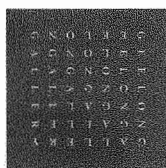


Andrew Seward

A BOTANICAL ALBUM:

drawings, prints and photograms
1999–2004

GEELONG GALLERY



GEELONG GALLERY
6 August to 26 September 2004

BALLARAT FINE ART GALLERY
25 February to 3 April 2005

Exhibition Sponsors



Overleaf Cat no. 01

YOU MAKE ME Happy and Sad

— thinking about Andrew Seward
thinking about making art

ANDREW SEWARD IS EMOTIONAL. He thinks emotional things while he works, and he writes constantly about why he does what he does – why he draws, why he makes photograms, and how he feels about being an artist. He is obsessed by the means of his art's production. For Seward, how something is, what it is, and what it is made from leads to an understanding of why it exists.

In 2002 Seward undertook a residency at *Lunuganga* (a country home) in Sri Lanka to pursue his interest in botanical subjects as monotypes and photograms – photographic images created without the aid of a camera. The photograms created in Sri Lanka, and which appear in this exhibition, were exposed to light while Seward was away but had to be printed in Australia. In other words, the artist returned home with the incredibly transformed, although imperceptibly changed, blank rectangles of photographic paper he set off with. Instead of experiencing the magical disclosure of the images while in the strange and lush setting of *Lunuganga*, the shadowy trace of the exotic plants was only revealed when Seward was back in his studio in Flemington.

The largest photogram on display at the Geelong Gallery, titled *Kitul*, consists of 81 pieces of light-sensitive paper joined together to form a map or flat *ikebana* arrangement of the fishtail palm. The massed, knobbly strands of the local plant

CHECKLIST

- 1**
Macrocystis augustifolia 2001
cyanotype
4 sheets: 112.0 x 152.0 cm
- 2**
Unidentified brown alga 2001
cyanotype
4 sheets: 112.0 x 152.0 cm
- 3**
Phyllospora comosa 2001
cyanotype
9 sheets: 168.0 x 228.0 cm
- 4**
Carpoglossum confluens 2001
cyanotype
6 sheets: 168.0 x 152.0 cm
- 5**
Ecklonia radiata 2001
cyanotype
6 sheets: 228.0 x 112.0 cm
- 6**
Cystophora subfarcinata 2001
cyanotype
6 sheets: 228.0 x 112.0 cm
- 7**
Kitul
Caryota urens 2002
photogram
81 sheets: 277.0 x 228.0 cm
- 8**
Dotalu
Loxococcus rupicola 2002
photogram
15 sheets: 154.0 x 76.0 cm
- 9**
Cycas revoluta 2002
photogram
15 sheets: 154.0 x 76.0 cm
- 10**
Unidentified brown alga 2001
cyanotype
76.0 x 60.0 cm
- 11**
Rhizome
(possibly marram grass) 2002
drawing: pencil on Arches paper
76.0 x 60.0 cm
- 12**
Aloe vera 1999–2000
drawing: pencil on Arches paper
76.0 x 60.0 cm
- 13**
Drawing from London Plane
2002–2004
drawings: pencil on Arches paper
38.5 x 28.5 cm

Overleaf Cat no. 12

Overleaf Cat no. 03

and its hefty stalk cut an eccentric and monstrous figure. *Kitul* took four hours to make, but at this stage in his career Seward is a photogram expert. He has spent years experimenting with timing, colour and various plant forms and is constantly curious about the way particular species will look when represented by their silhouette. However, like Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot – one of the inventors of photography and a pioneer of photograms in the 1830s – Seward's earliest photograms did not 'fix' themselves onto the paper and so disappeared into nothing. With regards to *Kitul*, assistance was needed to manoeuvre the 81 taped-together sheets around Seward's tiny room under the red glow of a safety light before they were briefly exposed to a single, dangling ceiling bulb. Making such large works of art, especially during the heady, tropical nights spent at *Lunuganga*, provides a challenge for the artist and turns the process into a 'photogram event'.

For all this effort, Seward is not interested in educating us about plants. While the photograms and cyanotypes are titled with their botanical nomenclature, the proper names are meant to give each work a rational feel thus preventing them becoming 'dark metaphors' for more poetic readings. It may be no surprise that Seward is immersed in the work of nineteenth-century English photographer and scientist, Anna Atkins – indeed, during a residency in London in 2002 he studied versions of her work in *British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (1843-53) held at the British Library. However, Seward does not share Atkins's aim of creating a precise scientific record, even though both have employed the cyanotype process to literally create blueprints of the sea life under investigation. Seward recognises that his images are not 'good enough' in scientific terms, and, indeed, why make a photogram today when you can take a macro-digital photograph? The 'gap' between Seward's photograms and the natural world, also partially retained in the formal titles, creates a rash of information that is in many ways excessive but, perversely, not useful enough to assist us in the search for their meaning. The artist's real and virtual time-travels around the world and back into history have become important parts of his practice. He likes the politics of, and mutability gained when not needing much to create a work of art – drawing requires only pencils and paper, photograms only chemicals and light-sensitive paper. Such economy means the creative process can take place anywhere. There is a certain simplicity with which the artist can record the world around himself and, inversely, how the world can then prompt new projects.

When drawing, Seward works like a camera, meaning he creates images in the gap between the highly complex way we see with our own eyes and the flattened, slightly restructured vision of the lens. (Avant-garde Soviet cinematographer, Dziga Vertov, famously worked from this perspective.) But although he can't help seeing photographically (and our minds can't resist forming narratives wherever possible), Seward always draws from life. Sitting close and working in a concentrated manner at a drawing makes the artist intimate with the subject so that his mark-making eventually adds up to the

14
Adiantum tenerum 2002
monotype: oil on Japanese
Sugami paper
63.0 x 50.0 cm

15
Selaginella willdenovii 2002
monotype: oil on Japanese
Sugami paper
63.0 x 50.0 cm

16
Unidentified 2002
monotype: oil on Japanese
Sugami paper
63.0 x 50.0 cm

17
Selaginella sp. 2002
monotype: oil on Japanese
Sugami paper
63.0 x 50.0 cm

18
Blechnum sp. 2002
monotype: oil on Japanese
Sugami paper
63.0 x 50.0 cm

19
Stenochlaena palustris 2002
monotype: oil on Japanese
Sugami paper
63.0 x 50.0 cm

20
Marine Algae, Trabeg,
Dingle Peninsula,
Co. Kerry, Ireland 2002
monotypes: oil on Japanese
Tosa Shoji paper
each 47.0 x 31.5 cm

21
Leaves from Lunuganga 2002
monotypes: oil on Japanese
Tosa Shoji paper
each 47.0 x 31.5 cm

22
Cyanotype photograms of
lowland flora, Sri Lanka 1999
cyanotypes
38.5 x 28.5 cm

23
Malocclusion I 2004
drawing: pencil on Arches paper
4 parts: each 38.5 x 28.5 cm

24
Malocclusion II 2004
drawing: pencil on Arches paper
4 parts: each 38.5 x 28.5 cm

25
Malocclusion III 2004
drawing: pencil on Arches paper
4 parts: each 38.5 x 28.5 cm

ANDREW SEWARD Born in Melbourne in 1967 and completed a BA (Fine Art) at RMIT University in 1991 majoring in printmaking and painting and a BA at the University of Melbourne in 1992 majoring in fine art and the history and philosophy of science. In 1990 he co-founded *Platform*, a public art space at two central Melbourne railway stations that presented a program of monthly exhibitions and activities. He coordinated *Platform* until 2002. He has exhibited widely across commercial, artist-run and public gallery spaces since 1990 and has also curated exhibitions on such subjects as the contemporary relationship between painting and photography and the nature of friendship. A finalist in the 2000 Deakins Award and the 2002 Robert Jacks Drawing Prize, Seward has also worked as a lecturer in the Faculty of Art and

so that his mark-making eventually adds up to the thing in front of him.

What do we really mean by photography and drawing? The word 'photograph' means 'light drawing', and the two practices are also linked in the way they measure time. Photographs are moments sucked out of the past that exist on and on in an eternal present, while drawings show how time was spent. Seward literally recorded the minutes it took to complete each of the leaf drawings on the back of each sheet. The long, vertical lists – 19.2.03, 15.40-16.55; 27.8.03, 5.10-7.12; 8.4.04, 11.13-12.45 – start to look like a prisoner marking time but is in fact Seward's own imposed sense of discipline. It is a regime that allows him to account for particular chunks of each day and to see what can be achieved in a limited period.

The connection between photography and drawing lies in the way each represents the world and the transfer from three dimensions into two that each process requires. Both decipher what will be lost and what will be retained in the transfer onto paper. Sometimes, says Seward, these decisions become so stressful that the process of drawing isn't pleasurable – indeed, the photograms, cyanotypes and monotypes, which can be created almost instantaneously, are often made as a relief from this tension. He sees his botanical drawings as a series of choices about technique, rather than expressing a style. Each drawing is not just a simulacrum but represents hundreds of tiny, problem-solving activities related to layout, shape, shading and line that are interlocked with one another in order to give the best appearance of an individual leaf.

Seward confesses he isn't naturally good at drawing but undertook the group of more than 140 images to develop his skills and to experience art making as a completely embodied act by scrutinising objects and his own thoughts simultaneously. Like a camera measuring light, he takes a practiced 'reading' of what he sees and describes it. Such exacting descriptions of each leaf thus provide the answers to questions of what tools were used, what is represented and what is the context for these illustrations as they begin to assume the character of still lifes. This specificity helps focus our understanding of the concerns of the artist about observation, technique, nature, genre, history, science, art and illustration, and the application and usefulness of art. But still, we can't help but look for other layers of meaning in these images. Perhaps we'll have to look again, but this time a little closer, at life.

Kate Rhodes

Assistant Curator of Photography
National Gallery of Victoria

Seward has also worked as a lecturer in the Faculty of Art and Design at Monash University and directed three summer residential drawing and ecological programs in the Australian Alps. In 2002 he was artist-in-residence at the Australia Council's London studio and also travelled to Sri Lanka as the recipient of an Asialink award. His work is held by the National History Museum (London), Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (London), National Gallery of Victoria, Monash University, Monash Gallery of Art, Hamilton Art Gallery and a number of Australian and overseas private collections. Most recently, his work featured in the National Gallery of Victoria's *First Impressions* (2003), and he is currently completing a commission for the Natural History Museum (London).

BY WAY OF THANKS A botanical album includes the best examples of a number of groups of work made since 1999. At such a moment it is tempting to see these expressions as conclusive, but I understand that the making of these pictures is an on-going process in the way that a personal diary or picture album is. While this conception is important for the vitality and independence of my work, I could not have made any of it without the support of just a few people. Chief amongst them is my partner Roisin O'Dwyer and our three-year old son Flynn. I also acknowledge my mother Susan, my uncle Simon, and the memory of my father Stephen. The Australia Council and Asialink supported my residencies in London and Sri Lanka which were enormously helpful in the development of my approach and ideas. Thanks to Geoffrey Edwards for inviting me to exhibit at the Geelong Gallery and to the curator Brian Hubber. Bernadette Sandercock assisted with the identification of the marine algae, and Michael Daniels and Ashe De Silva, the caretakers at *Lunuganga*, with the identification of the ferns. Thanks also to those generous souls who lent works to the exhibition.

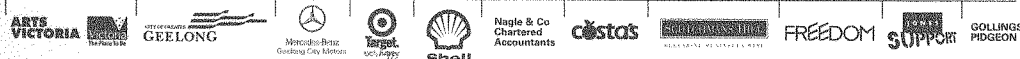
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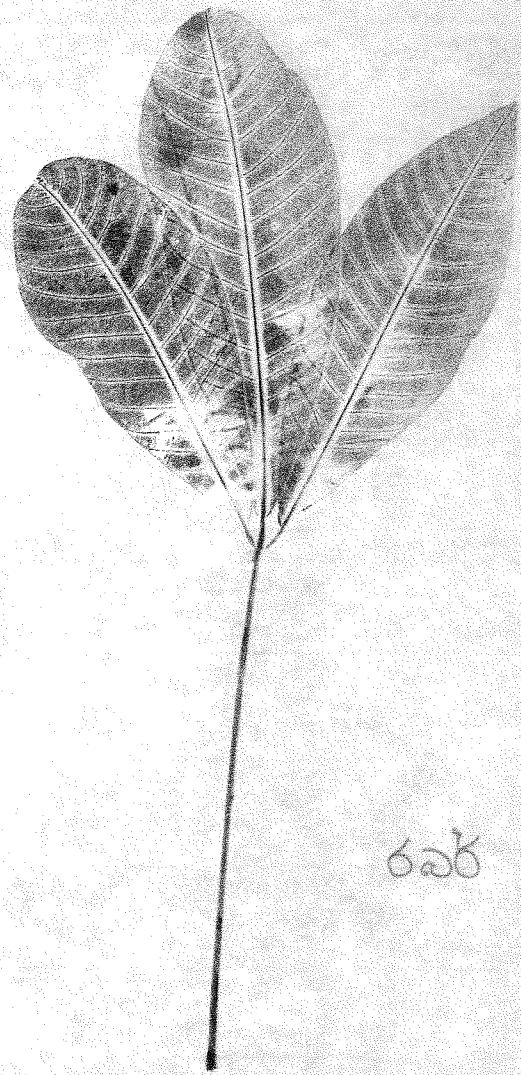
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