



A

ntarctic fax

EXHIBITION



WINTER SOLSTICE 1993

Curated by Kevin Todd

Supported by the Australian

Antarctic Division and

Contemporary Art Services Tasmania

The winter solstice is the one day of the year when the relationship between the earth and the sun is such that the days cease to get shorter and begin instead to slowly lengthen. However, to most of the Australian population living in temperate to tropical zones, this is not a day of great significance. But in cultures of much of the northern hemisphere the bleakness of winter is so intense that the symbolism of this day cannot go unnoticed. It is for this reason that Christmas falls when it does - a time for celebration and optimism - the sun will return. Although subsumed under the Christian ethos, the same principles of birth and new beginnings underlie it. Most of us in Australia miss out on the significance between the festival and the season as generally the winters are not that bad and very few people consider marking the solstice in any formal way. The Christmas festival falls in the opposite season. The appreciation and meaning of the turkey and flaming pudding become somewhat missed in the dash from the beach.

But Australia's administrative responsibility extends beyond the shores of this island continent to the far reaches of the southern ocean. Consider the lot of the people at the bases in the Antarctic, condemned, though it is their choice, to months of unrelenting cold and semi-darkness, confined indoors for the most part because of the impossible gloom beyond the protective walls. Here the Winter Solstice is restored to its rightful position. At this time around June 21, throughout the Antarctic regions most regular work activity carried out at the bases ceases. For the one hundred or so people who spend the ten months between summers at the four Australian bases the time means a few days of celebration, relaxation, feasting and fun to herald the turning of the seasons.

It is a period of intense communication between the many international bases throughout the Antarctic continent and to family and friends in the outside world. The facsimile machine has usurped the position of the telephone. The one dimensionality of the time delayed phone conversation is replaced by the tangible object and the recognisable and personalised presence of the fax - the medium of the moment.

In this project *Antarctic Fax Exhibition ; Winter Solstice 1993* initiated by Kevin Todd in conjunction with the Antarctic Division and with support from Contemporary Art Services Tasmania, 25 visual artists and a similar number of writers were asked to contribute images and texts which were faxed to the bases as part of these winter solstice celebrations.

Kevin Todd is an artist who uses computer technology in the generation of his imagery and is currently utilising the medium of fax to transfer his images from one location to another. This process effects the nature of the image not only through the texture of what is reproduced but also through the knowledge on the part of the maker and the viewer of the relative simultaneity of the process. There is a certain level of magic in the transfer of the information which transcends the technological marvel of the apparatus itself.

This immediacy of connection and the instantaneous sharing of the apparent substance of the communication is as bizarre as it is utilitarian. Rather than sending the finished artwork on a summer supply ship and hanging it at the appropriate time, the medium of fax is both as magical and as high-tech as the life lived at the bases appears from this distance and intimately connects the giver and the receiver.

This exhibition, the first of what is hoped to become an annual event, is both a chance to communicate with people at the edge of the earth as well as an opportunity for artists to consider the fax medium while exploring their relationship with, and dreams about, this barren white land which lies almost beyond comprehension.

Five Perspectives Including Antarctica

1
It is there, curious, inhospitable
as outer space, graveyard
for the hero-explorers; and some
who returned were compelled to go back

to the snow, great emptiness,
to peer out through the ice
plastered across their faces.
We read about it in books.

Impossible! Impossible!
Yet if extremities are close,
reading about them gives them a place
other than here.

2
A man, in a heavy overcoat,
steps out into a London street:
hearing the easy swish of buggies
he thinks of ponies and sledges.

It is 1910; his name
will be synonymous with Antarctica
when his beloved empire
has melted to a few outposts

and ideas about origins have gone
beyond the blasted, frozen frontier
where emperor penguins guard their eggs.
In extreme innocence he gets lost in the crowd.

3
The Antarctica display
in the Tasmanian museum:
photos of scooped and sculpted ice

in sunlight, penguins
in full dress, fat seals
on their floating waterbeds of ice

invent a benign wilderness.
I think of explorers in extremis
who faced no more

or less than anyone else
in a seemingly comfortable house.
I think of Antarctica as metaphor.

4
If the tilt of the globe altered
(an inconspicuous adjustment in space —
a lightly breeze-blown egg)

and the icecap shifted
off its pedestal of rock
and slipped into the sea

with a gigantic, scrupulously slow heave,
it would create shock waves through water
similar to those you have seen when a pebble

is dropped into a pond and, in nature,
equally significant. But imagine those glinting fish
you disturbed swimming about the house!

Right : Barbie Kjar
Solstice Feast 1993
Below and Left : Pat
 Brassington

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5
 When the balmy tropics,
 for some, are winter dreams
 where vines twist upwards before their eyes
 in exhilaration at the heat,

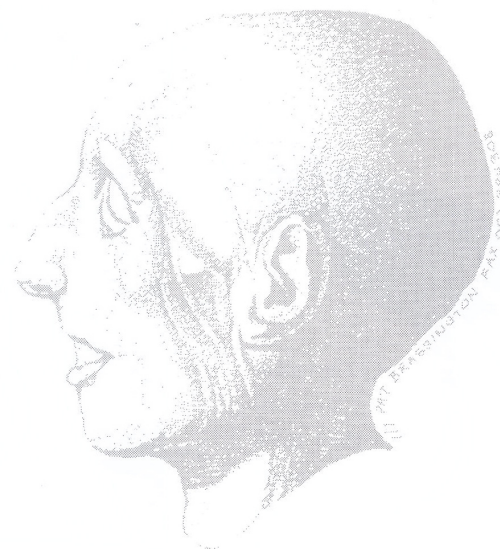
I dream of the south, here,
 where snow is already a companion
 to the nearest mountain,
 an intimation of proximity.

Antarctica: under two thousand miles south —
 all sea! The wind has memorised
 the cold as shared fossils memorise
 the drift of continents.

Under the ripped and crevassed
 antarctic ice huge forests
 have collapsed as strata; we seize
 a rest from past and future

amongst our dreaming trees.

Andrew Sant



Can a Billiard Cue Be Repaired?

Why Does a Jew Never Walk Under the Arch of Titus?

How Much Smoke Is Released in Making a Word in the Sky?

Why Doesn't the Sky Ever Fall Down?

Antarctica is the last wilderness - the last frontier for our imaginations. A land where indigenous life not dependant on the sea is reduced to a miniscule algae, fungi and bacteria growing in rudimentary soils or tiny invertebrate animals. A land where the coming of summer in this treeless expanse may be marked by the snow algae colouring the landscape green or yellow, but where the norm is blazing whites and frozen blues.

The chosen artists and writers approached this task in various ways from the realistic to the conceptual, from the narrative to the abstract. Their work, constructed from primitive substances such as graphite, charcoal and ink was transformed via electronic gadgetry and telecommunications satellites into a sequence of impulses and then reassembled in an alien landscape at the edges of our dreams.



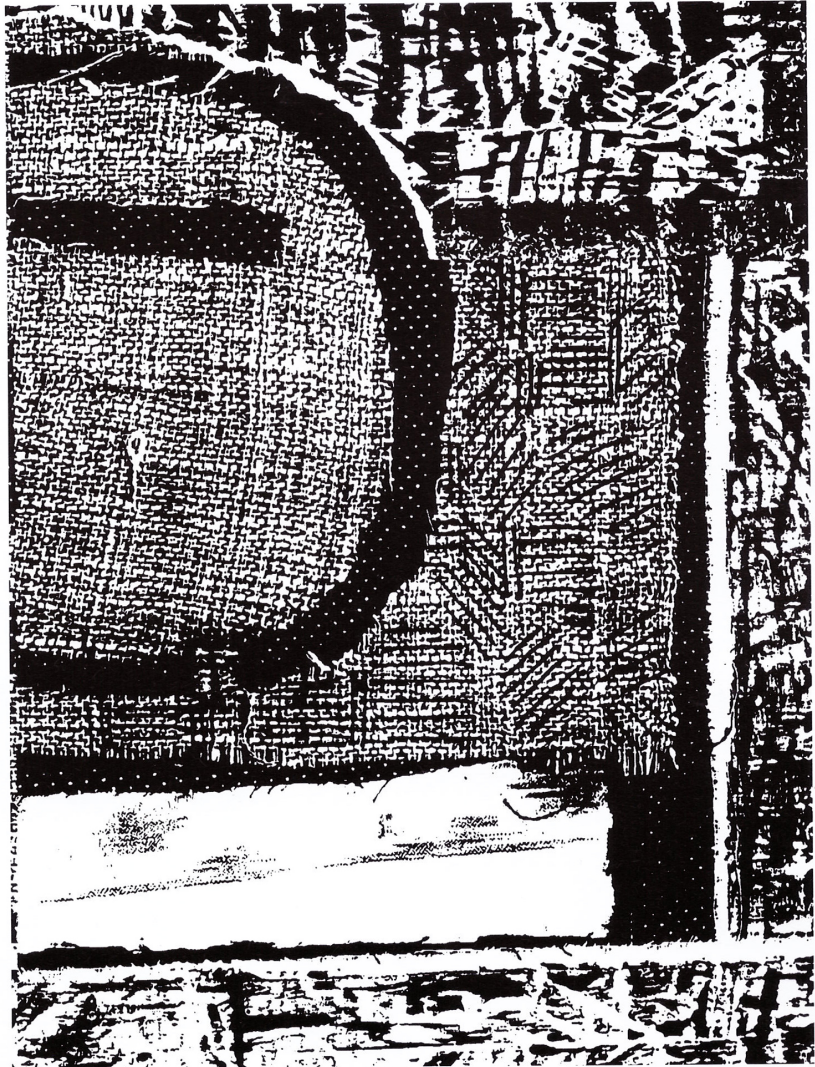


Polheim

Favour walked with us,
the sixth comrade.
Death was a light secret like
Wisting's tobacco,
triumph a handy weapon
stowed in close
for quickly clubbing the dogs
according to order.
Order was easy to haul.

We whipped out victory, snapped
it to the pole
in a breeze.

Jim. Thorne
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And who is the audience for this exhibition? Who are these people who desire to spend vast periods of time in accute isolation under significant physiological and psychological stress in order to undertake intriguing projects about time, space and life. How will they be feeling after a number of months separated from 'civilization' with still many months to come. What do they want to hear and see? And how will they receive what they are sent?

In one seemingly simple action this challenging enterprise forges together the myths and realities of our contemporary society. **JANE DEETH**

Above : David Marsden
(detail)

Top Left : Pat
Brassington

Bottom Left : Cath
Barcan