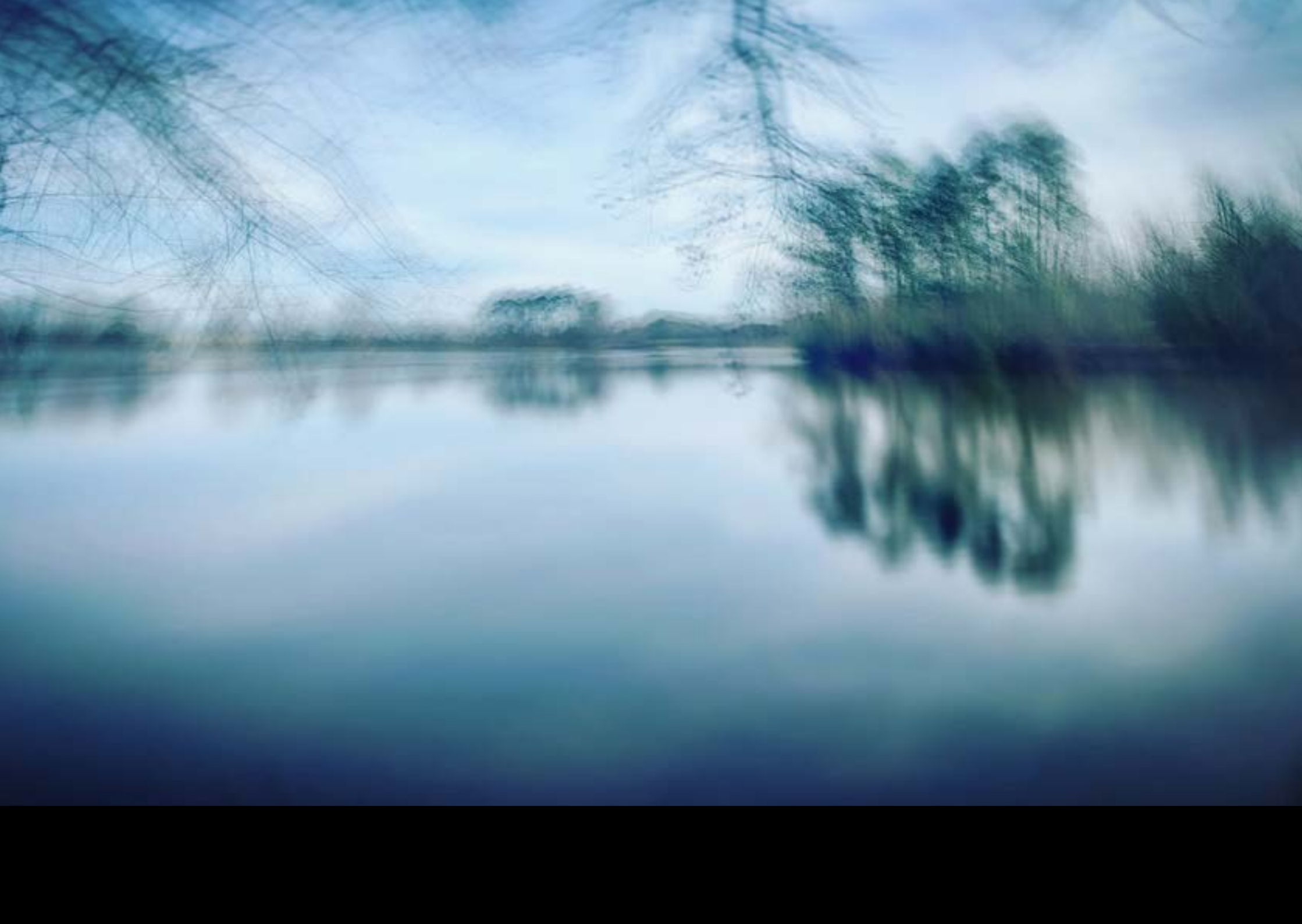


The Imperfect Beauty of the Sublime

Bronek Kózka

Catalogue Essay
Damian Smith



The imperfect beauty of the Sublime



Using hand-held devices to record impressions of the world seems not merely a hallmark of the contemporary, but a defining feature of life in the digital age. Be it an iPhone, Android or tablet, the possibility of transmitting our experiences in real time embodies the weightless, spaceless conditions of the digitally connected subject. While the impulse 'to see' and 'to be seen' is by no means new, it is the tiny fish-eye camera, embedded spy-like in all of our devices that makes our immediate line of sight visible to the world. Our images are no sooner formed than they dissolve into incessant rounds of evaluation, commentary and re-circulation that mark our passage through the day.

For artist and photographer Bronek Kozka, the hand-held recording device is an integral part of his adventures trekking into remote parts of the natural world. As others have done before him, such as the Tasmanian photographer Peter Dombrovskis (1945-1996), whose striking photograph 'Rock Island Bend' became an icon of the environmental movement, Kozka locates the contents of his images within the strenuous and challenging journeys that are required to obtain them.

His photographs however are never singular in the manner that one might expect of an analogue photographer such as Dombrovskis. In place of the single viewpoint, Kozka makes full use of the digital memory banks, sweeping up loads of images that differ one from the other. Light is captured across a wide dynamic range. The finished image is made at the time, with the layering happening in real time. Unlike a conventional camera, where it is not possible to observe the image while the exposure is being made, Kozka, via various digital platforms, is able to see the composition unfold. According to the artist, "I see how my arm movements affect the image, my breathing etc. Then I decide exactly when the image I see on screen captures my feeling of the place."

Kozka's compressed realities, allowing time to operate as an active feature of an otherwise still image, places his work more properly within the haptic, tactile tradition of painting. Undoubtedly when studying Kozka's works, one can recall the great landscape photographers of the United States of America, such as Ansel Adams (1902-1984) and William Henry Jackson (1843-1942) before him. Yet here too one recalls the landscape paintings that also informed this bold new-world aesthetic. En-plein-air photography, while signifying a move towards Modernity has its precedents in the sublime and picturesque landscapes of 17th and 18th century European painting.

Those antecedents can be located for instance in the portability of the artists' sketch book, so important to the likes of J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851); one also recognises an earlier precedent to Kozka's work: the pre-photographic viewing lens known as a 'Claude glass'. Made of darkened glass or obsidian the curved lens condensed large scenes into attractive or picturesque vignettes reminiscent of the landscape paintings made by the French artist Claude Lorrain (1600-1682). In 1778 the travel writer Thomas West suggested that:

The person using [the glass] ought always to turn his back to the object that he views. It should be suspended by the upper part of the case ... holding it a little to the right or the left (as the position of the parts to be viewed require) and the face screened from the sun.

The glass did not however make a recording, meaning that the adventure en-plein-air was ultimately a private affair. Reading West's description, it is possible to see how Kozka's work follows a long trajectory of landscape images that seek, via a single frame, to capture the nuances and changeability one encounters in the natural world.







In 'East Coast, Tasmania' 2022 for instance, the roll of the sea, signified through interwoven, staccato frames evokes the slow passage of time. In contrast, 'Spiky Beach no.1, Tasmania' 2022, provides an impression of impasto paint on canvas; the crispness of the foam formed by the swelling waves is contrasted against the sombre pastels of the wintery ocean.

Kozka is an inveterate traveller and out-of-doors trekker, journeying to locations across the globe. In his current exhibition, images have been selected not only from his journeys in the Tasmanian wilderness, but also from Wilson, North Carolina, upstate New York, Poland and his hometown Melbourne. They are dream-like images that play to the focal distortions of the convex camera lens, sometimes sharply in-focus and on other occasions softened to suggest a lapse in perception. They are images that speak to the drama of exploration and the immersive experience of making.

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Wilson No. 16, 2020
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 100 cm



Bellarine, 2021
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 120 cm



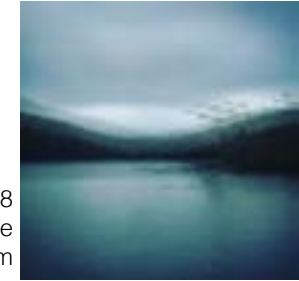
Wilson No. 14, 2020
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 157 cm



East Coast Tasmania, 2022
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 178 cm



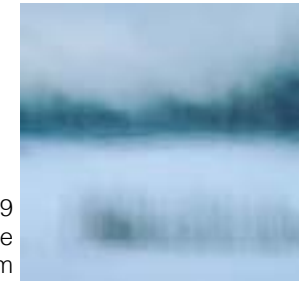
Wilson No. 3, 2020
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 100 cm



Mount Field, Tasmania, 2018
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 100 cm



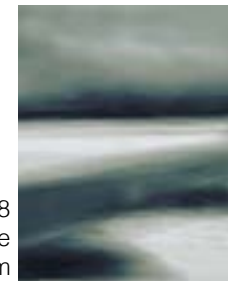
Spiky Beach No.1, Tasmania, 2022
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 178 cm



Białowieża, Poland, 2019
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 100 cm



Melbourne Study 10, 2016
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
90 cm x 90 cm



Lakeville (near), New York, USA, 2018
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 124 cm



Rocky Hills, Tasmania, 2022
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
90 cm x 90 cm



Swansea Beach No.2, Tasmania, 2022
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 145 cm



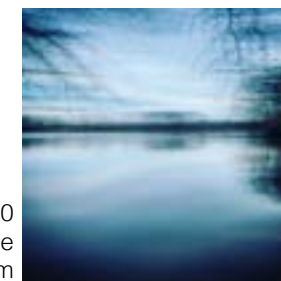
Whitesboro No.1 (near), New York, USA, 2018
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 124 cm



Spiky Beach No.2, Tasmania, 2022
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 177 cm



Whitesboro No.2 (near), New York, USA, 2018
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 124 cm



Wilson No. 13, 2020
Archival Inkjet Print on Canson Platine
100 cm x 100 cm



Bronek Kozka lives and works in Melbourne Australia. His work investigates the portrayal of remembered moments through tableau photograph, leading to explorations of “real vs fake”, interdisciplinary practices that include sculpture and the use of 3d scanning, to explore a more fluid understanding of memory and why it is an important part of human experience.

His images are constructed, be they physical room sets, 3D generated spaces (and characters) or artificial environments, for example his 2016 “Theme Parks” series.

This “construction” approach to lens-based work has also informed his sculptural practice.

“Mediated through the digital lens” explores the impact of the i-device through ideas of engagement/dis-engagement, ‘being in the moment,’ and approaches to making that extend the i-device beyond merely capturing a scene. The project aims to provide a healing and cathartic experience, producing works that are, as with all conscious acts, inherently personal, while at the same time prompting a political response to the environmental challenges of modern times. In a world of rising sea levels, catastrophic climate change and where societies are out of sync with natural cycles, the process of connecting, or more deeply communing with nature through an immersive process of making, seems critical.

In using the i-device, the work seeks to create an immersive experience similar to how the world is being experienced through camera phones and mobile devices, experimenting with how the device could enhance our appreciation and engagement with the natural environment rather than as a distraction that disconnects us from being ‘in the moment’.

The making process involves the instantaneous layering of exposures: as the image is made, the layering process becomes visible & interactive. Movement and blur the result of the subtle movements of nature and the maker. As one moves – whether intentionally or not - the image evolves; each breath taken is reflected in the final image. One’s physiological response to the landscape is recorded as part of the image.

Kozka has an on going involvement in arts education, as a lecturer in photography at RMIT University, in Melbourne, Australia, where he is currently a PhD candidate undertaking a research project “Perfect Synthetic: Hyper-reality, the re-staging of memory and the tableau”, investigating cultural theme parks, outdoor museums and historical re-enactment groups and their significance on cultural identity and shared experiences

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2020 *Understand Wilson*, Eyes on Main Street Festival, Wilson NC, USA
- 2019 *Mediated by the Digital Lens* - BaoHe Festival Hefei, China
- 2016 *Remembering what never happened*, MARS Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2015 *The Politics of Remembering Violence*, RMIT, Design Hub, Melbourne, Australia
- 2014 *Perfect:Synthetic Theme Parks*, Perth Centre for Photography, Perth, Australia
- 2014 *Ritual*, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Spare Room, Melbourne, Australia
- 2014 *Auschwitz Revisited*, Auckland Festival of Photography
- 2013 *Room 101*, Pingyao Photo Festival , China
- 2012 *reConstruction of Memory* , FotoFreo (core program+artists in residence), Turner Galleries, Perth, Western Australia, Australia
- 2012 *Digital Narratives*, Albury Regional Gallery, Albury NSW, Australia
- 2012 *The Mask I'm Wearing*, Pingyao Photo Festival , China
- 2012 *Myth, Memory & the ¼ Acre Block + The Living Room*, Caloundra Regional Gallery, QLD
- 2011 *The Australian Dream*, (collaborative, 2 person show) , Visionquest Gallery, Genova, Italy
- 2011 *Pandora's Hippocampus*, Bett Gallery Hobart, Australia
- 2011 *Untitled exhibition*, MARS Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2011 *Myth, Memory & the ¼ Acre Block*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, Australia

Selected group exhibitions

- 2022 *Eyes on Main Street Festival* (Group show – outdoors)
- 2021 *Eyes on Main Street Festival* (Group show – outdoors)
- 2019 *The Model Citizen – Modelling Surveillance*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne , Australia
- 2018 *Territories* - Pingyao International Photography Festival
- 2016 *Sculpture by the Sea*, Bondi, NSW Australia
- 2016 *Iris Award* – Perth Centre for Photography
- 2016 *MIRA MOBILE PRIZE*, Portugal
- 2016 *Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Photography Award*
- 2016 *National Photography Award MAMA* – Albury Regional Gallery (Winner, 2 Works Acquired : Remembering what never happened series
- 2016 *Lorne Sculpture Biennale*, Sculpture Trail (Main) , Lorne, Victoria
- 2014 *The Blokes Show*, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Project Space, Melbourne, Australia
- 2014 *The Museum of Abject Sentimentality*, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2012 *Lumens Festival: Curating the Ancient City*, Suzhou, China
- 2011 *New Worlds*, The Museum of Photography, Seoul, Korea
- 2011 *Chobi Mela*, International Photographic Festival, Bangladesh
- 2010 *Modern Narratives: Photography as Story Teller*, Albury Regional Art Gallery
- 2010 *Arte Laguna Prize Group Exhibition* - Tese di San Cristoforo(Arsenale di Venezia)
- 2010 *Suburbia: The Australian Dream* - Grand prix international de photographie de Vevey
- 2010 *The Kitchen Sink*, Mars Gallery, Melbourne
- 2010 *Brave New World*, Queensland Centre for Photography
- 2010 *Imagining the Everyday*, Pingyao Photo Festival , China
- 2010 *Hijacked Vol2*, Exhibition , ACP, Sydney

雄伟壮观的不完美之美

使用手持设备记录对世界的印象似乎不仅仅是当代的一个标志，而是数字时代生活的一个决定性特征。无论是 iPhone、Android 还是平板电脑，实时转换我们亲身体验的可能性包含了无重量、无空间数字连接主体的条件。而“观察”与“被观察”的概念并非新事物，它和微型鱼眼摄像头，嵌入式间谍窥视镜以及我们所有的设备一起，把我们可见的事物直接呈现给世界。我们的意象刚形成，便不断消溶在每一天的被评估、评论的循环通道中。

对于艺术家和摄影师布罗内克·科兹卡 (Broniek Kozka) 来说，手持记录设备是他徒步进入自然偏远地区世界的冒险之旅中不可或缺的一部分。正如其他人在他之前所做的那样，如塔斯马尼亚摄影师 Peter Dombrovskis (1945-1996)，其引人注目的照片“摇滚岛湾”成为环保运动的标志，科兹卡 (Kozka) 的影像内容在艰苦而充满挑战的旅程中获得。

然而，他的照片绝不是人们想象期待的像 Dombrovskis 这样的胶片摄影师那样的单一。取代了单一的视觉角度，Kozka 充分利用了数字存储的优势，使用了大量连续不同的图像，光线被捕获在很宽的动态范围内。最后的成像也是通过实时发生的分层影像即刻完成。有别于传统的相机在进行曝光时无法观察图像，Kozka 利用数字摄影能够看到作品如何展开。艺术家说，“我可以看到我的手臂运动、我的呼吸如何影响图像，我从屏幕上看到的图像准确地决定我如何捕获我对这个地方的感觉。”

Kozka 的压缩现实方式使时间不再被静止的图像定格，而是成为一个动态的特征发挥作用。这使得他的作品被更恰当地置于传统的绘画的触觉和绘画技巧中。毫无疑问，在研究科兹卡的作品时，人们会想起他之前的安塞尔亚当斯 (1902-1984) 和威廉亨利杰克逊 (1843-1942) 等美国伟大的风景摄影师。然而，也有人会回忆起同样为这种大胆的新世界美学提供信息的风光画。风光摄影虽然标志着向现代性的迈进，但在 17 世纪和 18 世纪欧洲雄伟壮丽的风景油画中有其先例。

这些先决条件在于艺术家写生素描本的便携性中，这对于 J. M. W. 特纳 (Turner) (1775-1851) 之类的艺术家来说非常重要。Kozka 作品的早期先例有被称为“克劳德玻璃”的前摄影时代的观察镜头。这种由深色玻璃或黑曜石制成的曲面镜头将大场景浓缩成迷人的风景如画的小插图，让人想起法国艺术家克劳德·洛兰 (Claude Lorrain) (1600-1682 年) 创作的风景画。1778 年，旅行作家托马斯·韦斯特 (Thomas West) 建议：使用 [玻璃] 的人应该总是背对他所看到的物体。它应该悬挂在玻璃盒上部..... 稍微向右或向左握住 (根据要观察的风景的位置要求)，脸不要暴露在太阳下。

然而玻璃并没有记录的性质，自然的冒险终究是一个私人的事件。阅读韦斯特的描述，可以看出 Kozka 的作品是如何遵循风景画的漫长轨迹的，人们通过单一的图像来捕捉自然世界的变化多端和各种细微差别。

例如，在 2022 年的作品“塔斯马尼亚东海岸”中，海浪的翻滚通过交织却又间断的框架唤起了对时间缓慢流逝的感觉。相比之下，2022 年的作品“Spiky Beach no. 1, Tasmania” (Spiky 海滩一号作品，塔斯马尼亚) 给人的印象仿佛是画布上的厚涂颜料；涌起的海浪所形成的松脆泡沫与冬日海洋的阴沉色彩形成鲜明对比。Kozka 是一位资深旅行者和户外徒步旅行者，足迹遍布全球。在此次展览中的影像作品图像不仅从他在塔斯马尼亚荒野的旅程中挑选出来，而且也来自美国北卡罗来纳州威尔逊、纽约州北部、波兰和他的家乡墨尔本。它们是梦幻般的图像，有时是相机焦点的变形影像，时而展示了清晰的镜头焦点，时而模糊的焦点暗示了视野的消失。这些图像讲述了探索过程的戏剧性和身临其境的制作体验。翻译

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Translation Helen Yu 翻译

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