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Derek Kreckler

Through the Looking Glass

Brenda Croft

There is something disconcerting yet seductive about Derek Kreckler's series of photographic images from *The Looking and Other Outcomes*. They conjure up feelings of safety, but also confusion. We are unsure whether we are looking at the 'real', or the 'imagined', for these contemporary depictions have historical resonances.

First though, I must acknowledge that I have known Kreckler since the early 1990s and worked with him on many projects during the past decade. He is not only a professional colleague, but also a close friend, and we've had the arguments to prove it. Over the years we have also had numerous discussions around the dinner table – or more fittingly, over that suburban non-Indigenous communal icon, the backyard barbecue. We have covered a myriad issues affecting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people; particularly the role of non-Indigenous people in Australia's contemporary multi-layered societies. Or, as Kreckler puts it, assessing, wondering, negotiating and worrying about 'Australia's cultural landscape'. This is a metaphorical and a literal landscape, which in this body of work is specifically sited in the inner-north suburbs of Perth.

Kreckler wrestles with the membrane of memory. He skirts the borders of physical and cultural space; *looking*. His images act as a mirror with him as the unseen *other* looking, monitoring the everyday. Gazing at Kreckler's images one's growing perplexity at seeing an anonymous stylish Aboriginal woman engaging in everyday tasks is replaced by a sense of the exotic. At first glance these images of the everyday seem familiar. She reads books to enthralled Aboriginal children (her own?), in *Bookshop* (2001). She has her hair done, (or straightened à la African-American style) in a futuristic looking *Salon* (2001). She makes a considered selection from the delicatessen section in the local supermarket, as in *Freezer* (2001). And yet the residual impression is alien. With her Player tee-shirt, she could be an Indigenous

Lara Croft, or the missing Angel whose inclusion would have made the Hollywood remake much more kick-ass and sexy.

These seemingly normal, shiny, clean, calm, domestic interiors of what-might-have-been jar the sensibility when juxtaposed with sandy-based, weed-ridden, exterior images depicting stereo-typically Aussie-male road-workers. Yet, these images continue to flip over and over, offering new versions, a variety of readings. Whereas the interior locales have a cold *Stepford Wives* simplicity that could be anywhere, the outdoor settings appear to be constructed scenes from a stage play, the city being a tangential player in the 'empires built on the bones of the dispossessed'.¹

The diptych, *Naturestrip 1* and *Naturestrip 2* appears mild enough, the strip of faded bitumen on the left of the image drawing our attention off into the middle-distance like a bend in the Swan River. It is only by studying the first image more intimately that the viewer comprehend that the men have come to physical blows. Yet we, the viewers, are marginal to this scenario, real or imagined, where the original Indigenous people of the place have been effectively erased from any picture and written out of local histories.

Kreckler is a creature of the city suburbs, beach and bush, a *White Pointer* who has cast his observational net, his images have bite behind their seemingly innocuous facades.

*This story's right, this story's true, I would not tell lies to you.*²

Brenda L Croft is a member of the Gurindji nation. She is Senior Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Croft is also an artist, writer and lecturer.

<Notes>

1 Judy Watson *True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists raise the flag* exhibition catalogue, InIVA, London and Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, Sydney 1994 p30

2 Archie Roach 'Took the Children Away' Mushroom Records 1990