

Review by Robert McFarlane

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Murray Fredericks has photographed some unforgettable natural vistas, from the jagged beauty of the Himalayas to Tasmania's comparatively welcoming Cradle Mountain wilderness.

I remember being startled by the beauty of a 2000 Fredericks photograph of a South American glacier, glittering like party ice as it eased down a Patagonian valley to the sea. Fredericks's landscape photographs were almost always distinguished by their vivid sense of scale, strong composition and fine black-and-white printing.

His latest exhibition, *Salt*, departs dramatically from this vision. Fredericks has photographed exclusively in colour on remote Lake Eyre in South Australia, capturing minimalist landscapes that contain few familiar visual elements.

"I didn't want to keep doing the same thing," he says. "Looking back at the pictures [of mine] that I liked most...I noticed they were ones that conveyed a sense of space. I deduced that maybe it was just space that interested me.

"I had photographed on salt lakes in Bolivia and had a strong response to the sense of space and pure emptiness there... and so, I thought, we have salt lakes in Australia...and I took a trip to Lake Eyre without [much] expectation. But the first time I saw the lake I felt a deep vibration that hit me right in the chest and I knew there was something here. It was like an epiphany."

By concentrating on space and colour, Fredericks's photographs reduce a landscape to its most elemental. Much as British painter J.M.W. Turner did more than a century ago, Fredericks allows light, colour and form to convey his artist's vision.

If there is a constant in the *Salt* pictures, it is the subtle colour within each 1.5 metre-wide print. Fredericks is able to capture both extreme definition and a wide range of hues – from deep blue night skies to the muted colours of the desert.

Perhaps Fredericks's most arresting photograph in this show is *Salt 199*, in which repetitive patterns of dried salt in the foreground juxtapose with a dark blue sky through which two stars pass, trailing opposite arcs of light. This truly planetary picture underlines the delicacy with which we navigate the heavens while also suggesting parts of Earth may not be quite so different from Mars.