

In 1995 a group of prominent New Zealand art photographers ventured to the remote wilderness of Tamatea / Dusky Sound in Fiordland to encounter this mythical region and record their experience. Tamatea / Dusky Sound represents a key point of origin in the emergence of Pākehā art history, where the first oil paintings were made in Aotearoa by William Hodges aboard The Resolution on Captain James Cook's second voyage. Hodges' paintings evidence the arrival of European vision in New Zealand, including the colonial representation of Māori, while in contrast, also recording this unique natural environment and its characteristic shifting light in a relatively faithful way.

Centuries later, Mark Adams, Darren Glass, Ian Macdonald and Haru Sameshima – along with historian, anthropologist and prominent Cook voyage scholar Professor Nicholas Thomas – chartered a boat to Dusky Sound in an ambitious expedition to retrace Cook and Hodges' voyage and their pioneering representations of 'first contact' with Aotearoa. Generating diverse contemporary images and reflections of their own, in this exhibition the artists' work captured during their remarkable journey has been brought together for the first time.

Hodges was the first professional artist to visit Aotearoa. His paintings can be seen as founding works in the origins of Western art's arrival in New Zealand, and were perhaps the first plein air paintings produced in this country. In Hodges' *View in Pickersgill Harbour, Dusky Bay, New Zealand* (c. 1776) we see a fallen tree used as a gang plank from The Resolution onto the land. Hodges' vantage point appears to be on the stern of the ship, a colonial participant-observer.

Decades before the invention of photography, Hodges was acting under instruction from the English admiralty to depict Cook's voyage with empirical accuracy. Mark Adams notes 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.¹ The most salient is their presentation of the 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 exoticized 'noble savage'. He is rendered with brown skin, though with a straight nose like a Greco-Roman statue.² Hodges' use of a circular shaped tondo canvas layers further Western art historical associations, from Greek antiquity to the Renaissance. Adams proposes Hodges' circular composition could also be reflective of his view through a telescope.

Adams' project, *Cook's Sites*, responds to the locations of Captain Cook's first contact with Aotearoa New Zealand and other destinations in the Pacific during his pioneering voyages. Adams has rigorously studied Hodges' work, making pilgrimages to view his paintings at Greenwich Museum in London (as does Ian Macdonald on each visit), and photograph other sites in the United Kingdom and Europe related to Cook's Pacific

¹ Mark Adams, personal conversation, cited in Emil McAvoy, *Turning the Telescope Inside Out*, essay published by Two Rooms in association with the exhibition *Views From Astronomer's Point*, 2017. Excerpts from this essay are also included and adapted in this text.

² See for example, Francis Pound, *Frames on the Land – Early Landscape Painting in New Zealand* (Auckland, New Zealand: Collins, 1982).

peregrinations – where botanical specimens, indigenous artifacts, and the voyagers' documents are also held.

Adams' pilgrimages extend to the specific sites in Aotearoa Hodges depicted, spending weeks at a time embedded in wild environments waiting for what feels like the right moment to photograph. Adams' immersive investigation 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.

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. Adams notes:

"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."³

The Totara stumps and Kidney ferns to which Adams refers are key to his vision of Astronomer's Point in Tamatea. 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.

The 1995 expedition to Tamatea / Dusky Sound which is the focus of this exhibition came about through friendships, creative networks and shared research interests. Professor Nicholas Thomas, then Pacific Anthropologist at The Australian National University, had seen *Land of Memories*, Adams' project on the South Island, and *Pakeha/Maori*, Adams' photographs of Rotorua. On a visit to Aotearoa in 1991, Thomas saw curator Rangihīroa Panoho's ground-breaking exhibition of Pacific art *Te Moemoeā no Iotefa (The Dream of Joseph)*, which also featured Mark Adams' photographs of Pacific tatau. Inspired to research further, he met with Adams and the pair decided to collaborate. Their plan was to charter a private vessel to both Dusky Sound and Queen Charlotte Sound for a fortnight to revisit and retrace sites of Cook's first contact. They assembled a crew of fellow photographers with aligned practices and interests to join them: Haru Sameshima, Ian Macdonald and Darren Glass. It was their first trip, and in Adams' case, was to become the first of many. Apparently, Adams also offered them unlimited crayfish and blue cod caught in this abundant region if they agreed to join the adventure and also split the costs.⁴ Macdonald's son Andrew acted as the trip's ferryman, and caught fish along with artist Darren Glass, making good on Adams' promise.

³ Mark Adams, artist's statement to accompany the exhibition *Views from Astronomer's Point*, 2017.

⁴ Haru Sameshima, email correspondence with the author, May 24, 2023.

In recent conversation, Haru Sameshima emphasised the connections in bringing these like-minded artists together: through photography, shared technologies and resources, and the role of Real Pictures, the Elam School of Fine Arts and other communities of support and exchange.⁵ Sameshima was completing an MFA project at the Elam School of Fine Arts from 1994 – 1995, and had been camping for months and photographing with Adams prior to the Dusky Sound voyage. Loosely entitled *eco-Tourism*, Sameshima's research involved critically investigating histories of New Zealand landscape photography in various forms, such as professional and amateur photography in the 19th Century, government sponsored images promoting New Zealand as a tourist destination, books in the 'Beautiful New Zealand' genre, Pictorialists of early 20th Century, conservation inspired photographs of the land since the 1960s, and modernist art photographs since the 1960s. This later materialised in the publication *Bold Centuries*. Sameshima notes:

“My output as a photographer involved revisiting many of these sites depicted, and loosely rephotographing the sites with various camera technologies appropriate to the photographic reference I was making...Dusky Sound fitted this framework of 'eco-Tourism' well, being one of the early sites of human encounter with 'untouched nature', both by Māori and Pākehā...It is the style of the 19th Century professional photographers like the Burton Brothers and Muir and Moody, but inspired by the scientific observational nature of the Astronomer's Point visit by Cook and his men, as one of the tasks to fix the position of New Zealand using a chronometer and stars.”⁶

Ian Macdonald likened the group's Dusky Sound voyage to viewing the first pictures of the moon's surface, an encounter with new and unfamiliar terrain mediated by photography.⁷ Macdonald's work has included roles as Exhibitions Officer at the Auckland Art Gallery, running Real Pictures, and working as a travelling stills photographer with the BBC. He also trained as a navigator in the merchant navy, and for Macdonald, the 1995 expedition resonated with Cook's voyage and its moment for navigation and science. Cook and Hodges were joined by astronomer William Wales who was observing the Transit of Venus, a significant moment for scientific discovery. Macdonald notes that Cook's voyage to Dusky Sound was the first using the Harrison Chronometer, which enabled very accurate longitudinal measurements.

Macdonald's work centres on photographing Aotearoa's ancient native forests, and on forest conservation. His images during this trip were taken on a large format 4" x 5" plate camera, which he also used while travelling for the BBC. These photographs are rendered in striking detail and colour, and stitched together with software. Macdonald reflects on photographing the native bush as Cook might have seen it, still largely untouched. He notes:

“The expedition was about marks in time. For my part, I was able to document the forest as it was pre-human before the impact of browsing animals. The irony was that this photography was possible at the very place the first Europeans to visit landed, who irrevocably changed the New Zealand landscape.”⁸

In contrast, while photographing on Heron Island, where he spent much of his time, Macdonald also describes several touching encounters with local animal life while photographing which speak to the poetic intensities of first contact. In one he states: “I

⁵ Haru Sameshima, personal conversation with the author, May 12, 2023.

⁶ Haru Sameshima, email, May 24, 2023.

⁷ Ian Macdonald, telephone conversation with the author, May 21, 2023.

⁸ Ian Macdonald, email correspondence with the author, May 22, 2023.

stood on a rock with my large camera on a tripod, and a pod of dolphins congregated just behind me as they watched the proceedings.”⁹ And in another: “While standing behind my camera, a flock of bellbirds surrounded me, singing a musical chorus repeated by others over the whole island. I felt I was the centre of attention for the local bush telegraph.”¹⁰

Artist Darren Glass also joined the group, bringing a large custom-built pinhole camera, one of many experimental structures Glass has created. The camera in question is donut shaped, with the location of the many apertures decided by throwing a dart at the structure. These apertures look up, down and out – creating fragmented, overlapping views. The camera contained 120 film with a slow film speed, and his compositions created using a succession of 30 minute exposures. He rotated the position of the camera between exposures, taking 3-4 hours to make each work. There is an optical push-and-pull as individual frames appear to slide into one another – singular perspectives collide and coalesce as one crashes and blends into the next.

In conversation, Glass discusses his interest in the way the eye sees and the mind remembers – not in isolated images, but in streams of successive images. Glass studied the history of early photography at Elam, and he also describes the pinhole camera as “primitive and brutal”.¹¹ The murky, organic quality to the images it produces speak to the appearance of the earliest known photographs and a sense of photography’s emergence as a medium.

In this exhibition, there is a sense of collective return, from long exposures capturing the movement of Tamatea’s wind, rain and tides, to the act of revisiting and photographing sites where historic events and representations have occurred. These photographs are teeming with life – they hum with the weather, and reflect on moments spent looking and thinking from many viewpoints, telescoping the past and present.

Emil McAvoy, June 2023

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Darren Glass, telephone conversation with the author, May 18, 2023.