

full spectrum

Gregory Ackland / Joe Felber / Will Nolan

COUNTRY ARTS SA LEARNING CONNECTIONS RESOURCE KIT



Gregory Ackland, *Snowblind* (detail), 2011, archival inkjet print, 670 x 1000mm

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE KIT

This Resource kit is published to accompany the exhibition *Full Spectrum*, touring regionally with Country Arts SA 2013 – 2015.

This Resource kit is designed to support learning outcomes and teaching programs associated with viewing the *Full Spectrum* exhibition by:

- Providing information about the artists
- Providing information about key works
- Challenging students to engage with the works and the exhibition's themes
- Identifying ways in which the exhibition can be used as a curriculum resource
- Providing strategies for exhibition viewing, as well as pre and post-visit research

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THIS EXHIBITION

Full Spectrum is an investigation into representation, perception and abstraction by artists Gregory Ackland, Joe Felber and Will Nolan. Designed to challenge the viewer's perspective of photography today, each artist has experimented with a range of image-making processes in order to engage the still image as both a conceptual and cultural object.

FROM THE CURATOR

The works in this exhibition function as reflections of each photographer's concerns, explorations and pursuits of our technical craft. *Full Spectrum* is an exploration of what a photograph can be, what it can mean, and why should this be important? These questions are inherent to a contemporary photographic practice and worthy of further investigation; each of the photographers, Ackland, Felber and Nolan, have embarked on the development of new works to address these questions.

These artists, who form the core of the Photography Department at Adelaide College of the Arts believe that rigorous investigation of conceptual photography and a continued practicing of technique is vital for the development of new work.

Will Nolan's work is forensic in nature, true to technical specificity, intensely singular but always presented in serial form; there is a kind of repetitious obsession for detail drawn out through a purist's methodological approach. His works are slippery things, where beauty in all things is obsessively presented, where scale is exaggerated and where time is stopped - so we might as viewers, wonder and remember the disposable.

Joe Felber, conversely, is lyrical, teasing and inherently Swiss in his approach to image-making. This of course is important, as it is his design sensibility that informs his conceptual deconstructions of the photographic image, and his dry sense of humour that imbue his layered images with a staccato rhythm; at once aesthetically pleasing and conceptually challenging. Disorienting and alluring, the artist plays with temporal and spatial instability suggesting contradiction and endless permutations of the truthfulness of the image recorded by the camera.

Gregory Ackland's images conjure emotional responses to the vastness of nature. They are about the awe and wonder found inside the viewer, the image a trigger for this. Hope is also important in his images, as he intimates through his thoughtful still lives. The image becomes a vehicle, engaged in metaphor and eerie silence. The emptiness of Ackland's pictures suggest an emotional void, the picture is rendered only as ink on paper, or emulsion on celluloid and it is the viewer's interaction with the picture that transforms it; as if the picture is a trap patiently waiting for its prey.

I encourage you to spend time with the pictures in this exhibition, explore the details, rhythms and colour palettes of each artist's work. A consistent thread found in all of the works is one of observance, all of these pictures resonate as evidence of a keen attention to detail and of a studied process of looking and seeing.

Country Arts SA will tour *Full Spectrum* to regional South Australian galleries through 2013-2015 as part of their touring program.

Gregory Ackland, 2011

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Will Nolan, *White Wall #3* (detail), 2009, giclee print on german etching paper, edition 3/5, 1000 x 1000mm

EXPLORING THE WORK

GREGORY ACKLAND



Gregory Ackland, *The Disrupt* (from the series *Slowed Breath*) (detail), 2011, archival inkjet print, 670 x 1000 mm

Gregory Ackland is Studio Head of Photography and Digital Media at Adelaide College of the Arts. His early training in painting and video continue to inform the way he works with photography to challenge the 'landscape' genre. Often focusing on the overlooked, the non-site and the detritus left-behind at scenic points, his landscape works contest the idyllic and romantic notions associated with landscape. In *Full Spectrum*, Ackland has also engaged with still life: another genre steeped in expectation, to challenge both himself and the viewer with his broken incantations or *memento mori* arrangements. They are paradoxically beautiful and ugly at the same time – broken and discarded objects; carefully observed and arranged, layered in contextual meaning rather than existing as descriptions of the objects themselves.

There is a sense of violence and tenderness present in these still lives, the deep black void beckoning the viewer into a contemplative space, the arrangements floating within this flattened space like apparitions of memory and mediated scenes of tragedy. They are bound and intertwined – intimating a correspondence between object and place – drawing analogies to human struggle and nature's force.

His latest works continue to investigate the dualistic, centering on beauty, connectedness and fragility.

THE WORK

The image above titled *The Disrupt* comes from the series *Slowed Breath* and it is from the series title that we should take our first clue as to how to read these images. *Slowed Breath* refers to the meditative – the notion of slowing down, becoming aware of our surroundings and finding a sense of 'one-ness' with the environment. So it is that we draw breath, silently, inwardly and consider the piles of dirty snow that have been pushed into new 'mountains'; the horizon obscured, the sky offers nothing, we are drawn to the empty plastic receptacle – discarded and alien in its isolation. Ackland asks us to reframe our thoughts here, to consider why this object might be more important than the location itself. Indeed the viewer might wonder why is this worth my time – and the answer lies there within that paradox. This miniature moment of glory for the discarded object of no-use, here in this non-site, at this particular time – we must realise now as viewers that it is in our act of looking, thinking and acknowledging that we have actuated the importance of such a picture. The image is the reason.

The camera as recording device provides the only evidence of this interaction between place, object and photographer. The singular acknowledgement that the object was located there and recorded once – channeling Barthes' understanding of the consciousness of a picture *being-there* and *having-been-there*. The strange uneasiness of the picture – the record of a small death – the disrupt.

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'They represent the composition of a conceptual space, images and ciphers in which 'the visible' does not lie in the immediacy of the real.'

Stella Santacatterina
The Fantastic Space of the Image,
Portfolio #48, 2008 p.55

JOE FELBER



Joe Felber, *Reflexorama (Colour-Light-Shadows)* (detail), 2011, digital photography on metallic paper, 1220 x 7200 mm

My significant practice spent living and working in cities and major art centres in Europe and Australia has given me an insightful meaning of cultural diversity. During the early nineties whilst I was living in Cologne, Germany, a movement to conceptualise 'photography as art' developed.

During that time the communication and media philosopher Vilém Flusser published his seminal contribution on photography - *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*.

Flusser's investigated the analytical dialogue of the relationship between designers, artists and the tool of the camera. For Flusser, new media – beginning with the photo camera – has had a strong impact on people in general as well as on those who work with them. Flusser also questioned the function and meaning of design, and has inspired me to respond through the gesture of creativity as an interdisciplinary artist.

THE WORK

Examining pictures; first we ask questions such as; what do pictures consist of? What are they doing? This 25 panel grid is a photographic record of painted panels with the intention of understanding the camera in order to record light and shadow, and the illusion on perspective. Vilém Flusser's phenomenological study questioned the function and meaning of design, and has inspired me to respond through the gesture of painting, in turn, exploring its rationale for existence. My examination on abstraction has appeared continuously for the last 30 years in photography, painting, drawing and collaborations with other artists and disciplines. The emphasis on the grid responds to Rosalind Krauss as a structure within the visual arts of the twentieth century; also the time and space within music and photography as an illusion of recorded witness on light, object and colour. The priority given to the whole over the parts within this work allows the viewer to cross examine beauty and the relationship to formal structures.

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WILL NOLAN



Will Nolan, *The Greatest*, 2011, Inkjet print, pine wood, leather football, 800 x 600 x 500 mm

Will Nolan is a photo artist based in Adelaide, South Australia who graduated from University of South Australia with Honors in 2008. Since graduating he has exhibited nationally and has been the recipient of a number of grants and awards. Nolan is currently lecturing in photography at the Adelaide College of the Arts and at the School of Art, Architecture and Design at University of South Australia.

In my art practice I explore many genres within photography ranging from still life to landscape. More recently I have combined both sculpture and photography into my practice and the *Full Spectrum* exhibition gave me the opportunity to exhibit this new work. The interest for me in combining both sculpture and photography is the communication between objects and the photograph itself. Both of these mediums play an important role in the artwork and the preconceived idea of these objects is what intrigues me. The new arrangements that I reconstruct allow new ways for the audience to engage with the artwork and the object.

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WORKS

The picture above is an installation photograph of the artwork *The Greatest*. When I was a child I was exposed to sport very early and played football from the age of six. This love and involvement with sport that my family bestowed on me is still evident today. Like myself, other Australians have been subjected to this and I want to understand the types of values that this has led to and how this translates into other aspects of life. My values are still the same but there is a shift with my priorities from sport to art. What I apply to my art practice is in the same rigor as I did when I was playing and training and I want to explore and represent this understanding through art.



Joe Felber, *Lasting World Fragments (1)* (detail) 2003-2005, digital metallic print, edition 1-15, 60 x 95mm

THEMES

THEME 1

LANDSCAPE

Canonizing the unnoticed

Landscape as a theme is often a cultural strategy employed to make sense of the physical; through photography's history it has followed the hierarchical classification of painting, however conceptual photography since the late sixties has questioned the juncture of documentary and pictorial concerns by deliberating over the distant, more 'objective stare' and interrogating the inherent flatness of photography's monocular stare.

The trope of modernist formalism is directly opposed by an attention toward the flat, banal and seemingly pointless landscapes presented. Why has this view been chosen, when another similar view might be more majestic or inspiring?

Allegory must be important then, and we must as viewers search for the signs that inform these decisions and impart their reasons. The limit of the photograph's ability to communicate gives rise to an ambiguity of meaning and leaves the viewer to reconcile a meaning, any meaning for themselves.

THEME 2

CROSS - DISCIPLINE

The image is present

This theme is perhaps the most obvious and difficult to resolve. Photography has always been an uncomfortable bedfellow with the more established traditions of painting and sculpture, yet here we find ourselves vibrating between two central ideas; the imagination of painting and the physicality of sculpture. In exploring this space, we have looked beyond the camera and the print to extend the photographed object into the physical, to question the rendered image as the 'unequivocal truth' of the object. By presenting the object as empirical and present, rather than a two-dimensional print (protected by glass) it takes on a completely different quality, where the object can occupy a particular space and time. It is a way to project the image beyond Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' and position it in a continuum – it's right there – activated as an object that occupies time, space and place. It now has a physicality or volume – something that photography has always struggled with.

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¹ Sidra Stich, *Fischli/Weiss MATRIX/BERKELEY 118*, University Art Museum, Berkeley, 1988

THEMES

THEME 3 STILL LIFE

Common objects are no longer common

Photography has a strong history with still life; the ideals of observation, detailed recording and reproduction have been a constant as the camera's mimetic nature was exploited in search of technical precision and perfection. The formal qualities adhered to by this kind of approach are being questioned here – is there more to what you see than accurate reproduction? Here we'll introduce a quote by curator Sidra Stich on the Swiss photographers, Peter Fischli and David Weiss from her catalogue essay,

“For Fischli/Weiss, the video and most all of their art follow a desire to show “the way things go,” to call attention to the play of meanings that can be provoked by common objects, to manifest paradoxes and oppositions while indicating that there are no clear dividing lines or resolutions.” ¹

This quote brings light to the conceptualisation of still life, to propel the common object toward alternate meaning and importance. When viewing this exhibition consider why so much effort is invested into photographing the inane, useless, broken and discarded objects? Consider whether new relationships are formed when the object is removed from its context, scaled up and framed? Our explorations have led us to draw attention to the process and the end product, the importance of the object in both its physical and rendered forms.

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Gregory Ackland, *Heaven, Man and Earth: Arrangement #6*, 2011, digital C-print, edition of 5, 750 x 500mm

EXTENDED LEARNING

FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Consider the sites selected by the artists to photograph – can you relate to these sites and how would you have photographed them?
- How do you think the artists have drawn the viewer’s attention to specific ideas in the works?
- In your view, what role does repetition play in these works?
- Do you think scale is important in these works and why?
- How does your personal history influence the way you understand the photograph?
- Identify three strategies the artists have employed to relate the importance of objects to the viewer.
- Is the photograph an idea, or a judgement?

GREGORY ACKLAND

- In your mind, assemble no more than five objects to create a personal ‘memento mori’ arrangement. What are those objects and why have you chosen them?
- Consider what sound might accompany the artworks presented here, and how this might affect the viewer’s response?
- How connected are you to your own ‘heroic’ landscape?

JOE FELBER

- How are painting, drawing and printmaking relevant in photography?
- What are the connections between conceptual art and photography?
- What does ‘time and space’ mean to you?
- Explore ways that photographic representation is relevant to our memory.

WILL NOLAN

- The discarded object may be overlooked in the environment but once photographed, it becomes something else! Would you agree or not, why?
- We use photography to record what we see, but does it record how we feel?
- When we view a photograph we bring our own emotion and feeling to that photograph. Do any of the photographs in this exhibition create a certain feeling for you?

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