



Geraldine Barlow

Laurence Aberhart

Monumental

We make monuments as we might build a cairn of rocks in the ever-moving waters of a river – perhaps a small private memorial to mark the life of someone dear; or a larger construction, giving form to a more communal experience of loss and grief.

Some monuments are inadvertent, eddies in the flow of time, cut from the fabric of an entirely different logic. Some monuments are shrines, others mausoleums, sometimes a weathered rock which stands alone, sometimes the site of a long passed battle, the marker of an invention to auger a new age. Some monuments ground a centre of faith, at other times an outpost, a replica, the life of a child, the shared rest of two, and the sad graves of many. Some monuments were never made as such. They are found and framed by the 'eye' of the camera, the eye of the photographer and, at another point in this flow of time, the eye of a distant viewer.



Laurence Aberhart has made a long study of the monumental. This exhibition draws together work from a thirty-year period, photographs taken in Aberhart's native New Zealand, as well as in Antarctica, America, Australia, Asia and Europe.

In 2010 Aberhart travelled throughout the northeast of the United States on a Fulbright scholarship. This exhibition includes photographs of public monuments recorded on this and previous journeys to the US, such as a memorial to Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre in Washington and a number of smaller copies of the Statue of Liberty. Aberhart has always been interested in bringing views from the periphery, or perhaps the middle ground, to our attention. Not so much the grand subject, but that which might slip by escaping our attention. His work *Buffalo, New York, 24 October 2010* is a street view, our gaze falls primarily upon the towering form of a building, perhaps built in more prosperous times, now fortified and converted into storage. In the foreground a row of identical trucks is arrayed, facing the deserted street. The building bears the sign 'Bison storage and warehouse corp.', as if a memorial to the vast herds, now displaced by metal, stone and cracked concrete.



Graveyards feature throughout Aberhart's practice. Sometimes he documents a particular grave, for instance *William G* where in stone, a baby sleeps on a cloth-draped shell; or he may observe an unintentionally poignant composition: a small child on one grave appears to have adopted the same pose as the larger angel adorning the neighbouring headstone. Sometimes Aberhart records memorials of unusual form and design, as they crack and slowly fall. *Carved headboards #3, Pawarenga Catholic cemetery, (St. Gabriel's) Pawarenga, Whangape Harbour, Northland, 10 May 1982* features two much weathered headboards carved in wood and inscribed in Maori. From the far north of New Zealand, they mark a vernacular adaptation of a European memorial tradition, as well as the early spread of Christianity adapted to local culture. Behind these graves is the distinctive tiered hill of the site of a former *Pa*, or fortified settlement. This image might be linked to that of the ruined towers of the Chateau Feodal in France. Memorials on the sites of former battlegrounds also recur throughout Aberhart's work, from a humble marker on a hill, to the low massed pyramid of the First World War monument at Souain in France.



Aberhart finds monumental forms in a more abstract sense also, in naturally occurring and man-made features in the landscape: perhaps the beauty of Mount Taranaki's pyramid peak, a lone pillar of rock amidst the waves, or the curving shine of a pair of grain silos, the impossible modernist sweep of 'The Egg', in Albany, New York or the filigree geometry of a radio antennae in Antarctica.



As a photographer Laurence Aberhart builds catalogues. He returns to certain subjects repeatedly, recording the world near to him as well as far from home. Aberhart has remained committed to the demanding early photographic process of making 8 x 10 inch negatives and 1:1 format prints. Technically, Aberhart chooses a process of stillness, an extended measure of moments over which light acts upon a prepared surface, and then is employed again in the process of printing and developing the images. There is a special sense of light in Aberhart's work, never entirely of the now. Light is both still and moving, captured and yet the vehicle for a still-flickering sense of loss.

Geraldine Barlow, May 2012

Geraldine Barlow is now Curatorial Manager of International Art., Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA)



Image captions:

Page 1:
Monument to the dead of Champagne [de Navarain], Souain-Somme py Tahure, France, 10 October 1994
silver gelatin, gold & selenium toned
printed 2000: 1994/2000/#1
19.4 x 24.5 cm

Taranaki from Okato cemetery, Okato, Taranaki, 22 May 2010
2010
silver gelatin, gold & selenium toned
printed 2010: 2010/#5
19.4 x 24.5 cm

Page 2:
Buffalo, New York, 24 October 2010
silver gelatin, gold & selenium toned
printed 2011: 2010/2011/#1
19.4 x 24.5 cm

Carved headboards #3, Pawarenga Catholic cemetery, (St. Gabriel's) Pawarenga, Whangape Harbour, Northland, 10 May 1982
silver gelatin, gold & selenium toned
printed 1982: 1982/#1
19.4 x 24.5 cm

Page 3:
Rupanyup, Victoria, 3 May 2005
silver gelatin, selenium toned
printed 2010: 2005/2010/#1
19.4 x 24.5 cm

[William G], Shaw, Mississippi, 17 September 1988
silver gelatin, gold & selenium toned
printed 1989: 1988/1989/#1
19.4 x 24.5 cm