

LAND\$CAPE; GOLD AND WATER.

Mandy Martin

Mandy Martin is an artist and a lecturer in the Environment Studio, School of Art, National Institute of the Arts, Australian National University. Her work has always been concerned with the environment and our relationship to the landscape. This year she is working on a collaborative project, Land\$cape: Gold & Water, responding to the impact of the Cadia / Ridgeway gold mine on 10,000 hectares of natural habitat, agricultural land and the Belubula river in the Lachlan Catchment. It is an interdisciplinary project combining art and text and will be presented to rural and city audiences through a touring exhibition and accompanying publication. The project derives from 5 intensive field trips, organised by the Environment Studio and the participants include lecturers and students of ANU, personnel from other research institutions, local Cadia Region artists, Wiradjuri mentors, environmentalists, graziers and mine personnel.

The inspirational landscape I have chosen is that of the Cadia Region. I will describe it through the story of a collaborative, interdisciplinary project combining art and text; *Land\$cape: Gold & Water*. The landscape includes the Cadia Hill gold mine, owned by Newcrest Mining on 10,000 hectares of natural habitat, agricultural land and the Belubula River in the Lachlan Catchment, part of Murray Darling Basin in New South Wales. The project will be presented to local, rural and city audiences through a touring exhibition and accompanying publication.



Cadia Hill Mine. Artists, scientists, mine personnel and graziers working with Mandy Martin on *Land\$cape: Gold and Water*. Photograph by Mandy Martin.

The research for the project derived from 5 intensive field trips, organised by me for the Environment Studio, the Art School, ANU. The project involved staff and students of ANU, personnel from other research institutions, local Cadia Region artists, Wiradjuri mentors, environmentalists, graziers and mine personnel. We sought to engage the local community in a process whereby a broader range of landscape values are considered in the evaluation of natural resource use. Aesthetic evaluation of landscape is an important part of ecosystem services but little used or understood in Australia at present. Ecosystems offer

human society a range of what can be described as services, just as a city offers buses, sewerage, electricity and roads. Ecosystem services include the natural allocation of rain, the price of individual trees, rare plants, clean air or water. Other values like biodiversity and visual amenity can also be seen as a service. Our project aimed to use this methodology to place a value on the "Viewshed" or in mining terms, "Visual Catchment" and give that a value alongside other landscape values like indigenous, social and environmental values.

Establishing what is inspirational in this Cadia Region landscape is of course subjective and conditioned by many cultural factors. Working as a group of 16 people with the community will help to establish common ground. As an artist, I personally have responded to this landscape since I first visited it in 1995 and initially made small mixed media works combining conventional media with found substances including pigments and sometimes found supports like tin, signifying second- settler occupation. I was interested in the interlocked and bare boned hills and their special qualities of light. Gradually the series has evolved and currently I am completing a mosaic of 100 small canvases, half of them of the river and painted in a gold palette, using river sand and natural pigments, the other half of Cadia Hill Mine, painted in a copper palette, using tailings from the dam and sulphide concentrate from the sag mill. The small canvases are juxtaposed with a 570 cm diptych of the tailings dam with text inscribed in the foreground.



Mandy Martin: Installation at the Orange Regional Gallery, 2002.

Our family pastoral company own a property which they purchased in 1931, adjacent to Cadia Hill mine and also lease a neighbouring property, from the mine. We have been involved in the respective environmental impact surveys and development proposals from the start up of the mine and have worked closely with them, not only on the management of our leased property but also this project. As well, we are working with the mine and CSIRO to develop a long- term land management plan. This is aimed at integrating environment and production values on the Cadia Farms (14 properties purchased by Cadia Hill Mine for mining purposes and to act as a buffer zone) and through that protecting in posterity, the endangered Superb and Turquoise Parrots and the Yellow-Bellied Sheath-tail Bat and their threatened White Box and Yellow Box communities. The negotiations with the mine and CSIRO, and proposed reclamation efforts are all positive initiatives towards maintaining aesthetic amenity within the range of ecosystem services that we wish to build and retain. My husband, Guy Fitzhardinge and I have been working individually on these issues in the past and on a range of other projects. We felt the need to involve a larger local

and interested group of artists and writers, not only to build our own knowledge but to engage in this contemporary ethical debate about the value of landscape by inserting a more developed notion of aesthetic value into the discourse which is why we evolved “Land\$cape : Gold & Water”.

This inspirational landscape therefore is a contested landscape and one where rapid change has occurred and is still occurring. Effort and achievement therefore make this landscape inspirational.

Other things like the social displacement and grief at loss of Wiradjuri lands, native habitat, farming land and past environmental histories, for landholders and local community, heighten my emotional response to this landscape.

Another conditioner is the “Gold Footprint” or the hidden costs of the total energy, water, fuel consumed and rock mined to produce for example one gold ring, in other words this landscape has global drivers accelerating the rate of change, so my understanding of its inspirational qualities is coloured also by the scale of something small and precious being threatened by something large and ubiquitous.

A third set of conditioners which affect my aesthetic reading of this landscape includes other issues impacting on the health and value of this landscape like salination, weeds, cold water pollution, carp and degradation of land from grazing and agricultural practices, I know that what I see does not look as good as it did in the past when it was healthier.

Rebecca Solnit wrote in *As Eve Said to the Serpent. On Landscape, Gender, and Art* (1), “There is something biblical about the casting out of the dwellers in our public gardens. And there is something dangerous about being on the wrong side of our own symbology, even if we’re on the right side of the fence”

This danger, this ability to tamper with the work of gods, to completely rework the profile, composition of a landscape, like the mere digging over of a garden plot is shocking when it is on the other side of the fence. My mother-in-law, the children’s writer Joan Phipson lives in this landscape also and now in her 90th year hears the mine grinding away 24 hours a day and the daily blasts reminds her that gold mines have the jurisdiction to dig right up to one’s garden fence. The property and region are the location and locale for many of her prize winning books including, “Watcher in the Garden”(2). Joan has written of a special waterhole and the tree we sit under, in the past year also with Joan’s lifelong friend Rosemary Dobson who has written several poems about the property. Other distinguished writers who have sat under that tree include Richard Nelson, who survived a furious summer storm to write about his encounter with the platypus. Both writers and artists of second settler Australian backgrounds have found the place special. Our neighbour, Meta Rothery, in her late eighties now, one of the original European descendents of the area, still living on the property first settled in the 1830s, paints a rich panoptica of images on rocks collected from the river at this spot. These are part of an installation for the exhibition, a river of rocks flowing through the space, representing the cultural inflows of the Belubula; foxes, cats, flowers, the queen, horses, dogs, Cathy Freeman, and “Plugger”, the football player!

As my own series of paintings has progressed I realised it was important to have a traditional Wiradjuri owner, voice their connection with the place. The Environmental Impact Surveys undertaken by both respective stages of the mine had located a scarred tree on Oaky Creek and I was keen it should be photographed before we erected the obligatory fence around it. Alana Harris, a Wiradjuri, born in Cowra completed this task and also as a water person made a series of photographs of the river. We exhibited these works “They Have a Faith to Move Mountains”(3) together at Bathurst Regional Gallery.

Other artists working on the current project include Marty Huehner, an ecologist/artist from the USA (and 11 of his students) who has made dental alginate prints of fox tracks, stalking birds on the surface of the tailings dam; Matt Higgins, an honours photomedia student, whose poignant digital images of a brilliant blue butterfly plastered on the dusty ground reflect his prime concern with local communities facing globalisation; Penny Stott, an honours painting student is researching threatened species particularly the superb

parrot; and Nicki Dickson, also an honours painting student, who paints sublime images of noxious weeds like Bathurst Burr. Weeds, carried by the wind, rivers and animals cross the mine fence. As do endangered parrots, bats and the indicator of environmental health, the bogong moth.

The death count of bogong moths from huge lights burning all night must be immense, that loss of night sky amenity not only affecting fauna but in the development phase, in our own house many kilometres away as the crow flies, we cast shadows from the light of the huge lights on the inside walls at night. We now, where there was previously dazzling clear night sky, have a city of lights burning orange, through the constant pall of dust, a change of aesthetic for certain.

Cultural change is always difficult to effect and because second settler Australian's brought their own agricultural systems and notions of the landscape picturesque with them, often it was impossible to even see the land for what it was and to see that what was being destroyed, was gone forever. Polo grounds, European gardens, vineyards and windfarms, fit with a Eurocentric vision of an ordered landscape and although we see all these on the other side of the fence, I don't think these things mean more to rural stakeholders than the long-term preservation of natural habitat and pastoral amenity. This is also true of the personnel we have met at the mine, many would consider themselves green. However I do think they may not have thought of the long-term consequences of loss of ecosystem services. Second settler Australians reshaped the grassy box woodlands of the Central Tablelands, long managed by Aboriginal fire farming and now the mine is finishing off that transformation, reworking the contours of the land into unnaturally shaped waste rock heaps and 95 meter high tailings dams. The unspoilt view amenity in the Cadia Region, once it was bitten into, seemed to change rapidly, a previously uninterrupted pastoral view now became a small city of activity. In the past 2 years the mine has built a road, power-line and pipe-line pumping water to the mine, through the property we lease from the mine. On the other side of that fence are the tailings dams.



Mandy Martin. *The Tailings Dam*. Oil on Linen © 2002.

Why worry, pastoral landscape is already spoilt, degraded by grazing and cropping? Maybe if we had valued this landscape more appropriately, valued it for the memories, the cultural history, the scale of this loss would not be so big. One of the four writers in our project and also a photographer, Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies PhD candidate,

George Main, deals with these issues of grief caused by loss and displacement, his image of the waste rock heap through the abandoned shearing shed window, freezing in time this transition. Likewise Sarah Ryan, Sustainable Ecosystems at CSIRO, another writer and artist, works with digital photographs, to represent displacement, symbolically relocating from the living room of an imaginary Cadia farm a 1940s Raynham vase, a somewhat funereal lustre ware object, onto the tailings dam, into the old shearing shed, now a storage area for mine samples, and onto the waste rock heaps.

Local artist, Ken Hutchinson in his series of portrait paintings of people and the landscape reminds us that Worster's "howling world of nature" has always been a force in human life" (4) and that "without intending to do so, large-scale ventures seem to reduce ecological richness and human-scale endeavours to trivialities" (5). The landscape settings for his subjects become psychological stage sets, his hillsides are scattered with sheep impaled on the stumps of ringbarked White Box, tractors ploughing up paddocks right across the horizon into his subject's ear, leaving trails of red dust billowing out behind. Ken slams home the message that the grazing industry doesn't have a clean slate and massive changes to landscape have occurred as the results of bad grazing practice, the scale of environmental damage done by the mining industry is small in comparison with other rural industries. Peggy Spratt, honours painting student and biologist, paints with wax encaustic and found pigment the eroded gullies and ravaged hillsides of our agricultural past.

Wendy Teakel, sculptor, painter, and Naomi Greschke, make us aware that industrial agriculture and the monoculture of large-scale mining have similar implications for a landscape aesthetic, the loss of landscape amenity: "When a corporation gets so large it can wield power to externalise costs that should be properly be part of the price of the product it sells, then the public may reap the benefit of buying a (cheap) product but be forced to absorb ecological costs that it did not agree to accept... The megacorporation may affect the taxes of millions of citizens and compromise the quality of life of future generations"(6).

Rebecca Solnit (7) says "landscape's most crucial condition is considered to be space, but its deepest theme is time". Marty, besides working with dental alginate casting of the tailings dam, has constructed clay impression time lines of the deep time in the Cadia region, from the Devonian Fish fossils in nearby Canowindra and Fossil Hill, through the geological fault lines, natural flora, to European agriculture and finally the mine. These timelines, another landscape aesthetic, are presented sequentially in core sample boxes from the mine and fired with glazes from substances found at different sites at the mine and in the region.

Lex Beardsell, an honours painting student/ microbiologist, herself with Chinese ancestry, has constructed vertical landscapes reminiscent of Chinese scroll paintings, starting with rubbings of the 1880 Chinese gold- diggings along the river, the sluice walls covered now in lichen. She has responded to these subtle colourings and used natural substances like soil and ochre to make the rubbings then transferred historical photographic images into the works as a mere palimpsest. John Reid has photographed the river and the mine focussing on subtle issues of the impact people, the Wiradjuri, the Chinese through to the current 10 year pit, have had on the land.

Belinda Jessup, honours, Textiles, collects leaves from the White Box, Yellow Box, casuarina, mistletoe and lichen and dyes silk on the open camp fire, brewing in her witch's cauldron an amazing array of landscape colours, twisting actual leaves into the fabric leaving a distinct imprint. The soils and concentrate from the mine on the other side of the fence also create colour, fitting Rebecca Solnit's observation that "Attention to substance as a manifestation of nature unravels assertions about alienation from nature"(8).

The point of aesthetic evaluation by artists is that the art itself becomes the evaluation and although I could write clumsily about my choice of a gold palette to capture the light on the river at dawn, the cobalt blue of the sky at winter solstice and the naples yellow/pink light bathing the green underlaid with red ochre of hills crossed with sheep tracks, that is the job of writers. I would similarly love to prove that this landscape in Cadia Region is

so special it should be frozen in time and even restored to a healthier version of its original aesthetic. And also to point out that the unspoilt rural vistas and natural habitats advertised as a tourist attraction are the very amenity which that industry depends on and which attract people to live in the area are being destroyed forever. We need to preserve what we have left and agricultural and mining havoc need to be rehabilitated so that the uninterrupted vista of rural arcadia can be re-established. We just have to go through the painful process of destruction before the reconstruction can occur.

(1) Solnit, Rebecca, *As Eve Said to the Serpent. On Landscape, Gender, and Art* University of Georgia Press. Athens. USA 2002, p.132

(2) Phipson, Joan, *Watcher in the Garden*

(3) *Auriferous*

(4) *Remaking Reality. Nature at the Millenium* Routledge, London 1998 eds Braun, Bruce & Castree, Noel, P. 201, ref, Worster, P 1096

(5) *Fatal Harvest; the Tragedy of industrial agriculture* Ed Kimbrell, Andrew. Foundation for Deep Ecology 2002 California, P. 91 Paul Hawken.

(6) *Ibid; Fatal Harvest* p. 91 "Scale - Does It Matter?" Kirschenmann, Frederick

(7) *Ibid; Solnit, Rebecca, P. 53*

(8) *Ibid, Solnit, Rebecca, P. 59*