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dissociation

Alex Bond

Heathcote Museum & Gallery
7 March to 12 April 2015

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I have lived near the Canning River Regional Park for well over a decade, frequenting its trails and woodlands daily, and yet resisted for many years the impulse to make photographs. It was not for lack of visual inspiration. I was struggling to resolve an internal conflict. I could see beauty within the woods and wetlands, yet I could also see evidence of degradation from land use, introduced species and a stagnating river system. How could I portray its beauty on one hand when this environment is in decline? On the contrary, by not photographing the river parkland, would I not be self censoring, denying its inherent beauty and dissociating myself from my surrounds?

So what of the environment in which we have our homes, raise families and work? Whilst not imbued with the status and glamour of national parks, surely it deserves greater consciousness? We all desire to live in healthy surroundings with fresh air and clean water. Yet in this fast paced world we rarely have time to slow down, and consider our surroundings, our place within a landscape.

The Canning River Regional Park is one of Perth's largest regional parks, just 10km from the CBD. But all is not well for the Canning River, a major tributary to the Swan River. The Department of Water released a report warning of the ongoing decline in the health of the Canning River and surrounds. Desalinated water has been pumped into the river to maintain water levels (Mercer 2013). Within the park a third oxygenation plant to pump oxygen into the anoxic river has just been completed.

I resolved to photograph the river woodlands and wetlands as it presented to me, regardless of weeds and other evidence of degradation. I am more interested in capturing the inherent beauty of my subject revealed under certain light than photographing the merely beautiful. The abstraction of black and white is ideal for drawing attention to textures, shapes and composition.

As is my practice, I used a wooden 4x5 field camera, a process that demands time, patience and consideration, an approach I felt equalled the significance of recording a landscape in rapid transition. I hand process all my black and white films and make my own prints in a traditional wet darkroom, using silver rich fibre based papers of bygone years. The prints are toned and processed to archival standards and mounted on museum boards.

I rarely make a one off image of a subject. There is always so much more to discover on returning to photograph at a different time, season or light. Each visit builds upon my knowledge and with it grows a greater empathy towards my subject. Is beauty so close to our homes and work not worthy of our consciousness and appreciation?

Alex Bond 2015

References:
Mercer, D 2013, 'Canning River awash with toxic problems' The West Australian, June 11, viewed 9 January 2015, <https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/17548936/canning-river-awash-with-toxic-problems/>

Mercer, D 2013, 'Drinking water flushes rivers' The West Australian, June 15, viewed 9 January 2015, <https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/17613138/drinking-water-flushes-rivers/>

Artist Talk:
Saturday, 14 March 2015, 1.00pm to 2.00pm at the Gallery: A discussion of my work methods, including the use of a field camera.

Free Workshop:
Sunday, 15 March 2015, 1.00pm to 2.30pm at the Gallery: A demonstration of black and white film processing. Participant numbers are limited, email heathcote@melville.wa.gov.au to reserve your place.

Brief Biography:
Alex Bond works predominantly with the landscape in large format. Since 1989 he has published his images under his imprint Stormlight Publishing, receiving State and National awards for excellence in print, and two international nominations for his book, *Pemberton Wine Region Western Australia.* Further information at www.alexbond.com.au.

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Front image: Oxygenation Trail, Canning River, 11 x 11 inches



Alex Bond using his field camera, Canning River Regional Park



Canning River
16x20 inch fibre based silver gelatin print



Sheoaks in mist
16x20 inch fibre based silver gelatin print



River woodland
16x20 inch fibre based silver gelatin print



Fire aftermath
16x20 inch fibre based silver gelatin print



Sheoaks and hesperantha falcata
16x20 inch fibre based silver gelatin print



Paperbark regrowth
16x20 inch fibre based silver gelatin print



Riverbank roots
16x20 inch fibre based silver gelatin print