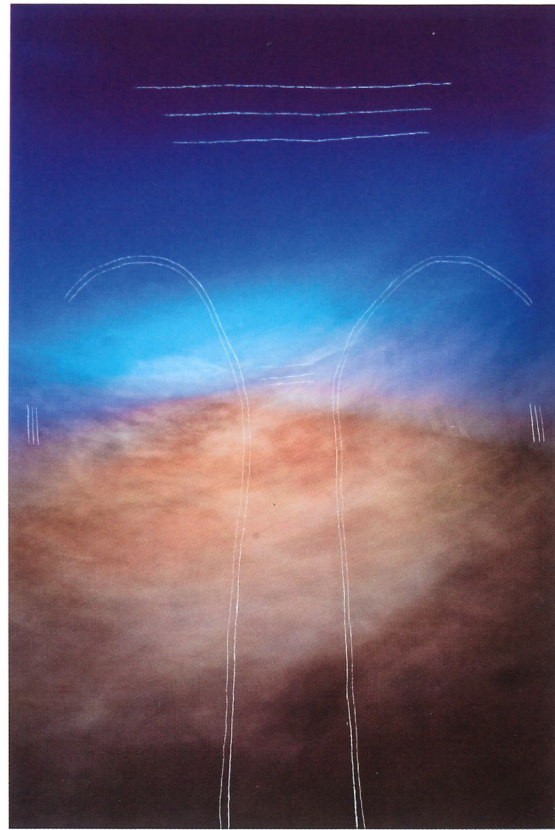


On the map

Surface, depth and grappling with 'country' are recurrent themes in a new survey show from Western Australia. By **Perdita Phillips**.

— Michael Jalaru Torres, *Minyirr*, 2017, sgraffito on Giclée print, unique state, 60.9 x 40.6 cm. Reproduced with permission of the artist. Photography: Michael Jalaru Torres



It is unsurprising the portrayal of places and landscapes is a popular genre in Western Australian artwork, given the role of landscape in Australian art history as a way of exploring identity, estrangement and colonisation. Landscape art, though, has attracted its fair share of criticism in modernism and postmodernism, as much for what it excludes as includes. According to art scholar Edmund Capon, Australian art has been 'too strongly defined by place', but is there unfinished business here? I have speculated elsewhere on the effect of the unique geological history and ecology of the southwest of Western Australia on recent art² and this might account for the continued interest in botanical representations in the new survey exhibition *On the Map*.

26S 121E | On the Map features more than thirty artists who are Print Council of Australia or Printmakers Association of Western Australia members; despite the geographical title, curator Laura A. Taylor chose not to impose a constricting curatorial theme, other than to include artists currently working in or identifying with WA. With a few notable exceptions it represents a comprehensive survey of established, emerging and student, city and country artists practising in a broad range of media and processes. The result is a range of works that represent local and global concerns, a mix which allows investigation of the tensions of

contemporary printmaking practice set against the terrain of local patterns of place.

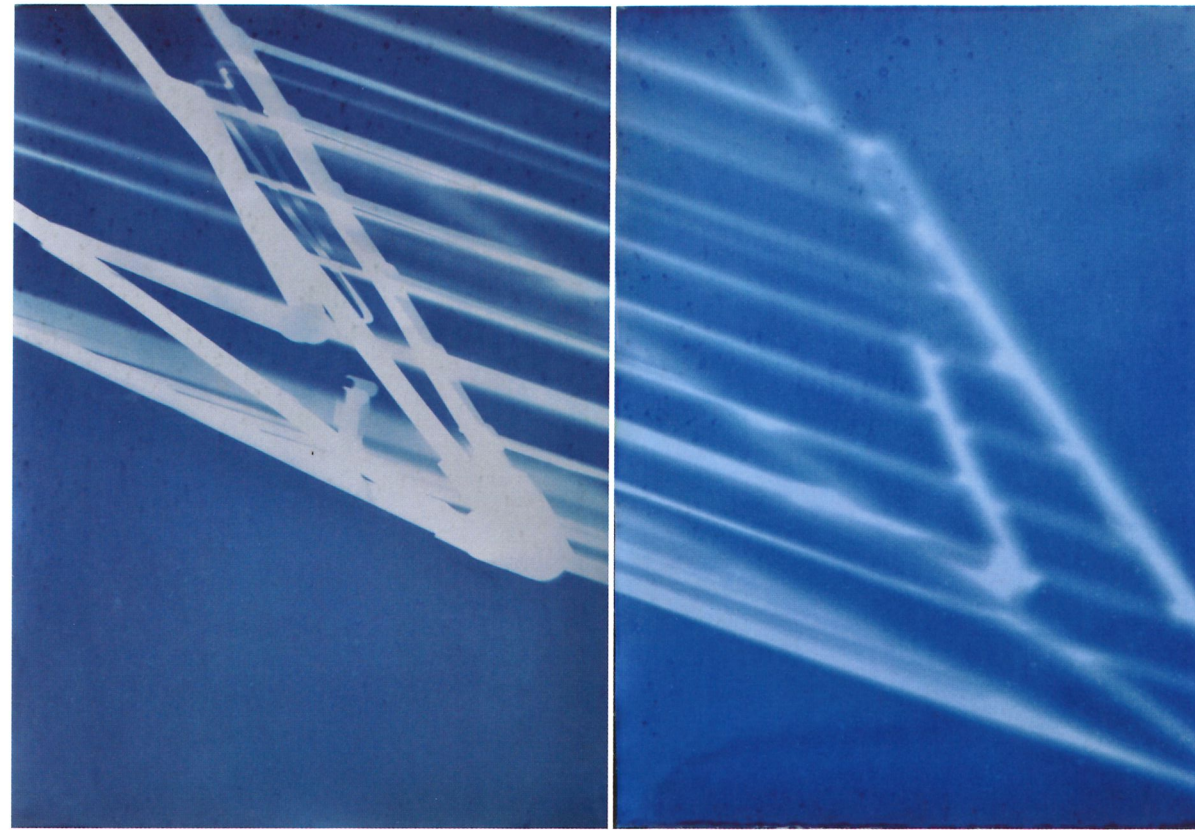
The exhibition includes the work of Helen Clarke, whose oeuvre includes representations of Australian fauna and flora. Her linoprint, *Burringurrah, Gascoyne* (2017) takes on the larger landscape at Mount Augustus; her interest in shifting between scales of the micro and macro is captured here in the complexity of the patterns of bush and outcrop. The rolling rhythms of the slopes and strong colours used make the work glow with active agency—capturing the way that landscapes can 'push back' on humans. Many layers of colours are involved. Clarke writes, 'My image of Burringurrah feels more like a sculpture to me, I can almost see each of the boulders that make up the shape'³.

In contrast, Shelley Cowper's work is less representational and more about conveying multiple impressions of place. She tackles the Hillarys Boatyard, with all its industrial waste and grit in *The Boatyard* (2017). Ladders, ropes and rusted objects form the subject matter against a ground covered in 'abstract trails of faded orange and blue anti-foul paint...'. In her process, 'spatial form is reduced to an outline or a shape...'⁴, as a fabric of overlapping and layered surfaces is assembled. Watercolour comes first, then etching and relief plates, combined with more prints from metal fragments

from the site. The result is both flat and simplified and full of depth — as if one is falling through the 'ground' of watercolour into the sea itself.

Curtin University PhD students, Melanie McKee and Monika Lukowska recently combined their interest in home and displacement in the exhibition *Terminus* (Paper Mountain, 2016)⁵. The work of McKee and Lukowska is about movement and emplacement, and the processes of materially knowing a place. In *Warszawska* (2017) Lukowska has reproduced the streets of her hometown—Katowice, Poland—in a sombre and pale black and white lithograph. She describes how the buildings of her childhood were covered with a skin of coal soot. In the print, a building of a certain age and modernist form is pushed back into the past by these industrial deposits. Lukowska writes, 'Through the medium of lithography, I hoped to evoke the tactility of buildings' façades and their unique porous textures'⁶.

The preoccupation with landscape in Australian art raises issues around surface and depth. In the work of Fred Williams, art historian Rex Butler notes, 'the surface of the canvas becomes equivalent to the surface of the landscape... there is nowhere properly to see the landscape: it is at once in our space, part of the world, and infinitely far away, unattainable. Scale collapses, both within the painting and in our relation to the painting'⁷. More widely,



— Monique Bosshard Curby, *May 31, 2017, 12.48-12.57pm* from the *In search of lost time series*, 2017, Cyanotype on Magnani, diptych, unique state 76 x 112 cm (76 x 56 cm each). Reproduced with permission of the artist. Photography: Monique Bosshard Curby

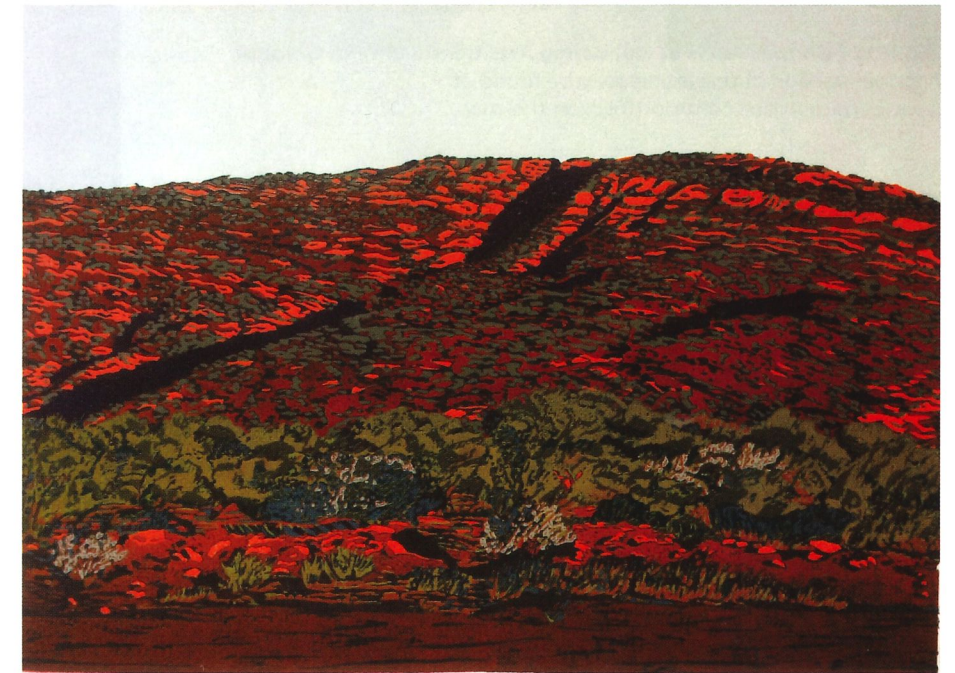
— **below**
Helen Clarke, *Burringurrah, Gascoyne*, 2017, reduction linocut print, 50 x 70 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

'The rolling rhythms of the slopes and strong colours used make the work glow with active agency.'

the impact of Western Desert painting was not only in altering the perception of landscapes from pictorial view to aerial surface, but in its combination of an autographic nature and abstractness that creates a space that is both *very far* and *very close*: the landscape becomes haptic⁸.

The haptic, repetitive processes and the autographic continue to be important to a host of WA printmakers. The works of Vanessa Wallace⁹, Camilla Loveridge, Guundie Kutchling (her repetitive handwritten 'o's in the hand coloured linoprint, *Balance*), Tessa Beale, Aliesha Malfrici and Eveline Ruys all deal with 'surfaces as zones of encounter'¹⁰.

A very recent excursion into the print can be seen in the work of photographer Michael Jalaru Torres, a Yawuru/Djugan man living in Broome. In a recent exhibition (*Scar*, in association with the Wanneroo Art Gallery and Paper Mountain), Jalaru Torres experimented with hand-marking and scratching the surface of his giclée prints. In *Minyirr* the background is stylistically blurred. It is a long exposure shot of a landscape—what Jalaru Torres calls 'capture through



motion' with tawny tones below and blue skies above. The surface is interrupted with a sgraffito pattern based on ritual body scarring. The body marks float above the landscape: the act of cutting the paper's surface is both a laceration and a stroking. 'We are the land,' he writes. 'We scar our skin to show where our

land is and that our culture is alive on the ground below our feet... Our culture is the warm colours of the land that you feel and not just see...'¹¹. The accompanying print *Hate* is more forceful, referring directly to ongoing oppression. It recalls an incident in the 1980s when his grandfather came across shooting targets in the bush

around Broome with the names of well-known local Aboriginal identities. Here a target has been recreated as an upside-down Aboriginal flag but the entire print surface has been scratched with scores of tally marks—'each notch is a value that has been placed on our misery'¹². The land is not passive or separate from humans; histories of trauma are engraved into the present, and this has political consequences.

So if modernism and its photographic, filmic and digital screen technologies are associated with depthlessness, how has the medium-anxiety of printmaking fared in post-post-modernism? Academic Giuliana Bruno argues that the screen of modernism *is* a material zone.¹³ She maintains that surfaces *can* contain depth. Contemporary artists are able to access its materiality, its volume, thickness and texture, tackling how it affects us, and what can be projected, designed and built at this zone of encounter. It would seem that the haptic still provides a way to critique within art, especially through repeated touch and slow processes.

Monique Bosshard Curby investigates the depth of surface in her cyanotype diptych, *May 31, 2017, 12.48-12.57pm*. It records the passing of time cast by the shadows of an everyday object. The sharp, white diagonals and industrial planes slant off, becoming more unfocussed to the lower right. Light is recorded as a blue surface, and the movement of time is made visible through the performance of depth. The markings generated depend ultimately upon time, latitude and longitude.

In one final work, Clyde McGill's Janus-like figure (*Great horns, mate!*, 2017) shows off his golden prongs, appearing as a harbinger of future conditions—'a shamanic individual, caught in a dilemma, almost now without choice, a political shambles, two sides, two horns, belief or denial as the temperature increases and the water level rises'¹⁴. It is the most overt work in *On the Map* that tackles ecological and political criticality. Given the current environmental and political climate such intensity, in whatever form, is needed more than ever.

26S 121E | On the Map is at Mundaring Arts Centre until 15 October.

A longer version of this article may be found at www.perditaphillips.com/portfolio/on-the-map/

below

Monika Lukowska, *Warszawska*, 2017, lithograph, edition of 6, 56 x 70 cm. Reproduced with permission of the artist. Photography: Monika Lukowska

right

Clyde McGill, *Great horns, mate!*, 2017, etching, woodcut, gold leaf on 270g paper, edition unique, 233 x 108 cm. Reproduced with permission of the artist. Photography: Clyde McGill.



Notes

1. Taylor, Andrew, 'Edmund Capon says Australian art is unpopular overseas', *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 10, Art. 2014, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/edmund-capon-says-australian-art-is-unpopular-overseas-20140911-10eq4h.html>.
2. Phillips, Perdita, *OCBILS, YODFELS and Biodiversity in Art*, 2016. <http://www.perditaphillips.com/portfolio/ocbils-yodfels-and-biodiversity-in-art>.
3. Clarke, Helen, email correspondence, 30 June 2017.
4. Cowper, Shelley, email correspondence, 27 June 2017.
5. See also the 2018 exhibition *Locale* at Heathcote Museum and Gallery, curated by McKee and Lukowska.
6. Lukowska, Monika, email correspondence, 29 June 2017.
7. Butler, Rex W, *Imants Tillers — The Last Australian or the First Post-Australian Artist?*, The University of Queensland, 2009, <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:177452>.
8. McDonald, Helen, 'Fred's Place: A Dry Aesthetic', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 12 (1), 2012, 58-79, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14434318.2012.11432628>.
9. see Starcken, Sue, 'From little things... Vanessa Wallace by Sue Starcken', *Artsource Newsletter* (Summer), <http://www.artsource.net.au/Magazine/Artist-Features/Vanessa-Wallace>, and Polain, Marcella, Vanessa Wallace: emerging from ground, *Imprint* 47 (4), 2012, 18.
10. Oppenheimer, Sarah, and Giuliana Bruno, 'Art Interview: Giuliana Bruno by Sarah Oppenheimer', *BOMB* 128 (Summer), 2014, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/10056/giuliana-bruno>
11. Jalaru Torres, Michael, *Scar: an exhibition by Michael Jalaru Torres*, Wanneroo Art Gallery, City of Wanneroo, W.A., 2017.
12. *ibid.*
13. Bruno, Giuliana, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014.
14. McGill, Clyde, email correspondence, 29 June 2017.