



IMAGES OF WAR Where in the world do two sheep have the luxury of such open, verdant pasture? While as a species, humans huddle in crowds on stark, grey, paved squares? Evidently, these are both virtual spaces, city- and land-scapes constructed around digitally altered perspectives: six collaged views from atop and around some of the famous sites of Europe (such as the view on to Piazza San Marco from the Campanile in Venice); and four elongated Victorian landscapes featuring a couple of sheep (the rest of the flock having been digitally removed).

In the cityscapes, the point of view has been multiplied and stitched together, edge to edge, in a patchwork based on floor plans of architecture. The crowd seems caught in a maze; the open squares and plazas tightly interwoven into a rich spatial plaid, a slotted, captive space. The landscapes have been multiplied and extended, one being a mirror reflection, others more like extrusions, various details, merged and rendered, all of them seamless, functions of Photoshop. Repeating clumps of trees clearly signal the process. Two sheep luxuriate within this digital idyll, eating, playing with each other.

The movement of crowds across these spaces resemble the meandering desire lines of sheep across a paddock. Indeed, these are images of tourists 'flocking' to the attractions of London, Sienna, Florence and Venice, corralled like sheep toward one prominent site or another. Contrariwise, a field full of sheep is reworked into an exclusive, loving portrait of only two newly clipped merinos, caught frolicking in a soft clear light. So while tourists pay homage, grazing the rich cultural pastures of Western civilisation, another introduced species makes itself at home on the cleared plains of a new land.

The two series are reminiscent of Loder's first CCP show in 1994, which consisted of grids of small photos: close-ups of an architectural model with figures, such that they appeared real; and re-photographs of particular crowd scenes such that they appeared generic. Depth of field, black and white film, grain and contrast all conspired to confuse the real space of the city with its model. Similarly, in the most recent work, digital collage and blending tools introduce

ambiguity to each aspect of the image, facilitating the same exchange of attributes across the series: real versus constructed space; nature versus cultural phenomena; human versus animal behaviour.

Loder has often worked in grids or series too, and has often changed the shape of images (6 metre photos leaning against the high walls of Gallery 101 or the multi-panelled room at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, where every surface writhed with video projection). She speaks of the most recent images in painterly terms; the collages reminiscent of geometric, rectilinear abstraction while those long landscapes might recall ancient friezes (and of course cinema). But photography has always been based on the pictorial conventions of other media, despite deriving from optics (its model being the human eye). Why else is a photo rectangular, other than because of some Renaissance 'golden mean' (since a lens and an eye are circular)? However, photo-technology has also occasionally exceeded these traditional confines too, new capacities challenging old standards.



For example nineteenth century panorama photography gave us more at either end of the photo, and some funny lenses rendered 360-degree spherical views (though these are usually unintelligible). More recently stop-motion has multiplied the viewpoint onto any single event, and digital means have enabled the seamless extrapolation of an image in any direction. Likewise, traversing one of Loder's prints, 4 metres long and only 7cm high, is not only a matter of requisite technology in film processing, image manipulation and output, but a profound physical experience too.

Typically, we intuit a physical connection to the subject of photography, in so far as it was 'there' and there was a camera in front of it, and we are now situated at the same point of convergence; a subliminal geometry arranging events in our minds as if we were there too. Thus we extrapolate from some imaginary or virtual physical experience to a representation; and despite all the changes to photography, it's still a reflex action. For example, in Loder's landscapes we must walk their length to see

the whole detailed image, and even though we may sense its deliberate construction over time, and even though it takes us time to view it, we nonetheless apprehend it phenomenologically as a (photographic) instant.

So now we are no longer just looking straight ahead when we look at images, bound by optical laws to single phenomena. Rather it's as if we had turned our heads to survey an entire scene all at once, or we were physically able to surround an event, looking on from every angle, or every detail of the scene was brought to our eye separately but instantaneously, or we could look on intensively to infinite depths, or we could see forever over vast distances, or we could view things in a split second that occurred over time.

Clearly, the analogy between the body and optics is breaking down; the model of vision is physically impossible. Or perhaps not. Maybe photography is not simply disembodied, or unrelated to what we might normally see, but rather comes to illustrate our physical

enhancement, our technological improvement. Thus we assume super, godly powers in the act of looking at photographs just as I am presently looking at clear, green images of war on TV taken in Iraq in the middle of the night.

Not surprisingly, Loder's images were first conceived a few years ago at the height of debate over genetic engineering, and in particular the cloning of the first living thing, a sheep called Dolly. The interrelation of key terms in her work bears this out: crowds, sheep, species, digital manipulation. And let's recap the benefits of new media technology too: co-extensiveness in time and space (or omnipresence); manipulability and mutability; infinite reproduction and refinement. Photoshop is not just a useful tool but also a terrifying premonition of things to come, after war, at the end of the world. To judge by Loder's virtual scenarios, public space, as it turns out, is a cul de sac and the ideal paddock is where the real sheep plays happily with its identical copy. **Stuart Koop**



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**NICOLA LODER
wild thing**

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Collages from left to right

Il Campo - Sienna
Piazza Della Signoria 1 - Florence
Piazza Della Signoria 2 - Florence
Piazza St Marco - Venice
1200 x 1200mm each

Sheep from top

Calda, from Harcourt to Bendigo
on the road to Newstead
the road to Maryborough
Hume near Ruffy
4000 x 70mm each

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ARTS
VICTORIA



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