

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF RICHARD WOLDENDORP

Di Ingelse - Yarrall

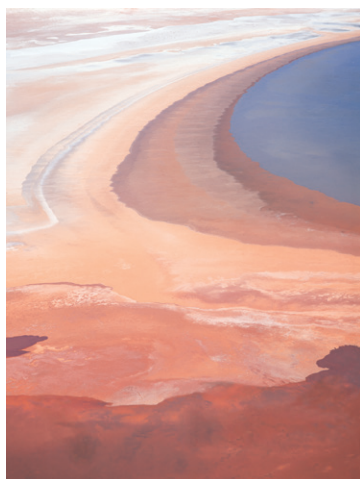


Figure 1
Receding water lines, Lake Moore, Western Australia – *Abstract Earth*.

Richard Woldendorp was born in The Netherlands, in the city of Utrecht, on 1 January 1927. After spending three years in Indonesia while serving in the Dutch army, he decided to migrate to Australia in 1951. His original intention had been to go to Sydney, but he was persuaded by the friends he met on the boat to stay with them in WA, and he never left.

Richard had studied art, painting and commercial design as a young man in Holland. Being unable to find work in this area when he arrived in Perth, because of his lack of English, he worked as a house-painter and eventually started his own business. He acquired his first camera in 1955 and immediately saw its artistic potential; he joined the Cottesloe Camera Club in order to hone his photographic skills, and won first and third prizes in a national photographic competition.

The purchase of his first camera coincided with his discovery – almost by accident – of aerial photography. One of his house-painting assignments involved a trip to the Kimberley in a DC3, to paint the office and crew quarters of MacRobertson Miller Airline in Derby. The trip took all day and as the plane was not pressurised - they had to fly low, giving Richard his first aerial impressions of the outback.

He then started working as a freelance photographer and began obtaining assignments from magazines, government agencies and mining clients. It



Figure 3
Richard Woldendorp Self Portrait 1961.



was not until the 1980s that he started photographing from the air, as he realised that certain parts of the country are better seen from that point of view. He quickly became well known for his artistic approach to Australia's infinitely varied landscapes, which he has continued to photograph ever since.

Richard Woldendorp is one of WA's most popular and successful artists, and has built up and sustained one of the most significant bodies of photographic work in Western Australia. His work developed to become highly individual, evidencing a keen formal and structural sensibility and interest in land use, ecology and history. Richard was invited to exhibit at the Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara and before the exhibition went there, it was shown to Gary Dufour at The Art Gallery of Western Australia and as a consequence it was exhibited there in 1986 before going to USA. It subsequently toured the USA and Holland. The State Art Collection now holds 17 of Richard's works, and in 2009 presented a second survey of his work in the exhibition, *Abstract Earth: The Photography of Richard Woldendorp*.

Figure 5
Pindan coast, near Broome, WA – *Out of the Blue*.



Figure 2
Small tidal river with flood plain, east of Darwin, Northern Territory – *Abstract Earth*.

He has lived for many years in the Perth Hills suburb of Darlington, in close proximity to the homes of renowned, [now deceased], Western Australian landscape painters Guy Grey-Smith and Robert Juniper, both of whom flew with him on many occasions and whose work also had a strong relationship to aerial perspective.

Richard is the author of 25 books, the most recent being *Out of the Blue*, which was published in 2013. In the introduction to this book he sums up his affinity for his chosen profession: ‘To some people flying is a way of getting from A to B, but for me it is an opportunity to observe the landscape from a different perspective. It is quite surprising how revealing the landscape can be, even from a commercial jet.’

He goes on to contrast the difference between the landscapes of Australia and those of the northern hemisphere, from where he came, thus:

At first this age-old worn-down landscape does not appear to lend itself to the spectacular photography that can take place in the northern hemisphere, or in Africa, with its obvious diversity and dramatic wildlife. But Australia has its own strong identity, which has evolved over millions of years and requires careful observation. Everything – rivers, coasts, mountains, plains and deserts – changes with the seasons and with the light at different times of the day. As much as possible, I like to be inspired by what I see: this is where I experience a sense of wonderment of a world so complex, varied and beautiful. I emphasise the highlights by pointing the camera down and focusing on the subject, excluding the horizon so one loses a point of reference and reality often takes on an abstract form. At all times I take great care to retain the reality of what is there.

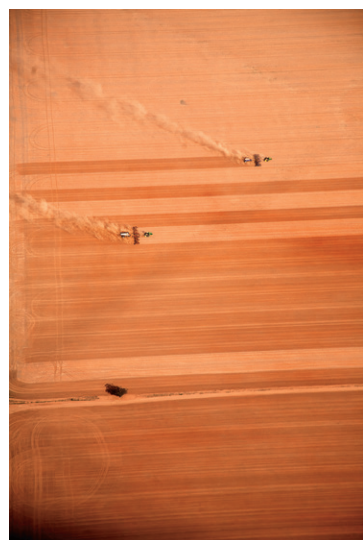


Figure 6
Ploughing, Southern Cross, WA – *Out of the Blue*.

Richard Woldendorp has been recognised for both his photographic work and his contribution to the Arts. He has won many awards with the Australian Institute of Professional Photography (AIPP); he was made a Fellow of the Institute in 1998 and an Honorary Life Member in 1998. In 2002 he was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Australian Commercial and Media Photographers (ACMP), and in 2004 he was honoured as a Living Treasure of the State of Western Australia. Most recently, in the 2012 Queen’s Birthday Honours, he was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his service to the Arts as an Australian landscape photographer.



Figure 4
Eighty Mile Beach between Port Hedland
and Broome at low tide, WA –
Out of the Blue.

ENDNOTES

R. Woldendorp, *Out of the Blue*, 2013, Sandpiper Press Pty Ltd, Glen Forrest, in association with Fremantle Press.

R. Woldendorp, 2008, *Abstract Earth: A View From Above*, Printed Singapore: Tien Wah Press, Singapore