

CHRISTINE GATES ARTIST IN RESIDENCE AT THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

The Palaeontology Department last month welcomed to the Melbourne Museum artist, Christine Gates, for a three week art residency to investigate and photograph marine fossils from the inland sea areas of Central Australia. The museum has one of the best collections in the world of this material and it includes spectacular opalised reptile skeletons from Coober Pedy. Head of Collections, Robert Morris, assigned Invertebrates specialist, Natalie Schroeder, to act as guide and liaison during the visit.

Christine is developing a series of works on paper, entitled 'The Desert and the Inland Sea', that was inspired by the 1844 expedition of Captain Charles Sturt into Central Australia. In the 19th century the myth prevailed for many years that there existed a great inland sea in the centre of Australia. So convinced was Sturt of its existence that he took with him a whaleboat and a mariner to sail it. Sturt failed, of course, but had he set out a hundred million years earlier he would have achieved his goal.

"There are a number of issues I'm examining with these images. I enjoy the surrealism of Sturt heading off into temperatures that exploded thermometers in the shade and telling his men to paint the boat and have it ready for launching on his return. There is courage exhibited alongside limited vision of the desert as the 'dead heart' and inability to see that the first Australians were living there successfully and could help him understand and survive in the country he was traversing," said Christine.

"As well, the story involves the two great icons of Australian life, the desert and the sea that both define our country and terrify us with thoughts of the unknown and untamable. So the images are about what compels us, as humans, to explore and to expand our boundaries - the outer, physical boundaries being paralleled by the inner. They provide a challenge to explore the unknown in the landscape and in oneself."

"My seascapes are created from photographs of crystals of earth and water. Scientific research acknowledges that a study of the microscopic structure of materials provides an understanding of their macroscopic properties and often leads to the development of new applications. Meditation on the inner world can achieve the same outcome," she said.

Christine plans to use material photographed at the museum to create original works that have an element of scientific veracity. The art residency offers the opportunity for an interaction of art and science and provides us with a visual language that extends our understanding of the possibilities of both.

Christine's blog, describing her stay at the Museum, can be read at: <http://christinegates.blogspot.com>
The Desert and the Inland Sea series 1 can be viewed at: http://www.christinegates.com/des_sea/index.htm



Top left and right: Opalised fossils used by Christine on which she based her artwork

Left: Christine Gates

Far left: Inland Sea III by Christine Gates