

terraform *terraform*

David Lindesay

Terraform explores our desire to control the environment and the imprints left by our presence. Lindesay's photographs, taken to capture the sublimity of the natural world, depict places that appear to exist naturally but are human made or altered. Reflecting the inherent tension between wild and contrived nature, these photographs are marked, carved, and defaced in a process that intervenes directly into and onto the film.

The Meditative Photographs of Terraform by Fletcher Aldous

The words 'photograph' and 'terraform' are derivatives of Latin phrases. Within our current epoch, their meanings have become inextricably linked through their relationship to nature. From 19th century pictorial musings to present-day mass media, photographs have infected our way of interacting and understanding the natural environment. Much of what we have observed of the earth is dependent on a photograph's ability to offer an accurate depiction. One may have 'seen' a landscape, yet this is only made possible through the camera's ability to produce lifelike images. This dependence gives a sense of wistful naivety to the notion of 'drawing with light' in a contemporary context, as photography suffocates the collective understanding of place.

Terraform is the title chosen by artist David Lindesay for the body of work he completed during a yearlong residency at Photo Access. The word translates to 'transform so as to make earth-like, to support life'. Within the work, the audience can view human altered landscapes in both a literal and figurative sense. Lindesay's gestural marks created over negatives blends the indicative sign of the image and the artist's hand, forming a subjective response to the world. The subsequent body of work portrays both the connection and detachment the artist feels toward the landscape of his hometown.

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I personally have not spent much time on Ngannawal land in Canberra, nor have I spent time walking around the edges of Lake Burley Griffin as Lindesay has done. However, from my own practice, I understand that photographing nature heavily relies on a meditative process- listening, walking, viewing and then photographing. Reworking the negatives in the darkroom adds another cathartic element to the production of Terraform, bringing the artist closer to his subject. Within these works, one contemplates the earth's delicate flow and humankind's encroachment upon it as we venture into our own entropy.

Lindesay's desire to portray man's influence on the natural world could be relevant to almost any patch of earth inhabited by Westerners. However, the artist chose the place he is most familiar with and analysed the functions of its geography. Upon viewing the work, it becomes difficult not to think of the New Topographic movement and their intention of photographing human impact on the landscape. Yet, in Lindesay's practice one will not find the chilling silence of Robert Adams or Richard Misrach. Instead, they are confronted by a quiet warning through a stage whisper. The collection of prints portrays what we have come to expect from our 'natural' environment, crafted by the hand of the artist.

Since the pandemic, there has been a cultural zeitgeist of healing and reconnecting to our damaged environment. During lockdowns people were encouraged to find a 'Gaia place', a location in which we can connect with nature and remove ourselves from the influence of contemporary society. Within the same time period, people have flocked from cities into rural areas, further spreading the influence of humankind on places of sparse population. The photographs of Terraform question the possibility of connection to our natural world given the ubiquitous and inevitable human impressions made on landscapes. Within this context, the exhibition's title feels like a poison. To create a world 'more human', is to remove its unique natural balance. Upon challenging this notion, the artist pulls photography back to its etymology as a personal method of 'light drawing'. The works reject the role of the viewfinder as a method in which the Western photographer attempts to organise and structure the environment. Terraform refuses to create works that 'shape, make, constitute, develop, arrange', the world. Instead of simplifying through removal, Lindesay's practice reconnects with nature by including all elements of the landscape.

These photographs exist as part of an ever-expanding medium portraying our existence. We are all witnesses and makers of these tortured vessels of reality that fuel a continual expansion of images. Thus, it is our responsibility not merely to capture the world but to rebuild it, first by listening, then viewing and finally through creating.

About | Fletcher Aldous

Fletcher Aldous is a photographer currently living on Gadigal Land in Sydney, Australia. His practice is informed by our complex relationships to nature, dreams, and the human psyche. Fletcher holds a Bachelor of Fine Art from Monash University, graduating in 2021.

Image list

1	David Lindesay, Terraform (1), 2022, archival inkjet print and mixed media, 59.4 x 42 cm	Ed.10	\$600
2	David Lindesay, Terraform (2), 2022, archival inkjet print and mixed media, 59.4 x 42 cm	Ed.10	\$600
3	David Lindesay, Terraform (3), 2022, archival inkjet print and mixed media, 59.4 x 42 cm	Ed.10	\$600
4	David Lindesay, Terraform (Booroomba Rocks), 2022, archival inkjet print and mixed media, 50 x 237.6 cm	Ed.5	\$2,000
5	David Lindesay, Terraform (4), 2022, archival inkjet print and mixed media, 59.4 x 42 cm	Ed.10	\$600
6	David Lindesay, Terraform (Lake Burley Griffin West Basin), 2022, archival inkjet print and mixed media, 50 x 176.2 cm	Ed.5	\$1,750
7	David Lindesay, Terraform (5), 2022, archival inkjet print and mixed media, 59.4 x 42 cm	Ed.10	\$600
8	David Lindesay, Terraform (Molonglo River), 2022, archival inkjet print and mixed media, 50 x 89.1 cm	Ed.5	\$1,000
9	David Lindesay, Terraform (negatives), 2022, Ilford HP5 negatives		NFS

About | David Lindesay

David Lindesay is an emerging photographer from Canberra. In his practice, he investigates materiality, masculinity, and beauty through medium format film photography or more experimental processes such as liquid light and corrupted Polaroids. Lindesay uses his work to play with the roles of the photographer, the subject, and the audience, as well as reveal parts of the making process that are conventionally concealed.

A graduate of the ANU School of Art & Design, Lindesay has exhibited in Canberra, Melbourne, and Sydney, in numerous solo and group settings. His work is held in the National Film and Sound Archive permanent collection.