

# LIGHTSITE

IAN WEIR

*Lightsite* is a collapsible room-sized pinhole camera which was erected in a number of locations throughout the Great Southern region of WA in 2006.

*Lightsite* was conceived by architect Ian Weir as a means of celebrating a variety of individuals and their families who have a very strong sense of connection to the landscapes in this region. This project was completed for the 2006 and 2007 Perth International Arts Festivals and the photographs were exhibited in regional galleries throughout Western Australia during this period and at the WA Museum in mid 2007. *Lightsite* – both the camera obscura and its photographs – was exhibited at the Fremantle Arts Centre during FotoFreo 5 April to 4 May 2008. *Lightsite* forms part of Ian's completed PhD thesis (UWA), a multidisciplinary study on the relationship between architecture and biodiverse landscapes.

## Lightsite: landscapes as pure light

Camera is Latin for 'room' and, like all pin-hole cameras, *Lightsite* is completely dark inside except for a simple aperture (about 10 mm diam) in one wall. There are no lenses or mirrors, just a small hole and a dark room. However, the room is not actually dark because a remarkable amount of light passes through the aperture and 'projects' itself onto the white walls and ceiling of the interior, creating a full colour image of the outside world. Because light is reflected off objects outside and then travels in a perfectly straight line through the aperture, this image is inverted and flipped sideways. The camera is room-sized because I specifically wanted to put people inside it (there is a light proof door). *Lightsite* does not have a floor, which is important from a creative standpoint because it enables the structure to be built over whatever plants or objects exist on the location it is built. Thus, the physical landscape and the inhabitant of that landscape are both contained within the site of the room. However, these entities are only revealed by the actual light which has entered the room via the aperture – light which has reflected off the landscape and family members outside of the room.

## Lightsite: theory and representation

While *Lightsite* is a celebration of connectivity between people and place, it also seeks to contribute to contemporary landscape theory. Recent landscape theory tends to sediment the notion that human understandings of landscape fall into two distinct, diametrically opposed understandings: 'landskip' versus 'landschaft'. Landskip corresponds to the pictured landscape, or framed scene (for example, the tourist's snapshot discussed above). This type of landscape representation is derided by contemporary theorists who claim that its preoccupation with visual phenomena leads to superficial understandings of landscape, or 'scenography'. Landschaft, on the other hand, refers to an immersed state of inhabitation such as that experienced by farmers and those who work the land. The representations of landscape for these individuals, it is argued, are primarily non-visual; they take the form of vivid mental, or 'eidetic' images.

It is a mistake to assume that those that work the land do not also value the purely visual aspects of their landscape. *Lightsite* was therefore conceived as a means of fusing the dichotomy between the eidetic and the scenographic – combining both understandings into one 'image form'. For example, in *The Light of Gairdner*, the camera is constructed over a barley field during harvest. The recorded image shows Harvey Lynch standing within the immediate site (the barley) along with the surrounding external view of his brother and their

harvester. In this way the experiential, the personal and the scenic aspects of landscape are collapsed into one image.

The landscapes and people featured are also woven into my own life story (having grown up in this region) and, in simple terms, I have tried to combine our feeling for place with our seeing of place. One of the most rewarding aspects of *Lightsite* for me is the reaction that local people have when they enter the room and find *their* landscape revealed as just pure light.

The idea of the work is to help the viewer/occupant reflect on his/her own relationship to landscape. Landscapes are increasingly being valued for their ability to provide scenic imagery to the photographer. But the conventional camera separates the photographer and the viewer from a more direct experience of that landscape. *Lightsite* places the viewer *inside* the camera, reminding him/her that landscapes are constructed through the agencies of light and personal interpretation.

## Making Lightsite

*Lightsite* is constructed from 50mm thick lightweight 'freezer' panel and is designed to be flat-packed on a trailer for transportation. Its dimensions are 3.6m<sup>2</sup> x 2.4m high. The aperture is a mechanism taken from a 5x4 inch view camera with the lenses removed. A simple hole in a sheet of aluminium foil was used when this failed. The colour images recorded inside *Lightsite* were taken with an old 35mm SLR camera on a tripod. I call this the 'witness camera'. All of these exposures were five-minutes long using *Provia* transparency film. The exhibition also features large format black and white images which range from two to five minute long exposures. These were created by mounting up to 32 sheets of 8x10" photographic paper directly onto the internal rear wall of *Lightsite*. The correct exposure times were determined by converting *Lightsite* into an on-site darkroom with processing chemicals. This led to some aberrations and some total disasters – but in risk lies fortuity.

## Lightsite: the projects

With the help of many assistants, *Lightsite* was erected in six sites within a region circumscribed by the Stirling Ranges, the Fitzgerald River National Park and the localities of Jerramungup and Bremer Bay. This area is part of the Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO ratified region that has immense cultural and biophysical history. All of the photographs are five-minute long single exposures. No computers or digital processing techniques were used in their production.

### Site 1. Time Alone

The Jerramungup Land Settlement Scheme initiated in 1955 saw the development of 133 farms, each of around 3000 acres in area, each with an identical house, shearing shed and shearers quarters. Many of these houses now lie vacant due to the amalgamation of farms to increase profitability. *Time Alone* was taken in one such vacant homestead. The last resident, a widow, passed away here. Her body was found two weeks later. The sense of loneliness is palpable.

The initial idea for *Lightsite* was to convert the small outbuilding into a camera and transport it throughout the district, using it to photograph its journey and local residents. *Time Alone* is part of the initial series of images taken to test

this concept; the writing is achieved with torchlight during the long exposure. Following this 'proof of concept', the project evolved into the collapsible, floorless structure of *Lightsite*.



#### Site 2. *Five Minutes at Nowanup*

This image celebrates the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park – a group of amateur and professional botanists and zoologists whose passion is the biota of the Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve. This region is internationally renowned for its species richness, yet paradoxically its biota is considered to be relatively unknown. The 'Friends of the Fitz' seek to remedy this lacuna of knowledge. A few of their members are photographed here at *Nowanup*, the Greening Australia owned property north-east of the Stirling Ranges, where they gathered in to assess the natural re-vegetation of degraded farmland.



The subjects in *Five Minutes at Nowanup* are:

Inside *Lightsite*: Gillian (Jill) Craig, botanist & Andy Chapman, zoologist.

Outside *Lightsite*: Helen Taylor, amateur botanist & Nathan McQuoid, Greening Australia botanist.

#### Site 3. *The Light of Gairdner*

Harvey and Allan Lynch lost their father Frank in a crop dusting accident seven years ago when they were teenagers. Until 2007 they managed their Dad's 6000 acre farm and are photographed here at the time of their second last barley harvest. Allan is outside with their new CASE harvester, and in the distance are the grain silos of Gairdner.







Site 4. Barbara at Content Too

When you get amateur botanist Barbara Miller talking about the plants around Bremer Bay, she will reveal to you that her dream is to document every single species – no small task. Barb's local knowledge surpasses that of professional botanists who will regularly defer to her. For many years she has displayed monthly notice boards in the local general store to inform locals and visitors which plants are flowering each month. Barbara is photographed on *Content Too*, a 4 ha property on Point Henry, Bremer Bay, where she has identified over 80 species of plants.



Site 5. Jack's Bay (the architecturalisation of memory)

Jack Morris began fishing at Bremer Bay in 1951 and held the sole professional fishing license there for 37 years. Jack and his family lived in a variety of sites around the mouth of the estuary, finally settling near to where these images were taken. Jack passed away last year aged 86, after returning to Bremer Bay to be near his daughter Rhonda. Four generations of Jack's family are captured in *Jack's Bay*. The title, in parentheses, is inspired by the remarkable stories Jack told me during the 2 hours it took to take the photographs.



The subjects in *Jack's Bay* are:

Inside *Lightsite*: Jack Morris, retired fisherman.

Outside *Lightsite*: Jack's daughter Rhonda with her husband John Ford; Jack's grandson Karl with his wife Monique and their children Jessica and Jake Ford.

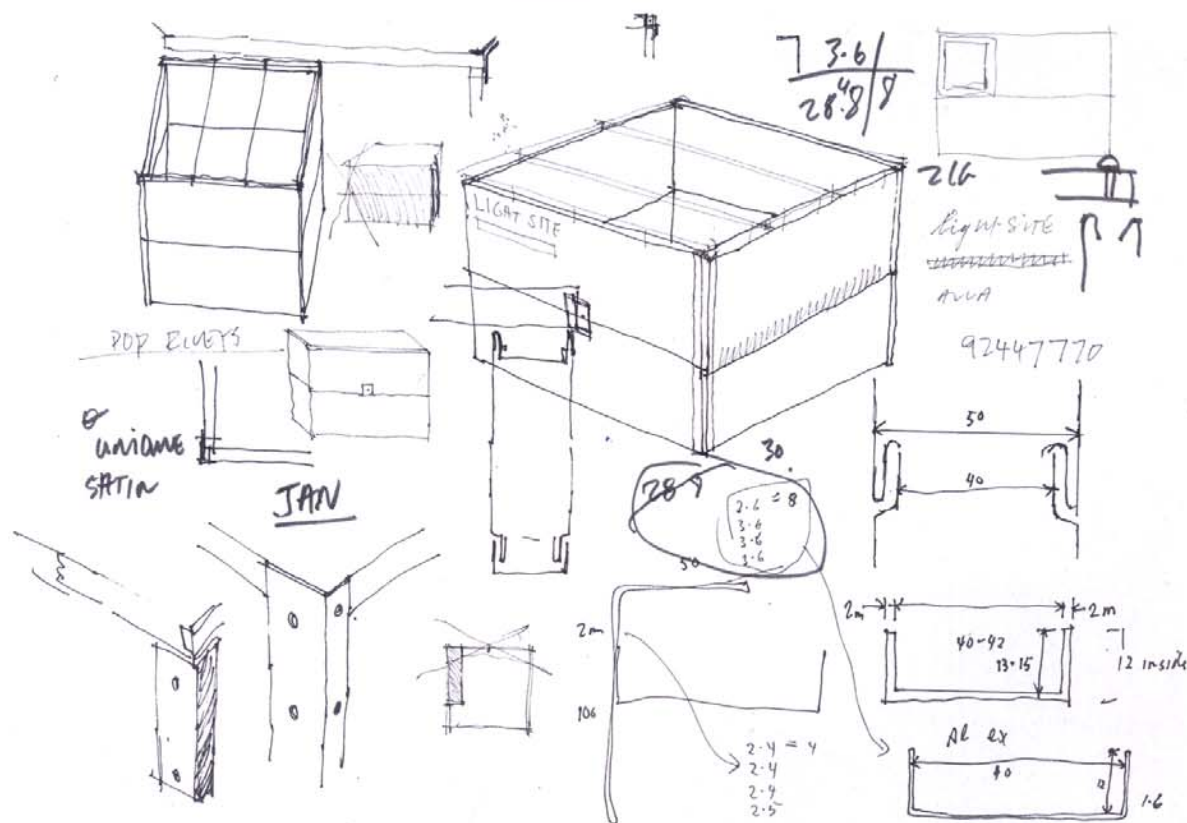
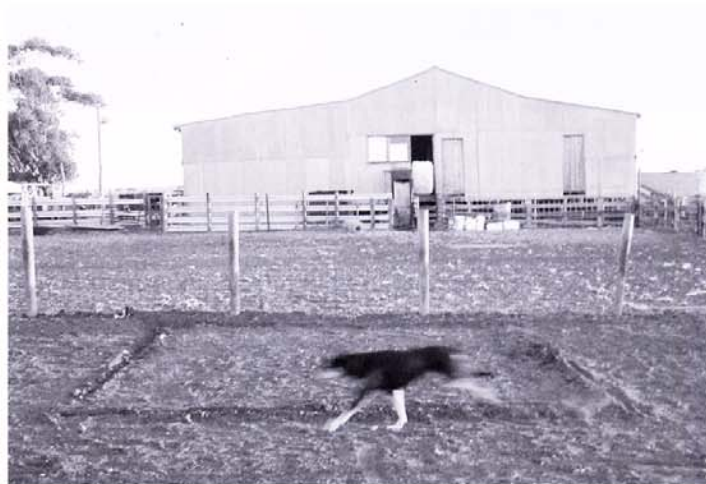
**PHOTOGRAPHS, ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND CONCEPT** IAN WEIR **CURATORS** ANNETTE DAVIS AND SHAARON DU BIGNON (MIX ARTISTS INCORPORATED) **FUNDING** REGIONAL ARTS FUND AND IAN WEIR **TOURING** EXHIBITION **TRANSPORT AND CURATION** ART OF THE MOVE **IDEA DEVELOPMENT** PROF JIM KOSINSKI, PROF RICHARD WELLER, AMANDA KEESING (GONDWANA LINK), ANNETTE DAVIS AND SHAARON DU BIGNON **ASSISTANTS** ANDREW SELMES, GRAEME WARBURTON, MARK JEFFREY, CRAIG LUSCOMBE, RON TAYLOR, ANDY CHAPMAN, NATHAN MCOUID, TOM KEESING, ARIE WILSHER, RICHARD DAVY, DAVID LYNCH, STEPHEN DEERING, LUKE REMAJ, PAUL REMAJ, JASON REMAJ, CHRIS (KINGEY) KING, KEITH ABBY, STUART MANGAN, RON BAIRD, JAMES QUINTON AND SIMEON ROBINSON **IMAGE PRODUCTION AND DOCUMENTATION** ADAM MONK AND PHILLIPA KELLY

### Site 6. Working sheep at Glen Shiel

This image celebrates Ian Mangan and his son and grandson on *Glen Shiel*, Gairdner where Ian has farmed since 1958. Glen Shiel was developed as part of the 1955 Jerramungup War Service Land Settlement Scheme and until last year Ian, at 82, was the sole remaining first-settler still actively farming in the district.



The subjects in *Working Sheep at Glen Shiel* are:  
Inside *Lightsite*: Ian Mangan.  
Outside *Lightsite*: Stuart (son) and Jacob Mangan (grandson).





*Making Lightsite*