



NATURAL TALENT Murray Fredericks in his element shooting in Wolgan Valley

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Landscape photographer Murray Fredericks, who shot Wolgan Valley for the accompanying article, inhabits two artistic worlds. You could say one is the visual world and the other is a place where the visual world mirrors the soul.

From the second of these worlds, Fredericks' 'empty' landscapes are distilled to an atmosphere that is so intense the viewer feels submerged. They record a place of vast skies, enveloping cloud and dried earth stretching to infinity; a world where land, sky and weather are inseparable. These are the photographs that have emerged from Fredericks' enduring fascination with Lake Eyre, the drought-bedeveloped salt pans of the South Australian desert. Fredericks has lived on the lake, camping on its dry, crazed, salt surface and, most recently, entering it in flood, photographing its changing faces for five weeks at a time over seven years. This year the lake filled with water. "I was there when the water started trickling in and, when I left, it was over my shoulders," he says.

These are the photographs that hang on gallery walls, most recently at Hamiltons in London (Salt II, 25 June - 11 September) and in a joint exhibition at the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney (The Lake, 28 August - 10 October). They have already helped earn him a growing international profile.

The year of the flood marks, with appropriate drama, the end of Fredericks' intense affair with Lake Eyre. Next will be Greenland. Fredericks is working towards his first excursion there, and the plan is, as with Lake Eyre, to camp out on the ice.

"Lake Eyre was as minimal a landscape as I could find at the time," he says. "But I've asked myself, 'is there a more minimal landscape?' And I'm thinking there might be, and it might be a completely flat ice cap."

A documentary, *Salt*, filmed by Fredericks and jointly directed with Michael Angus, records his work on Lake Eyre and has won three important awards in 2009: Best Australian Short Film at the recent Melbourne International Film Festival, Best Documentary Short, Atlanta Film Festival, and Special Jury Prize at Silverdocs, the Discovery Channel and American Film Institute's Documentary film festival in Washington.

The other of Fredericks' photographic worlds is one in which he approaches landscape with a more conventional eye, aimed at communicating in a more direct way with the viewer. His photographs of Wolgan Valley for the accompanying article here aim to reveal its physicality, but he is still looking for that moment of epiphany.

"There are places I've bushwalked to that are like that," he says. "There are valleys like that in Tasmania and various places around the Blue Mountains. There's something about this place; there was a sense. I've thought about this a lot and it goes to the centre of what my work is about. There's some feeling, some energy; when it all starts happening, my hair stands on end."

"Here it was something to do with the space of the valley, the valley walls, the trees, the shapes that were going on, the light, the mist ... we were completely immersed, it's a kind of drama. The whole place came alive and, at that point, it got taken out of the normal." JE