

RICKY MAYNARD

Portrait of a Distant Land



Artist's Statement

Returning to Places that Name Us (Wik Elder Portraits) 2000

This visit to Aurukun was short and highly restrictive due to the oppressive political air surrounding the township at that time. I therefore chose to quietly observe the people to be represented. I was however given a privileged place in story and song and was given good omens in passage through their lands. Yet I was disciplined to work in my usual fashion. On this rare occasion it was best to walk away and yet honor them in some small way.

It is my wish to ask the viewer to identify in these pictures the existence of struggle below the surface, to see things that are not immediately visible and to see that what things mean has more to do with you, the observer. To know the meaning of a culture you must recognize the limits and meaning of your own. You can see its facts but you cannot see its meaning. We share meaning by living it.

Wik people have been fighting for decades for their country. This passage of time has come at a high cost in denial, depression and death. How could we even begin to understand the pain and suffering? Yet the people still continue with their strong belief of spiritual ancestry and Dreaming. As told to me by another photographer working in the area, 'these are people with their hands still literally in the mud, in the earth.'

Their lands share the seasons of the Wet and Dry. The Wet brings heavy rain and fierce storms. To the Wik-Klakan people, lightning is the mighty work of the sky serpent, the rainbow, Taipan the rainbow serpent whose messengers, the voice of thunder and the knife of lightning, are greatly feared. The child of the lightning is Wild Bush Fire Dreaming, a strong totem and Dreaming story of the Wik peoples.

Australia needs to rid itself of the notion of having an 'acceptable history' and one that is pleasing to the senses and allows 'all of us' to feel united as one. This country continues to bypass the truth of its collective past. How can there be a future built on this? We need to understand and learn from history because if we repeat history we head for tragedy.

Here in this brief presentation is a 'rawness' and 'intensity' in picture making that push the boundaries of discipline. I wanted a presence and portraits that spoke, and through this process, to present an idea rather than preach messages.

These are images that have a common concern about the meaning and social relevance in the making of history. In this sense they are about 'leaving proof'. Life in passing and in complicated times. For the Indigenous picture maker addressing this era of uncertainty, loss and denial where proof seems absent, the problems of historical record amidst that uncertainty become central to my work.

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This continuing body of work aims to create a visual historic diary with an expression of our collective oral history, to provide a contemporary 'frame of reference' in the essence and evolution of this land, one that asserts and maintains our rich cultural heritage.

By creating collective and autobiographical narratives and exploring concepts based on intersections of history, memory and cultural representations, I hope to provide an insight into historical perspectives through a pilgrimage back to country - a process of exploring 'Place' located within self and cultural memory.

Traveling in and around Tasmania following the song lines and ochre trails of my people, I seek the truth hidden from view, the truth long hidden in the hearts of the Elders, in the depth of the archives and in the marks people have left embedded in the landscape.



Custodians, 2005



The Spit, 2005