

*Purrumbete Verandah, 2008*¹

Seth Keen

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Abstract: In describing his 2008 digital video installation, a continuous 3 minute five second loop, Seth Keen introduces a contemporary engagement with the historic landscape of rural Victoria witnessed by Von Guérard in his paintings of the 1850s. Bringing together a background in documentary practice and graphic design, Seth is interested, as a media artist, in using digital technologies to explore forms of environmental portraiture that document relationships between people and place. In this video work, he revisits the location and landscape painting, *From the verandah of Purrumbete, 1858*² by Eugene Von Guérard.

Purrumbete Verandah, 2008 documents the landscape and location that Von Guérard painted in 1858. Video is used to record the view across Lake Purrumbete from the verandah of the Purrumbete Homestead. Edited into this shot, are shots of local fishermen and a view of the Purrumbete Homestead recorded from Picnic Point on Lake Purrumbete. Caught up in the tranquillity of this location, I slipped into the pace of the fishermen and their interaction with Lake Purrumbete. They become a pivot for differing viewpoints on the verandah location. The video work can be viewed on the web at <http://www.sethkeen.net/portfolio/purrumbete-verandah/>.

These shots originated from the *Locative Painting*³ research project, which records the numerous locations Von Guérard painted in the Corangamite Shire. Each of the locations depicted in the paintings are recorded with video and geotagged photos. This data is being used in the development of a prototype online video website, that integrates Google Maps⁴. Part of continuing research into the design and development

¹ This paper is a contribution to the *Placescape, placemaking, placemarking, placedness ... geography and cultural production* Special Issue of *Coolabah*, edited by Bill Boyd & Ray Norman. The Special Issue is supported by two websites: <http://coolabahplacedness.blogspot.com.au> and <http://coolabahplacedness-images.blogspot.com.au/>.

² Guérard, EV 1858, *From the Verandah of Purrumbete [From the Verandah of "Purrumbete" Looking Towards the Old Woolshed on Picnic Point]*, 51.4 h x 86.3 w, National Gallery of Australia, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, Painting, oil on canvas.

³ Geoplaced Knowledge and the Design Research Institute at RMIT University are supporting *Locative Painting* (2008-10), a collaborative research project between a media artist, a web developer, interaction designer and Corangamite Arts, a local volunteer community organisation.

⁴ Google Inc. make the Google Maps Application Programme Interface (API) available for the non-commercial development of websites.

of an online video website as a type of 'combinatory engine'⁵. A key objective of this website is to create a narrative structure, which provides multiple perspectives on this subject. In the *Locative Painting* website⁶, I focus specifically on the visual representation of maps and how they can be used to provide a geographical viewpoint on locations within a documentary narrative.

Purrumbete Verandah, 2008 (video still by Seth Keen).



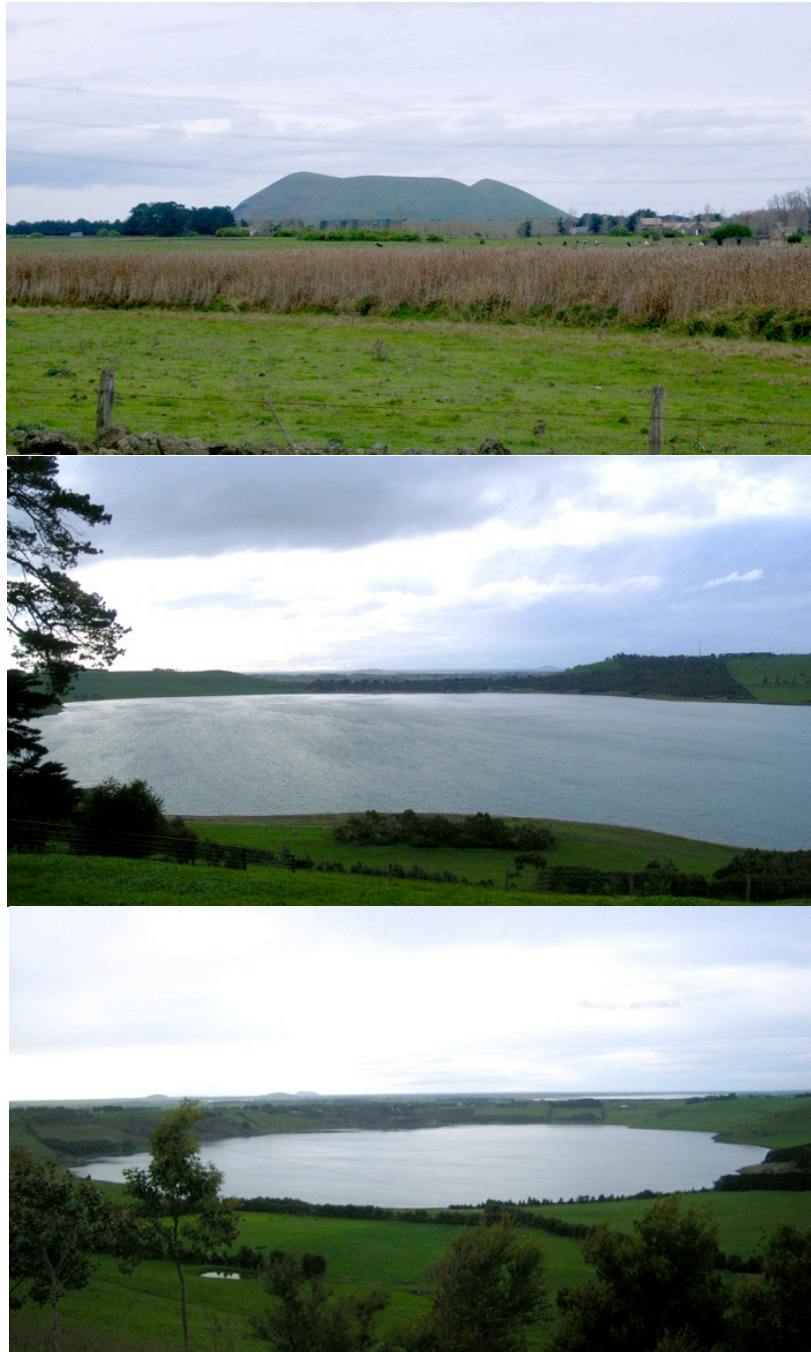
Video stills from the Purrumbete Verandah, 2008 video: boat and fishermen; the Purrumbete Homestead (video stills by Seth Keen).



⁵ Miles, A 2008, 'Programmatic Statements for a Facetted Videography', in G Lovink & S Niederer (eds), *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to Youtube*, XS4All, Amsterdam. p. 226

⁶ <http://www.sethkeen.net/portfolio/locative-painting/>

**Locations painted by Von Guérard in the Corangamite Shire: (top to bottom)
Larra, Lake Bullen Merri, and Lake Gnotuk (video stills by Seth Keen).**



Each painting is used as a focal point to generate media content on the relationship between the painting and the location it records. For example, a number of interviews have been conducted with local people, who have connections to these locations, some have ancestors who settled the land and commissioned the paintings. This interview material is being used in combination with the recorded video, photos and associated maps.

Interviewees in the Locative Painting research project project: (top left) Sue Cole 2009; (top right) Joan Mahony, 2009; (bottom left) the late Josie Black, 2009; and (bottom right) Jock McArthur, 2009 (video stills by Seth Keen).



I am certainly not the first person to retrace the footsteps of Von Guérard in this region. Dacre Smyth documented each of the locations that Von Guérard recorded in his paintings, in *Views of Victoria in the steps of Von Guérard* (1984). As Smyth points out, the original verandah that Von Guérard painted in *From the verandah of Purrumbete*, 1858, ‘no longer exists’⁷, being replaced when the homestead was rebuilt in 1883 and again in 1902. Hence the different building facade in the video recording compared to the original painting. The commission from the Manifold family who settled the land and built the homestead also included the painting, *Purrumbete from across the Lake*, 1858⁸. I pay homage to this painting with a closer framed shot of the current Purrumbete Homestead, recorded from Picnic Point. I had to record the shot from nearby, due to the growth of trees on the original painting location.

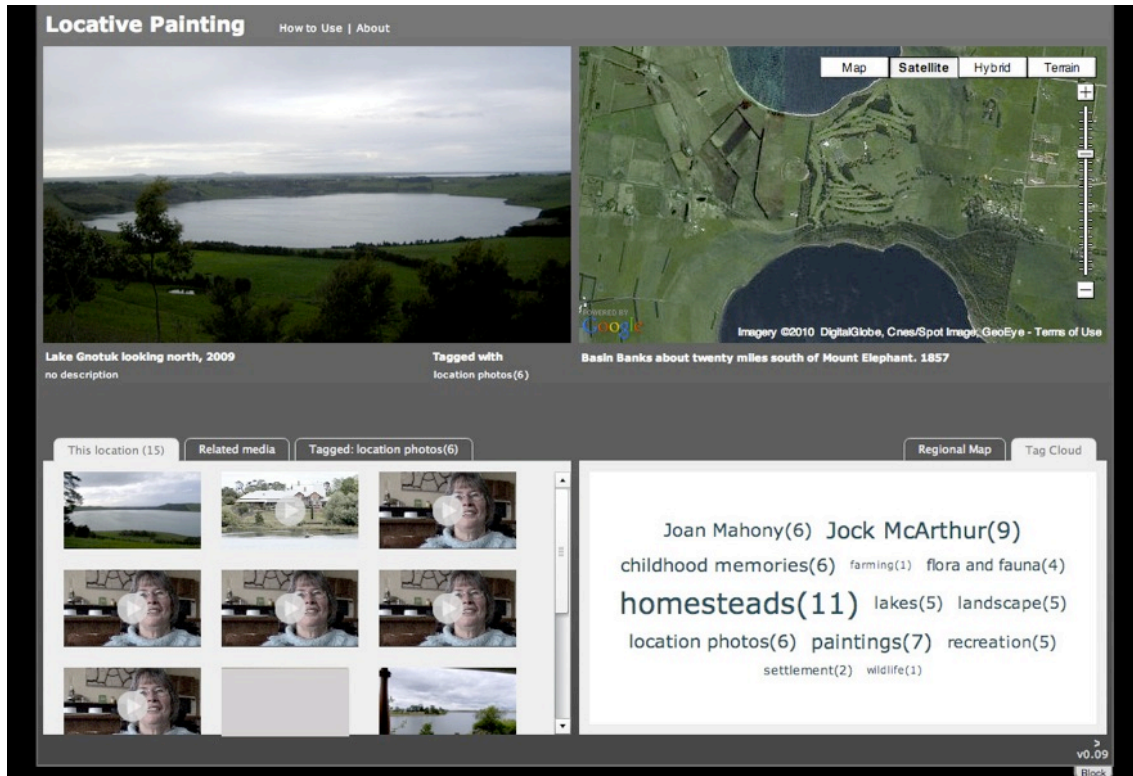
Following the historical theme, some of the original moving panoramas and dioramas staged in Melbourne around the time that Von Guérard completed his paintings, influenced this video work. Documented by Mimi Colligan, in *Canvas Documentaries*⁹, these moving landscapes demonstrate a fascination with providing a sense of place, in a manner similar to my project.

⁷ Smyth, D & Von Guérard, E 1984, *Views of Victoria in the steps of von Guérard: a fifth book of paintings, poetry and prose*, D. Smyth, Toorak. p. 48

⁸ Guérard, EV 1858, *Purrumbete from across the Lake [Manifold Homestead, Purrumbete View of Purrumbete Station]*, 51.0 h x 85.5 w, National Gallery of Australia, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, Painting, oil on canvas.

⁹ Colligan, M 2002, *Canvas documentaries : panoramic entertainments in nineteenth-century Australia and New Zealand*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, Vic.

Locative painting prototype: Gnotuk_tags-tocative 2010 (Imaqery © 2010 Digital Globe Cnes/Spot Image, GeoEye Website screencast; created by Seth Keen in collaboration with the Web Developer, Daniel Pettet, and Interaction Designer, Michael Dunbar).



Links

This article links to web sites containing further materials. The video work described in this article can be viewed at <http://www.sethkeen.net/portfolio/purrumbete-verandah/>, while further project documentation and other images can be viewed at <http://www.sethkeen.net/portfolio/locative-painting/>.

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Seth Keen teaches New Media at RMIT University in Melbourne. He holds a MA (by Research) and is currently in candidature on a practice based PhD (Communication). Seth works with video to explore the nexus between documentary practice and new media technologies. His practice is interdisciplinary across media, art and design. He produces video works for exhibition, broadcast, screening and online publication. Interested in social and environmental change, Seth collaborates with organisations on the design of frameworks to create web interactive documentaries, audio-visual archives and tools. In collaboration with the Institute of Network Cultures in Amsterdam, Seth helped facilitate and research the Video Vortex conference series, a critical forum on online video. <http://www.sethkeen.net/> (School of Media and Communication, School of Media and Communication, RMIT University, Australia. Email: seth.keen@rmit.edu.au)