

Art Portfolio

John South



LIST OF WORKS

Electric pond 2018
video
duration variable
60 x 84 cm

How the sun came to be 2018
video & audio
dimensions variable
60 x 84 cm

Skyworld 2018
video installation
dimensions variable
60 x 84 cm

2018 2018
photograph on cotton rag
60 x 84 cm

2018 2018
photograph on cotton rag
60 x 84 cm

2018 2018
photograph on cotton rag
60 x 84 cm

BIOGRAPHY

John South (Bathindi) grew up in the Blue Mountains, making them his home again as an adult. He has been exhibiting his work in solo exhibitions since 1990 at Parrish Regional Gallery & Levens Bequest, Project Contemporary Art Space in Wollongong as well as at Bournall Aboriginal Artists Cooperative. He was a finalist in the 2006 and 2007 Parliament of NSW Indigenous Art Prize. He was selected for the 2008 Honouring Country: Sharing Our Stories program at Blue Mountains Cultural Centre. He has also been included in group exhibitions at the Blue Mountains City Art Gallery since 2014.

South has completed postgraduate degrees at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW and Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney. He is currently a PhD candidate at Western Sydney University researching Aboriginal Astronomy. This research includes developing new skills in astrophotography and geospatial analysis as well as a greater understanding of the cosmology that is based on astronomy.

He finds inspiration in the natural world and explores locations through the camera lens, using it as a way of seeing what is not normally visible. This can either be through the macro lens or through long exposure photography of the night sky. South has always been interested in the way time can be altered through video. His practice includes finding locations that allow celestial observations, particularly mornings and settings along the horizon.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Blue Mountains Cultural Centre acknowledges that the City of the Blue Mountains is located on the traditional lands of the Darug and Gundungurra peoples. Blue Mountains City Art Gallery would like to thank John South for his dedication to his practice and his passion for his subject matter. John South would like to thank his family for their support.

John South SKYWORLD

BLUE
MOUNTAINS
CITY ART
GALLERY



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Published in conjunction with the exhibition
John South: Skyworld
30 June - 19 August 2018

A Blue Mountains Cultural Centre exhibition
curated by Rika Oakley

IMAGES

Cover and inside:
Skyworld 2018
video stills

Above:
Moon 2018
research photograph

Left:
title??? 2018
photograph
60 x 84 cm



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2018, Skyworld, Blue Mountains City Art Gallery,

Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, solo exhibition, video installation.



JOHN SOUTH: SKYWORLD

Australian Aboriginal cultures are rich with astronomical connections, including sky stories, which are a way of remembering and transmitting important parts of ceremony, law and culture. Skyworld is the spiritual realm beyond the horizon that is part of Aboriginal Cosmology shared across tribes. It is inhabited by Dreamtime ancestors, known as sky heroes, who travelled to Earth and formed our landscape before returning to the sky. They left behind geological reminders such as rock formations, mountains, plants and animals.

Through video installation and photography John South explores cultural and spiritual mythologies surrounding the night sky, creating a contemporary, digital interpretation of an ancient Cosmology. South uses the waterlily as a symbol to connect the metaphysical location of Skyworld above to the physical Earth below. Waterholes with waterlilies are considered potential residing places for the spirit ancestors such as the Rainbow Serpent. In Skyworld the Milky Way can be seen as the waterhole while the stars are the waterlilies.

A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN SOUTH

RO: Where did it all begin - what set you on the artist's path?

JS: One of the earliest experiences I can remember associated with visual arts was visiting Norman Lindsay's Gallery in Springwood. Seeing his studio within the gardens, that are scattered with fountains and sculptures leading down into the bush where there was a swimming pool, sparked a fascination for what I later came to know as a bohemian lifestyle. It wasn't only visual artist's that were inspirational to me; it was also musicians, dancers, film and other creative production.

RO: How did you become interested in Aboriginal Astronomy as a subject for your artwork?

JS: I've always been interested in astronomy generally. Growing up I remember travelling to a relatives property near Coonabarabran to observe Haley's Comet, near the Warrumbungle National Park. This is now the first "Dark Sky Park" in the Southern Hemisphere. There were so many more stars visible away from the city lights. It's a different type of communication when you're looking into the night sky listening to stories, as

opposed to sitting inside. It's a way of continuing a cultural storytelling practice. My auntie's recall this happening with their Nan, camping out under the stars in the backyard on a warm summer night, listening to Nan's stories as they looked out into the night sky.

RO: What do you think people could learn from Aboriginal Astronomy today?

JS: It's important to distinguish the difference between astronomy and cosmology. Astronomy is the understanding of the movement across the sky of the extra-terrestrial objects and phenomena. Once this is understood the cultural astronomy known as Cosmology develops, based on the unique characteristics of stars, planets, star clusters and galaxies. Each story is connected to a place on earth, such as rock formation or mountain, which is usually at the end of a dreaming track or song-line. This is the concept of the "mirror in the sky" reflecting the land below what is known as Skyworld. Learning a culture's Cosmology will change the way you see the world.

Artists are also change agents. Both Astronomy/ Cosmology and an artwork can lead the viewer through a narrative of the night sky: when the viewer connects to the characters or stories present. It can lead to self-discovery and understanding. If we

slow down enough to listen to a story or absorb an artwork our perception of time can change. A similar change in perception is necessary to grasp astronomical concepts around the enormous distances unfathomable using an earthly understanding. This is why observing Haley's Comet, at such a great distance, makes it appear to be stationary, or the solar flare from the sun being such a huge size also appears to be motionless from our perspective on earth. Both the physical reality of the Astronomy and the associated Cosmology require a shedding of past understanding of the world around us to gain a more precise one.

RO: What does Skyworld mean to you? Can you explain the importance of Skyworld to Aboriginal cultures.

JS: What is important about the notion of Skyworld is that it is a shared cosmology across the world's indigenous cultures. For Australian Aboriginal people it is a location that clever men went to and encountered the same ancestral being often spoken about in the Dreaming. The importance of Skyworld is in its universal understanding: themes between different cultures run parallel without any contact being made from culture to culture. The archetypal representation of this collective understanding is what Aboriginal people called Skyworld.

RO: Can you tell me about the symbol of the waterlily? What does it mean to you and what does it represent?

JS: The waterlily symbolises many things which continue to evolve with each new interpretation. Dreaming connections to the waterlily often present the waterlily as a star or stars as waterlily. An example could be the Milky Way as a body of water and each star is a waterlily. It is a location where the Dreamtime ancestors collect the waterlily. On the waterlily pond is identified as a location where the Rainbow Serpent has come to rest and best not be disturbed. When considering some of these connections the waterlily can be seen as a star if you also see the reflection as part of the whole.

RO: What do you want audiences to take away from your exhibition?

JS: There isn't one thing that I would like the audience to go away with because it will be different for each person and I wouldn't want someone to feel they somehow missed the point of the show. If people go away thinking about Skyworld that is enough. Perhaps leading to the question: Is Skyworld a real place? Is this concept repeated in other parts of the world? Why are waterlily (or lotus) present in spiritual iconography?

What this work offers is an opportunity to see the world around us in a different way; to see how the waterlily and its reflection in the water can become the shape of a star. Then the waterlily pond is not just a physical location but a metaphysical concept; drawing connections between ourselves and the flower in the personal and the waterlily pond and the cosmos in the universal.



2018, Possum Skin Cloak, Lewers Gallery, Video Installation



Power Desire Control, NSW Parliament Art Award finalist Parliament



Axis Mundi as a tree a bridge between the earth and sky Digital print 2015

The evolution of earth has influenced some of the art works that I have made since starting the research, including the two artworks; *Power Desire Control* and a series of photos of the night sky (above).

During the Renaissance a pinhole camera technique was developed as a way of projecting the outside onto a canvas allowing perspective points of view within painting and drawing. Suggestion this technique eventually led to early photo cameras. (Hockney, 2006).

Edward Hubble has left behind his legacy of glass plate capturing some of the first nebular defining the term based on the fuzziness of the images.

The Kepler satellite is still today using photography to map parts of the universe in search of habitable planets. a way of documenting the night sky through photography is a way I have explored rising and setting sun and moon and meteor showers. Playing with the exposure to reveal additional stars, invisible to the naked eye. The images explored through post processing in photoshop image editing application. Using photoshop and rawtherapy stitching them together to produce a wide angle panorama. Then pushing the image further drawing on the distortion of light pollution than adding lightning, letting the narrative reveal itself which led to *Power Control Desire*, (above).



2017, Skyworld, video
3 min Blue Mountains
City Art Gallery, Blue
Mountains Cultural
Centre , Cafe.
Our *worldview* beliefs
develop on how we

perceive space and time. However, how we perceive space and time, is formed by our cultural beliefs. Our beliefs developed over time tend to build through shared collective mythologies. *Dreaming Tracks* cross the landscape and trace the epic journeys conveyed in mythologies. As a result, seem embedded within the landscape, shaping rivers and forming mountains bring to mind the messages held within the mythology. While Aboriginal nations have their own mythology there are overall themes shared between groups across the country.

John South - Barkindji Nation



2016 Dreamscape and Possum Skin Cloak

Braemar House & Gallery

Springwood



2015 Possum-Skin Cloak video installation NADOC

Blue Mountains City Art Gallery,

Blue Mountains Cultural Centre

Possum-fur seat and time-laps of mist

Bell birds audio.

2014 Dreamscape NADOC

Blue Mountains City Art Gallery

Blue Mountains Cultural Centre

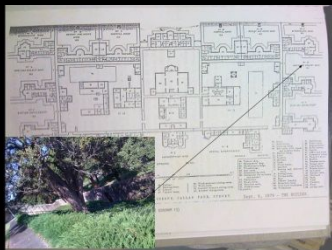


Video projection onto pillow - Archival images of the progression Blue Mountains railway
with night time crickets audio.

2011 End of year show (masters in Fine Arts research)

Sydney College of the Arts

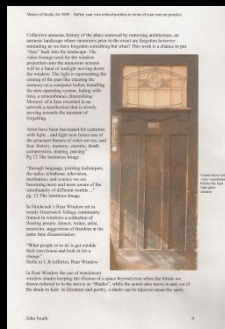
Balmain



2009 Number 4 video installation (masters in studio art)

Sydney College of the Arts

Balmain



video seen through leadlight in door



video stills

Fire

Parliament of NSW Indigenous Art Prize

Parliament House

Sydney



2008 Summerland video installation *Confidential Business*

Casula Powerhouse

Casula

Mara Mob



2007 Rainbow Lorikeet painting

Parliament of NSW Indigenous Art Prize

Parliament House

Sydney



2006 Sydney Gay and Lesbian **Mardi Gras** *Headdresses* photo

The Pink, the Black and the Beautiful

Boomali Aboriginal Artist Co-operative

Leichardt





2004 Blue Pool - Graduation Show

College of Fine Arts

Paddington

Warali Warali Trail Project

Fairfield City Council

Fairfeild



2000 Geometry (film)

Indigenous Mentorship Scheme screening - Metro ScreenPaddington

