

*Natural Wonders, 2004*

17 July – 24 August, 2004

*Supernatural Artificial: Contemporary photo-based art from Australia*

Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, Japan, Chulanlangkorn Art Centre, Bangkok, 2004

*Natural Wonders* travels through real and artificial landscapes within the diverse field of tourism and leisure. The images present panoramas of spectacular landscapes whose territory is marked out by viewing platforms, walking tracks, staircases and signposts. Alternatively nature is designed within theme parks, resorts or public garden and is navigated in a particular way. There are landscaped gardens that vibrate with iridescent colour against the natural surroundings and sculptured paths of artificial grass. Located conveniently in the transit lounge of an airport terminal is a hydroponic orchid garden displaying the natural exotica of its country. In a mature garden park established in the heart of the Australian Capital Territory is an English landscape replicated on Australian soil where live kangaroos graze on neatly mowed lawn. There are also images in *Natural Wonders* which bear no resemblance to the natural world. These are fabrications of magical worlds where reality is substituted for an illusion that seems more wonderful than nature itself. In Santa's Kingdom for example, a hallway is decorated entirely with dazzling Christmas decorations and adults wander mesmerised and enthralled through an imaginary world of make-believe.

Postcards, posters and brochures of tourist sites are the source material for my work and are used to examine the stereotyping and idealising of place. What draws us to these sites in such numbers is the hope of being moved and transported beyond the everyday and the familiar, to somewhere more ideal. But often we find the experience of being there somehow lacking or mediated by our familiarity with the images of these sites that they don't live up to our expectations. Australia has a limitless number of natural wonders on its vast continent and no site remains unmarked. Uluru, is our most significant natural site and continues to draw people to the centre. No longer can one climb the rock and through this act, take possession of it without desecrating sacred aboriginal ground. So we park our cars instead at a viewing area and wait patiently to see it transformed by the light of dawn or dusk. Here nature becomes spectacle. We travel to these wonders in order to document ourselves there and come away with shallow memories. The photographs in *Natural Wonders* of real and artificial environments are evidence our search for the sublime and the 'wonders' that have been created in its name.

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