

## Australian Art in Guanajuato

Judith Jaffé © 2008

With his perspicacious eye for the avant-garde, the Director of Museo del Pueblo de Guanajuato, Arq. Francisco Javier Pichardo Gómez procures world-class artworks. The Museo, itself an artistic tribute to colonial architecture, is permanent home to acclaimed Mexican artists, including the revered muralist José Chavez Morado.

For the first time, Gómez has discovered Australian Dreamtime entwined in contemporary art. For the first time, the Museo presents a new body of work by Australian artist Christine Gates. Mexico and Australia. Dry desert lands seeped in memories and mysteries evoke longings and sanctity; yearnings that will continue through time.

*The Desert and the Inland Sea* is an exhibition that expresses the artist's affinity with explorers of land and sea; of space and spirit. Like brave 16<sup>th</sup> Century seafarers sailing towards the edge of the known world, Gates breaks new artistic ground. She integrates traditional etching and relief printing techniques with digital manipulation and photopolymer gravure plates. She fuses the physical with the spiritual in layered visual works. Microcosmic photographs of crystals and digital processes bring to life what Gates terms "other worldly elements—partly realistic, partly created". The boat is used as a symbol of hope and exploration. It is a boat adrift in a sea of light; a boat sculpture amongst rippling rocks, a skeleton boat in a dreamlike plan—it represents the universal and the specific elements of the explorer Sturt's journey. Like indigenous custodians, Gates trusts the intuitive over the controlled. *Into Heartland*, C-Type Digital Print on Fuji Crystal Matt Paper, utilises ambiguous perspectives inviting the viewer's interpretation.

Gates's greatest achievement in this body of work is Light. It glows and glimmers. It illuminates and intensifies. It is magnificent and meaningful. Explosive and ephemeral. Powerful Light—it can take the viewer by surprise.

To communicate the surrealism of Sturt's dream and the magic realism of desert landscapes is Gates's aim. To respect the sacred and the dreamlike is her duty.

Was it Captain Charles Sturt's quest for *Fame*, as he quotes, when he wanted to be the first man in the 1840s to "set foot in the centre of the blank map of Australia" that steered him? Or was it a sense of *Fantasy*, as Gates extrapolates, that urged him to cross a desert of sand and stones with a boat?

*Waves of Stone*, Photopolymer Gravure Intaglio Print on Fabriano Tiepolo Rag Paper, places the viewer with Sturt as he peers into the heart of the interior seeing "waves of the sea in endless succession".

Sturt lugged his boat across the inland sea of sand and rocks. Was it in vain? He failed to find an inland sea, failed to touch the centre. But he was touched by mystery and magic when he

contemplated the “vast heart of the interior” that hung as a “veil that could be neither pierced or raised”.

Sturt’s dream hampered by impossibility is layered with collaged images by Gates to reveal the poetic sensibility that silently underpinned Sturt’s futile endeavour.

Gates views life as a journey of the physical and spiritual. She has travelled across the continents and oceans of the planet and at times delved beyond. She sees and learns. She borrows and records. She discovers and creates. Her artworks sensitively layer the world of Humans, of Nature, her vision and that of those before her. With subtlety and insightfulness Gates evokes and provokes. Through her works the viewer glimpses inner recesses. Urged by colour, design, layered images, manipulations and creativity that mystify and inspire, the viewer also take the journey.

The viewer goes with Gates and Sturt to the vast continent of Australia, the birthplace of Anangu Tjukurpa. Black velvet night skies aglow with secrets and remnants of stories and rich, red desert landscapes have spawned myths and mirrored mysteries. Gates has succeeded in transforming symbols and metaphors. She has entered the dreamtime and shared the energy with us in this exhibition, *The Desert and the Inland Sea*.

***The Desert and the Inland Sea***

An Exhibition of Works on Paper by **Christine Gates**

**6 March 2008 – 3 April 2008**

Museo del Pueblo de Guanajuato, Guanajuato, Mexico

Sponsors: Museo del Pueblo de Guanajuato  
The Embassy of Australia in Mexico