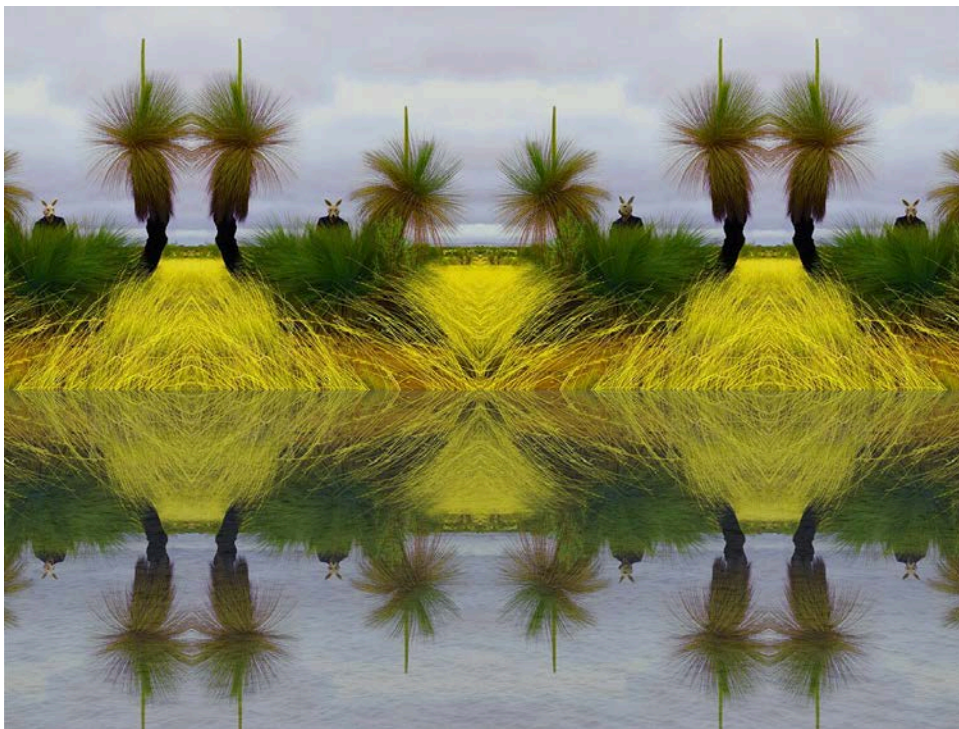


JOHN EISEMAN AND ANNE CONRON, ARTISTS IN THE DESERT AND AFTER THE RAIN

By Simon Caterson

July 18, 2018



Jon Eiseman, ANNE CONRON – ‘After the Rain’ 2018,
Type C printed on archival photographic paper mounted on aluminium composite board (Dibond)
100cm x 133cm, edition of five

Partners in life and art who divide their time between Victorian and Tasmania, recently sculptor John Eiseman and photographer Anne Conron decided to embark on extensive travels throughout Central Australia. The journey was an experience that Eiseman says left them both “overawed with the beauty of the land”, and it has inspired **a powerful new suite of work from both artists.**

Naturally, each individual work speaks for itself. Taken as a whole, Eiseman’s bronze sculptures and Conron’s digital photographs are complementary in terms of form and content. The work combines ancient artistic practice and timeless themes with the latest imaging technology and a contemporary sensibility.

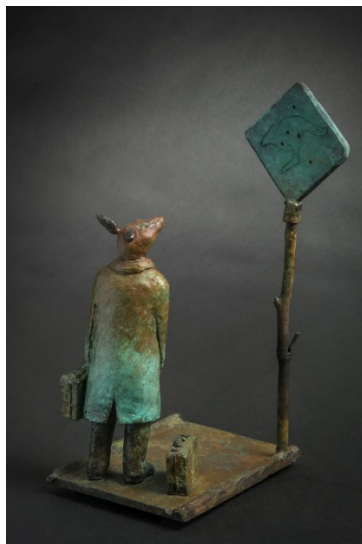
Eiseman’s work belongs in a tradition of art and craft that spans millennia. Traditional wax-loss bronze casting, of which Eiseman is an established master, is one of the oldest and most widely adopted techniques in art – the earliest known example is believed to be over 5,500

years old. Surviving bronze sculptures from the ancient world originated in the Middle East, China, Africa and the Mediterranean.

In Europe, bronze statuettes became popular during the Italian Renaissance, often drawing on Greek mythology for depictions of gods, nymphs, satyrs and fauns. Sometimes the pieces were decorative reproductions of much larger sculptures. Due to the reduced scale, these objects were portable as well as talismanic.

While Eiseman's bronzes are similarly mythic in subject matter, it is a private mythos developed over a long and successful career. This iconography Eiseman has described as "the lone figure on a journey through dreamlike landscapes, sometimes with strange companions and sometimes in strange situations".

The conceptual whimsicality of Eiseman's vision is counterweighted, literally, by the bronze. Even the most delicate-seeming feature of the work is painstakingly cast and welded in place. To actually hold one of the heavy pieces is to immediately register the permanence of an artwork made with bronze.



Jon Eiseman 'Crossing the Border' 2018, bronze, edition of five, 33cm x 17cm x 13cm

Apart from introducing subtle effects of colour and texture, the patina with which Eiseman covers the surface of each piece is indicative that these pieces are meant to exist as objects in the everyday world rather than consigned to a display cabinet.

In terms of scale, Eiseman's works are not downsized versions of larger works. We ourselves are the full-size representatives of Eiseman's vision, not the other way around. It is as though through them we are seeing ourselves from above as if we are in the swoon-like state between sleep and wakefulness.

The introduction of thoughts and ideas for new works inspired by Central Australia added a dimension to the existing imaginative world, explains Eiseman. "The challenges I face are to blend these works into my mainstream ideas which have no identity with a specific time or place and to avoid any cultural and spiritual references of the Indigenous people, as I feel that would be an intrusion."

For the new exhibition, Eiseman has produced a body of work "using the old rusting tank and tank stand as a device to tell my stories." One piece, 'After the Rain', depicts a man and a woman standing in a tank half full of water with trees growing from the top of their heads, about to embrace. Another, 'Waiting for the Rain', shows a gnarled tree growing out of an empty damaged tank with a man gazing up to the sky.



Jon Eiseman, 'After the Rain' 2018,
unique bronze,
44cm x 17cm x 16cm

“Both these works,” comments Eiseman, “will I hope be metaphors about love, life and the human condition. Above all I also hope my work contains elements of spirituality and poetry.”

As has been the case for the past ten years or so, the exhibition of Eiseman’s sculptures is augmented by Conron’s digital photographs, which convey their own synthetic grace and mystery in complement to the physical reality of the sculptures.

Using Eiseman himself as the model for a solitary figure in recognisable yet subtly manipulated landscapes, Conron gestures towards surrealists such as Magritte, while locating a disembodied figure in landscapes that are real, thus emphasising the connection between the landscape and the imagination of those travellers who pass through it.



Jon Eiseman, ANNE CONRON – ‘Crossing the Border’ 2018 Type C printed on archival photographic paper mounted on aluminium composite board (Dibond), 67cm x 100cm, edition of five

The artistic journey undertaken by Jon Eiseman and Anne Conron across Central Australia has yielded remarkable work that reaffirms and extends their remarkable creative partnership.

The desert is a familiar subject in Australian art, but there is nothing else quite like this.

After the Rain, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne, July 17 to August 11. This is an expanded version of the essay written for the exhibition catalogue. Photos of bronzes by Andrew Barchin