

Kristian Laemmle-Ruff

Mind the Gap

11 August – 19 September 2017



Kristian Laemmle-Ruff, *Fukushima apple tree*, C-type print, 1000 x 835 mm

In the spring of 2014, Australian photographer Kristian Laemmle-Ruff dropped out of Melbourne psych rock band House of Laurence and boarded a flight to Perth to embark upon a hitchhiking tour that would take him north along Australia's western coast, into Arnhem Land, and months later south into the red centre. With little more than a surfboard, a camera and a tiny bottle of red desert sand, given to him by a partner, his journey slowly but surely deepened in meaning as the many fractures, bifurcations and gaps in Australia's cultural landscape increasingly came into focus, becoming ever clearer and more explicit.

Mind the Gap is at once a record of that journey and an artist's meditation on the experience during and after the fact, while folded into its fabric is the artist's

reflections on a previous journey undertaken earlier that year to Japan as a volunteer photographer for an NGO, to document exactly what was taking place in the highly contaminated areas in and around Fukushima in the wake of the nuclear disaster. In the artist's words:

I photographed children whose early childhoods have been in a radioactive cloud. I met people whose family had been separated through the disaster. I walked through 'temporary housing facilities' and with help from a translator documented the community living there. I saw 'temporary rubbish piles' of highly contaminated soil along riverways, near orchards and right in people's front yards.



Kristian Laemmle-Ruff, *The Cycle*, 2 melted Apple Macbook Pros, Variable

As Laemmle-Ruff pushed on toward the centre of Australia, what became impossible to ignore was the fact that uranium from Australian uranium mines was used in the Fukushima reactors, and so the tiny bottle of red sand which he wore around his neck seemed to become heavier as his thoughts and observations matured. The sand took on a more potent symbolic meaning related to the use/misuse, exploitation

and abuse of the land. This prompted him to join a tour through Australia's nuclear landscape run by Friends of the Earth about which he writes:

On the Radioactive Exposure Tour I was able to visit Roxby Downs and Olympic Dam; the most horrible, traumatic places I have ever experienced. With permission from elder Mick Starkey, I collected a sample of earth from that area. The sand one sees is symbolic of country being used to fuel nuclear disasters and long-term storage hazards worldwide.



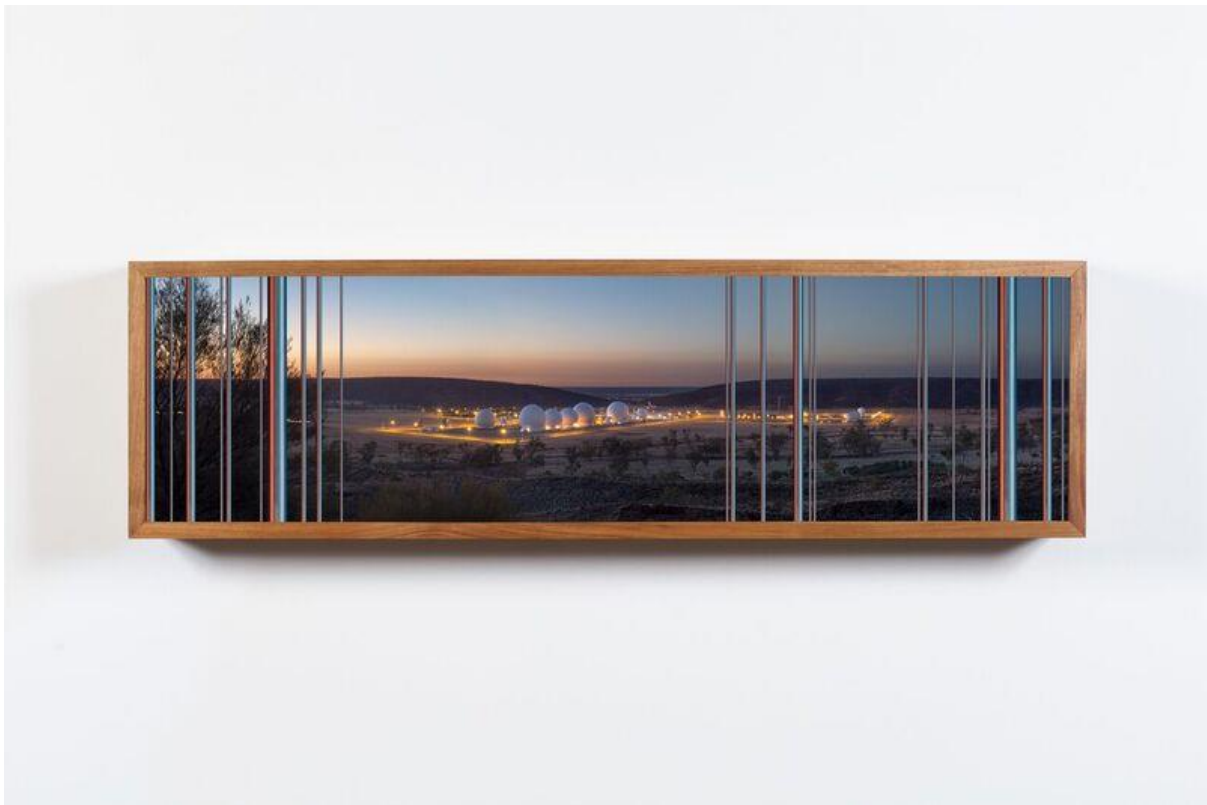
Kristian Laemmle-Ruff, *Glass & Sand*, Glass and sand, 100 x 200 x 100 mm

Somehow between surfing remote breaks, working on a cattle station, living in caves, hunting goats and spending sleepless nights in mining towns trying to find his next lift, Laemmle-Ruff found time to capture a series of clear and culturally hauntingly images of the top secret 'joint US-Australian' intelligence facility outside of Alice Springs. Laemmle Ruff titled the feature image of this series 'Pine Gap (A Photograph of the Centre of Australia)'. The work went on to win a Highly

Commended Award at the 39th Alice Price prompting judge Chris Saines CNZM
Director of Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art to write:

Laemmle-Ruff's Pine Gap is an image of paradoxical contrasts: a site of crystalline modernity nestled among the ranges of an ancient land; an instrument of geo-political surveillance being surveyed.

In being, like many elements of Australia's cultural experience, somewhat dark and politically charged, *Mind the Gap* encourages us to be mindful of the gaps, blind spots and connections that run, often invisibly, through our experience of space and place.



Kristian Laemmle-Ruff, *Pine Gap (A Photograph of the Centre of Australia)*, Duratran print in
Blackwood light-box, 1280 x 370 x 185 mm

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