

# Art

Arts

## Figuring Landscapes



Head shot Andrew Kötting's 'Jaunt'



Christ on a bike Shaun Gladwell's 'Approach to Mundi Mundi'

A programme of video art from Australia and the UK reveals contrasting ideas of what 'landscape' means. By Nick Dent

Destiny Deacon's 2004 video art piece 'Over d-fence' depicts an indigenous man sitting in his backyard chatting to two black dolls. When a nosy neighbour tries to sell him some religious magazines and he refuses, she accuses him of being drunk. An amusing send-up of suburban Aussie soaps, 'Over d-fence' was one of the Australian films suggested by co-curator Pat HOFFIE for *Figuring Landscapes*, an exhibition of video art from the UK and Australia devised by London curators Catherine Elwes and Steven Ball.

"When I put this work forward some of the responses were 'this is not about landscape,'" HOFFIE reveals. "I said, 'You ask any blackfella and they'll tell you it *is* bloody landscape. Our backyards *are* their country! In Australia, landscape means things that are really different to Britain. And that was always potentially a problem, but a problem that made it interesting."

HOFFIE is an artist and professor at Griffith University in Brisbane. She and colleague Dr Danni Zuvella curated the Australian half of the show of 56 moving image works. Tackling ideas such as history, identity, gender,



Board meeting Ah Kee's 'Can't Chant'; inset: Scott Morrison's 'Ocean Echoes'

tourism, ecology, and the sublime, the films recently screened at the Tate Modern in London and are showing at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery at the College of Fine Arts in April.

A show involving two nations, one of which has colonised the other, is always going to have its political side, and this is something explored in several works that HOFFIE brought to the table. Vernon Ah Kee's 'Can't Chant (Wegrewhere)' depicts three black surfer dudes catching waves at Surfers Paradise. It's only when they're standing on the beach you see that their surfboards are patterned like traditional Aboriginal shields.

In Patricia Piccinini's 'Sandman', a fully clothed girl swims through the

ocean. You'd think she'd fallen off an ocean liner – if it wasn't for the gills in her neck. "It gives the sense we're hybridised in some way. Patricia's dealing with who we are as antipodeans – how we're half this and half that, and not quite anything."

### "As antipodeans we're half this and half that"

The British works are a mixed bag. 'Jaunt' by Andrew Kötting takes us on a high-speed boat trip from the Thames Estuary to London. 'Hinter-

land' by Esther Johnson explores life on the coast of East Yorkshire where the shoreline is receding by two metres a year. Semiconductor's 'All the



Time in the World' shows Northumbrian scenery shaking as if rattled by giants' footsteps. "The stuff I really liked had a kind of wacky British humour," HOFFIE says.

Notions of the sublime, integral to landscape works since time immemorial, remain in films such as 'Approach to Mundi Mundi' by Sydney artist Shaun Gladwell. "Here's this guy in black leather on a black bike, riding through that wonderful foreverness of the Australian landscape," says HOFFIE. "And then he slowly lifts his arms up – 'look ma, no hands' – and it becomes an allusion to so many things: the crucifixion, *Mad Max*. It's just the most beautiful sequence."

► *Figuring Landscapes* shows at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, COFA, Paddington, 2–25 Apr. See listings.

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