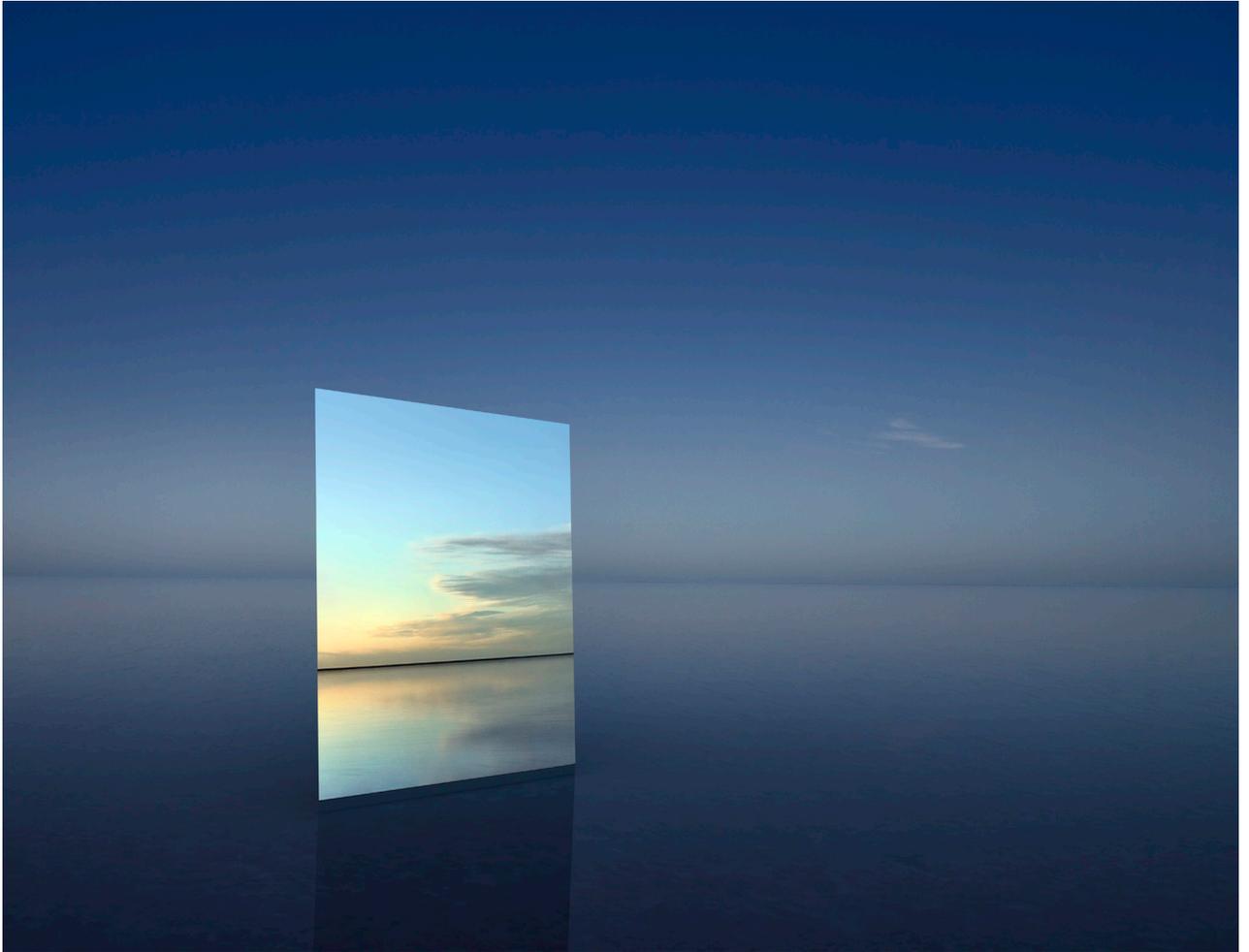


MURRAY FREDERICKS

VANITY



Mirror 11, 2017, digital pigment print on cotton rag, 120 x 155 cm

THE INTERTWINING: MURRAY FREDERICKS INSIDE THE OUTSIDE¹

What is the “thingness of light?”² Light, which makes things visible, is the very thing that can’t be seen. It floats – nowhere but everywhere. Its presence touches but it can’t be touched. Light, like space, is not visible, yet it is the totality of everything; space is the “pneumatic – the breath spirit” that connects all beings with non-beings.

Melissa Bianca Amore

Space is *space-less*, a continuous infinite fold. So in what way do architectural structures control how we perceive space and navigate our walking bodies? For Murray Fredericks these enquiries have been at the forefront of his practice since the late 1990s. The artist begins his observations by returning to pure awareness – back to the origins of light and space, back to the emptiness and back to the phenomenal. Fredericks employs the landscape as a primary medium to reveal the psychology and the perception of space – its materiality and immateriality.

He does not observe the landscape from a distance, but rather he moves inside, not outside looking in. Fredericks awakens a deeper consciousness, provides an encounter with the mind’s void – *the akase* (open space), and reveals a renewed understanding of the infinite.³ He does this by recording travelling light in the open expanse at Lake Eyre, a salt lake located in northern South Australia. Since 2003, the artist has made over twenty visits, each time attempting to expose something else, something buried in the landscape itself. “To choose a shape or a line and work with it, and repeat it again and again. For me I’ve chosen the horizon line,” Fredericks remarks.

His most recent photographic series, titled *Vanity*, plunges the viewer into a spatial gestalt, exploits a type of “naked consciousness”⁴ and reveals a pure landscape, untouched, as *thing in itself and of itself*. In these images, Fredericks dissolves the horizontal and vertical axes of the landscape into a boundless optical deception, a diminishing horizon line that fades back into itself. “The pursuit

1 Maurice Merleau Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, trans. James M. Edie, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), xv.

2 *Light and Space* artist James Turrell discusses the concept of the “thingness” of light, as pure essence. Christine Y. Kim, “James Turrell: A Life in Art,” in *James Turrell: A Retrospective*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art Catalogue, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark, Jennifer Mac Nair Stitt, and Phil Graziadei (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2013), 131.

3 “The word used for ‘open space’ is *akase*, from *akasa*, literally space, but more specifically and technically referring to the “space-less” at the axle point of a wheel and synonymous with the principal void-point whence the spatio-temporal world deploys.” Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, ed. Benedict Anderson (New York: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1985), 37.

4 *Basic Space of Phenomena*, ed. Susannce Fairclough, Jeff Millerm Mary Racine, and Robert Racine, trans. under the direction of His Eminence Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche by Richard Barron (Lama Chokyi Nyima, (Padma Publishing, 2001), 3.

of these images is driven by a (flawed) search for a kind of perfection, perhaps, a vain attempt to escape the anxieties inherent in the human condition,” he says. “Standing in the silken water, surrounded by a boundless horizon, there is a sense of deep release, as the physical boundary of the self softens or dissipates into pure light and seemingly infinite space.”

This new series indicates a partial shift away from depicting the traditional conception of the landscape as a romantic image – and as commonly associated with the “sublime” – to a more phenomenological engagement with light and space as the origins or the essence (*eidōs*) of the landscape itself.⁵ Generally speaking, the artist attempts to re-define the landscape as a “psychological space” and as an extended field of vision, with the aim of asking what else is involved in the activity of “seeing” light. This marks the beginning of Fredericks’ new investigations into how *light* occupies *space*, and also modifies the perception of the overall pictorial frame.

According to Fredericks, this new direction is the result of his intimate encounters “inside” Lake Eyre. Following extended periods alone in the open vaporous expanse, one can imagine that something unlikely occurs beyond the physical and acute observation – the landscape begins to reduce to its purest qualities, such as *light* and *space*. In this perceptual depth, the body undergoes a type of reduction and the mind fades into a liminal dream. In the artist’s words: “at times there is a sense that the physical boundary between your body and the environment it stands within softens, becomes less defined.”

This experience is commonly understood as the *Ganzfeld* effect, which is when the visual field is completely saturated with no referential point to stabilise your vision. As a result, you experience a type of over-exposure, a perceptual blindness. This moment suggests a continuous exchange between the body and the light, whereby one’s lived experience becomes a shared space. Thus, we may say that Fredericks’ attempts to translate this heightened experience, where “the physical body dissolves back into the expanse” in a photograph or image, has led him to new investigations using an optical apparatus like the mirror.

This is the first time Fredericks has inserted an object into the pure landscape. “Two mirrors were, quite literally, dragged out to the centre of a giant reflecting pool of silken water, kilometres across,” Fredericks explains. “It was immediately clear that the mirrors would be angled in a way that denied their physicality. Once flattened into a two-dimensional photograph, the mirror appears as a sheet of pure light or an image existing like a window into another landscape.”

5 The Greek root for Plato’s word “idea”, *eidōs*, literally means not just image or likeness but an image reflected in water or mirror.



Mirror 25, 2017, digital pigment print on cotton rag, 120 x 155 cm

Through this simple gesture of inserting two mirrors into the landscape, which act as perpendicular planes, Fredericks has completely disrupted the spatial parameters and perceptual depth of vision. And as a result, the physical properties of the landscape within each photograph slowly liquefy, dissolve and fold, undergoing a mysterious inversion or positive/negative effect. This technique also produces the feeling of being both *inside* the outside and *outside* the inside simultaneously, where everything is cancelled out and becomes part of the reflection itself.

“The mirror is used as a plane,” Fredericks explains. “The physical quality of the mirror disappears and it becomes the image that it reflects. So in some ways, the landscape itself is heading towards abstraction. I wanted to reveal the quality and the essence of light, so I placed the mirror inside the landscape’s reflection.” In this space, Fredericks opens the apparatus to a type of double vision and invites a new possibility in which the viewer can come to comprehend the complexities of infinity and the body in space.

These hauntingly mysterious horizons reveal the simplicity of an expansive field of nothingness and the void, declaring perhaps that the landscape returns back to its purest form, which is light and space, when we are not looking. The absence of symbolic representations or spatial markers also dissolves the categories of signs – the indexical, pictorial and the signifier – back into the medium of space and light.

In this reflection, an illusionary pictorial frame emerges, producing the effects of a perfected artificial image, where both the landscape and its reflection are simulated into one powerful synthesis, creating a strong tension between the artificial and the real. And perhaps these works appear “picture-perfect” and manipulated because the reflection, or rather, the copy of the landscape, has buried the original somewhere. In this intimate intertwining, Fredericks reveals the complexities between the representational space and the “real” space, suggesting that the vision of the landscape begins with *space*.

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Melissa Bianca Amore is a critic, curator and independent scholar based in New York.