

**IN
RESPONSE
TO PLACE**

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**RECENT PHOTOGRAPHS FROM
RICKY MAYNARD**

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**'PRIVATE PROPERTY'
RESPONSES TO PLACE IN THE
WORK OF RICKY MAYNARD**

On surveying the images produced by Ricky Maynard for his *In Response to Place* series, a group of photographs that mark Indigenous sites along a section of the heart of contemporary Melbourne (the northern bank of the Yarra River), I am immediately struck by the degree to which the images are able to balance a sense of landscapes past and present and integrate them to form an organic *reality* for today. In Maynard's work there is no self-conscious attempt to reclaim an Indigenous attachment to place.

Equally, there appears no anxiety to recover a 'lost' Indigenous past or to justify an Indigenous presence in the city of Melbourne in 2006.

In Response to Place documents the dynamic culture and histories of Indigenous people as a subtle but potent presence that is neither argued for nor defended. The landscapes and stories of the Wurundjeri people of Melbourne are understood and reproduced by Maynard as a lived reality and continuum available

to us through the lens and on paper, under our feet and all around us. Importantly, these places are not segregated from other locations in the city. Nor are they assimilated into or consumed by the city. As all stories should, they co-exist with other stories while maintaining their own particular meaning and resonance.

Landscapes are dynamic. They do not exist statically and without change. Built and so-called natural landscapes shift and shape each other

as part of this dynamic. Ricky Maynard responds to topographies of place with this phenomenon in mind. Other photographers, such as Walker Evans, who documented the environmental disasters of the midwestern dustbowl of America in the 1930s, have influenced Maynard's own work. Evans understood that an image of a rusting advertising sign, or a rotting floorboard in a rundown shack perhaps, could convey the story of a place as effectively as any image of the topsoil disappearing with the harsh winds.

In order to tell his own story of Melbourne, Maynard juxtaposes the glass and steel of the city's high-rise towers with the scarred and inscribed surfaces of ancient rocks. He highlights the integral relationship between the architecture of roadways, of light pole, and passing trains, with recent interventions produced on wood and stone by other artists who have responded to the narratives and landscapes of the city. Maynard invites us to appreciate both the changing and familiar light of Melbourne; the city of night, the city of shadows, and a city bathed in the hues of a magical blue blanket of sky.

The images produced by Maynard are of sites along one bank of the Yarra River. It is a landscape that has been altered both geographically and culturally throughout time. An engagement with the physical environment by photographers has traditionally regarded the natural world as fundamentally discreet from human interaction and presence. *In Response to Place* is influenced by both a philosophy and practice that challenges this idea, illustrating the social and cultural use and attachment to place by people.

This constant shift was most dramatically present and created unstable conditions for Indigenous people following the arrival of European occupiers to what would subsequently become known by them as the Port Phillip district after 1835. Not only was the topography of both the river and its surrounds subject to an impact not previously experienced, Indigenous groups who lived on and owned land throughout the district witnessed the destruction of places that they had both formed and been informed by. Therefore it is important that we recognise another reality.

Change rarely impacts upon us equally, whether the effects are positive or negative. The advantages gained by some who engage with place, who covet it, exploit it and gain materially from it, occur at the expense of others.

The writer and critic, John Berger, has written that within the photograph there is both an absence and a presence, indicative not of an oppositional and abrasive point of view, but simply a reflection of the emotional states of loss and attachment that exist within each of us. The Indigenous loss of place as an outcome of colonisation *appears* as an absence in Ricky Maynard's photographs of Melbourne. But without contradiction, a continued and unbroken presence is also a constant vibration throughout *In Response to Place*. This reflects both the strength and honesty of Maynard's work.







To fully appreciate the value of these images it is helpful to visit the sites and landscapes that have been photographed. During my own walk along the riverbank I could sense the presence of Maynard's creative and intellectual motivation. His voice was present in place, as were the voices of other Indigenous people. Two voices were particularly strong. Not surprisingly, both of them, like Maynard, were revered artists and thinkers.

One was the voice of William Barak, the Wurundjeri artist, intellectual and eventual elder. He had been present as a young boy at the signing of the Batman 'Treaty' in 1835, and lived to witness the federation of Australia in 1901. The Wurundjeri, as with other Indigenous groups of the Port Phillip area, were increasingly forced to the margins of their own country following the arrival of Europeans. Eventually many of them were relocated to the Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve near present day Healesville in the 1860s. Despite the losses of land experienced by the Wurundjeri people both land and place remained a continued source of cultural and spiritual vitality.

The words of William Barak, resonating this philosophy, continue to hold meaning for us:

You got to know your father's country, Yarra is my father's country...me no leave it, Yarra, my father's country.

While walking where Ricky Maynard had taken his camera I also remembered the work of another photographer (and poet), Lisa Bellear, who during her all too short life often took her camera into the streets of this city to make pictures of Indigenous people engaging with and being in place. Lisa Bellear, like Ricky Maynard, celebrated Indigenous life in this city today while asking us to bear witness to her images that reflected both injustice and hope.

The words of Lisa Bellear, as with the photographs of Ricky Maynard, also ask that we simply give respect to each other's place:

*Dear anyone to anyone
who just might care
I didn't know
I just didn't know
I'm still not
sure*

(from 'To no one: and Mary did time', Lisa Bellear 1961-2006)

Written by Tony Birch
Lectures in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne

All images *Untitled*, Ricky Maynard, 2006

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**ARTIST STATEMENT
BY RICKY MAYNARD**

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Zone VI 5 x 4 wooden field
view camera

Kodak 160 NPC 5 x 4
colour negative film

Scanned on Imacon
Drum scanner

Printed on Chromira printer -
Photographic paper

102 x 76 cm Chromira Print

I am interested in making intelligent art with a specific cultural purpose. To seek a balance between craftsmanship and social relevance. Photography has the ability to tell stories about the world and how the photograph has the power to frame a culture. In response to form and discovering significance of place we come closer to understanding place within ourselves, physically, metaphorically and historically. It is a continuing journey and as with this body of work continues to address issues of identity, site, place and nation.

Landscape photography, the main business of which, is a rediscovery and revaluation of where we find ourselves.



**CITY GALLERY
MELBOURNE TOWN HALL
SWANSTON STREET**

**GALLERY HOURS
MONDAY 10AM - 2PM
TUE - THU 11AM - 6PM
FRIDAY 11AM - 6.30PM
SATURDAY 10AM - 4PM**

**EXHIBITION DATES
24 JANUARY 2007 -
21 APRIL 2007**



*Living
the Arts*