



# CELESTIAL BODY MODEL OR METAMORPHOSIS AS THE BASE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Anabelle Lacroix

*Underscoring much of my relationship to photography is the continual questioning and reassessing of what it means to make a photograph.*

- Kate Robertson

Kate Robertson is a photographer who makes images of what is not seen but lived experience. This series *Celestial Body Model* (2014) extends the artist's interest in renewing ways in which images are produced and in photography as a process in itself. Robertson challenges photography as a representational medium to record, by exploring the inner-workings of communities and conveying forms and concepts that are part of a certain *being* rather than *seeing*.

Moving away from the immediacy of a snapshot, Kate's practice is engaged in a lengthy process to represent the sensory modes of learning, here a Deep Ecology workshop called *Earth as a peppercorn*. Learning through experience or the well-established idea of *phenomenology* is to learn about the world not only via the intellect but also with your senses such as movement in space. The workshop is one example of a time-based collective experience that result in a new awareness and knowledge. Kate uses lived experience in her metamorphic process to make images, bringing into the gallery a particular kind of experience.

The premise of Deep Ecology is that humanity as a separate form from the natural world can cause trauma and unbalance in society. The *Earth as a peppercorn* activity aims at visualising and experiencing the vastness of the universe, understanding ideas of space, distance and scale by using simple tools to represent planets (peppercorn, pinhead, chestnut...).

The ten images of this series represent the sun and the planets of the workshop, their original objects are found in the forms abstracted though multiple exposures and hand colouring of the photograph. The photographic process is in control of what becomes visible in the image, layer after layer of exposures. Kate negotiates the origins of representation as *mimesis*, as a realistic illusion of nature, 'acclaiming the effect of life'<sup>1</sup> (Anselm Franke) a work of art as an imitation of the physical world with its beauty and truth. The artist bounces on photography as a medium rebelled from the tradition of *mimesis*, as photography established itself not as an imitation but as the strongest connection possible to its subject through light, as an index.

What is striking in *Celestial Body Model* is how the images trouble our sense of scale. *Melon Sun* may remind us of flat looking blown up cells seen through a microscope while the mustard seeds in *Mustard Mars* seems of be tiny elements floating in space. Some images appear static and others carry a feel for speed and movement. In that way the artist has transformed and re-presented the lived experience of the deep ecology workshop, as well as reinterpreting the use of the picture plane in relation to its subject. Therefore Kate Robertson's photographic process can only reassess photography as a system of relations meaningful in a cultural context rather than a fixed image.<sup>2</sup>

The cyanotype calico screen, or a direct exposure from the sun, in the centre of the gallery space is a reminder of analogue photography process at the heart of the artist's practice. It is also a blocker. A blocker that enhances process over the immediacy of the image.

1. Anselm Franke, *Animism: Notes on an Exhibition*, Eflux Journal #36, 07/2012.

2. For Allan Sekula 'The meaning of a photograph, like any other activity is inevitable subject to cultural distinction, the task is to engage in a photographic discourse, an arena of information exchange, that is seen as system of relations between parties engaged in communication' in *On the Invention of Photographic Meaning*, 1975.

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Front: *Melon Sun* Top to Bottom: *Pinhead Mercury*, *Peppercorn Venus*, *Walnut Jupiter*, *Mustard Mars*, *Pinhead Pluto*.  
All works: 2014, Toned silver gelatin prints, 495 x 390 mm, edition of 3 plus AP

