

In the late nineteenth century Russell Duncan, a photographer and Robert McNab, historian and parliamentarian, visited the Dusky Sound sites associated with the 1773 voyage of James Cook. When I was twelve I was given a children's book about Cook's voyages to the Pacific, illustrated by Duncan's photographs. My photographs are 'after' the paintings and photographs of Cook's artist William Hodges and Duncan. Their origin is a childhood dream prompted by the misrecognition of a Duncan photograph of blurry forms shrouding Totara stumps and Kidney Ferns that grew into monsters. I knew I had to go there.⁽¹⁾

Views from Astronomer's Point is the latest iteration of Mark Adams' ongoing project Cook's Sites, which photographically documents the locations of Captain James Cook's first contact with Aotearoa New Zealand and other destinations in the Pacific during his pioneering voyages. This exhibition presents a number of triptychs drawn from the series and includes new works; most share a specific focus on Astronomer's Point in Pickersgill Harbour, Dusky Sound, Fiordland.

Adams' practice operates at the nexus of cross-cultural exchange. Historian Damian Skinner discusses Adams' reflexive work in terms of Pākehā identity and its uneasy relationship to settler colonialism, an identity formed through relationships with Māori.⁽²⁾ This is echoed by Māori artist and curator Nathan Pohio, who asserts that Adams is "a Pākehā re-thinking the Pākehā position to the land and people."⁽³⁾

Along with other locations such as Tahiti, Cook's Sites creatively examines the original encounters between European navigators, native New Zealand landscapes and local Māori tribes. Adams' photographs also form part of the eponymous publication in collaboration with anthropologist and historian Professor Nicholas Thomas of the University of Cambridge.⁽⁴⁾ Thomas has also discussed Adams' "engagement with the deep, artful, bloody, and inextricably complicated histories of colonialism in the Pacific," highlighting his capacity to bear witness, strategic irresolution, and conceptual focus on context.⁽⁵⁾

During his second voyage on board the HMS Resolution, Cook was accompanied by the English painter William Hodges, the first professional artist to visit Aotearoa. Consequently, Hodges' paintings can be seen as founding documents in the origin and development of Western art in New Zealand, and were perhaps the first plein air paintings produced in Aotearoa.

Adams has rigorously studied Hodges' work, making pilgrimages to view his paintings at Greenwich Museum in London, and photograph other sites in the United Kingdom and Europe related to Cook's Pacific peregrinations where botanical specimens, indigenous artifacts, and the voyagers' documents are also held. Adams' pilgrimages extend to the specific New Zealand sites Hodges depicted, spending weeks at a time embedded in these wild, remote environments waiting for what feels like the right moment to photograph. Adams' immersive investigation of Cook's Sites makes him a foremost expert on Hodges' project in New Zealand, given his intimate knowledge of the precise locations Hodges recorded, a claim few historians can make. Being there makes all the difference.

Decades before the invention of photography, Hodges was acting under instruction from the English admiralty to depict Cook's journeys with empirical accuracy. Adams recounts that while many of Hodges' paintings do faithfully record what he saw, other representations are selectively shaped according to a number of pictorial conventions and subjectivities, not least of which is their presentation of the indigenous Māori whom he encountered. A key example of Hodges' problematic colonial idealisations of Aotearoa is *A View in Dusky Bay, New Zealand (1773)*, where the Māori subject is portrayed according to the visual codes of the exoticised 'noble savage.' He is

rendered with brown skin, though with a straight nose like a Greco-Roman statue, and his spear is more reminiscent of Western weaponry than its traditional Māori counterpart.⁽⁶⁾ Hodges' tondo canvas layers further Western historical associations, from Greek antiquity to the Renaissance. Adams proposes Hodges' composition could also be reflective of his view through a telescope.

Cook's Sites acts as a partial and poetic mirror on this early (colonial) art history, while concurrently foregrounding histories of photography as a subject. In *Indian Island, 360° panorama after William Hodges 'View in Dusky Bay', 2-10 August, 1998*, Adams reframes a view of this region from the position of Hodges' Māori subject by placing his tripod on the rocky outcrop where the figure is thought to have stood. In doing so, Adams is not attempting to speak for Māori; rather his lens is directed reflexively towards Pākehā, looking out from inside the painting and back on these colonial moments from the vantage point of the 'other.' His expansive split panorama creates a 360 degree view, which can also be seen to refer to Hodges' circular canvas. In an inversion of Hodges' iconic piece, Adams turns the telescope inside out.

Similarly, Adams' vast panorama *Nine Fathoms Passage 27 June 2014-1 July 2014 After William Hodges' 'Waterfall in Dusky Bay with a Māori Canoe', 1775-77 (2015)* responds to the painter across 11 large colour photographs. Taken from a rock in the middle of the fiord, it approximates the view from the waka where Māori appeared within the Hodges' painting.⁽⁷⁾

Adams uses a large format plate camera exclusively. His exquisitely detailed prints are at times presented 'full frame,' with black film borders and teeth marks visible in the corners from clips used to hold the film while being processed. This mode of presentation adds a certain gravitas to the images, as they draw on the origins of photography and suggest a certain truth value. However, his groupings of images within a single work may in fact be composed from individual shots taken at different times of day over a number of days. In this sense, they are a kind of 'docufiction,' a highly structured composition which compresses time and space, most clearly visible in the shifting light across frames. He traces this shifting light in the volatile weather particularly prominent in this region: sun, cloud, mists, squalls of rain, wind, thunder, hail. When a storm rises the weather can close in for days at time. Adams attention to light and dramatic changes in weather connects him to histories of the Sublime, evident in the often extreme contrasts of light and shadow in Hodges' paintings.

There is a fractured coherence in the diptychs, triptychs and suites, where fragments of topography such as mountain ranges often appear or disappear at the image borders. The photographs are lined up organically to share the same horizon, while retaining their individual points of view. This presentation of multiple perspectives through individual frames might further evoke a kind of unresolved pluralism at stake in this terrain. Adams' methodology retraces and reflects on diverse accounts and artefacts of history, while being firmly grounded in our complicated postcolonial present: a kind of photographic revisionist historiography.

Adams' engagement with the photographs of Russell Duncan, who re-traced Cook's journeys in the nineteenth century, represent a further take on a take on a take. The Totara stumps and Kidney Ferns to which Adams refers are key to his vision of Astronomer's Point. The stumps were created by the felling of trees in order to establish an observatory for astronomer William Wales. Wales was literally putting New Zealand on the map. His reference to Duncan further reminds viewers of photography's complex role in the colonial project. Adams' contemporary images look out as an astronomer might, yet they also turn the lens back on the site itself. Adams' childhood dream based on Duncan's book of photographs evokes Western cartography's monsters in the margins of unknown territories, while alluding to the presence of histories, which haunt these locations.

⁽¹⁾ Mark Adams, Artist's statement to accompany the exhibition *Views from Astronomer's Point*, 2017.

⁽²⁾ Damian Skinner, "Photographing Māori, Picturing Pākehā," in *The Reflexive Photographer*, ed. Rosie Miller, Jonathan Carson and Theresa Wilkie (Edinburgh & Boston: MuseumsEtc, 2013), 252-263.

⁽³⁾ Nathan Pohio, "The 'Food Basket of Rakaihautu' from Horomaka, 31 March 1991," in *101 Works of Art*, Ken Hall et al. (Christchurch, New Zealand: Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, 2015), 284.

⁽⁴⁾ Mark Adams and Nicholas Thomas, *Cook's Sites* (Otago, New Zealand: Otago University Press, 1999).

⁽⁵⁾ Nicholas Thomas, "Mark Adams," in *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers*, ed. Lara Strongman (Auckland, New Zealand: Mountain View Publishing, 2005), 136-7.

⁽⁶⁾ See for example, Francis Pound, *Frames on the Land – Early Landscape Painting in New Zealand* (Auckland, New Zealand: Collins, 1982).

⁽⁷⁾ This work was recently on display at the Auckland Art Gallery in the exhibition *To All New Arrivals*.