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SUPER SPORT SUNDAY

Thomas Lord

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In 2004, TV3 in New Zealand was running a segment on the Sunday news programme called 'Super Sports Sunday'. Double the length of a weeknight segment, it nearly filled half of the hour-long news with the latest from the world of sport. At the same time, this phrase -*Super Sport Sunday*- was appropriated by Dunedin/Ōtepoti youths as a text message code, for a cannabis inspired day walk. These were often formative outings for many young Ōtepoti locals who participated in these rituals, often leaving with a different perspective on place, upbringing, privilege, and a transformed relationship with the world. In 2020, with the New Zealand cannabis referendum taking place, I was offered an exhibition slot at the Huw Davies Gallery in Canberra. Australian Capital Territory (ACT) had recently decriminalized Cannabis, so I decided to make a new body of work by visiting some of the locations where these rites of passages had taken place or are still taking place.



Figure 1. Thomas Lord, *Mowed lawn at Evansdale Glen*, 2020, hand printed silver gelatin photograph, 82 × 66.1 cm.

I aimed to make photographic images to gaze into with little to no interpretive control, images which allowed the viewer to be free to their own devices while looking long and hard into these spaces. To provide these “long looks”<sup>1</sup> into locations of contemplation, I used a large format film camera. This process, with its inbuilt limitations require the photographer to slow down. These limitations include the need for the camera to be on a tripod, a timely focussing process and composing the projected image upside down and in reverse as it appears on the ground glass, all of which allowed me to be more present in the landscape as I performed these meditative tasks. When I was ready to release the shutter, often for exposures between 30 seconds to 20 minutes, I was not forced to hide behind the back of the camera and this allowed me to roam freely, stand and sit alongside the camera in conversation with the surroundings as the image was being made. I first travelled to Evansdale Glen, a beautiful scenic reserve often bypassed, as access is off State Highway 1 and the formidable Kirimoko Hill. While I looked for a place to set up my camera, birdsong was interrupted by the engine brakes of trucks making the steep descent nearby, and although I was by myself, the reserve had been mowed as if an important game of cricket is about to take place. My composition is of the mowed lawns leading up to a ruin of old reservoir, shadowed by the native bush behind it. Taken in a hurry, my thoughts were not in the present but leading to all the other locations on my list.

As I returned to my car, I double checked all the equipment and realised that my loupe was missing. The loupe is a simple but important magnification device that is used for focussing a large format camera. I followed my steps back to where the camera had been set up to find no trace of the missing magnifying glass. The sun was intense and directly above me at this point. I started catastrophising worst case scenarios of burning down the forest I had come to observe. I spent another hour or so, kicking through lawn clippings until I was drawn to an iridescent kereru feather. The purple and greens of the feather pulled me out of the mental funk that had taken over and I was forced to sit for a while. After several deep breaths, I spotted the loupe within arm’s reach of where the feather had been found. A timely reminder to slow things down and that this kind of photography requires patience, as the images are received not taken. Unlike the methods used in snapshot photography, where a decisive moment is taken quickly and often without consent from the subject, this project required a slow and unspoken agreement with the location. The slower exposure times evade the opportunity to take something from the moment but rather allow the image time to make itself.

This incident forced me to set some new parameters for the project:

1. Visit only one location a day
2. Spend at least two hours at a location
3. It’s ok to not make an image on a visit
4. Enjoy being there and try not to think too much

This new framework permitted the work to flow easily and progress with each excursion. Putting aside pre-existing ideas, the lens focussed on liminal spaces and details along the paths. I used a 210mm lens which is a slightly narrower angle of view of the human eye when mounted on a 4x5 camera. A focal length which allowed me to close-in-on a space, but leave enough room, to reveal the stage for where an activity had taken place.

The project began to change at a leisurely pace as evidence of ruins, non-native weeds growing within native forest remnant, wire fences prohibiting entrance into pine plantations, started to speak of something other than my initial project plan.

One photograph that made the final edit *Tōtara roots overlooking the Pacific Ocean* initially caught my eye as the exposed roots of a Tōtara reminded me of an ideal seat where visitors may rest while ascending the steep sand dune. During the making of this image, I thought of the 1879 painting *Sandfly Bay* from Nicholas Chevalier, a painting showing the location of the photograph and depicting endemic bush, which in some cases make their way down to the coast. This brought on a sense of anemoia,<sup>2</sup> nostalgia for a past I had never experienced, while in the presence of a lone figure acting as a natural monument within an empty dune.



Figure 2. Thomas Lord, *Tōtara roots overlooking the Pacific Ocean*, 2020, hand printed silver gelatin photograph, 82 × 66.1 cm.

The Canberra exhibition space is a rectangular room of 7.2m × 2.8m. Wanting to print the images at least 80cm wide, forced me to cut my initial edit from 18 to 12 to 9 images. This was a challenging task for me which required some advice from peers. Having arrived at 9, I decided to curate the show as a map of Dunedin Harbour and the Otago Peninsula, the floor space acting as the harbour as you walk around the exhibition. I left enough space between images to spend time at each location also leaving the small entrance wall blank while exiting the gallery into another exhibition.

For this exhibition I decided to collaborate with New South Wales based master darkroom printer Sandra Barnard of Sandyprints. I first witnessed her darkroom wizardry in 2020 at Harry Culy's show, *Mirror City* at the Jhana Millers Gallery in Wellington. I was impressed by her printing and welcomed the idea of the prints travelling interstate rather than internationally to meet the gallery's deadline. Although I had a desired look in mind, it was through Sandra's eye and multiple test prints that the final works started to come to life. Fibre based prints need time to dry and time to be properly pressed. Unfortunately, a combination of high humidity and mass flooding, created a whole new meaning to wet printing process and pushed the deadline to the limit. The gallery team did a fantastic job with installation, keeping me in the loop at every stage of the hang. Due to travel restrictions, I was unable to attend the month-long show but enjoyed reading reviews and people's feedback online.

A recurring comment was that the work was "mysterious,"<sup>3</sup> with guests left wanting more information about the spaces they had spent time gazing into.



Figure 3. Thomas Lord, *Pūrākaunui pine forest*, 2020, hand printed silver gelatin photograph, 82 x 66.1 cm.

Shortly after the Canberra show *Pūrākaunui pine forest*, was selected to be part of the Dunedin School of Art photography alumni show, *A little more Magenta*, and was the first showing of any of this work in New Zealand. The image chosen had been made while walking along a beach track only to stop when I heard frogs in the distance. During camera set up a shaft of light illuminated the wire fence in the foreground and isolated individual trees within the forest.<sup>4</sup> Needles from the pine plantation accumulated in a haystack like formation and the light lasted until I packed down. The calling of frogs was replaced by the aggressive barking of dogs on the back of a ute as it half-heartedly slowed down to pass me. I embrace these serendipitous moments when I work, as the mood of a location plays a significant role in my decision making. Doors are always opening and closing as to when it is a good time to for an image to be made, but I generally rely on an environmental factor that forces me to stop, as evident with the frogs as an opening and dogs as a closing in *Pūrākaunui pine forest*.

In another collaboration, I worked with Silvi Glattauer from The Baldessin Press and Studio in Victoria to make solar plates from my exhibition images. Solar plates are used with traditional etching techniques to produce a photo intaglio print. As a practicing artist, Silvi's work is concerned with her love for nature and a deep concern for the environment. It was a comfortable collaboration as these themes run through my work and within this series also. Collaboration is important to me as it offers the work a chance to receive additional expertise and a fresh perspective after months of being absorbed within the process and beginning to settle for what my ideal print should be.



Figure 4. Thomas Lord, *Map of Muaupoko*, 2022, test photogravure print.

Currently, I am in the process of using these plates to hand print an extended catalogue using the photopolymer photogravure process. Unlike the darkroom prints these are A5 which constitutes a very small enlargement from the 4x5 negative. A size which provides maximum detail at a smaller scale, similar to a childhood pastime of drawing on a balloon only to pop it and discover your original drawing shrunk down to a size which would make drawing at that detail, on that surface impossible. In the hand printed catalogue, I have included three additional works from one of the earlier edits and will sequence the images differently from the installation in Canberra.

I have continued to use the methodologies explored in Super Sport Sunday beyond this project. I've found myself returning to the locations from this series every weekend which has led to a new body of work of that makes up some of the research toward my MFA. I now find myself focusing on the textures and the hidden details, not the stages of Super Sports Sunday. While patiently waiting and responding to intuition, I seek to uncover and understand the allure of these, sometimes mysterious, places of contemplation.



Figure 5. Test printing at The DSA P Lab. Photograph: Lynn Taylor

**Thomas Lord** is a lecturer in the photography studio at the Dunedin School of Art. As well as photography, Thomas has held exhibitions in painting where nostalgia, ecology and the concept of home forms a common thread between the two media.

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