



Madigan Gulf

Heart of the Nation

How do you draw a line under an artistic project that has obsessed you for much of your adult life? At what point do you think, *Stop?* Murray Fredericks, a father of four from Bondi who works as an architectural photographer, made 25 trips to Lake Eyre over the course of 16 years, creating dazzling abstract images of that otherworldly landscape. “I tried to walk away from the project a few times,” he says. “I would come back to Sydney and think, ‘I’m done now’, forget about it for a month or two, and then new ideas would pop into my head...” New ideas like photographing the place after rain, or at night, or with mirrors placed as props in the landscape.

His favourite spot, in remote Madigan Gulf, is transformed by localised rain into a vast puddle stretching beyond the horizon. Heavily saline due to the salt crust below, the water is “syrupy”, he says. “The wind doesn’t ruffle it, so it acts like a perfect mirror.” Wade for 6km or so through this calf-deep water and you’re into an ethereal space. “The shore disappears, the sky and water merge... there’s nothing around, so you lose all reference points. And your mind just *dissolves* into the space.” That’s the feeling he’s trying to convey in this photograph. Executing it, however, involved rather a lot of sweat and grunting. He and his assistant spent several days hauling five reinforced mirrors, each 1.5m long and 35kg, to that magic spot, one

at a time. “The first 2km from the shore was through deep, sucking mud,” says Fredericks. “The wheels of the trolley wouldn’t even turn; we’d take turns dragging it, 50 paces each.” Finally, with the mirrors in place, they used Windex and wipes to ensure they were spotlessly clean. And then, around 1.30am, Fredericks captured this panorama just before the Milky Way set, with the galactic centre behind him reflected in the mirrors. Bravo, right? But no encore. Because as soon as this image was in the bag, he knew his grand obsession with Lake Eyre was over. “It felt like the crescendo at the end of a piece of classical music,” the 50-year-old says. “After 16 years on this project I thought, *that’s* the one to go out on.”

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Photography
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