

**Tracey Moffatt: Spirit Landscapes at Tyler
Rollins Fine Art**

By Bansie Vasvani, November 17, 2013



Tracey Moffatt. *As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land No. 2*,
2013; digital print; 49 x 72 in.; edition of 8.

Perhaps the most striking part of Tracey Moffatt's *Spirit Landscapes* at Tyler Rollins Fine Art was meeting Moffatt in person. Forthright and guileless, she spoke of her Australian Aboriginal ties and her return to her country to document nature after being away for more than a decade. Stirring in her commitment to her heritage and nation, her photographs tackle issues of identity and belonging in a forceful yet subtle manner.

In the series titled *As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land*, a slew of surreal images are presented through different colored filters that alter a viewer's perception and reception of the work. Photographed while lying on the ground, a reclining naked female body's contours are interwoven with shots of the trees and the sky that suggest her strong association with the land. Yet the spectrum of bright tinted filters create an affective distance from a more heavy-handed treatment of traumatic Aboriginal history. Not only does this feature set a playful tone and help release past anxiety, it also has the opposite effect of drawing the viewer in and making the image resonate and linger in one's mind.

If the work is defined especially from the point of view of Moffatt's Aboriginal ancestors and the way they were bound to the land, her methodology helps unbind, expel, and banish these memories. *Picturesque Cherbourg*, another series comprising photographs of pretty suburban landscapes that are ripped and reassembled, was in fact an area where the "natives" were held in the 1920s. Decades later, the cheerful sunny backyards attest to the passing of time and the absence of memory. Moffatt seems to suggest that time continues singularly through day and night, keeping the past from the present and future. The violence of the ripped photographs is a reminder of Cherbourg's tainted history.

Even though Moffatt's images reference personal themes, the notions of identity and belonging take on a larger universal significance. She raises important questions about the subtle play between traumatic memories of the past and the present, and the way they shape one's relationship and kinship with a place. Ultimately the viewer is left to ponder these ideas from Moffatt's persuasive and compelling body of work.

Spirit Landscapes is on view at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, in New York City, through December 21, 2013.

Bansie Vasvani is an independent art critic and writer. She lives in New York City.