

## ARTISTS STATEMENT - *EL DORADO SPRINGS*

Valerie Sparks

The main source for this work is the utopian, hybrid landscape of El Dorado, the scenic wallpaper produced by the French company Zuber in 1849. Scenic landscape wallpapers were exclusive to French wallpaper production companies but were popular around the world in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The original wallpapers were created using, what sometimes came to thousands of wood blocks. Sparks' large format prints utilize contemporary digital photographic technology. This process heightens the hyper real quality, creating landscapes that appear so real that they should exist but are impossible at the same time. Each piece of work includes elements from different locations, times of the day and seasons which are assembled to create a seamless, flawless and therefore impossible place, emphasizing the way European representation of the landscape can be a highly constructed and fantastical process. There are multiple moments present and multiple points of perspective. The authority of the representation of landscape and place is disrupted. Zuber's El Dorado is a lush picturesque garden scene meandering through different terrain. It is a condensed world view which includes architectural features and scenes from the American, European, Asian and African continents and reveals an attitude toward the world at a time of increased access, travel and colonial activity. El Dorado Springs takes this idea and jumps ahead to contemporary Melbourne where we find an urban terrain that includes architectural features and places of worship for many communities who have migrated to Australia.

Mainly found on the periphery of suburban Melbourne, these buildings also tell us something about the history of migration to Australia, the patterns of settlement, and the desire to create a sense of the sacred (or perhaps religious gravitas), by people who have found themselves far from home, whether that be through exile or choice. This includes (in order from left to right) the: Russian Orthodox Church in East Brunswick, Linh Son Buddhist Congregation Reservoir, Alliance Francais St Kilda \*, Shri Shiva Vishnu Temple Carrum Downs, St Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne, Bright Moon Buddhist Society Springvale, Albanian Australian Islamic Society North Carlton, and the Sikh Temple Gurudwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Craigieburn.

The mountains that form the back ground are the Zagros Mountains around the Iran Iraq border. Photographs were taken from the plane on a recent trip to Europe. All other non architectural elements have been gathered from a variety of locations in Australia, New Zealand, France and the UK.

\* The Alliance Franciase building Eildon was not built by the French community in Melbourne but as a site for cultural activity is included as a link to the country from which the scenic wallpapers originated. In addition Eildon Mansion was designed by Reed and Barnes, now Bates Smart who, arguably more than any other firm, created and contributed to the distinct built form of early (and indeed contemporary) Melbourne, a form that made manifest Melbourne's identity as a European outpost.