

In 1955 after a journey home to The Netherlands from his home in Perth, Western Australia, Woldendorp found he was excited with the quality of his souvenir photographs. He felt 'they had something' and a surviving album of these early images already shows his interest in abstract form. On his return Woldendorp became more involved with photography and studied the work of great European photographers. His work in these years was in black and white and informed by a respect for the 'decisive moment' cherished by photojournalists such as Henri Cartier-Bresson. This notion of the split-second when all is right in the frame, remains at the heart of Woldendorp's approach to landscape work.

Woldendorp had no desire to become a studio based commercial photographer so it was fortuitous that in the 1960s the Australian economy was beginning to boom - especially in mining ventures - and a market developed for pictures from across the whole country for local and overseas magazines. By 1961 Woldendorp had his first commission for *Walkabout* and a few years later became a full time freelance photographer holding his first solo exhibition in Perth that year.

After he turned to photography as a vocation and art in the 1960s Richard Woldendorp was struck by how little Australians really knew the hinterlands. As an immigrant from The Netherlands Woldendorp came from a country which was knowable, which revealed itself in ordered fashion.

To reveal the neglected character of the country Woldendorp published his first book, *The Hidden Face of Australia* in 1968 with specialist bird photographer Peter Slater. The next year Woldendorp was one of two photographers featured with portfolios in a lavish and ambitious book edited by Craig McGregor, called *In the Making* - on the vibrancy of the arts in Australia. The *In the Making* book sought to show the alliances between all the art forms but favoured the style and manifestos of abstract expressionism. Woldendorp's monochrome and colour works shared formal concerns with the abstract forms and dynamic rhythms across all the visual art mediums featured in the book..

By the 1980s Woldendorp was known for his representation of the dramatic forms and colours of Australia's remoter regions. In aerial work Woldendorp often eliminates the horizon line emphasising instead the powerful linear and planar forms of the landscape. His works have a striking resonance with the work of landscape painters of the 1960s-1980s — with the 'aerial' viewpoint in the paintings of John Olsen and Robert Juniper. The images also run in tandem with the emergence in the 1980s and 1990s of a generation of dynamic desert paintings in modern acrylic by indigenous artists.

Fellow photographer and reviewer, the late Max Dupain commented that Woldendorp's landscapes looked like they were made 'a million years before man arrived'. Coastlines in particular have fascinated him for their confrontation of motion and pattern in the waves and waterways and massive landforms. In his own commentary on his portfolio in *In the Making*, he stated that 'nature provides so many abstractions, details, shapes — if you stay in the bush for weeks you become one with it. That's what I'm interested in: form, contrast, simplicity of line'.

While Woldendorp has travelled extensively across Australia, his great work centres on the terrain of the West. His friendships have tended to be more with painters and writers than fellow photographers. Deeply moved by his own experience in coming to Australia as an immigrant, Woldendorp has turned his initial gawping wonder into a vision combining strength and lightness, the monumental and the delicate. The works in the current exhibition are among the most abstract and distilled of his career. The landscape in his 'world-view' is dynamic like the vision of the indigenous people and artists who came to know it millennia before the Europeans. Photography can so easily excel at freezing time and imposing a frame of order on the land. Woldendorp's vision is not eidetic – the camera's facility with exact replication of detail is traded off with the creation of images which are like some imaginary sea. We do not experience the land like this at ground level as individuals but through technological apparatus and an artist's imagination.

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