

the road to here

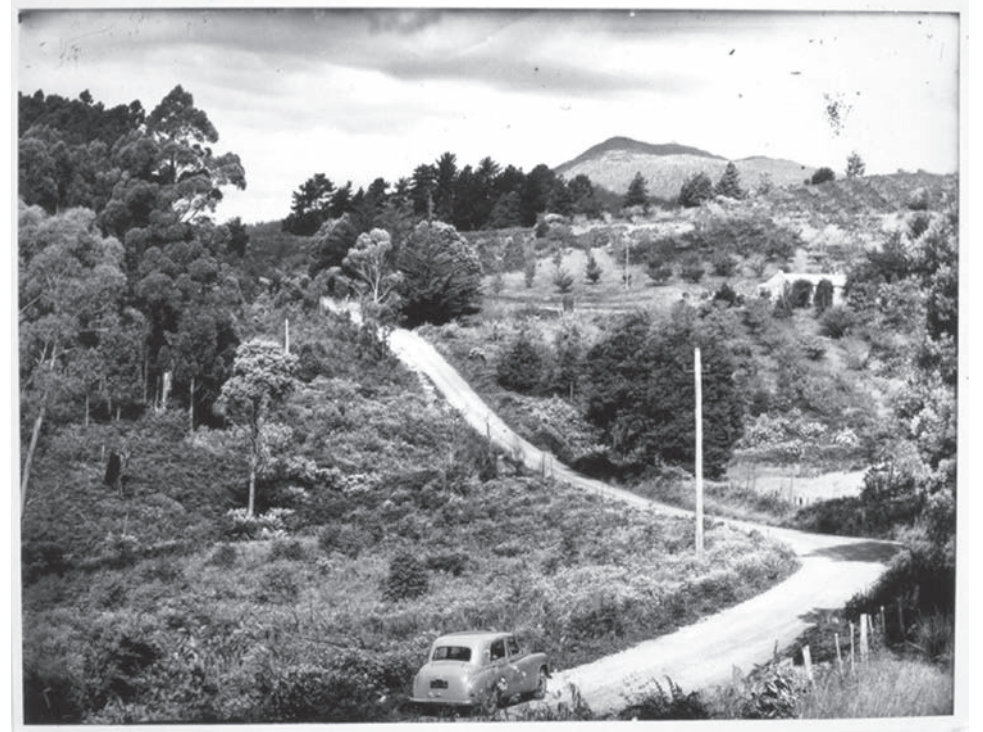


the road to here

A photographic exhibition
curated from the negatives of the
Robinson Collection

16 November 07 - 13 January 08, Devonport Regional Gallery

curated by DR DAVID MARTIN



On the Road, 1936/2007
Black and white photograph
36.5 x 49cm

the road to here

There is another world but it is in this one!

The 2007 Robinson exhibition utilises negatives from the collection to expand upon ideas about the role and the conception of landscape. I like to consider that the landscape is both an external 'place' that we exist within, and an internal place that exists within us. Generally, the landscape is thought of as a place existing outside of and independent to the self, a vista that extends away from the self in space and time. Instead I propose that landscapes are not bound by features such as mountains and seashores, but are actually places within the self.

In either case, the landscapes we have inherited are shaped by stories and actions that took place well before our being-in-time. And the shape of the landscape we have inherited is implicit in the shape of us – similar to a genealogical pattern. Thinking about this idea, I wonder if it is at all possible to be anything other than the sum of my

1. Paul Eluard quoted in Patrick White, *The Solid Mandala*, Penguin, Great Britain, 1969.

'genealogical parts'? Can I be any *more*, or any other, than a pre-written 'program' that is predictably reactive to any 'forces' brought to bear? At first this seems like a dead-end question, until I re-examine the pattern and attempt to comprehend the constituent elements from different viewpoints.

Photographs play a distinctive role in our idea of landscape. In many ways, photographs appear to reiterate and emulate the idea of landscape as a distant thing outside of, and beyond the self, in space, time and tangible reach. It is often considered possible to understand the content of a landscape photograph from a distant past by, in a sense, rewinding time, like one might rewind a movie. But this presumes that the *effect* of time is linear – a concept which in itself is a very neat historical construction. Though a photograph's content may begin life as a type of double of material appearance, this 'double' aspect is soon altered in the fold of time. And this folding of time produces a variety of complex origami-like effects on the understanding of a photographs' content.

In a basic sense, photographs transport the 'material appearance' of a scene into another space and time where all of its known, or previously understood, characteristics, though appearing the same, are subjected

to quite different relations. Concurrently, these same photographs are a product of latent emotions and ideologies which are altered very little during the same interval of time. The co-mingling of these quite temporally divergent properties within photographs produces complexities which are not simply or easily resolved.

A further complication arises by approaching the Robinson photographs – or any other photographs for that matter – as simply 'historical documents'. This categorisation lends the photograph's subjects an aura of 'something' which is held at bay, as it were, at a safe distance from our 'here'. Yet, as an artist working with these negatives, I find this not to be the case. The subjects of these photographs are not at a safe distance, they contain qualities that can prick the conditions of our existence, and lead us to become conscious that there may be an unsuspected size and shape to our present being. Our unawareness of the possibilities of our being lies latent in the after-effect of these photographs.

Items that portend to be historical photographs – and histories in general – seek to provide answers, or verification of a past. They are used to resolve the past, to focus a viewpoint of the particular historical narrative being constructed. The collected photographs in this

exhibition provide no answers, they have no single viewpoint, although they may point to ways in which aspects of the mind have been, or could be, landscaped.

While I do not wish to formulate specific narratives, but rather provide places where meanings may evolve for the individual viewer, I would like to propose one narrative stream that may be focused through the photographs of the Thylacine.

The Tasmanian tiger, or Thylacine, has become a much used, and potent, symbol of Tasmania. A graphic image of the Thylacine is currently being used by the Public Sector to portray all things Tasmanian and it is accompanied by the logo; 'Tasmania The Natural State'. The irony of that logo is profound. David Owen in his book, *Thylacine, the tragic tale of the Tasmanian Tiger*, writes that the Thylacine 'is able to comfortably represent much that is Tasmanian'. If we take the ingredients of the tiger's tale and mix it with Owens' statement what will it make? A recipe for making a Tasmanian symbol? Take something that is unique. Implicate it in a prejudice of blind economic rationalism. Enlist a politician to make up stories about it. Engage the political system to enact legislation to bring force to bear, the purpose of which is to ultimately destroy that something unique

– for the better of the 'state'. Then, after a goodly time, when this 'something unique' is safely gone, resurrect it and make it a symbol of all that is good. Voila! A cake of symbolic potency baked *in the past* that represents the 'natural state' of things Tasmanian.

In the world of the appearance of things, there is no thing that is just one thing. Each thing is more than itself alone. The further that a particular thing passes through time the more complex it becomes – the more facets of meaning are accrued.

The Robinson collection of negatives is an invaluable resource that is unique in terms of it being in the possession of a regional art gallery and, especially in the circumstance of *all* Australian museums and art galleries, it having been made available for artistic interpretation. This collection could so easily be just another in a long list of under-utilised resources with unrealised potential. These types of photographic assets need to be used, to be made available for interpretation, recognised as potent, *living* archives that help form an understanding of our present and possible futures.

Dr David Martin



From the back seat of my father's car; 1956 - 9/2007
Series of black and white photographs
40.6 x 50.8 cm each



From the back seat of my father's car, 1956 - 9/2007
Series of black and white photographs
40.6 x 50.8 cm each



"It doesn't rain as much in Strahan", Unknown/2007
Toned black and white photograph in gilded frame
39 x 53cm



The Agent, 1948/2007
Toned black and white photograph
58.5 x 78.2cm



Building Castles, Unknown/2007
Toned black and white photographs
163 x 186cm



Building Dreams, 1937 - 1963/2007
 Black and white photographs
 120 x 178cm



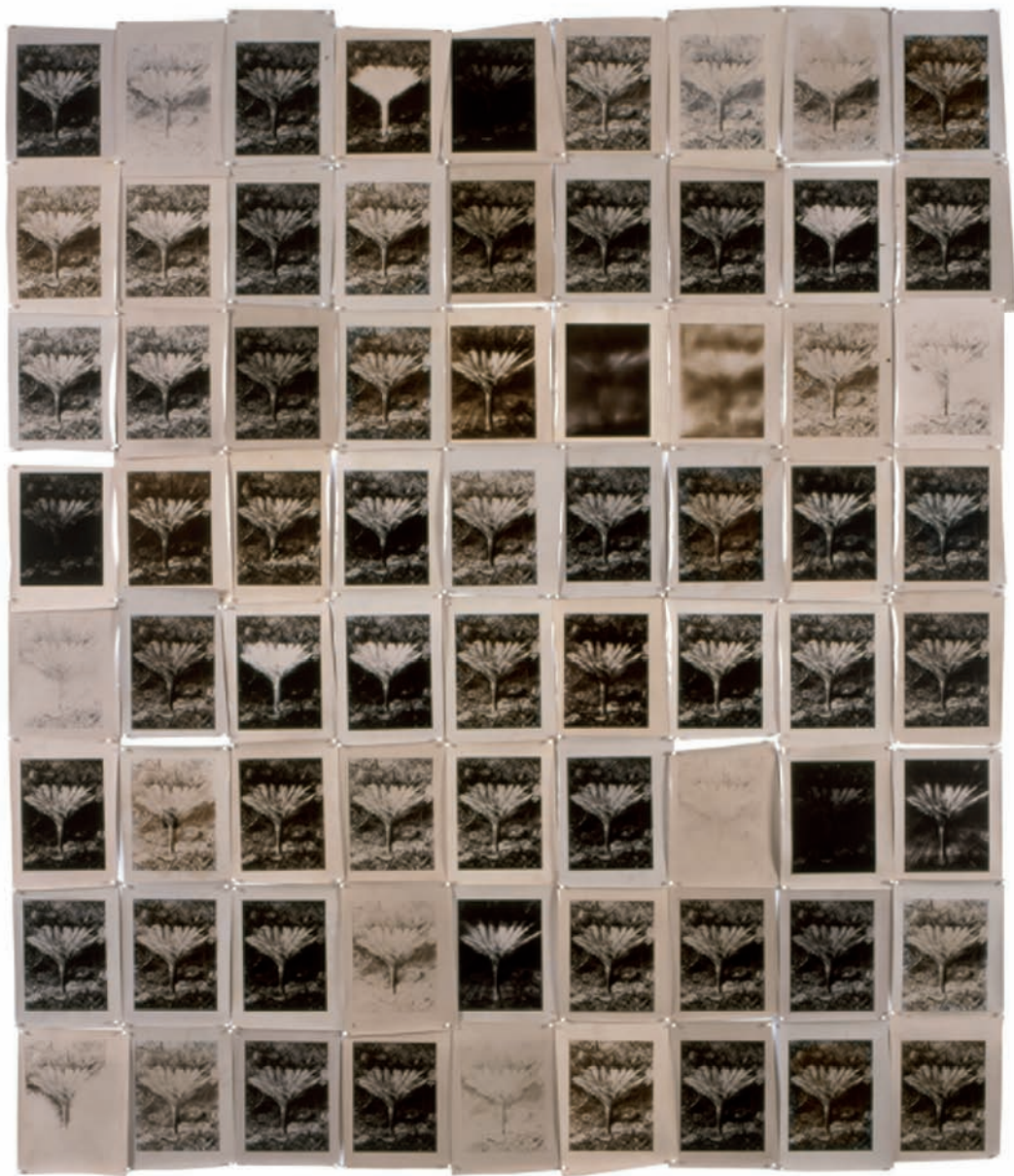
Lie of the land, 1940/2007
Black and white photograph
58.5 x 78.5cm



Down the Garden Path, 1937/2007
Black and white photograph
63 x 82.5cm



Gilding the Rhetoric of Erasure, Unknown/2007
Toned black and white photographs in gilded frame
125 x 103cm



Man Fern Man Fern Man Fern Man Man Fern, 1936/2007
 72 Toned silver gelatin photographs
 162 x 139cm



The bullock team, Unknown/2007
Toned silver gelatin photograph
18 x 30cm



The Crossing, Unknown/2007
Toned black and white photograph
58.3 x 78.3cm

The Trappers' Hut, Unknown/2007
Toned black and white photograph
58.3 x 78.3cm



Tiger Dreaming, 1927/2007
Toned black and white photographs
18.6 x 86.4cm





Tiger dreaming (detail).
Toned black and white photograph



Tasmania the Natural State, 1941/2007
Toned black and white photograph in Huon Pine frame
25.6 x 41.8cm



Water Falls, Unknown/2007
Toned black and white photographs
278 x 163.5cm

Sublime Gravity, 1949/2007
Black and white photograph
77 x 47cm

Collins' Mole, 1929/2007
Black and white photograph
150 x 87cm



Acknowledgements

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Cover image: *Getting Us There*, Unknown/2007

Toned black and white photograph

58 x 78cm

Back cover image: *Tiger dreaming* (detail), 1927/2007

Toned black and white photograph

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