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Elisabeth Condon 'This Land Was Made for You and Me' GRANTPIRRIE WINDOW. Caroline Rothwell 'Exotopos' GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney. 5 - 28 March, 2009.
by Lionel Bawden and Nell

April 2009

Sydney artists Nell and Lionel Bawden reflect on the dynamic conversation between the companion exhibitions of Condon and Rothwell. Grounded in landscape, both exhibitions engage a dialogue around lost or imagined utopias/dystopias, our sense of connection to them and our displacement from them.

Hearing a Painting, Seeing a Song

"grass, grass, grass, trees, trees, trees, sky, sky, sky" - Woody Guthrie

Guthrie's song is the most pure landscape painting I have ever seen. I often 'hear' paintings and 'see' songs. Surely Oliver Sacks could explicate this complex neurological occurrence. He might describe Elisabeth Condon's paintings as a purposeful adventure in synesthesia. To get less perceptual and more actual, this apparent cross-pollination of the senses IS the experience of being alive. Condon's paintings are bursting out with life. In an abundant universe not dissimilar to ours, one life form in her work moves fluidly into the next. Colours, times and shapes happily shift and flow without separation.



Elisabeth Condon
*This Land Was Made
for You and Me*
Seven-panelled
painting

Condon's seven-panelled painting, *This Land Was Made for You and Me*, derives its title from the last line to each verse of Guthrie's most renowned song. Originally penned in 1944, 'This Land is Your Land' is a veritable anthem of inclusion. In this case, Condon was aware her 'everyplace' would look out onto the street of Sydney's Redfern. It's long-established demographic of Indigenous Australians, artists, blue collar workers, immigrants from all over the world, and students is threatened, paradoxically, by the very likes of the gallery as the 'hood' becomes gentrified.

In conversation, Condon told me "the landscape is the only thing that can contain everything." My mate, Uncle Max would agree. Uncle Max is an Aboriginal Elder and to be in his orbit is to realise there is no place better than right where you standing. Instead of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people reconciling to each other, Uncle Max speaks of all people reconciling to 'THIS'. When he says the word 'THIS', his eyes roam up to the sky and across the trees while his feet stomp on the ground. If we really see and really hear the "grass, grass, grass, trees, trees, trees, sky, sky, sky" then we are already reconciled to the land and therefore, forever on common ground. Despite of our individual sensory experience, This Land Was Made for You AND Me.

Nell, 2009.