**Rediscovering the land through non-indigenous Australian Art**

**Chris Dalton**

Abstract

The public policy framework that shapes environmental management laws reflects how we perceive the world and value the land. This paper explores what those perceptions and values might be, as seen through the eyes of non-indigenous Australian artists.

Their art is rich, but presents ambiguous and contradictory insights into Australia. For example:

* A vast flat monotonous land devoid of features (Frome: First view of the salt desert – called Lake Torrens, 1843)
* A land that kills (Gill: Grim Evidence, no date)
* Arcadian woodlands (Long: Spirit of the plains, 1897)
* A western civilised Brisbane (Rivers: Under the jacaranda, 1903)
* Heroic Australians in an alien environment (Drysdale: Man feeding his dog, 1941)
* A barren land populated by carcases (Nolan: Drought, 1962)
* A battlefield where only the fittest survive (Pugh: Wild Dog, 1964)
* The centre of life (Olsen: Life Approaching Lake Eyre, 1978)
* A confronting desolation that offers hope (Boyd: Crucifixion, Shoalhaven, 1979-80)
* Exquisite beauty (Wolseley: A Journey Near Ormiston Gorge in Search of Rare Grasshoppers, 1980)

The land is variously depicted as God-forsaken, an enemy to be conquered, hostile, tortured, a virginal Eden full of promise, womblike, intricately beautiful and a ‘bloody good mate’.

At the heart of all these images is a theme of spiritual relationships, be it one of ‘domination’ (the subduing of the Earth, and having dominion – John Locke, Second Treatise on Government, 1689), ‘stewardship’ (human beings legitimately exercise a ‘responsible stewardship’ over nature … so it can worthily accommodate and feed the world’s population, Benedict XVI, 2009) or ‘equality’ (The natural environment is, however, not merely a resource for the benefit of human beings, but has intrinsic value as a part of God’s creation, UCA, 2006).

All these images can be found in the CSG debate, and so assist us to recognise how our world views and values shape environmental legislation.

Speaker Biography

Chris is a PhD candidate researching “How an Australian theology of land can inform the public debate surrounding the Coal Seam Gas Industry”, funded by the Public and Contextual Theology Strategic Research Centre, CSU. Chris has previously worked in both the public and private sectors in Australia on telecommunications public policy development for over 25 years.

His academic history includes:

* BSc (Hons) Mathematics, Sussex University, 1971
* Graduate Diploma in Administration, Canberra University, 1979
* Master of Arts (Public and Contextual Theology), CSU, 2011
* I am presenting a paper in June at the ANZATS Annual Conference on “Experiencing Land as Community through Judith Wright’s poetry”.