

OPEN YOUR MIND - TREAD SOFTLY

GEORGINA CAMPBELL



3 OCTOBER - 8 NOVEMBER 2015

THE GALLERY @ BAYSIDE ARTS & CULTURAL CENTRE

Front cover image:
Georgina CAMPBELL
Mountain #1 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Back cover image:
Georgina CAMPBELL
Airport 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

OPEN YOUR MIND –
TREAD SOFTLY
Georgina Campbell

The Gallery @
Bayside Arts & Cultural Centre
3 October - 8 November 2015

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Brighton VIC 3186
AUSTRALIA



Georgina CAMPBELL
Dark city 2013
Type C print
80 x 118 cm

Pure nature and empty expanses

Photography is a paradox. For many artists who use this medium it can be a pathway to understanding one's own reality, while at the same time it provides an opportunity to manipulate and construct it. Campbell's images oscillate between imagination and documentation, fact and fiction. Evident in this exhibition is her interest in the visual aspect of history and the potential scenarios that become apparent at the juncture of past and present. While much of contemporary creative photographic process focuses on gimmicks and aesthetic 'bells and whistles' in an attempt to be noticed, this body of work, in contrast, has a timeless quality that is firmly rooted in the tradition of descriptive documentary photography.

The series of work exhibited in *Open your mind - tread softly* was created during a residency in Gamli Skóli (Old School Art House) on the island of Hrísey off the north coast of Iceland. This tiny island of just over seven square kilometres is surrounded by the mountains of Eyjafjörður and with no natural predators on the island it has become a haven for birds.



Georgina CAMPBELL
Windsack (detail) 2013
Type C print
80 x 118 cm

There is a sense in these photographs that Campbell knows where she is going, yet is unaware of, and excited by, what she will find when she gets there. Metaphors waiting to be realised are found in the unpredictability of the paths. A steaming geothermal power plant; a solitary trail flag; the surreal image of a children's playground at night; there are no illusions of grandeur in this work, only a carefully crafted simplicity to show, without filters or distraction, a point of view that is relevant.

Campbell's work is contemporary photography that references the history of the medium without being nostalgic; it is complex but not for complexity's sake. The formal structure of form and content are evident in *Dark city*

2013. The image plane consists of two parts. The road that curves around the rocky outcrop separates the foreground and background, drawing the viewer's eye to the centre of the image and upward to the mountain range on the horizon. To the right of frame a group of people walk along the road, leaving behind what is outside of the frame as they enter the landscape, a reminder to the viewer that photography captures only a part of the world and that we have no way of knowing what lies beyond. In this seemingly bucolic setting, the intimate formal landscapes provide a sense of place but also hint at no return.

Iceland is one of the most tectonically active places on earth and as a result has a large number of underground hot springs that provide an energy resource that is sustainable and almost infinite. In the image *Power plant*, 2013, the viewer can see the geothermal industrial landscape and its co-existence with nature. Framed by the windscreen of a car, the plant is nestled in the curve of a valley, a place where the landscape was built and formed by water, wind, erosion, and only marginally by human beings. As a world leader in the development of geothermal energy for both domestic and industrial use, more than 66% of Iceland's primary energy supply comes from this natural resource. This makes the Icelandic environment one of the cleanest in the world. But there is a trade off - the rural landscape is being transformed by these industrial plants - nature is being shaped by industry. Campbell finds beauty and grace in this once pristine landscape as sections of it are slowly being modified and dominated by man.

The title, *Open your mind - tread softly*, is taken from a sign on a Green Hiking path in Hrísey which alerts the hiker that they "... are entering a world of energy and harmony which will renew both body and soul." In Campbell's images, the energy is not visible but rather something to be experienced. The world is there to be observed, to be watched, and a good photographer will compose images that allow us to see what is there but so often what we don't see. Campbell provides us with photographs that capture an instant and as such the landscapes become autobiographical, a way for the artist to share her experience at that moment in time. There is no concern around projection of ego; she is more interested in allowing the viewer space to absorb seemingly simple images that offer space for contemplation. The end result is a body of work inspired by engaging with the outside world - in essence a record of events that are fleeting yet still manage to remain distinctly personal.

Julie Skate 2015



Georgina CAMPBELL
Hiking sign (trail flag) 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm



Georgina CAMPBELL
Structure #2 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Q & A with artist and curator



Georgina CAMPBELL
Magic snow 2013
Type C print
80 x 118 cm

JS: This seems to be your first foray into landscape photography. Have you intentionally stayed away from this genre until this residency in Iceland? Did you go with the intention of creating landscapes or was the environment just too overwhelming to ignore?

GC: I have always been interested in landscape as a genre. I am usually drawn to landscape imagery, and images by other photographers that usually pique my interest are, more often than not, landscape works or it is the scenery that interests me most. Weirdly, I very rarely take photos with people in them - even on holidays. It is the landscape itself or rather the sense of location that interests me and I have always taken landscape images but have never really created a cohesive body of images about one place before now. I knew Iceland's landscape would appeal to me -

the vast open spaces, the northern lights and the snow but I had actually planned to work on my scanner cameras during my residency in Iceland but for technical reasons that just wasn't working out. In the meantime however, from every direction snow topped mountains and the water of Eyjafjörður surround you so you have to pay attention to the environment. I started to take landscape images really just to be able to show people later and say "Look at this! It was really like that" and then as I was walking about the island, wandering about taking those kind of images, I realised that I was actually making decisions about the images and I was always capturing a kind of energy every time. I had been to the trail and seen the "Open your mind..." sign and so that was germinating in my mind the whole time too. Looking at the work now, to me, it is evident that there is a hint of movement in every image. Movement that represents energy or natural forces in one way or another - it might be the water or clouds moving, the mountain itself moving at a glacial pace, the snow falling or even the faster-paced effects that humans have on the landscape etc. I made *Mountain meditation* as a way to demonstrate the slow but very alive landscape. Someone recently asked if it was a cinemagraph¹ and it is not. It really was just that still, with only the water moving to indicate it is a video. Other works like the *Trail flags* series almost seem to me to be suggesting the futility of trying to work against nature so, yes, ultimately the environment was indeed too overwhelming to ignore especially on the tiny island of Hrísey.

JS: Landscape photographers are stuck in a strange place between all those photographers who produce remarkable photographs (such as for National Geographic) and those photographers for whom the landscape is a stage to produce statements about something that might not have much to do with the landscape itself. The former is generally just decorative (...how beautiful!) whereas the latter often ends up being almost a declaration (...look what man is doing to the environment!). It seems to me that in both cases the essence of how a landscape can make you feel is lost; the extraordinary feeling of being immersed in something that can be awe-inspiring but, ultimately, also is very subtle and nuanced. How do you navigate between those two poles? Or is this something you're not worried about? Or is this too confusing a question?

GC: Not a confusing question at all but a very confusing scenario! There is definitely a subset of landscape photography that deals with the postcard view and then there are images that seem to reduce the landscape to a circumstantial element. However, I would argue that indeed picturesque, attractive, landscape photography these days does actually serve as a window into the beauty of the natural world and also declares the urgency of preventing further environmental damage. I think it is useful in that way but I get where you are coming from. I think ultimately my landscape work is more autobiographical. It is where I am at the time, it's what I see and what I want to share about that experience at that moment. With these works I didn't want to focus on the typical imagery you see representing Iceland, although it does seep in - how could it not! I tried to concentrate on what I felt were the key things I wanted to remember. At its core, photography, for me, is about collecting sites, with each photograph becoming a souvenir from your life proving this thing happened. Even though my images can be read as a commentary on the environment in a small way, they are primarily about that invisible, intangible sense of energy that I felt this area had. Ultimately this body of work is just asking the viewer to stop and contemplate these spaces - inside my mind I'm still thinking "wow, these places of pristine space, complete silence and nature as it is supposed to be actually do exist!". So they are not really just landscape images - they are my personal experiences.

JS: What motivated your photographic approach? What type of equipment do you use? Did you use any particularly unusual techniques?

GC: As I mentioned before, I had planned to use my time in Iceland to test out my scanner camera which I've been working with on and off for over ten years now. I had hoped the winter's dark conditions would prove useful for taking low light but highly detailed images the scanner camera is capable of, but the colour in the landscape was too imposing and completely lost using the scanner as it only sees in grey scale, so I ended up just using digital cameras for most of the work which was a novelty in itself for me - I have always used film cameras and mainly medium format. I did take film cameras too but digital was just handier on those dark days. I also found it useful to be able to record video which has become something I am thinking about more often now. I also made *Green night* on an iPad using a basic time-lapse App - I am interested in how technology can be utilised

to create work almost by magic. It is pretty low-res but I don't mind that painterly quality. My animated GIF is an extension of this idea - I wanted to create a GIF work of the northern light, which to me are very magical but I don't like the idea of the viewer having to interact with the technology itself "to go behind the curtain" so I have designed a way for the viewer, or in this instance the curators etc. to simply flick a switch and the work comes to life. *Green night* is like that too - a time-lapse that shows what goes on in the dark and the dawn with the movements of light and nature revealed in a way that you would not normally see with the naked eye.

JS: I quite like the *Artefacts* series, also created in Iceland. This seems so far from your landscape photography and I'm curious to learn whether for you this is just something very separate or whether there are underlying common ideas about photography that spawned both these series?

GC: These works were created using the scanner camera so you can see the detail that it is capable of. The works were taken inside the studio when it was truly too dark and cold to be outside. I was interested in what other artists had done during their residencies and the whole place was full of little bits of art and left over materials from a multitude of artists that have used the space before. I like how the works almost look like photograms. I scanned a number of objects but I liked how these glass containers, of which there are a few around, looked like ghost images. All that creative energy - almost glowing. I like the idea that the scanner camera seems to see that glow like a Kirlian image or an actual photogram that captures the shadow of the thing itself rather than the actual object. In a roundabout way these works do link to my landscape work in that it is all about capturing energy in one way or another. And again, it's autobiographical in a way - these items were existing in the same space as me at the time.

Interview with Georgina Campbell (GC) conducted by Julie Skate (JS) via email correspondence
July 2015



Georgina CAMPBELL
Listening 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Georgina CAMPBELL (1978 -)
Born Gosford, New South Wales
Lives and works in Melbourne, Victoria

Airport 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Big rock 2014
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Cairn 2013
Type C print
80 x 118 cm

Dark city 2013
Type C print
80 x 118 cm

Dark clouds 2014
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Energy channelling device 2014
Balsa wood, Scenic snow flakes, recycled
rubber matting, timber, cotton rope, hot
glue, nails
45 x 70 x 60 cm

Energy zone #1 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Energy zone #2 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Energy zone #3 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Energy zone #4 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Energy zone #5 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Energy zone #6 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Energy zone #7 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Footprint 2014
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Grass that looks like fur 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Green night, Hrísey, Iceland 2013
Digital video
3.47 minutes, looped

Greenhouse on Hrísey 2013
Type C print
56 x 84 cm

Hiking sign (trail flag) 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Hrísey at night 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Iceland 2013
Type C print
56 x 84 cm

Listening 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Magic playground 2013
Type C print
46.7 x 70 cm

Magic snow 2013
Type C print
80 x 118 cm

Mountain #1 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Mountain #2 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Mountain #3 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Mountain #4 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Mountain #5 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Mountain #6 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Mountain #7 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Mountain #8 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Mountain #9 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Mountain meditation 2013
Digital video
1.07 minutes, looped

Northern lights #5 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Northern lights with shooting star in Iceland
2014
Animated GIF

Open your mind 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Path 2013
Type C print
80 x 118 cm

Pink sky 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Power plant 2013
Type C print
80 x 118 cm

Rocks under magnifying glass 2014
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Snow balls 2014
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

Snow cleared on Hrísey 2013
Type C Print face mounted on acrylic
50 x 75 cm

Snow study #1 2013
Digital video
5.13 minutes, looped

Snow study #2 2013
Digital video
3.40 minutes, looped

Structure #1 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Structure #2 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 30.5 cm

The fountain of energy 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Three sheep 2013
Type C print
56 x 84 cm

Towards the North Pole 2013
Type C print
30.5 x 45.7 cm

Trail flag #1 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Trail flag #2 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Trail flag #3 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Trail flag #4 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Trail flag #5 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Trail flag #6 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Trail flag #7 2013
Type C print
25.4 x 25.4 cm

Windsock 2013
Type C print
80 x 118 cm



Georgina CAMPBELL
Power plant 2013
Type C print
80 x 118 cm

**Opening hours**

Wednesday - Friday 11am- 5pm

Saturday & Sunday 1pm - 5pm

Venue

The Gallery @ Bayside Arts & Cultural Centre

Brighton Town Hall

Corner Carpenter & Wilson Streets

Brighton (Melway 67 F10)

Entrance on Wilson Street

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**Bayside
Arts & Cultural
Centre**

