

HOME TURF



Tony Windberg

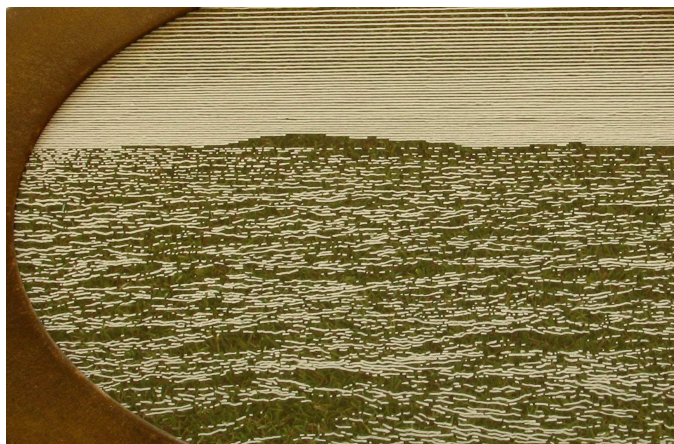
Art Collective WA

Achieving a good lawn, a decent bit of green in the backyard and even the front verge seems an Aussie rite of passage: to pump precious water onto a dry bit of land. What was growing there before? Why did it need replacing? What was wrong with it?

In 1802, the artist-in-residence William Westall aboard Matthew Flinders' ship *Investigator* was becoming rapidly disillusioned with the harsh landscape of the new world that was to be known as Australia. Back in England, his sketches from the crew's occasional landings were later made into oil paintings for the engravers to copy for publication. However, the illusion he created was of a greener place - more appealing, and framed within the idealised notions of the picturesque.

Less than 2 centuries later, another new world awaited exploration and investigation with a view to potential colonization: Mars. Transformation of the red planet and the hopeful search for life-sustaining water has parallels with earlier earthly missions and seems to suggest a human desire to change alien landscapes into something more comforting and familiar.

The series of works *Home Turf 1 - 4* depict alternating views of Cape Leeuwin and Mars. The shape of the Cape from sea is copied from Westall's first sketch of the southern land as reproduced in *A Voyage to Terra Australis* in 1814. The seas of rocks on Mars are copied from the first images transmitted line by line from the *Viking* lander in 1976.



Home Turf 3 (detail)

36 x 57 x 3 cm, ink under glass, synthetic turf, gypsum and iron oxide on wood



Home Turf 4 (detail) 59 x 172 x 4 cm, ink under glass, synthetic turf, calcium carbonate and iron oxide on wood

The ellipses are a counter perspective device. From a key viewpoint, they appear circular and orb-like - perhaps also suggesting a telescopic view. The illusion continues into the distorted imagery too. The picture plane is layered: the lighter marks - drawn to echo the style of the copperplate engravings - hover over the dark background of the fake grass seen through the untouched glass.

The frames are an integral part of all the artworks. Textures contrast with the orderly alignment of drawn marks, providing a chaotic counterpoint, nature versus mankind. The minerals used in the frame surfaces have particular relevance - diatomite is formed from micro-fossils - evidence of life - while iron oxide reflects rusty hues.



Home Turf 4

Human perception is called into question in the circular arrangement of the *Investigator* series of Cape Leeuwin looking out to sea, and the Mars series featuring images from each of the successful landers and rovers since 1976. Based on a classic illusion where the central dots appear to differ in size, the question is then posed: are we willing participants of deception?

Tony Windberg, May 2018



Investigator 1

28 x 28 x 6 cm, ink under glass, synthetic turf, copper paint on wood

'Sand and stone, with the slightest covering of vegetation, everywhere presented themselves on the lower lands... The vegetation, indeed, consisted of an abundant variety of shrubs and small plants, and yielded a delightful harvest to the botanists: but to the herdsman and cultivator it promised nothing; not a blade of grass ...'

Matthew Flinders, January 10, 1802 (from *A Voyage To Terra Australis*)