

The Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Photography Award
Judge's Remarks: Chris Saines CNZM, Director, Queensland Art
Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA)

Home of the Arts, Gold Coast

Friday 13 December 2024

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this land, the Kombumerri families of the Yugambeh Language Region – the first makers and storytellers to dream here – and pay respect to Elders past and present.

I recognise the untold contributions First Nations Australians have made to the care and maintenance of their Country, and the more remarkable cultural impact they continue to make across our creative community.

I acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who join us tonight, as I do:

- Uncle John Graham
 - Gold Coast City Councillor, Bob La Castra
 - John Warn, CEO, Experience Gold Coast
 - Yarmila Alfonsetti, Head of Arts & Culture, Experience Gold Coast
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**WINNER OF THE JOSEPHINE ULRICK AND WIN SCHUBERT
PHOTOGRAPHY AWARD 2024**

Merilyn Fairskye

Focus infinity III (4.47am, 11 May 2024, Maralinga village) 2024

Solve-Glaze archival pigment print on photo rag paper

65 x 200cm – 1/5



The Winner of The Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Photography Award 2024 is **Merilyn Fairskye**, for her work *Focus infinity III (4.47am, 11 May 2024, Maralinga village) 2024!*

Fairskye's work is a recent contribution to her Long Life Project, a longitudinal study of the history and global impact of the nuclear project, which has taken her to Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the US and UK.

Here, her subject is what remains of a once thriving town of some 2000 British and Australian scientists, stationed there to oversee and execute nuclear testing at Maralinga, of which only campsites now remain.

As the lights turn on in a portacabin, the pre-dawn reveals a spectacular cloudscape that, in this charged and freighted landscape, summons up the memory of the nuclear clouds that once loomed over this Country.

Life in Maralinga Village is now almost entirely defined by its past purpose. In radically defocusing the entire scene, Fairskye skilfully apprehends this stay on life's progress, its state of 'in-betweenness'.

This is not a place for living but for passing through, part of a global trail of historic nuclear tourism sites, like Chernobyl, and the Politburo bunker deep beneath Moscow that came to life during the Cuban missile crisis.

Fairskye is drawn to historical crossroads where 'people, technologies and the environment' meet and interact. Maralinga Village is emblematic of that interest, with the presence of people implied in their absence.

I selected this work for the award because it functioned at multiple levels and engaged me in a bigger story than its otherwise ordinary subject.

At one level, it's a striking large format colour- and light-saturated image of an outback campsite. Compositionally, it succeeds on those terms alone.

At another, it is inevitably joined to the history of this place, a moving reminder of what occurred here – the highly consequential impacts on the land and peoples of Maralinga that followed from nuclear testing.

The powerful events of 70 years ago, events that prompted these travellers to stay over in the village and to rise early for their soon-to-depart nuclear tour, still seem to reverberate across the morning sky.
