

## sid motion gallery

The Broken Pastoral is the culmination of ten years work and contains two interconnected strands of thought and practice.

The first is the transposing of themes of western classical art - ideas of the sublime, romantic, uncanny and melancholic - onto contemporary British landscape photography. The second strand aims to document these newly man-altered landscapes with a more nostalgic representation; a representation that is at odds with the dominant school of thought presently surrounding contemporary landscape photography. The second strand aims to document these newly man-altered landscapes with a more nostalgic representation; a representation that is at odds with the dominant school of thought presently surrounding contemporary landscape photography.

Ideas pertaining to man-altered landscape have been in the intellectual stranglehold of the New Topographic movement, since its inception in the early 1970's. The New Topographics were originally an intellectual response to pictorialism in American landscape photography but in the intervening years they are to be seen as the only possible intellectual response to the new landscapes being engineered by changes in industry and population trends in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

To put my cards on the table, I am a big admirer of the work of the New Topographics, from their rigorous treatise to their high production values in print. They have done much of the groundwork that has enabled photography to gain its present standing in the fine art world today, but I believe there is room for much variation and dissent in any artistic medium. This dissent and dialogue is the very thing that keeps art healthy and fresh, good art should question everything and believe nothing, even of itself.

The exhibited photographs, because of the intentional inclusion of the elements nostalgia and romanticism, all fall within the jurisdiction of The Broken Pastoral, which is a distinctively modern, English cultural response to accelerating industrialisation and technological advances that have impacted on the English Landscape over the past century and a half.

This idea has appeared frequently in art forms during the twentieth century, (mainly in music) but I think can be applied to the visual arts with legitimacy and validity. The broken pastoral invariably references a longing for a return to a bygone era, one often associated with the countryside (or even a period of suburban plenty) while, at the same time acknowledging the impossibility of making a return to this idyll.

The impossibility occurs because that world has been disrupted and disfigured beyond repair by the advance of modernity, its homeostasis now reliant on the intervention of mankind. The acknowledgement of this impossibility is dependent on the idea of reflective rather than restorative nostalgia in the work. Restorative nostalgia being a fixation of a point in history that is somehow better than the present world we inhabit while reflective nostalgia is to be enamoured by the historical distance between that point in time and the present.

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There is also the argument that a return to a pastoral idyll is doubly impossible because the collective memory of these bucolic landscapes is, in part, a construct of an outdated, diminishing, class system that would prefer the world to return to a place where it was once a dominant force.

The broken pastoral, for my part, is ultimately not a lament for something lost but a celebration of what has been created. These new landscapes have their own charm and nuances, replacing the old pastoral vistas; all created by mans intervention in the environment for eons, with new interventions and the creation of a new era in English Landscape. Paradoxically, these dystopian beauty spots invariably vacillate between the utilitarian and the sublime creating a cognitive dissonance within the work and, subsequently, the viewer.

Ultimately, no matter what an artist shows or writes about their practice, success is always dependent on the interaction between the work and its audience.