Landscape - Assignment 3 – Spaces to Places
In memory of those who lost their life in the Kaikoura Earthquake on 14th November 2016.

Also, with thanks to the following people who assisted me - many having endured their own trauma:

The Māori community, who cared for and fed 1200 displaced tourists three times a day for four days.

The Red Cross.

The New Zealand Defence Force who responded to the crisis and airlifted me out.

The British Consulate.

The Kaikoura emergency services.

Kaikoura hospital.

Kaikoura’s businesses and residents.

The New Zealand government agencies.

Singapore Airlines.

TV1

The Hastings family who took me in for ten days after I was evacuated. They went beyond the call of duty until I was fit to travel home.

My family and friends who were a very long way away supporting me as best as they could.
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Blog Link:

All relevant links for navigation are embedded at the top of the assignment blog page that is contained on this link:

https://511768oca.wordpress.com/category/part-3-assignment-3/
Assignment Brief.

Within a series of up to 12 photographs, explore a landscape, or a small part of a landscape which you believe to have some kind of significance. This maybe a landscape with which you have a personal relationship, or it maybe one that is more widely known. You may wish to begin your research with the local history exercise (3.5).

The objective is to engage with the question of how a ‘space’ becomes a ‘place’.

Your assignment should put into practice the idea that a ‘place’ is a constructed, subjective that, for whatever reason (political, industrial, mythological, environmental), is imposed upon, or becomes associated with, a particular space. This maybe a very specific location, or it may be a more generic type of space.

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“The image is used as a space, a location for memory traces.”

(Bates, 253)
Introduction:

The landmass of New Zealand was first defined as a place when the Māori people arrived from Polynesia C. 1100 A.D. The creation of the geology, flora, fauna, and all things bubbling / steaming were attributed to Mother Earth and Father Sky. For this assignment, I had initially aimed to explore how the natural phenomena in the landscape influenced the Māori belief system and their sense of place with the aesthetic style of Susan Derges and Ashley Adams in mind.

Since the early Māori settlement, the subsequent arrival of Europeans in the 18th century created tensions due to fraught land disputes. Now, the Māori sacred sites have largely been redefined as ‘Gilpinesque’ money making tourist spectacles. The Māori community continually strive to adjust to the imposition of the ‘New World’ settler ways that threatens to render their culture extinct.

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On 14th November 2016, at 00:02hrs, I was merely a tourist in Kaikoura.

I was unashamedly enjoying the romantic spectacle of the landscape as provided by the Māori’s Mother Nature (and Gilpinesque brochures). Little did I know that within a few hours of arriving there that I would be subjected to her subliminal wrath. Fighting for survival in the epicentre of a record breaking earthquake, and the subsequent 1700 aftershocks, transcends anything that is possible to convey adequately. I am sure that W.J Turner would understand. The world (let alone my intended assignment) spun on its head and I am lucky to have survived.

The magnitude and ferocity of the 21 fault lines rupturing was in the same league as
any infamous historical earthquake that has consumed thousands of lives across the planet. Kaikoura has been an area that has been redefined a number of times by migrants. However the inhabitants sense of place might have been previously defined, Kaikoura is now down in the history books as the epicentre of the most complex earthquake ever recorded. This time, space and place was redefined by Rūaumoko (God of Earthquakes) and Hine-nui-te-pō (Goddess of Death).

The importance of the photograph as a mnemonic device for collective memory and archives from before and after the earthquake will now be realised by the community. Demi truths in archives curated from this event, and the resulting collective memory will shape the already rich mythology of the region.

This assignment isn’t exactly aftermath photography and it isn’t exactly journalistic photography either. It is an archive of a journey somewhat more fraught and confused than described in the books ‘Wanderlust’, ‘Edgelands’ and Wordsworth’s poetry.

The assignment presentation is a risk because it is an expression of how a country has burnt the extremes of experiences into our psyche and dreams. The images jar against each other because the experience did. The technically considered images of the beautiful are juxtaposed with grainy surreal survival experiences that are synonymous with U.S. forces nighttime war archives from the mid 20th century. A similar aesthetic can be found in colourist abstracts such as seen in Jesse Alexander’s project ‘The Road’. My camera became the Freudian mnemonic device to later remember what I currently need to now forget.
Selected Images:

Image 1
Rock, mineral, water & steam.

Image 2
Mud, gas & water.

Image 3
Thermal Spring & vegetation.

Image 4
Rock & steam.

Image 5
Geyser.

Image 6
Thermal spring water.

Image 7
Rock, mineral and water.

Image 8
Thermal water & mineral deposits.

Image 9
Mineral coloured thermal water.

Image 10
Thermal water & mineral deposits.

Image 11
30 min. after the main earthquake - high ground found.

Image 12
In the pitch black - other people emerge from dark.

Image 13
4 hrs after the main quake. Red Cross helps the displaced.

Image 14
First helicopter to attend ground zero.
Write Up:

Process of Curating, Preparation, Presentation and Peer feedback can be accessed via this link.

https://wordpress.com/post/511768oca.wordpress.com/595

Image 1 – 10

These images are aiming to explore the environmental phenomena that contribute to the Māori mythology. The sense of scale is deliberately absent to enhance the subliminal ‘otherness’. The images help to illustrate how Māori mythology of Ranginui (Father Sky) and Papatuanuku (Mother Earth) were born in the minds of the Māori. Colour, texture and geological variety have been considered in the process of curating to create a balanced set. Susan Derges’s aesthetic was in my mind for images 1, 3, 6, 8, 9 and 10

In images 4 and 5, a more vernacular approach was used that would be more common in postcard images. However, without any sign of human interference or sign of flora or fauna, the sublime is further underpinned.

In all of the images, the frames are filled to provide surface tension. This serves to help keep the eye in the frame. This is important in the images where there isn’t an obvious point for the eye to rest.
Image 11 – 12:

These images capture the modern day reality of Rūaumoko (God of Earthquakes) and Hine-nui-te-pō (Goddess of Death). The aesthetic is more akin to grainy film nighttime forces naval battle photography from the middle of the last century. To try and say that I had planned this would be futile but the images are authentic and capture something of the confusing and terrorising environment that I found myself in. A 90% depleted camera battery, High ISO and a very shaky hand was all I had once I had evacuated to high ground.

All of the prints have been finished in a metallic ‘sheen’ that isn’t visible online. The metallic finish has complimented the colours and added to the ethereal feel. It is not something that I would have considered for any other body of work but it definitely adds to this body of work. The peer feedback and lead tutor critique at today’s OCA study day in Bristol served to confirm this decision.

The decision to juxtapose the portrait profile photographs with the landscape profile photographs has been made to help me communicate the confusing nature of the experience.
Self-assessment:

About midway through a module, I struggle with the given assignment. I think it is the point where an epiphany normally occurs and I begin to crystalise the reading and exercises undertaken. After a strong start, it seems to be assignment three that always attracts most critique from a tutor and then I go on to finish the next couple of assignments on much better form.

This assignment has been a long time in coming and I think that the reasons are self-evident. It was a mind blowing and life-changing event that had an impact on my health and ability to concentrate but many positives have come out of it all.

I had considered not tackling my Kaikoura experience until a later module or indeed, not at all. However, when I tried to engage in other concepts and topics, I was just drifting back to this.

I have come as far as I can with it right now. I had lost my way and confidence a little bit but the South West student day was invaluable to kick start me again. Jesse Alexander reminded me that an assignment doesn’t need to be perfect and it is fine to submit and seek guidance.

I have endeavored to be creative with the presentation, and I have pushed myself out of my comfort zone with new IT skills and risk taking. I have answered the brief but I realise that the contextual element is lacking. As well as just finding it very hard to get back into coursework due to medication, I haven’t been able to find a body of work that mixes imagery in this way and in this context.

With regards to curating the body of work, I took my tutor’s advice and printed the contenders to be included for the assignment presentation. The process of sticking
them on to a wall to enable selection and structure of a gallery format was highly beneficial.

I have read ‘Wanderlust’ and ‘Edgelands’ and kept the research into Will Self in mind from earlier in the course. I had aimed to have a written poetry or narrative to support this assignment but things changed and whilst I am coping fine since the earthquake, I can’t yet express the experience beyond what I have presented here. It may take a while before anything more poetic spills out of me.

I attended a Southwest region OCA study day with Stephen Moss lecturing on art and accompanying supporting literature acting in relay. Still, the poetry and writing element to this assignment failed to tumble out of me.

Albeit the photographs taken in the dark are technically abysmal, they are real. They are an accurate reflection of the confusion in the pitch black – with only a camera and no flash to hand.

The slideshow presentation has only been a recent decision. It still feels like a work in progress. Making a convincing presentation is a whole new skill set. I gave it a good few goes and I will probably keep coming back to it right up until assessment once I have experience of the software and digested tutor feedback.

I had to get through the aftermath of the Kaikoura experience before I could move on with any other landscape projects. It might be that my tutor suggests that this is presented as the self-directed project for assignment 4 (?). There is plenty to improve on but I am still alive and now reengaging with coursework!
Assignment references:

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