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Terra nullius

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Terra nullius

Abstract

Tonight the stars shine so bright against their backdrop of infinity. I arrived here in Sharks Bay this morning at 9.00 am after hiring a lift from the roadhouse with the town taxi driver who knew of Joe Mallard when he was young,...and had lots to say about Mabo and the World Heritage issue ...

- Journal excerpt Sat Aug 7 1993

Terra Nullius

Joseph Mallard

...and now suddenly the Landscape vindicates its rights, and we are attracted by the surroundings.

—Goethe, Italian Journey

It may not only be the Australian Aboriginal children of the future who will regard the Rainbow Snake with the same kind of guilty and bemused respect that the Irish give to their fables... one way in which the traditional Aboriginal culture will persist and develop in Australia will certainly be through the efforts of urbanised Aboriginals to recreate their own past in the process of self-identification within a modern and changing society

—Bernard Smith

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1993 was a year of accidental sightings and in its noon-tide returning, as if in a siesta, to the bricolage, the strange mixture, of memory, history and existence that constitutes origins. A visit to Mid-Western Australia brought me to the Geraldton cemetery. Here I had the uncanny experience of finding my namesakes place of rest. Before me lay the epigraph of my grandfather: Joseph Mallard(1901-1957) NEW GUINEA R.A.A.F WW 11.

I then headed north to Sharks Bay where my father and his brother were brought up on Carrarang Station, Edel Land peninsula, which my grandfather managed with his wife in the years before WW11. My grandmother, Ivy Mallard nee Poland, never ceased to reminisce about the marvellous life they lived in this remote part of the world. To the west of Edel Land, across the dunes, were the perilous Zuytdorp Cliffs whose name remembers the VOC ship that met its fate there one night in 1712. North of here, this fatal shore reaches furthest into the Indian Ocean and Steep Point watches over the channel separating Dirk Hartog Island from Edel Land Peninsula. To the south, the Murchison River still cuts its way through the layers of sandstone bedrock on its Loop and Z Bend to Kalbarri and the sea.

All photographed on foot, with the same lens and accompanying journal entries, these landscapes are not only the result of a geographic touring of remote coastal and inland Mid-Western Australia. But also of a series of events that led to a return to that 'other' experience of journeying: the songline... both descriptive and formal, close and far-sighted, stubborn geometry drawn on both cloudy and clear days with at times both fear and repose... turning to the landscape as a site of remembrance and (be)longing. As transient lives pass through it, we represent it and it represents us. These images were developed in a spirit of national and personal memorial, in that great wake of the *Mabo* decision in 1992, and in my subsequent retracing of my fathers life.

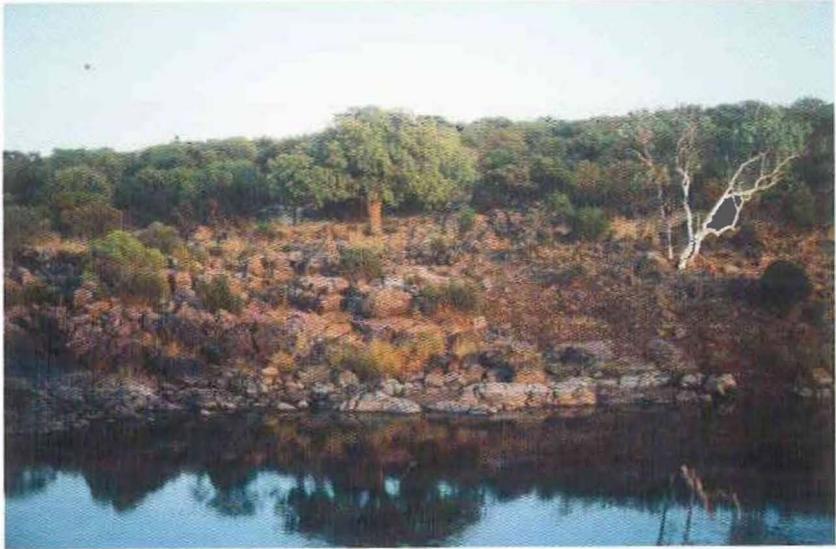
Terra nullius, now no longer an abused doctrine, at least at home, led me on a voyage of self-realisation, of self dialogue where the levels of light and land became witness and adjudicator of self and history. To make what was absent present ratifying new prospects on the horizon. As such these *imago* can be located as the celebration of a new dialogue/history in this country; now that there is ground to talk/walk upon.



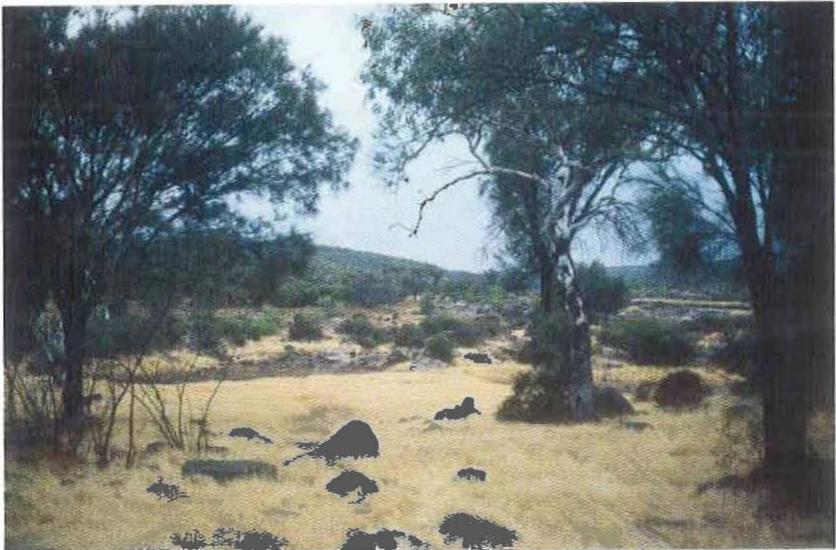
Cape Peron, Shark Bay



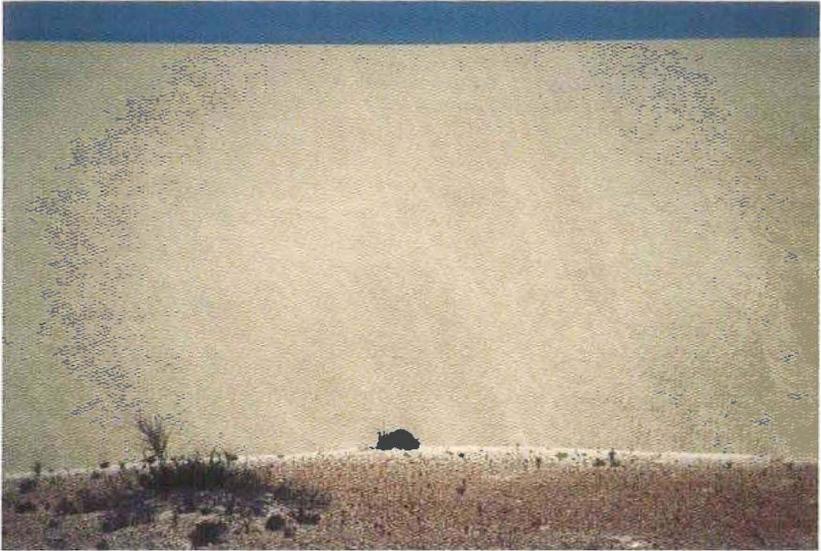
Epineux Bay, Edel Land



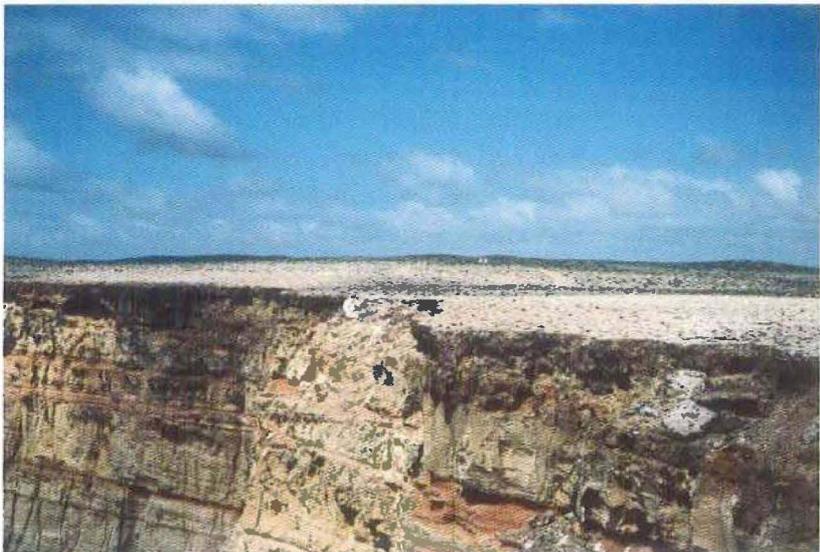
Hardabout Pool, Kalbarri



Hardabout Pool, Kalbarri



Dunes, Edel Land



Zuytdorp Cliffs, Edel Land