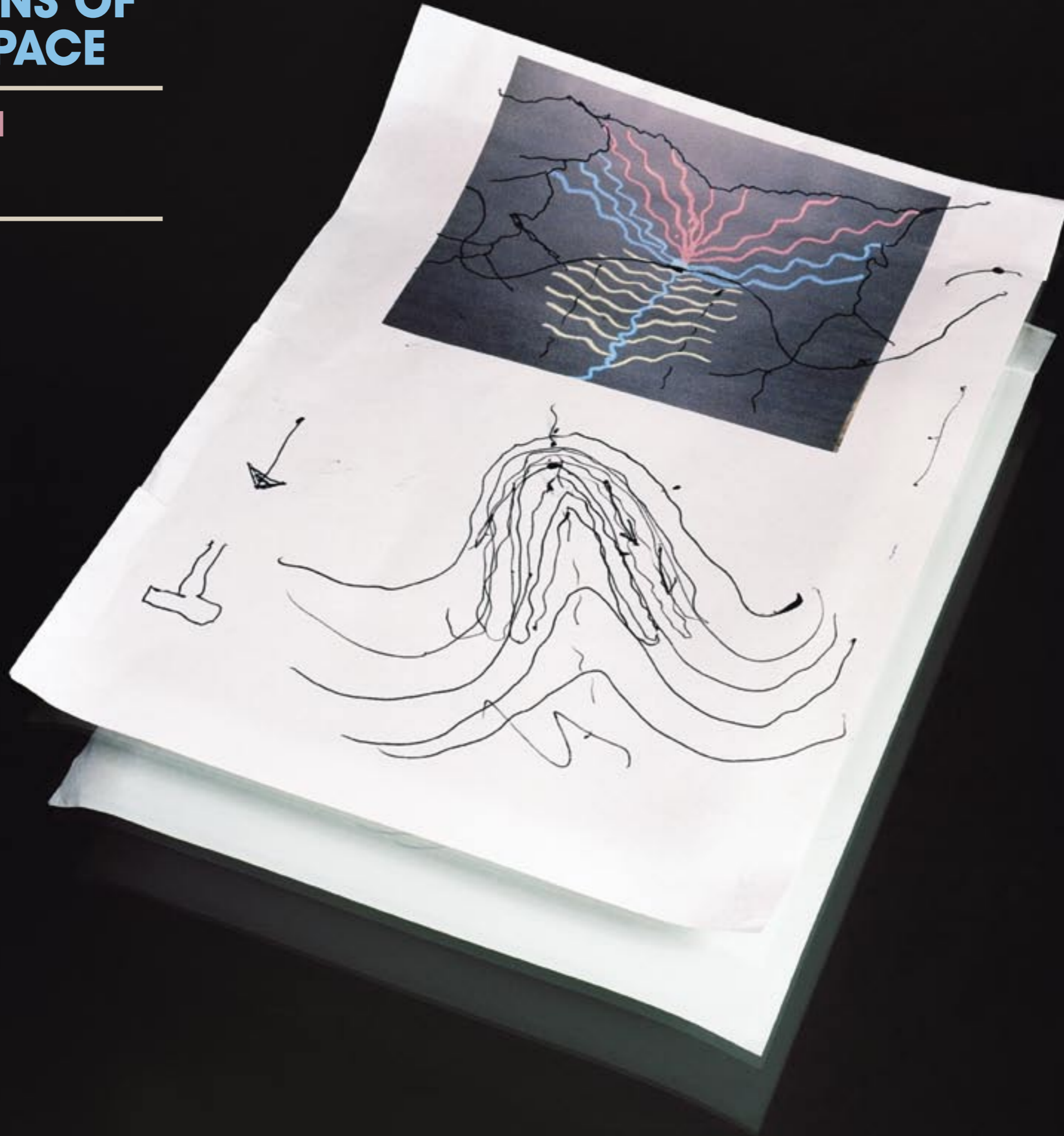


EXPLORATIONS OF AN OTHER SPACE

KATE ROBERTSON

TECHNO PARK STUDIOS
17 SEPTEMBER - 2 OCTOBER 2011



AN ESSAY BY AMY MARJORAM
WITH POETRY (INCLINED TEXT)
BY DR MAT PETERSON WHO REGULARLY
ATTENDS CONFEST AND MET KATE PRIOR
TO THE START OF HER PROJECT.

Kate Robertson went to ConFest with the purpose of photographing the place and people. As a festival that appeals to people who are searching for something more; I can't help but think her photographic ambitions went to ConFest on some level, to seek the connectedness to others and the land that the cameraless participants are also often searching for.

On the first day of Kate's first visit she became lost for 3 hours in an unfamiliar flat, dusty landscape temporarily settled on, but not settled in. The event's nonhierarchical layout is a muddle of handmade signs that can slowly be used like constellations to navigate by. Except, things shift and change across the days without an overarching pattern. You will always find yourself somewhere- a somewhere disoriented within clockless, ungraphable space.

Before going Kate had a ConFest map drawn for her; it looks vaguely topographical but also has a sense of suction pulls and as a map it seems to say give up and give in to the space. She has captured the diagram against glossy black and this odd map, which conversely hints only at experiential understanding, seems to hover before us. This map is a starting point within an ongoing series she plans to develop for at least five years both at the festival and with studio portraits of people she has met and elements of her experience.

Kate collected dust from the festival site, which was then photographed in the studio with her detail-hungry large format camera. The dust was extracted from the site and similarly these images were distilled through digital processing. The flux of dust reacting to air becomes a celestial miniature. Kate speaks about ConFest, how the site literally integrates in to the festivities as millions of particles of red dust envelop the participants. The parched ground hovers and clings and this immersion in the dust cloud becomes integral to the experience.

*the
spirit
is in the air
and palpable
if one's open to it*

Dust landscape I & II

The harsh conditions cause dust, and then the rain can suddenly pour. In *Red Diamond* we see part of the site that flooded so quickly a tipi frame was left stranded in the water. Kate huddled at the back of her camera with her photo cloak flipped over her head, hides in the dark to accurately capture the light and see's the actual site and it's reflected image extend in to each other. She see's this upside down on the glass viewfinder; using a loupe (like a magnifying glass), and similarly to her immersion in the image required to capture it, we sink in to this image as we view it. Unable to maintain delineation between reflection and tangible space we see a red diamond.

*other conditions
for merging
mirroring reflecting*

Red Diamond

ConFest is about slowing down. Digital photography has caused a speeding up; where we have collectively become a pack

of shutter-freaks snapping away, with an urgency to bind the moment in our technical ability to do so. This type of image making suits the pace and rhythm that we are often zooming along on but it doesn't leave the photographer much time to soak in the moment. With digital cameras the scroll feature becomes a map, guiding you to keep, delete, reshoot. For ConFest Kate chose to shoot on film, a slower process where the moment of the image being captured is suspended; existing only as an impression of what may eventuate on the concealed film stock. Without a tangible playback there is more space to immerse yourself in a continuum; to move through the festival to the next image moment.

Kate had previously never shot portraits in situ with the technically demanding 4 x 5. Taking a professional mode of image making and managing to have it cohere to the loose creativity of the festival and its dusty, inchoate camp is quite an undertaking. Her valuable and heavy equipment (7kg camera and a necessary 5kg tripod) acutely positioned her as engaged yet professionally restrained, she couldn't just let herself go and get lost in the moment.

The camera's cumbersome presence could have created technical distancing yet it had the inverse effect. It likely allayed potential concerns of secretive image taking within a festival that aligns itself with openness and is clothes optional. As she set up her camera, which could take up to ten minutes, the subjects had time to assess her. Kate often found herself chatting and being given ample background information and outlines of life stories. Some people react to the festivals' focus on energy and participation like shaken champagne being uncorked and Kate occasionally rather than having to ease her subjects, had to ease herself.

*Mixing worlds
(words)n = (lots of words)
chats n maths*

*strange
knowing
new ways*

It seems Kate was seeking people who were receptive to her needs to capture them and qualities of ConFest have subsequently coalesced through her subject's openness. In the photographs carefully selected here, there is a recurring motif of touch and embrace. In these images of people together, Kate's connection to her subjects is not so foregrounded, yet at the heart of this series is a need for Kate to be accepted as a photographer. Otherwise the images she is after simply can't be made. These are images of and about seeking connectedness.

*you me
and tipi
makes
three*

Nadia in embrace (early morning)

*no
know
sense
where
you
end
and
I
begin*

After the festival Kate invited Mat to her studio to take his portrait. As someone deeply committed to energy healing his focus on how things balance and connect extends with clarity beyond the festival. We see him as he performs postural exercises to locate his bodily energy so that he may shift it towards effective

use. Mat holds sessions at ConFest in these exercises as he see's connections between emotion and motion, what we hold on to and carry within our own frames.

*moving
sensing
feeling
changing thinking*

Motion/emotion I & II

The festival is about embracing unfamiliarity, so it isn't surprising that it attracts people who want more than their well-worn patterns. Whether we choose to attend ConFest, read self help books or just keep ploughing on I think we all hope to discover more within our lives and seek understanding through the experiences of others. This is ultimately what ties these images together and opens them up for us to contemplate.

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KATE THANKS THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE

Amy Marjoram, Dr Mat Peterson, Kim Donaldson, Shane Hulbert, Sally Cleary, John Billan, Steph Neoh, Brett and Steve from Arts on Burgundy, Eduardo LoBianco from Liquid Ink, Meredith Turnbull.

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