

“The alien in our midst ...” gaffa gallery, May 17-28, 2012

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Photographic montages and assemblages explore notions of displacement, land and belonging. Images of outback and rural Australia are juxtaposed with portraits of recently arrived immigrant youth, ghosts of Afghan pioneers, texts relating to early settlement, and vintage book pages. Most of the landscapes are from a trip from Menindee Lakes to Flinders Ranges and Lake Eyre in 2011.

Belinda Allen

“The alien in our midst ...” series 2011

Pigment prints on cotton rag, 90 x 60 cm,
\$480 ea unframed. Edition of 10.

1. Little Asia (Leigh Creek)
2. Ghan Town (Farina/Maree)
3. The alien in our midst (Lake Eyre)
4. Shot in a mosque (Lake Eyre)
5. They became a pest (Farina/Lake Eyre)
6. Live as they had always done (Lake Eyre)

History Tree series 2011

Pigment prints on archival book pages,
mounted on art paper. 90 x 100 cm,
\$1200 ea unframed.

7. Tree of Knowledge – Exploration/Orroroo
8. History tree –Geography/Barmah forest
9. History tree – Geology/Flinders Ranges
10. History tree – Government/Orroroo

Mandalas – Menindee to the Flinders Ranges 2012

Pigment prints on cotton rag, 42 x 60 cm,
\$200 ea unframed. Edition of 10.

11. Mandala - Menindee Lake 1
12. Mandala - Menindee Lake 2
13. Mandala - Pamamaroo Lake 1
14. Mandala - Pamamaroo Lake 2
15. Mandala - Orroroo Redgum 1
16. Mandala - Orroroo Redgum 2
17. Mandala - Flinders Ranges Nat. Park 1
18. Mandala - Flinders Ranges Nat. Park 2
19. Mandala - Flinders Ranges Nat. Park 3

Burning History – the Old Ghan/Coward Springs 2012

20. Pigment prints on cotton rag and
archival book pages, mounted on art
paper. 90 x 175 cm, **\$1200** unframed.

Accompanying objects/books: NFS

Christopher Lawrie

1. Home: The Land of Dreams: Mikhail

Pigment prints on cotton rag, 180 x 48cm.
\$400 unframed. Edition of 10. 2012.

2. Home: The Land of Dreams: Luway

Pigment prints on cotton rag, 1810cm x 483cm.
\$400 unframed. Edition of 10. 2012.

3. Home: The Land of Dreams: Tommy

Pigment prints on cotton rag, 1810cm x 483cm.
\$400 unframed. Edition of 10. 2012.

4. Home: The Land of Dreams: Sahro

Pigment prints on cotton rag, 1810cm x 483cm.
\$400 unframed. Edition of 10. 2012.

5. Life's But a Walking Shadow

Pigment prints on cotton rag, 1810cm x 483cm.
\$400 unframed. Edition of 10. 2012.

6. The Letter: John Kelly's Letter to his mother
in Glasgow September 1839 detailing their needs
for the voyage.

Pigment prints on cotton rag, 1810cm x 483cm.
\$400 unframed. Edition of 10. 2012.

7. Insular Australia 1

Page from 'The History of Salt . . .'
Salt on Paper, 745cm x 545cm.
\$500 framed. 2002 – 2012

8. Insular Australia 2

Page from 'The History of Salt . . .'
Salt on Paper, 745cm x 545cm.
\$500 framed. 2002 - 2012

9. Insular Australia 3

Page from 'The History of Salt . . .'
Salt on Paper, 745cm x 545cm.
\$500 framed. 2002 - 2012

10. From Weavers to Wapstraws:

The Artist's Family History including migrating to
Australia in 1836.
Salted Book, 25cm x 20cm x 20cm.
\$700. 2002 – 2012

The alien in our midst ... (Lake Eyre 2011)

This series is based on photos taken in northern SA (around Maree-Lake Eyre) in 2011, and on the history of the Afghan cameleers who were pioneers in this area. Below is an English version of the text on the images.

Little Asia (Leigh Creek)

Marree, with its high concentration of Afghans, was soon referred to as **Little Asia**. It also became the centre for inland transport with camel strings leaving regularly for the Birdsville, Oodnadatta and Strzelecki tracks, Broken Hill, the Northern Territory and the Western Australian gold fields. They often suffered from racial prejudice as a result of their religion, culture or the economic competition they provided for a declining number of jobs.

Ghan Town (Farina/Maree)

Wherever these Afghan cameleers settled, they lived in a separate part of town. Consequently many inland towns had three distinct sections, one for the Europeans, one for the Aborigines and a third section for the Afghans. Their areas became known as Afghan or **Ghan Town**. There was contact between the Aboriginal and Afghan groups but almost no contact between the Europeans and these two groups. Examples of this are well illustrated in Farina and Marree where even the cemeteries are divided along these lines.

The alien in our midst (Lake Eyre)

"Within the high tin walls of the Afghan camps in all towns of the north line, white women are living, the only ones in Australia who have blended to any extent with **the alien in our midst**. Renouncing the association of the women of their own race, they have forsaken their own religion for the teachings of the Prophet and the life of the cities for the desert trail. Several of these have made the pilgrimage to Mecca." Ernestine Hill, 1933.

Shot in a mosque (Lake Eyre)

Many of these Afghans did extremely well in their chosen business. Abdul Wade had four hundred camels and sixty men working for him. Fusli Ahmed worked the Port Augusta - Oodnadatta line for many years before moving to Broken Hill. Faiz Mahomet, who arrived at the age of 22, settled in Marree where he operated as a Forwarding Agent and General Carrier. In 1892 he moved to Western Australia and worked from the Coolgardie gold fields with his brother Taj Mahomet. On 10 January 1896, while Faiz Mahomet was at the Murchison gold field, Taj Mahomet was shot in the Coolgardie mosque by Gulam Mahomet. The case was reported in most newspapers both in Western Australia and South Australia. The Express and Telegraph called it 'Cold-Blooded Murder, **Shot in a Mosque**, Killed Whilst at Prayers'.

They became a pest (Farina/Lake Eyre)

In 1880 Sub Inspector B.C. Besley suggested that the police in the north should use camels for the collection of statistics and census forms. His suggestion was taken up and camels were from then on used by all police in the north for all kinds of work. The Marree police used camels to patrol the outback until 1949. When the camels, who were brought here because they could carry loads of up to 600 pounds over long distances with little food or water over almost any terrain, had outlived their usefulness, **they became a pest**. Most were shot when found on common land or without a registration disk. In this way hundreds were shot by the police to the delight of the pastoralists.

Live as they had always done (Lake Eyre).

Each Afghan community had its own leader. In Oodnadatta it was Abdul Kadir and in Marree it was Bejah Dervish. Bejah, decorated for his military service, came from Baluchistan and later took part in the Calvert Expedition of 1896. In these communities the Afghans continued to **live as they had always done**, following the Muslim religion and customs. Most Afghans who came to Australia were single or if married left their wives behind as they expected to return wealthy in the not too distant future. Many remained single but others married Aboriginal women. Very few married white women.

(Adapted from <http://afghanland.com/culture/australia.html>)

Mandalas – Menindee to the Flinders Ranges

The expeditions of Edward John Eyre

After settlement of Australia by white Europeans in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, white explorers were perceived as the aliens, intruding upon a long-standing habitation of most areas of Australia by aboriginal peoples. Some of these explorers played a crucial role in trying to reconcile indigenous inhabitants of the country with the new settlements, but in many cases disastrous misunderstandings between the cultures caused conflict and terrible bloodshed. Edward John Eyre, in addition to exploring inland South Australia and New South Wales, was instrumental in maintaining peace between white settlers and Aborigines along the Murray River. Below is a brief history and some extracts from the Preface to his major work on his explorations.

Following successful overland driving expeditions along the Murray River to Adelaide, Edward John Eyre, aged 23, set out to explore the Flinders' Ranges region. Together with a group of five men, two drays and ten horses, he left from Adelaide on 1 May 1839. The party set up a depot near Mount Arden, and from there travelled north to the coastal plain west of the Flinders Ranges, exploring the surrounding region and upper Spencer Gulf, before heading eastward to the Murray River and returning to Adelaide. In 1841 Eyre led another expedition across country back to the head of Spencer Gulf and their old campsite at Depot Creek, discovering and naming the Gawler Ranges on the way. This time he travelled further north alone, going about 80 km farther than Mount Eyre, reaching a peak a little south-west of modern-day Leigh Creek.

Eyre, together with his Aboriginal companion Wylie, was the first European to traverse the coastline of the Great Australian Bight and the Nullarbor Plain by land in 1840-1841, on an almost 2000 mile trip to Albany, Western Australia. He had originally led the expedition with John Baxter and three aborigines. Two of the aborigines killed Baxter and left with most of the supplies, and Eyre and Wylie were only able to survive because they were rescued by a French whaling ship which chanced to be there. Eyre named the place Rossiter Bay, after the captain of the ship.

(Adapted from Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flinders_Ranges and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eyre's_1839_expeditions)

Journals of expeditions of discovery into Central Australia and overland from Adelaide to King George's Sound in the years 1840-1:

sent by the colonists of South Australia, with the sanction and support of the government: including an account of the manners and customs of the Aborigines and the state of their relations with Europeans. By Edward John Eyre (1815-1901)

Preface (extracts)

For the account given of the Aborigines the author deems it unnecessary to offer any apology; a long experience among them, and an intimate knowledge of their character, habits, and position with regard to Europeans, have induced in him a deep interest on behalf of a people, who are fast fading away before the progress of a civilization, which ought only to have added to their improvement and prosperity. Gladly would the author wish to see attention awakened on their behalf, and an effort at least made to stay the torrent which is overwhelming them.

It is most lamentable to think that the progress and prosperity of one race should conduce to the downfall and decay of another; it is still more so to observe the apathy and indifference with which this result is contemplated by mankind in general, and which either leads to no investigation being made as to the cause of this desolating influence, or if it is, terminates, to use the language of the Count Strzelecki, "in the inquiry, like an inquest of the one race upon the corpse of the other, ending for the most part with the verdict of 'died by the visitation of God.'"

In his attempt to delineate the actual circumstances and position of the natives, and the just claims they have upon public sympathy and benevolence, he has been necessitated to refer largely to the testimony of others, but in doing this he has endeavoured as far as practicable, to support the views he has taken by the writings or opinions of those who are, or who have been resident in the Colonies, and who might therefore be supposed from a practical acquaintance with the subject, to be most competent to arrive at just conclusions.

In suggesting the only remedy which appears at all calculated to mitigate the evil complained of, it has studiously been kept in view that there are the interests of two classes to be provided for, those of the Settlers, and those of the Aborigines, it is thought that these interests cannot with advantage be separated, and it is hoped that it may be found practicable to blend them together.

The Aborigines of New Holland are not on the whole a numerous people; they are generally of a very inoffensive and tractable character, and it is believed that they may, under ordinary circumstances, almost always be rendered peaceable and well-disposed by kind and consistent treatment. Should this, in reality, prove to be the case, it may be found perhaps, that they could be more easily managed, and in the long run at a less expense, by some such system as is recommended, than by any other requiring means of a more retaliatory or coercive character. The system proposed is at least one which by removing in a great measure temptation from the native, and thereby affording comparative security to the settlers, will have a powerful effect in inducing the latter to unite with the Government in any efforts made to ameliorate the condition of the Aborigines; a union which under present or past systems has not ever taken place, but one which it is very essential should be effected, if any permanent good is hoped for.

(from The Project Gutenberg EBook of Journals Of Expeditions Of Discovery Into Central Australia, by Edward John Eyre, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5346/pg5346.html>)

Burning history

The Old Ghan/Coward Springs

The route of the Old Ghan is evident in driving through northern South Australia, in many small derelict towns and sidings from Leigh Creek to Marree, and along the Oodnadatta Track.

Farina, 55 km south of Marree, is a whole crumbling town. Originally named The Gums, and planned as a wheat growing area, it thrived as the northernmost rail point until the railway was extended to Marree in 1884, then slowly died, the last resident not departing until around 1970. Here much care is taken in aggregating and presenting historical information, and there is a memorial stone 'shrine', piled with old rusted metal implements and shards of glass and ceramic. Places such as this have a meagre history in comparison to the ancient world, it is sometimes neglected, sometimes valued, explored and maintained.

The Oodnadatta Track from Maree follows the Old Ghan route, and at Coward Springs the old stationmaster's residence and driver's cottage have been lovingly restored - the first as a residence for the current owners who operate a beautiful camping facility, the second as a museum to the old settlement, and the current bush conservation project. While the campsites have fireplaces we are urged not to damage the bush habitat by collecting firewood, but to gather it along the Track before arriving at Coward Springs - at 20 km distance there are signs to that effect. It's a little shocking to realise that the available firewood is largely rotting sleepers from the Old Ghan line.

In some places, travellers have rearranged sleepers to spell out their names on the embankment (there's not much to do in these parts ...). At others, including at the campsite, sleepers have been used for fenceposts, benches, garden edging ... But mostly they have been left scattered around between fragments of rail and the road, slowly silvering in the sun, until they can be pulled apart by bare hands into manageable campfire pieces.

These fragments of threadbare history: so vulnerable, so transient.