



Izabela Pluta *Untitled #1, Beijing Villas, Series 2* 2005  
 inkjet print on paper, 700mm x 700mm  
 Courtesy of the artist and Esa Jaske Gallery, Sydney



Mark Adams *Indian Island, 360° panorama after William Hodges, View in Dusky Bay, 2-10 August 1998* gelatin silver print toned gold  
 8 photographs, 508mm x 610mm Courtesy of the artist and Paul McNamara Photography, Wanganui

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(cover) Petrina Hicks *Zara 2* 2005,  
 lightjet print 800mm x 1080mm  
 Courtesy of the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney

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20 YEARS

IN  
 COLD  
 LIGHT

FRI 17 MAR –  
 SAT 6 MAY 2006  
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MARK ADAMS  
 DONNA BAILEY  
 RYSZARD DABEK  
 PETRINA HICKS  
 REBECCA ANN HOBBS  
 ALEX JAMES  
 ANNE NOBLE  
 IZABELA PLUTA  
 CURATOR MELISSA KEYS



Anne Noble *Antarctica – Polaria Centre, Tromso, Norway 2003*  
inkjet prints, pigment on rag paper, 950mm x 668mm  
Courtesy of the artist, Stills Gallery, Sydney and Paul McNamara Photography Wanganui



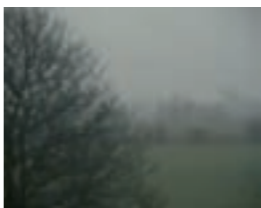
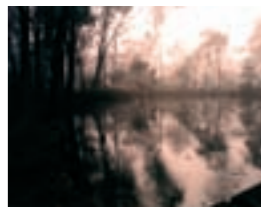
Anne Noble *Paradise Harbour, Antarctica 2005*  
inkjet prints, pigment on rag paper, 950mm x 668mm  
Courtesy of the artist, Stills Gallery, Sydney and Paul McNamara Photography Wanganui



Alex James *Winter 1851 #2 2004*  
type c photograph, 1270mm x 1010mm  
Courtesy of the artist



Alex James *Spring 1892 #2 2004*  
type c photograph, 1270mm x 1010mm  
Courtesy of the artist



Ryszard Dabek *Who falls...was 2004* DVD 4.48 min Sound by John Encarnacao  
Courtesy of the artist and Scott Donovan Projects, Sydney

Rebecca Ann Hobbs *Blizzard 2003*, DVD loop  
Sound by Felicity Mangan  
Courtesy of the artist and Johnston Gallery, Perth

Donna Bailey  
*The Winter Garden 2003*  
type c prints 3 photographs,  
850 x 1000mm  
Courtesy of the artist

**IN COLD LIGHT**

*In Cold Light* considers the contemporary aesthetics of coldness and the associated atmospheric of fog, rain, wind and snow with their register of psychological and emotional associations. Featuring works by contemporary photomedia artists from Australia and New Zealand, *In Cold Light* identifies a strand of recent photographic practice that invites the viewer to re-consider notions of the romantic and the sublime through the contemporary lens. In contrast to awe-inspiring nineteenth century images of jagged mountains, bottomless chasms and boundless, windswept plains, the artists in this exhibition present a range of humbler, subtler, less tumultuous visions that often rework notions of the sublime or consider the contemporary poetics of place. *In Cold Light* contemplates the metaphorical relation between cold environmental elements and emotional, historical and poetic experience.

Forensically alert to the artifices of image and history-making, photographer Mark Adams and anthropologist/historian Nicholas Thomas spent years retracing and

re-imagining the locations of first contact between Captain Cook and the indigenous peoples of Australia and New Zealand. During this trans-historical project Adams photographed sites based on the descriptions contained in explorers' journals and drawings by eighteenth century colonial artist William Hodges. The resulting body of work is a series of dramatic photographs of coves, inlets and waterscapes, darkened by brooding clouds and veiled by misty rain. The panorama *Indian Island, 360° panorama after William Hodges, View in Dusky Bay, 2-10 August 1998* was made rapidly, featuring 'the clouds and showers that... closed in as one sheet of film was being exposed.'<sup>1</sup> And yet it is more than this – the course of history is embedded in these photographs. The product of an artist finely attuned to the sublime tradition and the problematics of European representation, it is a contemporary artefact of history offering a richly melancholic observation point across a vista of the post-colonial Pacific.

Alex James' photographs of riverbanks, creeks and lakesides scattered across the Canberra district are sombre, poetic meditations on

place, history and human presence. We are told each identifies the site of a nineteenth century drowning featured in historical archives or drawn from oral histories. For example, *Winter 1851 2004* marks the location where George Edward Gregory drowned at the age of twenty-five having dived into the freezing waters of the Molonglo river. *Spring 1892 2004* captures the site where Edward Crace and George Kemp's horse and cart stuck in the Ginninderra creek, the two perishing in the rising waters that rushed along the creek after sudden heavy rains. These distant tragedies – re-told in James' pairing of images and texts – are presented as precisely localised sites. The scenes are transformed by the viewer into mini cinematic narratives, propelled by the interplay between photographic representation and imagination. Each pastoral image offers a momentary glimpse of the fragile and transient nature of humanity, the ever-present peril inherent in nature, and the arbitrariness of the construction of history.

Simultaneously grotesque and beautiful, Petrina Hicks' precisely choreographed portraits are elegant, bloodless and drained of warmth:

chilled figures, at once off-putting and alluring. In *Zara 2 2005* a wind from an unseen source blows a young girl's hair forward over her face. Often symbolically associated with intense emotion, change or turmoil, in Hicks' work this phantom wind is instead defined by an eerie, absolute stillness. It is as if her subjects have been invaded by a wintry force. Using digital technology to transform each sitter, Hicks creates portraits that resemble sculptural busts which, under close observation, shift between the Apollonian and the Dionysian—between perfection and imperfection. Each image is carefully calibrated to embody a cool perfection that is oddly unsettling.

Donna Bailey's triptych *The Winter Garden 2003* pictures the private place of the artist's bushland backyard shrouded in a luminous mist. The familiar Victorian scrubby terrain has a fairytale air and is transformed by a wintry fog. Bailey pictures her daughter in the central scene wrapped in a long woollen cloak, moving away from the camera on a backyard ramble. Heading towards an indeterminate forested horizon, one can almost sense the photographer outside the frame. As beguiling combinations of

home video stills and artfully composed snapshots, Bailey's images are apertures into a humble, yet magical world of everyday beauty and tenderness. In this instance, however, they are compounded by an eerie sense of foreboding suggested by the mysterious mists. Through veils of fog, the fragility of environment and human presence, is made even more poignant by the embedded link of person to place and the cloak of familial love.

Anne Noble's photographs explore the constructed phenomena of Antarctica, as both geographically-delineated continent and imaginary wilderness ideal. Occupying a vast, uncertain and pictorially prescribed zone in the southern hemisphere's cultural/geographical imagination, Antarctica exists in our imaginations as the physical extreme of coldness, pristine beauty, incomprehensible scale, and last-frontier adventure. Presenting the real and imagined aspects of Antarctica's sublime landscape, Noble's work mingles photographs of museum dioramas of Antarctica made at various institutions around the world alongside images of the 'real' Antarctica taken on a sightseeing cruise. This series of

images, part of a much larger project, both playfully disrupt and reinforce the mythological status of Antarctica and the ways in which its majesty as an idea propels our collective sense of longing, awe and wonder.

In Rebecca Ann Hobbs *Blizzard 2003*, the intrepid artist casts herself as a polar explorer. Clad in a hooded parker, which is tightly drawn down around her face, she clutches a guide rope, appearing, fading away, and then reappearing from behind a curtain of artificial fog and snow. Playing with the notions of vision and visibility, the seen and unseen, the artist's own eyes are never glimpsed, remaining hidden under the gathered fabric of the white plastic parker hood. Through repetition, this minimalist filmic narrative gathers an unlikely richness as it simultaneously calls to mind the legendary feats of Antarctic explorers Roald Amundsen, Robert Scott and Ernest Shackleton, absurdist theatre and low-budget video. Drawing from the archive of heroic exploration photography and cinematic memory, Hobbs' stark white space conflates a restrained modernist aesthetic with a romantic sensibility. Accompanied by an intense sound scape composed

by sound artist Felicity Mangan, *Blizzard* elegantly and ironically describes the heroic and theatrical nature of the sublime through the evocative deployment of the devices of small-screen drama.

Ryszard Dabek's video *Who falls ... was 2004* was shot from a train travelling across France. Images of a frosty winter landscape, scattered with skeletal leafless trees and smudged by soft mists, blend with urban geometric forms and structures: pylons, streetlights and bridges. A meditation on the poetics of vision, Dabek's work records the subtle swaying movement and rhythms of the camera operator, registering the rise and fall of his breath, until what we see slowly dissolves into a half-light. Dabek's cinematic journey situates and records the landscape as a 'reservoir of historical and psychic resonance', transforming an unfamiliar land into an emotional, internal place.<sup>3</sup>

Photographed on the outskirts of China's booming capital Beijing, Izabela Pluta's images of half-built villas occupy an in-between space defined by absence and presence, construction and decay. Set into a snow-covered landscape these

incomplete, unpeopled, concrete fabrications are of unknown origin and await uncertain futures. Pluta's images, shot during a residency at the Red Gate Gallery, capture their subject matter with the curious and unfamiliar gaze of a traveller. Construction sites, shadowy spaces, half-built rooms, wrapped magnolias buffered with fabric blankets against the extremes of the cold—all suggest narratives and traces of people unseen and unknown. Under sombre skies an inexplicable sadness suffuses the peculiar, cold emptiness of Pluta's meticulous compositions.

Open-ended and contemplative, *In Cold Light* speaks to the complexities and subtleties of the aesthetics of coldness. Focussing on the poetics of perception and place, the exhibition traces a series of linked concerns and themes including notions of the romantic and the sublime and suggests the rich emotional, psychological and cultural connotations of coldness. *In Cold Light* observes the camera's capacity to explore the ironies of history and to point towards the human interior and imagination through cold external forces.

Variouly evocative, mysterious, beautiful and eerie, *In Cold Light* pictures sensations experienced both bodily and emotionally – where atmospherics blur the very boundaries of self and world.

Melissa Keys  
March 2006

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Thomas, 'Indian Island', *Cook's Sites: Revisiting History*, Otago Press, New Zealand, 1999, p.57.  
<sup>3</sup> Ryszard Dabek, unpublished artist's statement, June 2005.

**Curator's acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my most sincere thanks to the *In Cold Light* artists for their enthusiastic and generous participation in this project. To the lenders; Stills Gallery in Sydney, Paul McNamara Photography in Wanganui and Jeff and Fran Ricketts. A special thankyou to Naomi Cass and the CCP for hosting the *In Cold Light* exhibition and to Karra Rees for her diligent and tireless efforts. I would also like to express my thanks to the many colleagues that have extended their support to this project especially Kyla McFarlane, Kendrah Morgan, Katarina Paseta and Zara Stanhope. And to the steadfast support of my partner Brendan and mother Vera.