panorama

LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY
3 MAY – 12 JULY 2014
Confessions to man’s weakness and his loves.
Whether the painter – fashioning a work
To Nature’s circumambient scenery,
And with his greedy pencil taking in
A whole horizon on all sides ...

The word panorama was invented in 1792 when Scottish entrepreneur Robert Barker described his 360 by 180 degree painting of the city of Edinburgh by merging the Greek word pan (all) with hórãma (view). His ‘view of everything’ invited participation to appreciate the expansive vista of the city and his new word captured the sense of excitement and the promise he wished to promote.

As he expected, the great attraction of his panorama was its ability to draw the audience into a controlled world and to create an illusion of direct engagement without the interruptions of the everyday. It was hugely successful and within a few years he had opened a purpose-built rotunda in Leicester Square in London where you could contemplate the vast city outside with safety and relative peace. Barker became a very wealthy man and by 1813 ‘panoramic’ was a word in common usage.

Like all successful inventions the panorama was of its time and reflected the growing interest in communing with the natural world and discovering its secrets. Romanticism had promoted the idea of the sublime and with the panorama it was possible to experience the magnificence of an alpine scene for a shilling and little discomfort. While this led to criticism that the panorama was debasing the notion of the sublime, William Wordsworth was somewhat ambivalent, both celebrating the artist’s ability to capture ‘with his greedy pencil … a whole horizon on all sides’ while decrying its pretence and the erosion of individual ‘imaginative power’. This did nothing to hinder its popularity. The great contradiction of being totally immersed while simultaneously detached is quintessential to the illusion of the panorama.

So when artists arrived in Western Australia shortly after Barker’s panoramas were introduced to the citizens of Edinburgh and London, that lure of being there but distanced was harnessed as a way of selling an interest in this new land. The panorama offered a seductive prospectus for the new colony and concomitantly a form of surrogate tourism that enabled instant transportation to this far-flung destination.

On his return to England after his sojourn in the new Swan River Colony, Robert Dale chose to describe the scope and scale of the landscape of King George Sound as a panoramic sweep. His drawings, later engraved by Robert Havell and published as A Descriptive Account of the Panoramic View, &c. of King George’s Sound, and the Adjacent Country (1834), was designed to attract potential investors in the riches and opportunities provided by the new settlement of Albany, which “… possesses every capability of forming a valuable addition to the colonies of Great Britain”. His panorama showed a fertile landscape inhabited by friendly natives living in harmony with the nearly arrived soldiers and settlers. However, this overt piece of propaganda did not accurately depict those relationships.

When Dale returned to England he carried with him the severed head of Yagan, the Aboriginal leader, who had been hunted down, shot, skinned and then decapitated when he retaliated against the imposed authority of the new arrivals. Incongruously the panorama was shown with the head of Yagan on a plinth in the foreground, revealing with gruesome accuracy the forcible acquisition of Aboriginal land and undermining the fiction of harmonious relationships. One hundred and eighty years later Chris Pease, a local Mineng Noongar man, has laid claim once more to his country by re-presenting the scene of cordial exchange and peaceful co-existence within a tainted paradise of felled Xanthorrhoeas and rudimentary town planning.

Gregory Pryor has also taken on the challenge of the Dale panorama in a series of three watercolours that similarly review the relationships depicted and highlight the practical and cultural knowledge of the Noongar people. In Pryor’s first version he paints a chromatically negative version to highlight an alternative reading of that relationship and showcase the ‘fire-
stick farming’ technology they had developed. In the second version a photographic negative of the panorama on fire alludes to the destruction of the knowledge built up over millennia that was being lost/destroyed by colonisation. The ‘faux idyll’ depicted by Dale is then finally consumed and a heavy black pall obliterates the scene in the final section “… the velvety blackness and silence (erasure) which is the culmination of fire”.

When the first ANZAC convoy was gathering in King George Sound, 80 years later, A. G. Sands used the panoramic format to capture the scale of the endeavour and to place his audience alongside him while viewing the scene as it unfurled below. Being there and embracing the scene was a way of building morale and showing solidarity.

For very different reasons the sense of ‘being there’ is the catalyst for David Collins’ exploration of new panoramic technologies that enable him to situate the viewer within the large-scale photographic tableaus he meticulously constructs. His cinematic aspirations draw his audience into the realm of decadence and excess where we are given control to explore at will with the joystick provided. Immersion in his 360 x 180 degree panorama encourages us to weave a contemporary narrative through an extraordinary world of beauty and dissipation where escapism and catharsis are presented as an essential constituent of human experience.

It’s not surprising that Barker’s invention of the painted panorama would become increasingly influential with the development of photography. From the 1840s artists with a camera were able to simply adapt the technique of linking views of a site to capture a full vista. In addition it may not be too farfetched to see in the Ukiyo-e woodblock prints that were flooding in from Japan at the same time, an additional influence both in the subject matter and format. With a focus on everyday life and contemporary activities the Ukiyo-e artists described the life around them and some recorded it in linked prints that carried the vision and action in a long continuous scan of a particular scene.

Gyokuransai Sadahide’s 53 Views of Tokaido Stations, 1860, documents post stations along the Tokaido (or East Sea Road), which was one of the five most important communication routes between modern day Tokyo and Kyoto. Like the Chinese and Japanese painters before him who had created horizontal scrolls, he chose the bird’s eye format with added cartographic elements as a means of unfurling time and place in an uninterrupted narrative. In his two-volume work the viewer becomes a traveller moving along the roads and down the well trod pathways. The seductively immersive quality of these panoramas and the immediacy of their subject matter may well have encouraged European artists and photographers to document the vast sweep of the urban and rural landscape in a continuous photographic panorama.

Alice Blanch reimagines this tradition in her series of Box Brownie Colour Panoramas by overlapping exposures to create a blurring of space and time in which “…past, present and memory merge as one”. The ephemeral clouds fractured and reabsorbed into the unfolding landscape heighten our sense of the continuity of tradition through the fusing of history with contemporary experience.

Ian North similarly reworks those traditions of recording and interpreting the landscape in his Adelaide Suite, in which the panoramic vista is adopted to remind us that beauty is where you find it, even in the familiar jumble of fibro fences and suburban streetscapes, in the ordinary and the everyday. Equally prominent in these suburban images is the sky, filled with billowing cumulus clouds that echo the Romantic vision of unconstrained freedom. They act as a counterpoint to the mundane and modest aspirations of 21st century urban life unfurled below.

Rodney Glick and Lynnette Voevodin’s Earthquake also documents a journey through space and time along a vast expanse traversed by the Great Western Highway as it cuts through the landscape and the small town of Kellerberrin on its way to Kalgoorlie. To the accompaniment of a continuous undercurrent of traffic noise the landscape is revealed as a constantly active field in which cars and trucks appear, are distorted and quickly disappear. Divided into 24 bands the long panoramic staccato moves us relentlessly on through the countryside, through the day and back through history. As Gary Dufour explains, the 24Hr panoramas of Glick and Voevodin echo the 19th century philosopher Henri Bergson’s ideas on experiencing time.

For him linear time was where moments precede in sequence and durational time was time as a lived experience, with the past implied and a future prefigured...
two features – durational time and simultaneous views – are at the core of the 24Hr panoramas.6 Durational time is also a structural element in Jacobus Capone's To love. Self-described as a 'durational project' the artist collected a sample of water from the Indian Ocean at Cottesloe and carried it in a suitcase across the country to Wollongong, where he released it into the Pacific Ocean. Each day during his five and a half month epic journey he undertook a series of rituals7 to mark time and document his passage through the landscape. His record of a panoramic engagement with the landscape is a form of unification and absorption, "acknowledging the self as being entwined within the landscape, and not merely in coexistence with it"8.

The horizon is a point of focus that draws the eye along the vast expanse of the panorama. Jon Tarry and Thomas Müller have chosen this always unreachable yet ever-present demarcation between earth and sky as their theme in responding to the challenge of the panorama. For Müller it is light and the mystical expectation we associate with that incandescent glow ahead, the Invisible Horizon of hope and aspiration. Tarry on the other hand is interested in the mechanics of recording the ineffable. His device that sits in the gallery in front of the shaped landscape elements on the wall suggests a rational intervention within the expanded pictorial frame through a "two-dimensional rendering of multi dimensional worlds"9.

The mechanics of understanding and interpreting are also at the core of Paul Bourke's work in visualisation through iVEC@UWA. Using sophisticated digital technologies he works with researchers in archeology, geoscience, astronomy and health sciences to give visual form to research to enable closer investigation and further research. His work at Wanmanna in 2012 with Jo McDonald from the Centre for Rock Art Research and Management presents a 360 x 180 degree panorama of a rock art site that enables closer investigation that is possible in the field. Similarly, his work on Beacon Island in 2013 with the WA Museum and Maritime Archeology at UWA provide an extraordinary visual record of an important site in our history, facilitating research into the earliest landfall by Europeans.

The panorama continues to seduce us by attending to our weaknesses and our loves, as Wordsworth identified, by drawing us into its promise of knowledge and understanding while offering a surrogate sense of engagement. Robert Barker’s entertainment provided an expanded peripheral field that fed our desire for detached participation and it continues to deliver as a tool for involving us in the external world, at one remove, where contemplation, interrogation and understanding are facilitated.

Ted Snell
Curator

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2. Artist’s statement 19 March 2014
3. Using the early daguerreotype process and presenting the photographs in a contiguous order enabled photographers like William Southgate Porter to create eight plate panoramas in Philadelphia in 1848.
5. The title references the famous Meckering earthquake in 1968 when this area was riven in two by a 32 kilometre fault line and shaken violently for several minutes. The echo of this rupture is captured in the format of this work and repeated in the cutting and splicing of the imagery.
7. At the closure of a day a single linen cloth was used to wipe and clean the dust, soil and sweat collected on the face that day, the process striving towards a more holistic form of engagement with the immediate surroundings. 97 linen cloths account for each day walked, where anywhere between 30-50 kilometres was covered
8. Jacobus Capone, Artist’s Statement website – accessed 18/03/2014
9. Jon Tarry, Artist’s Statement March 2014
Christopher Pease, Panoramic view of Minang Boojar (Minang Land), 2013, oil on linen (72 panels), 84 x 300 cm

Alice Blanch, Box Brownie Colour Panorama #13, 2012, fine art giclee print, 80 x 280 cm

Christopher Pease, Panoramic view of Minang Boojar (Minang Land), 2013, oil on linen (72 panels), 84 x 300 cm
Campus Partner
iVEC@UWA
iVEC@UWA is a facility of IVEC on the University of Western Australia campus. The facility hosts infrastructure including high performance computing, visualisation, conferencing room and high-end workstations. Staff expertise and services include data storage and management, visualisation, parallel programming, collaborative tools and video production. The facility acts as an interface between UWA users and IVEC, assisting UWA staff and students access similar or additional resources at the other IVEC facilities.

Curator’s Acknowledgements
Any curatorial project is complex and they all require collaboration and support – projects that have a short time frame even more so. Without the support of Erica Persak at the Stokes Collection and Jill Maughan at the Western Australian Historical Society the exhibition would have remained a ‘good idea’. I thank them sincerely for their enthusiastic support. I would like to thank all the artists who so quickly accepted my invitation to participate and took up the challenge of the panorama with such alacrity. Thank you also to my colleagues in University of Western Australia Museums who always excel in each aspect of presenting and managing our exhibition program. This one presented some specific problems, not least the short time frame, and I am extremely grateful to them all for their sensitivity, their diligence and their alacrity to respond to each new challenge with enthusiasm.

I am also grateful to Paul Bourke from iVEC@UWA who was immediately enthusiastic about becoming our Campus Partner for this exhibition.

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LIST OF WORKS
1. Robert Dale, engraved by Robert Havell, Panoramic View of King George’s Sound, Part of the Colony of Swan River, 1834, hand coloured engraving, 19 x 247 cm, Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth
2. Gyokuransai Sadahide, 53 Views Tokaido Stations, 1860, coloured woodblock on native paper, vols 1 & 2, 23.7 x 296.5 cm & 23.7 x 270.5 cm, Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth
3. Alice Blanch, Box Brownie Colour Panorama #12, 2012, fine art giclee print, 80 x 280 cm
4. Gregory Pryor, Taking Fire (Conflagration), 2014, watercolour on paper, 19 x 826 cm (in 24 sections)
5. David C Collins, Ballad of the sleeping king, 2014, augmented panoramic digital video and framed photographic prints, 41 x 31 cm each
6. Jacobus Capone, To love, 2006, 97 pieces of linen and 2 photographic prints, dimensions variable
8. Ian North, Adelaide no. 18, 2009, from the Adelaide Suite, 2008-2009, inkjet pigment print, edition of 5, 55 x 150 cm, Courtesy of the artist & Greenaway Art Gallery
10. Rodney Glick and Lynnette Voevodin, Earthquake, 2001, dual synchronised DVD projections with stereo sound mixed from the original 24 channels recorded, duration 60 minutes, artist’s copy
11. Tom Müller, Invisible Horizon, 2014, quicktime video, black & white, no sound, duration 1:14 minutes
12. A G Sands, Albany Harbour with troop ships (ANZAC Fleet), c. 1914, black & white photograph, 18.5 x 111.3 cm, Courtesy of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, P1999.6756a
13. A G Sands, Albany and Harbour, c. 1914, black & white photograph, 19.5 x 108 cm, Courtesy of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, P1999.6754a-c
14. A G Sands, Troop transports in Albany Harbour, c. 1914, black & white photograph, 19.5 x 111 cm, Courtesy of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, P1999.6753 (19 x 107)
15. Jon Tarry, Expansion, 2014, stainless steel, bronze, bone, timber, graphite, oil paint, free standing sculpture element, 90 x 280 x 40 cm wide flat to the wall, metal alloy and bronze, drawing tool 90 x 250 x 90 cm, Artist Jon Tarry, 2014, acknowledgement to Matt Dickmann
17. Paul Bourke, Beacon Island I & II, 2013, digital photographic prints 28 x 250 cm each (in collaboration with the Western Australian Museum and Maritime Archaeology at UWA)

CATALOGUE ONLY
18. Christopher Pease, Panoramic view of Minang Boojar (Minang Land), 2013, oil on linen (72 panels), 84 x 330 cm

All artwork Courtesy of the artist unless otherwise stated