' – even long before our attempts to 'subordinate' and 'domesticate Nature for our utilitarian use).

Through my landscape and coastal etchings I hope the spectator can 'connect' to this underlying universal human preoccupation with 'the eternal'; which, for me, has become a core interest as I gradually obtain some dim understanding – as a 'European' – of the Aboriginal concept of this ancient continent. In relation to many of these Australian landscape and coastal images I wish to reinforce that the influence of the first people's perception of the land is often very subtle in my work being more on a conceptual rather than on a straight out obvious visual level. (Although – formalistically speaking - in some of my work which shows a use of 'simple patterning' I reiterate my acknowledgement of the influence of an Aboriginal artist such as Rover Thomas amongst others).

In an appendix I provide some 'source' sketches and photographs which more or less relate to the main body of prints. There are also in the appendix a few prints which I have earlier produced going back to the early 80s. As it is I have not kept a record of the exact times when I made them but my first accomplished etching is *White Ox* followed up by the two Minnamorra Rainforest works; the ones set in Jervis Bay⁵ and on the New South Wales north coast respectively as well as *Looking into the Future*. You may wish to consider the stylistic differences from these earlier works to the later etchings presented in the main gallery. With that said the main gallery bemusingly opens up with two Wolli Creek etchings which are also early works but – and the second work in particular – brought into play for the really first time in my *conscious* mind the connection between land and the spiritual/cosmos; the second work, after all, it is entitled '*Supernova*' so it is rather appropriate that thematically it - as well as *Dance of the Dead* - be in the main gallery.

To look at more images feel free to go to my website <http://nicholasnicolaetchings.synthasite.com/> or by typing into a search engine *nicholas nicola etchings* which is a lot simpler. You will also see on the website which has quite a few pages that the subject matter is quite varied including topics such as producing quirky humorous images based on suburbia, mythological works as well as many prints based on the international travel which I did from the mid-80s to the early 2000s. As mentioned, it is only in recent times that I have mainly focused on the Australian terrain. In cyberspace I also have more detailed information on the etching process.⁶

I hope the work you are about to view proves to be an enriching experience. Thank you for taking the time to consider my art. Enjoy. Best regards,

Nicholas Nicola. February. 2012.



Three stills from a Super 8 movie camera taken while flying over Central Australia in a Cessna from Alice Springs in the Northern Territory to Amata. This Aboriginal community is to the south of Alice Springs just over on the South Australian side of the state border.⁷

Australian Landscape & Coastal Etchings Main Gallery



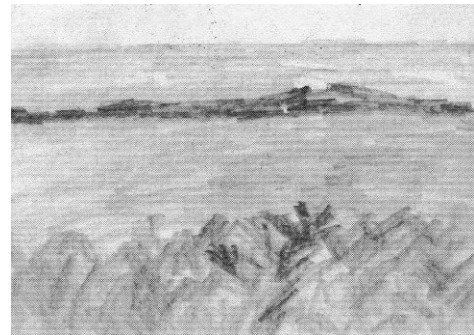
Supernova. *Wolli Creek. Sydney*
 Dance of the Dead. *Wolli Creek. Sydney*
 Rockface. *Coledale. South Coast*
 Misty Bluffs. *Coledale. South Coast*
 Coledale. *Early Morning. Coledale. South Coast*
 fallen angels. *wolli creek*
 Fallen Angel. *Shelley Beach. Cronulla*
 Fallen Angel *Shelley Beach. Cronulla*
 Well of Life *Shelley Beach. Cronulla*
 Angel Rock. *Gordons Bay. Sydney*
 Rings of Time. *Gordons Bay. Sydney*
 Emergence of Life. *Gordons Bay. Sydn*
 Cosmos (Corpuscles of the Universe). *Gordons Bay. Sydney*
 Heart of the Universe. *Gordons Bay. Sydney*
 That Tree, the Universe. *Royal Botanical Gardens. Sydney*
 Conception of the Universe with Cosmic Egg. *Central Australia*
 Old Mangrove. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 The Birth of Zeus. *Nielson Park. Sydney.*
 Black Galaxy. *Royal National Park.*
 Our Canopy, the Universe. *Blackwattle Bay. Glebe. Sydney.*
 Falling Angel. *Bobbin Head National Park.*
 Curramoors. (Mt. Purgatory). *Royal National Park.*
 Evolution of the Universe. *Bundeena. Royal National Park.*
 Three Fates. *Little Marley. Royal National Park.*
 Conception of Life. *Wombarra. South Coast.*
 Forming Galaxies. *Bulli Beach. South Coast.*
 Cosmic Currents. *Botany Bay National Park. Sydney.*
 Mangrove Souls (Awaiting to go to Paradise). *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Archangel. *Big Marley. Royal National Park.*
 Archangel. *Wolli Creek. Sydney.*
 The Last Judgement. *Apocalypse. Wolli Creek. Sydney.*
 Fallen Angels. *Wolli Creek. Sydney.*
 Zeus's Cave. (The Eye of God). *Wolli Creek. Sydney.*
 Mangrove Rhythm. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Cycle of Time. *Gordons Bay. Sydney.*
 Nebula. *Gordons Bay. Sydney.*
 Milky Way. *Cooks River.*
 It Will Pass. *Cooks River. Sydney.*



cooks river



hades tree
cooks river



Wedding Cake Island. Clovelly



Foundation of Time. Minnamorra Forest. Jamberoo. B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.



Ferns. Minnamorra Forest. Jamberoo.



cooks river

Wisdom & Youth. (Pillars of Time). *Minnamorra Rainforest. Jamberoo.*
 Misguided Angel. *Mougamarra Reserve. Ku-ring-ai Chase National Park.*
 Tree Rhythm Flow. *Mougamarra Reserve. Ku-ring-ai Chase National Park.*
 Emergence of Life. *Gordons Bay. Sydney.*
 Emergence of Life. *Gordons Bay. Sydney.* Ravelling of Life. *Gordons Bay. Sydney.*
 Nebula. *Gordons Bay. Sydney.*
 Burnt Soul. *Mougamarra Reserve. Ku-ring-ai Chase National Park.*
 Burnt Soul. *Mougamarra Reserve. Ku-ring-ai Chase National Park.*
 Burnt Soul. *Mougamarra Reserve. Ku-ring-ai Chase National Park.*
 Tree Womb. *Mougamarra Reserve. Ku-ring-ai Chase National Park.*
 Tree Womb. *Mougamarra Reserve. Ku-ring-ai Chase National Park.*
 Tree Womb. *Mougamarra Reserve. Ku-ring-ai Chase National Park.*
 Pillar of Time. *Minnamorra Rainforest. Jamberoo.*
 Hydra. *Botany Bay National Park. Sydney.*
 Trojan Wall. *Hawkesbury River. Ku-ring-ai Chase National Park.*
 Alpha/Omega. *Central Australia. (two etchings).*
 Alpha/Omega. *Central Australia. (two etchings).*
 Alpha/Omega. *Central Australia. (two etchings).*
 Reeds. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Reeds. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Riverbend. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Fallen Angel. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Under the Shade. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 The River is Calm. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 ...the sky is blue... *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Dance of the Dead. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Mangrove. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Reeds. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Reeds. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Rhythm of Life. *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Hades. (Twisted Tree). *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Purgatory. (Row of Trees). *Cooks River. Sydney.*
 Trees with Suffering Souls. *Cooks River. Sydney.*



Reeds. Cooks River.



Jervis Bay. South Coast.



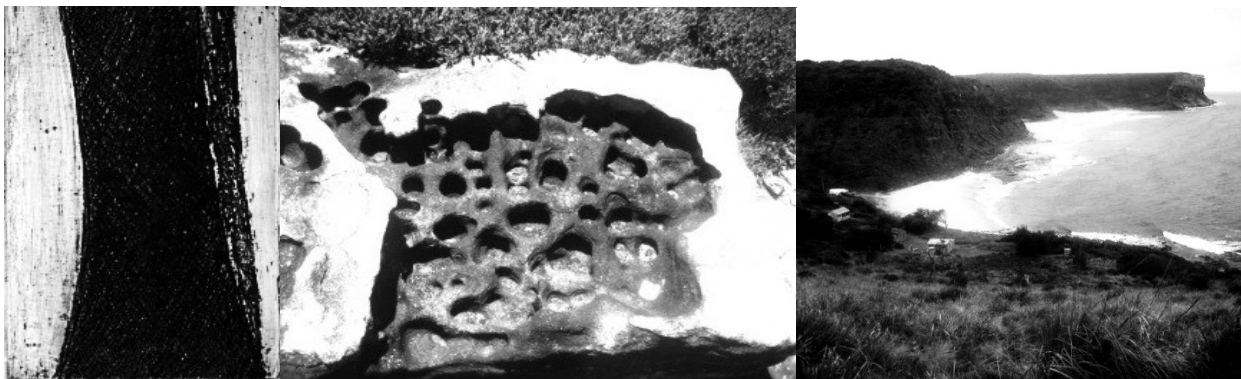
Wedding Cake Island.



Prometheus Rocks. Royal National Park.



Pinnacles. Western Australia.

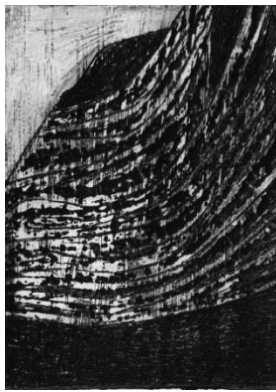


'Eternity.' Minnamorra Rainforest. Jamberoo. 4" X 2". aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate. Bundeena rock erosion. Gairie beach.

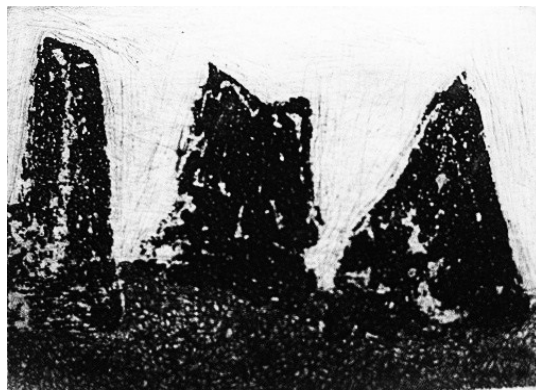
Mother Earth, Father Sky the flow of time and Heraclitus's river called reality

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*'.

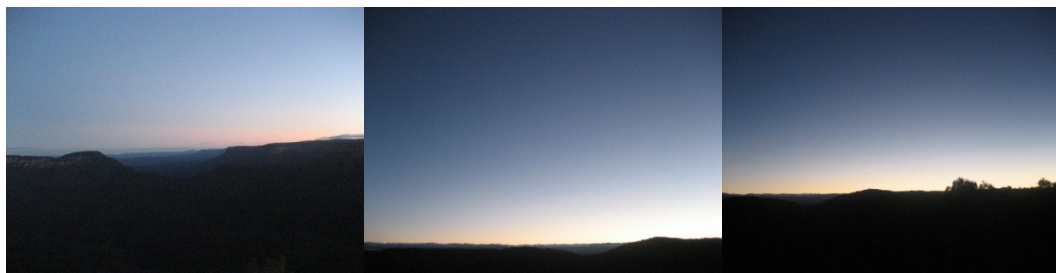


'The Flow of Time.'
B&W. 10cm X 7cm. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate⁸

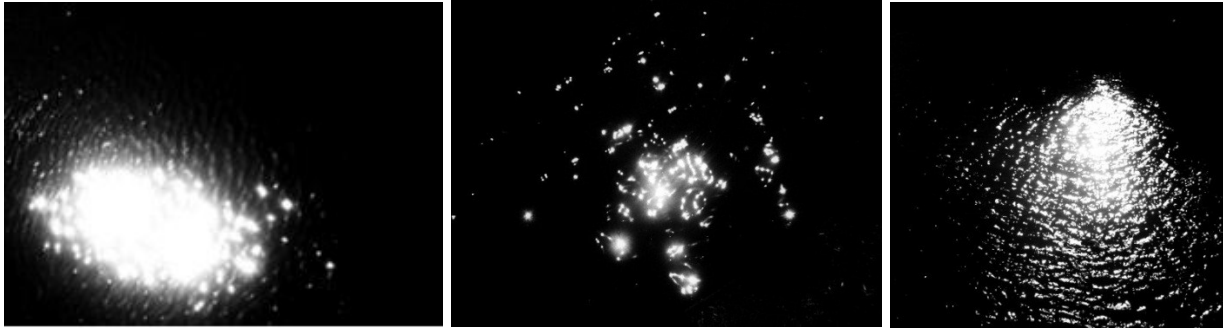


Dance of the Pinnacles.'
B&W. 10cm X 7cm. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate⁹

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 21st Century but in the 14th 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',¹⁰ 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.

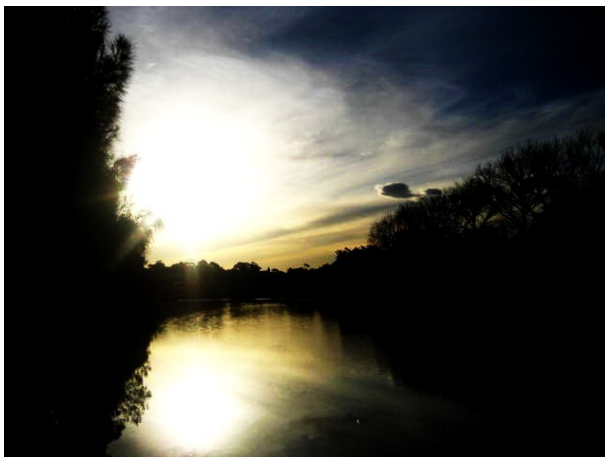
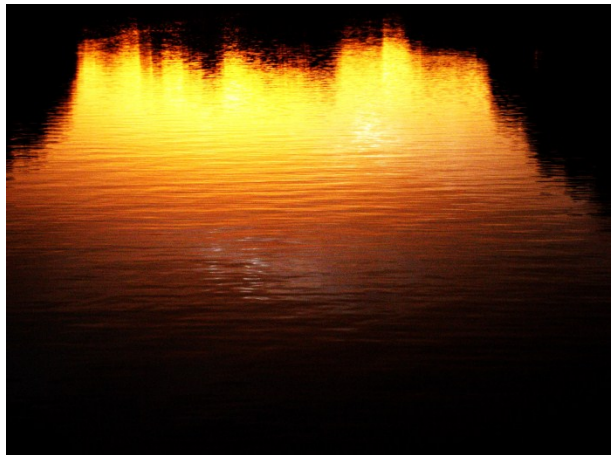
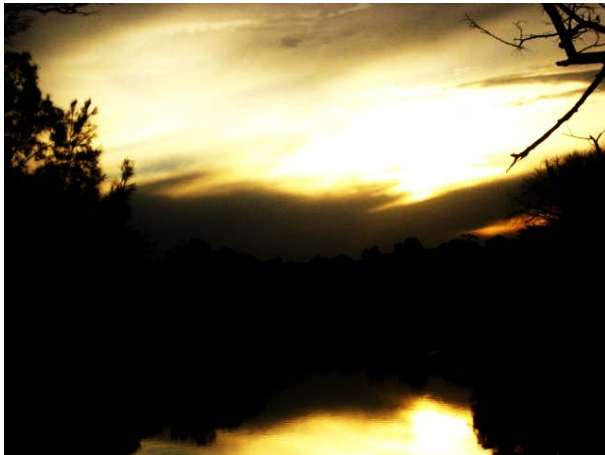
What should also be considered is how the large color field paintings of Mark Rothko which it is said have a religious quality to them and whose harmonious surfaces have been compared to clouds. Clouds as part of the natural realm and which are produced by a natural cycle that takes into account what 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 Transcendalists also comes to mind who - according to Evelyn Toynton in her book about Jackson Pollock[†] - 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*. (DOCUMENTTEXT. 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*. [†] *JACKSON POLLOCK* by Evelyn Tpynton. Yale University Press. 2012.

cooks river as the five rivers of the ancient greek underworld



Top left. **Acheron:** in Ancient Greek mythology this 'river of woe' flowed through Hades. Shades would be ferried across these waters by Charon.

Top right. **Cocytus:** in Ancient Greek mythology, Hades' 'river of lamentation', along whose banks the unburied would wander.

Middle left. **Lethe:** in Ancient Greek mythology this was the river by which one could drink of its pure waters to forget all sadness.

Middle right. **Phlegethon:** in Ancient Greek mythology this is the river of fire which burns but does not consume.

Bottom. **Styx:** in Ancient Greek mythology this river flowed in between the world of the living and the Underworld.

humanity & nature: some general comments from the renaissance to the present

Although humanity has always shown a ruthless willingness to control and exploit Nature one could put forward the proposition that for thousands of years there was a sense that Nature always ultimately had the 'upper hand'; especially in theocratic agricultural societies in which the gods - or God in the case of Medieval Christian Europe - would express blessings or judgements through Nature e.g. drought breaking rain as a thankful sign of divine appeasement; a devastating earthquake as a violent manifestation of divine displeasure. Nature had to be begrudgingly respected, for it recognized Nature provided all sustenance for human life as one worked daily with the very soil to produce food and acquired water from a well or river. However - to restrict my remarks to Europe - in the High Middle Ages, with an ever increasing population, there was an increased need to clear land for mass agricultural production, further urban settlement (which one can imagine led to an escalating 'political rezoning' between the endlessly competing and conflicting tribal 'powers-that-be'.

One could also argue a theocratic shift occurred whereby the age-old notion of 'plenitude' as a sign of God's favour was further accentuated by a belief that God would bless those who 'redesigned' His Creation to gain maximum benefit from it. Humanity would subordinate Nature in 'God's name' rather than wait for Nature to 'reveal' God's will to humanity.

The Church as all powerful as all seeing is reflected within the chasm of each Medieval cathedral which encompasses those inside it from all sides just as nature can also surround an individual; we are *within* nature, not apart from it and nature even enters into human consciousness just as the natural light enters into the vast space of a medieval religious interior through its large stained glass windows: the lingering visible 'light of God' eventually shining into the mind of every pilgrim. God and nature as one. Planted in the village and often beside the castle - the bastion of political power - a medieval cathedral rises 'naturally' up from the ground and with its many spires and buttresses organically appears as a 'holy mount'; to buttress a contradictory belief that humanity has a respectful, harmonious relationship with God's Creation - while at the same time defacing it for more earthly ends.

Incidentally, the pilgrim realises he or she lives within a spiritual maze which is this natural world and so must rely on the Church's guidance to lead him or her to salvation; as so famously typified by the labyrinth pattern on the floor of Chartres Cathedral. The medieval mind was terrified at being caught in the 'wheel of fate' (symbolized on the outside of the church) while on the quest to be enveloped within the bosom of the 'eternal rose' (inside the church).

The Renaissance introduced the visual ploy known as perspective: which led the human eye from an exterior position to a single point in a painted panorama that mainly involved an architectural space - such as a plaza or building - so as to fully utilize this new method of creating three dimensional space. As a consequence there developed a sense of 'separateness' between viewer as an 'outside observer' of the subject matter depicted which often included landscapes as 'background fill-ins' to many secular portraits - as humanity itself became the focus of Renaissance thinking rather than the environment in which humanity dwelled. (Official art often serves a cultural propaganda role and the Renaissance-commissioned-portrait certainly helped to reinforce the wealthy, noble status of the merchant class sitter and thus in a subtle way ultimately undermine religious authority; rather ironic considering how masterful the Church has always used culture to reinforce its eminent social position; also with the historical hindsight of several hundred years the incorporation of classical architecture in Renaissance religious scenes such as the birth of Christ or of the Crucifixion could now be perceived as a sort of 'ideological Trojan Horse' displacing Church authority).

As to Church design the square and circle became predominant features as a Classical approach became prevalent. One could argue that Nature was kept *outside* as the pilgrim now found one's self walking into a Neo-Platonic perspectival 'heavenly space' based on mental abstract 'perfect forms' mathematically devised

from the human intellect rather than being directly inspired from the Creation. With the rebirth of many of the tenets of Europe's classical past Humanist scholars would proclaim that humanity itself was the 'central keystone' in the 'architecture' of the whole Creation. Consider Leonardo da Vinci's famed *Vitruvian Man* which took on board the Ancient Greek ideal of 'man as the measure of all things' – everything in nature including the cosmos itself scaled to the proportions of a human being. Renaissance humanity at the foreground of the Creation with Nature at the very best – as many Renaissance portraits imply - marginalised to the background. Adam is no longer a gardener in the service of God but 'landed gentry' mastering a domesticated Eden as if equal to God. (Gainsborough's much later *Mr and Mrs Andrews* immediately springs to mind; it is ironic this painting is considered such an iconic painting of 'the property class' when one notes Gainsborough's preference for an unfettered landscape painting over portraiture).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century Cezanne would 'restore' nature as a conduit through which 'truth' and 'reality' could be worthily revealed by an artistic reductionism which would display oranges, buildings, mountains and human beings as 'structures' internally based on spheres, cubes, pyramids, cylinders etcetera: nature 'verified' by human geometry).

Humanism was certainly a positive force for social change freeing people from an enslaving, persecuting religious dogma (to actually encourage true religious freedom); yet with the industrialisation and secularisation of Europe a total disconnect from Nature was achieved: humanity revelled in its over-arching ability to fully exploit the whole Earth. John Ruskin in the nineteenth century – looking back to a pre-Renaissance past and who inspired the Pre-Raphaelites - urged that humanity culturally reconnect with Nature but modernism's belief in 'human progress' has remained too strong. Yet the divorce between nature and humanity which occurred when we placed ourselves in the center of the Universe needs to be reconciled. Today Nature ominously shows her ultimate relevance through climate change. Humanism is to be credited for creating a liberating intellectual environment that aided in bringing about scientific, technological, architectural, medical, educational, social and democratic advancements which – despite an ongoing barbarism that ceaselessly inflicts humanity – have vastly improved the quality of life for the majority of individuals living in the West.

However, it can also be stated that by the end of the twentieth century humanity is being forced to seriously reconsider its fraught relationship with Nature as the planet signals that humanity's Herculean exploitation of it has to be abruptly scaled down due to the real threat of global warming. The carbon economy that has generated much of the wealth enjoyed in the West – which has been able to pay for humanity's advances – has come at the expense not only of many non-Western populations placed into colonial servitude by many a Great Power but also at the cost of the natural environment in which a vast portion of the Earth has been quarried, de-forested and over-urbanised. The planet is simply desiring that human achievement and ecological sustainability be equally balanced. Despite being scientifically informed by Galileo, Copernicus, Newton, Darwin, Einstein and many others that the human race is not actually at the centre of the universe – but on the mere periphery of a galaxy amongst billions of others - and that it evolved on this Earth as a process of Nature and perhaps as a random accident of it – the modernist human intellect still needs to be budged from a mindset that it can no longer overlord the Earth as if the 'good times' will never end: history shows us how very often utopian aspirations have led to many hells. Yet this time the so called human paradise that is modern civilization will literally erode away at the onset of an ecological 'dark age' that may last for many generations. We will only have ourselves to blame.

In regards to the Australian context we should be very grateful to the Aboriginal Land Rights movement which has instilled into the national consciousness that lands other than those listed as national parks should also be left alone. In an age of ravaging economic rationalism the original custodians of this continent lead us to pause and think about something as 'ephemeral' as the vital ecological need to uphold the ongoing spiritual link between nature and humanity.

The national park conservation movement started in the U.S. in the nineteenth century and was fermented culturally by artists as well as by writers like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson was a Transcendentalist - being inspired by German Romanticism, which in a repost to the rationalism of the Enlightenment encouraged a mystical reverence of Nature (what also comes to my mind from earlier art periods is the enigmatic landscape *The Tempest* by the High Renaissance Venetian artist Giorgione and the evocative pastoral works of the French landscape painter Claude Lorraine. One also thinks of Turner's swirling skies such as in *Storm at Sea*'. In 1816 in *The Examiner* William Hazlitt wrote of Turner's work: "They are pictures of the elements of air, earth and water. The artist delights to go back to the first chaos of the world." Reuben Wheeler remarks in his book *Man, Nature and Art* that Turner's *'Snow Storm - Steamboat off a Harbour's Mouth'* that he captures some of the 'cosmic energy' of nature so as... '...to experience something of the power and energy of the cosmos itself.' It may be of interest to know that the volcanic explosion in 1815 on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa - which killed 12,000 people and led to the starvation of another 44,000 people who died in the ensuing famine - inspired Turner's formless nirvana worlds; for the atmospheric conditions in the northern hemisphere were very much changed; it said that in 1816 there was no summer; it impresses me how in Turner's orange-yellow skies both time and space have seemed to dissolve. As for the United States - which had the world's first national park at Yellowstone - there is Ansel Adams the American naturalist photographer who inspired his compatriots to appreciate the awesome beauty of their country through his magnificent work. In Australia - which had the world's second national park - Royal National Park neighbouring Sydney - the photographic images of the Tasmanian wilderness by Olegas Truchanas have also played a valuable conservation role in inspiring environmental activism. Bob Brown leader of the Greens certainly holds him in high esteem). It was certainly a progressive idea - well ahead of its time - that natural wildernesses deserved to be secured in their pristine condition and not be valued for purely utilitarian and economic reasons.

Labelling land as a national park as well as agitating that regions like Kakadu and the Franklin River be put on the World Heritage List do valuably contribute to saving such wildernesses; the paradox being that in regards to Australia all 'Crown Land' outside the protected borders still faces the danger of being seen as 'unworthy' of salvation due to it not being a part of the 'elect' - to use a theological expression. In regards to Australia the Aboriginal Land Movement has - in essence - also shown how most of this continent's land mass has to be perceived beyond its mere resource value. After all, one has to be reminded of the appalling fact of how up to ninety per cent of rainforest has already been cut down since the establishment of the First Settlement in 1788. It is pitifully ironic that mining multinationals will have large canvases of the Aboriginal dreamtime decorating their boardrooms while at the same time digging up the very landscape reverentially portrayed in these indigenous paintings. Although Aboriginals have also used sacred lands appropriated back to them for an economic return - the pros and cons of which can be argued *ad infinitum* - it has also given back to them in the 'white fella's way' the chance for a self-sustained self-determination.

Aboriginal contemporary art with its conceptual appreciation mainly on the 'mythical quality' of the land is a mature aspect that should be taken up by non-indigenous Australians. It is in this overall socio-historical context in which I 'position' my own prints which dwell on the natural realm. Thus my conscious decision to take into account how Aboriginal artists have portrayed the Australian landscape. I wish to qualify this remark by sincerely stating *not to steal* from them - in the manner that the Chiapas Indians of southern Mexico feared that their very souls would be stolen when photographed - but to hopefully *learn* in the manner of recognising that a forty thousand year old 'cultural stamp' on this continent must not be conveniently ignored by those who are only here in this land due to its relatively recent alien conquest.

In regards to a broader artistic context I am intrigued to discover while doing some rudimentary research for this rather generalised commentary to find myself identifying in the Western tradition with aspects of both the Pre-Raphaelites and the Romantics as well as to the 'cosmic Turner'; with that said I am entranced by Ian Fairweather's painterly natural rhythms influenced by Chinese calligraphy which in turn fascinates me; I am also very much attracted to the depiction of nature by such twentieth century greats as Georgia O'Keefe, and Fred Williams as well as to a rhythmic abstracted /ethnographic 'universal spirituality' in Kandinsky.

Jackson Pollock's abstractions identifying a 'universal rhythm' also intrigue me. One should also express appreciation to the artistic legacy of the Heidelberg School - a group of Australian Impressionists who in the nineteenth century took the audacious step to depict the Australian environment true to its own unique character – capturing for instance the bright Australian light - rather than rendering it in the formalist painterly tradition of the European northern hemisphere.

All in all it should be lastly stated that in the inevitable ongoing process of humanity constantly redefining its relationship with nature – not only as envisaged on earth but also in regards to the whole universe - our universal 'cultural dialogue' can play a vital role.



Three Fates.
Little Marley
Beach. Royal
National Park.



Eroding coastal
rock shelf. Jervis
Bay. NSW South
Coast.

References: *Man, Nature & Art* by Reuben Wheeler. Pergamon Press. 1968; *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger Penguin Press. 1972. *This Is Civilization* Channel 4 four part documentary series by Michael Collings. John Ruskin – third episode titled Feelings.2009. *The Conversation Movement in America led to the Creation of National Parks* by Robert McNamara.* *Super, natural Christians: how we should love Nature* by Sallie McFague.* *Dark ages and dark areas: global deforestation in the deep past* by Michael Williams*. *These three articles can be discovered on the world wide web by typing their respective titles into an internet search engine. *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through to the Middle Ages*. Penelope Reed Doob. Cornell University Press. 1992. In regards to Chinese calligraphy which has also influenced me: *Empty & Full. The Language of Chinese Painting*. Francois Cheng. Shambala Press. Boston.London.1994.(It is interesting Pollock was partly influenced by Navajo art & I wonder – only on a purely formalist level mind you - if these days Western viewers ever make a subconscious two way association between Pollock's work & Aboriginal art?).