

Murray Fredericks "Salt"

Boutwell Draper Gallery  
82-84 George Street, Redfern  
Until November 17  
Reviewed by Robert McFarlane

Murray Fredericks has photographed some of the world's most memorable vistas - from the jagged beauty of the Himalayas to Tasmania's comparatively welcoming Cradle Mountain wilderness.

I remember being startled by the beauty of a Frederick's photograph of a South American glacier, glittering like party ice as it eased its way along a Patagonian valley to the sea. Fredericks' landscape photographs were almost always distinguished by their vivid sense of scale, strong composition and fine black and white printing.

His latest exhibition "Salt", at Boutwell Draper Gallery, departs dramatically from this vision. Beginning in 2006, Fredericks has photographed exclusively in colour on remote Lake Eyre in South Australia, capturing minimalist landscapes with few familiar visual elements - except for an occasionally discernable horizon.

"I didn't want to keep doing the same thing," says Fredericks. "Looking back at the pictures (of mine) that I liked most ... I noticed they were ones that conveyed a sense of space. I deduced that maybe it was just space that interested me."

"I had photographed on salt lakes in Bolivia and had a strong response to the pure emptiness ... the sense of space there and so, I thought, we have salt lakes in Australia ... and I took a trip to Lake Eyre without (much) expectation. But the first time I saw the lake - where the desert ended and there was a perfectly flat salt plain - I felt a deep vibration that hit me right in the chest and I knew there was something there. It was like an epiphany."

By concentrating exclusively on space and colour Fredericks' photographs reduce a landscape to its most elemental level - much as British painter JMW Turner did more than a century ago - allowing light, colour and form to complete his artist's vision.

If there is a constant in Fredericks' "Salt" pictures it is the subtle colour contained within each 1.5 meter wide print. Using a cumbersome Japanese Toyo view camera loaded with large sheets of colour print film, Fredericks captures a wide range of hues - from deep blue night skies to the muted colours of a desert so flat and featureless it was once the location for Donald Campbell's 1964 world land speed record attempt.

Perhaps Fredericks' most arresting photograph in this show is "Salt 1999", in which repetitive ridges of dried salt in the foreground juxtapose with a deep blue sky through which, over a long exposure, two stars trail opposing arcs of light. This truly planetary picture underlines the delicacy with which we navigate the heavens while also suggesting parts of Earth may not be quite so different from Mars.