



IMAGE BACK: Penny Dunstan, *Rix's Creek Study #9 Thistle*, 2015–2017

IMAGE FRONT: Penny Dunstan, *PastPresent*, 2014–2017 (detail)



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THE UNIVERSITY
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PENNY DUNSTAN
SHADOWLANDS II

PHD EXHIBITION
19 July - 5 August 2017

WAYFINDING IN SHADOWLANDS

The foundations of the works in *Shadowlands II* are derived from a practice of 'wayfinding' – a performative process of encountering post-mining landscapes through walking. Wayfinding offered a method for responding to newly created post-mining sites in the Upper Hunter Valley. The act of walking allowed for action-based research where new knowledge is accreted, laid down layer upon layer, sedimenting into an art practice.

Most of my wayfinding took place at Rix's Creek Mine, where I was able to explore and record the landscape of a rehabilitated coal mine. I saw new grass germinate and young trees win battles for survival. I walked my way through newly created landscapes, empty dams and man-made hills, through kangaroo bedrooms, chough covens and blue wren territory. And as I walked, the earth pushed back at my feet. Over a three-year period I collected marks from the landscape: through frottage, photography, graphite and ink, and from the earth itself. I collected rocks from the ground's surface that revealed pre-mining histories going back 250 million years. Human manufactured soils or 'anthroposols' suggest futures where humans have superseded the process of natural soil formation.

My large-scale work, *PastPresent* 2014–2017, renders new topographies from hand-drawn maps of vanished and severely altered catchments of the Upper Hunter. Tracks of human and animal activity recorded on each section of map are severed as the metaphorical landscapes are crushed and reconstituted into a new form. And yet new futures unfold. Lumen print photography gives direct agency to the newly developing ecosystems. Made by camera-less photography, on the mine site, there is little time for preconceived ideas of how a plant should look. Exposed in the open over a number of hours and finally scanned, these prints incorporate the real world into their making: mould, mine dust, chlorophyll and plant matter.

This body-of-work is ultimately concerned with the process of reintegrating rehabilitated land through human imagination. By looking, touching, participating and relating through 'wayfinding', we are witness to new life on freshly reconstituted land, locating life where there has been destruction.

Penny Dunstan 2017



Penny Dunstan, *Shadowlands II*, The University Gallery, 19 July – 5 Aug 2017 | Installation view with *PastPresent*

RIX'S CREEK LUMEN STUDIES

These photographs are camera-less images made at the rehabilitation site. Plants were pinned to photographic paper with a glass sheet and exposed for up to three hours. The resulting images were digitally transposed and printed.

All works:

2015–2017
digital scans of lumen prints with plant material, insects, pollen, water, sap, mould and earth
edition of 5
85 x 60 cm \$250
42 x 30 cm \$220

1. *Rix's Creek study #1 Chickweed*
2. *Rix's Creek study #2 Millet*
3. *Rix's Creek study #3 Eucalyptus - juvenile leaves*
4. *Rix's Creek study #4 Couch*
5. *Rix's Creek study #5 Asteraceae*
6. *Rix's Creek study #6 Plantain*
7. *Rix's Creek study #7 Barnyard grass*
8. *Rix's Creek study #8 Lucerne*
9. *Rix's Creek study #9 Thistle*
10. *Rix's Creek study #10 Causina*

PASTPRESENT

This multi-panel drawing interprets the transformed post-mining landscape in the Upper Hunter.

PastPresent started as a memory of a landscape lost to mining. Vanished catchments were drawn in contours, overlaid with land-use trails from humans and companion dogs, sheep and cattle, and finally nocturnal animals such as the kangaroo, wallaby, goanna and wombat. Tracks pass over the land, their makers pausing to drink from the creeks and streams, graze the grasslands or rest, out of the wind, in the forests and rocky ground.

During installation each panel is crushed and coaxed back into a new land form to emulate the process the land undergoes when it is mined. The old networks of human, animal, water and wind interactions are reconfigured in re-formed land. These patterns can be observed trying to reassert themselves over an alien landscape, trying to remember what went before and bring it to the present. I named this drawing *PastPresent*, to describe the indistinct boundary between what has gone before and what is now present. This newly created land is a legacy of mining for coal. Yet it is still country and we should take caring for it seriously.

11. *PastPresent*
2014–2017
ink, graphite, crayon and coal on Japanese paper
21 x 3 metres (variable)
\$5,000

LANDSCAPES OF RECOVERY

A series of eight images of the Anthropocene in black and white documenting the re-establishment of living systems in post-mining land at Rix's Creek.

All works:

2015–2016
digital print
60 x 85 cm \$250
30 x 42 cm \$220

12. *Rix's Creek landscape #1*
13. *Rix's Creek landscape #2*
14. *Rix's Creek landscape #3*
15. *Rix's Creek landscape #4*
16. *Rix's Creek landscape #5*
17. *Rix's Creek landscape #6*
18. *Rix's Creek landscape #7*
19. *Rix's Creek landscape #8*



Photograph of mining void at used in *Anthroposol* series

ANTHROPOSOL SERIES

The word 'anthroposol' is derived from 'anthropo' (Greek) relating to humans and 'so'l' (Latin) for soil. This series explores the different futures of post-mining soils, with Rhodes grass, trees, weeds and kangaroo and bird tracks. Each image is drawn on a black and white photograph of the mining void from Rix's Creek

All works:

2015
graphite and chalk over black & white photo of a mining void
47 x 62 cm
\$350

20. *Anthroposol #1*
21. *Anthroposol #2*
22. *Anthroposol #3*
23. *Anthroposol #4*
24. *Anthroposol #5*
25. *Anthroposol #6*
26. *Anthroposol #7*
27. *Anthroposol #8*
28. *Anthroposol #9*

PERFORMING PASTPRESENT

A record of crushing and reconstruction of landscape. Lines of land occupations by humans and animals are traced on a topographic map describing catchments that have vanished or will vanish under open-cut coal mining in the Upper Hunter Valley. The maps are crushed and used to recreate a new landscape emulating the process of creating new landforms in a post-mining landscape.

29. *Performing 'PastPresent'*
2017
digital video

SOIL MONOLITHS

Soils pits were dug in three sites: an un-mined site, a site two years post reconstruction and a site 22 years after reconstruction.

They show that transported topsoils are supporting plant growth and that the decomposition of 250 million year old mudstone (grey) allows some growth (see the Rhodes grass root systems). These works are the first time the transformation of rock into growing media has been recorded as monoliths.

30. *Soil monoliths*, 2015
earth, eroded mudstone, sandstone, petrified wood in display boxes.
210 x 120 cm
\$800

Left to right:
Natural (un-mined) soil, Rix's Creek
Reconstructed soil, 2 years, Rix's Creek
Reconstructed soil, 22 years, Rix's Creek

LANDSCAPE OF RECOVERY

Rehabilitated land at Rix's Creek and the edge of the mining void.

31. *Landscape of recovery, Rix's Creek*
2016
digital print
60 x 85 cm \$250
30 x 42 cm \$220

THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD IN A BUCKET OF STONES

The surface of rehabilitated land is a mix of geological eras, from 300 million years ago to the present day. In these geology drawers is a record of the strata that formed and were then uplifted to become the New England fold belt; Permian forests are transformed into rock; Australia is settled by Indigenous people; Colonial farming is practised. Finally history is homogenised and available as a bucket of rocks, here sorted to show the passing of geological time.

32. *The history of the world in a bucket of stones (from the new surface of the earth)*
2015 - 2016
eroded overburden surface rocks and artefacts in geology rock sample drawers
180 x 121 cm
\$1,200

Interactive display – please pick up the stones and feel their stories.



Penny Dunstan, *Rix's Creek Study #1: Chickweed*, 2015–2017, lumen print, 60 x 85 cm