



THE SWORDS OF DAMOCLES
EVA FERNANDEZ

EVA FERNANDEZ
THE SWORDS OF DAMOCLES

From the exhibition *Where lies the Land*
Curated by Karen Zadra

MARSHALL ARTS, 1 - 29 March 2014
Adelaide, South Australia
T: 08 8373 0769
M: 0400 298 017
hydepark@marshallart.com.au
www.marshallart.com.au

All artworks are archival inkjet prints on Ilford Galerie Pearl paper
Edition of 10
Image size 120 x 80 cm

\$2700 mounted on aluminum
\$2200 print only

Copyright 2014 The Artist and Marshall Arts.
All rights reserved.

www.evafernandez.com.au
eva.fernandez@bigpond.com



Where lies the Land

It has been 227 years since the First Fleet set sail from Portsmouth, England and 226 years since it landed in Botany Bay, NSW. Nothing could have prepared the convicts and crew for what lay ahead, for Australia was a land far beyond most people's experience, her waters unfamiliar, and the landscape unimaginable.

The title of this exhibition is taken from William Wordsworth's poem *Where lies the Land to which yon Ship must go?*. Romantic in style, the poem describes a journey by sea to an unknown land; it is a metaphor for the journey of the soul to the afterlife. It expresses the mixed emotions that accompany a trajectory that is unidirectional and irreversible. In the Romantic sense, the First Fleet's journey from England to Australia was to the 'afterlife': they were leaving behind forever a certain life in the old world for a new and completely unpredictable world far from familiar shores.

And what of Australia's Indigenous inhabitants at this point in history? While visits from foreign seafarers were not uncommon in coastal areas, none had stayed for any period of time, nor in any great number. On that portentous day in May 1787, the Indigenous peoples throughout the country could never have anticipated how irrevocably their lives were about to change, as boat loads of people from an alien land and culture sailed their way. Their ancient world was about to clash with a new world.

The story of colonial and federal Australia is primarily one of struggles and divisions, possession and dispossession. From the moment the First Fleet landed, the relationship between the colonisers, the Indigenous peoples and the land has been fraught: agrarian versus hunter-gatherer modes of subsistence; civic versus nomadic living habits; proprietary versus custodial notions of land ownership; imperial versus ancestral constructs of knowledge and law.

This exhibition examines contemporary views of Australia's relationship to the land, and to each other. Through the theories and family histories that inform the work of Lorraine Connelly-Northey, Pamela Kouwenhoven and Eva Fernández, we are given an insight into the complex nature of Australia's 21st century identity and the importance of land in the formation of a personal and national sense of self.

Eva Fernández offers an immigrant's perspective on connecting to Australian land. Born in Canada of Spanish parents, Fernández arrived in Australia twenty years ago. In this time she has lived on the east and west coasts, and is now based in Perth. Despite twenty years here, she claims she is still an 'outsider' who continually sees her environment anew. To her eyes, the native plants, animals and light are an enigma, and the stains of colonialism are apparent.



Fernández's series of eight photographic works document her observations of contemporary Australia against the backdrop of Indigenous and non-Indigenous connections to the land. However, the primary subject – land – is absent from her images. Instead, she presents a catalogue of suspended objects that have been imported from the Home country: Holy Bible, Chair, Clippers, Photo album, Pitchfork, Suitcase, Trumpet and Teapot.

These objects symbolise Western cultivation and agriculture, the trappings of middle-class England. From an Indigenous perspective, they are symbols of oppression, destruction and dispossession. Contemporary Australia has been built upon the back of this marred history. The images themselves are sparely beautiful – much like the Australian outback – but at the same time, they are darkly sinister despite their bright white backgrounds. The objects stand out in stark relief. There is nowhere for them to hide, nor a background to soften their impact.

Suspending the objects from strings refers to the colonisers' attempts to retain their own culture as they tried to shape Australia in the image of the Homeland. Fernández subtly draws on her own cultural roots, citing the influence of Juan Sánchez Cotán, a Spanish Baroque painter (1560-1627). Sánchez Cotán depicted still lifes of fruit and vegetables suspended above the ground from string. This practice was used to prevent food from rotting. Fernández's use of this ancient Spanish custom becomes a metaphor for non-Indigenous Australia's continued practice of being bound to and by ancestral cultures from far off lands, at the expense of the aboriginal.

The string lends an eerie air to the works by alluding to the widespread acts of hanging Indigenous people out bush without a proper trial. In more recent times, it is a reminder of Indigenous deaths in custody.

Fernández's works suggest that the relationship to the land and between its peoples is still troubled by past injustices and the vestiges of colonial aspirations. Without the depiction of any physical land in her images, it becomes difficult to get one's bearings. There is a pervasive sense of dislocation.

How then is the viewer to orientate themselves towards the future?

Karen Zadra,
February 2014





Teapot







Trumpet