



detail

Caroline Rannersberger, *Sublime territory I*, 2005, fifteen panels, relief, screenprinting, watercolour and drawing on magnani pesca paper, 168 x 380 cm, courtesy the author and Araluen Galleries, Alice Springs.

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CAROLINE RANNERSBERGER

Jane Hampson

Land is a contentious issue in the Northern Territory. But a deeper current runs under the contemporary political debate: how does one understand the incomprehensible? Ever since the first colonial forays into the Northern Territory, Europeans have wrestled with understanding an environment that is at once awe-inspiring, beautiful, harsh and unforgiving. It remains a puzzle, and this puzzle is central to Caroline Rannersberger's exhibition 'Sublime Territory' at Araluen Galleries, Alice Springs.

Rannersberger is a Darwin-based artist of German-Australian heritage. The main works in this exhibition feature the land around the East Alligator River, Kakadu, where Rannersberger lived for many years.

Each landscape is an assemblage of fifteen panels, with each panel worked on in various layers and with various techniques: screen and relief printing, watercolour and pencil. Tonal variations reflect differing moods of the same land: sepia and gold when 'sublime', magenta and pink when 'sacred' and

umber and black when 'melancholy'. But rather than seamless monoviews, Rannersberger's works are inherently discordant. Across the panels – with their not-quite-matching edges – float the ruminations of doomed explorer Ludwig Leichhardt as well as images inspired by Albrecht Dürer's *The monstrous sow of Landser*, 1496, and *Simplicissimus*, a hermit character from seventeenth-century German literature. A freehand sketch of the East Alligator River sweeps across each set of fifteen panels – an imagined, romanticised view of the land by a colonial artist, George French Angas, who never went anywhere near Kakadu.

The resulting works are textural dreamscapes: they reveal themselves in layers, in pieces and panels. These are works bound by intellectual rigour, which are politically and culturally pertinent. And they are beautiful. There are smaller prints in this exhibition, but it's the landscape that dominates. For Rannersberger, it remains a vast puzzle with pieces that can never quite connect; a puzzle that remains eternally unsolved.

Sublime Territory, Caroline Rannersberger. Araluen Galleries, Alice Springs, 18 November 2006 – 14 January 2007; thirtyseven degrees, Sydney, 24 May – 16 June 2007.