

MAKING PHOTOGRAPHS HAS BEEN RUTH MADDISON'S 'DAY AND NIGHT' job since 1976 when she first began taking publicity shots for people she knew in theatre and rock'n'roll. Ruth has been exhibiting her work since 1979 and her portraits and documentary photographs now appear in most major public collections in Australia. Five years ago, Ruth moved from Melbourne to Eden, where she now lives. Recently she was awarded a major grant from the Australia Council to create a body of photographic portraits of local youth she has called 'Now a river went out of Eden'.

Anna Waldman, Manager of the Visual Arts and Crafts Board at the Australia Council told me, "Ruth's work stood out for its direct and uncompromising yet lyrical and sensitive qualities and the way it held a mirror to the world around her." She added, "Photographs, paintings, installations or ceramics have become an integral part in how communities see and express themselves either directly or reflected in the work of local artists."

This is Ruth's description of the project:

Now a river went out of Eden

by RACHAEL VINCENT

Eden is a small town (pop. 4000) on the far south coast of NSW. Economically depressed, it has traditionally depended on the fishing and timber industries for survival. In this environment young people are particularly vulnerable and uncertain. Where do they see their future?

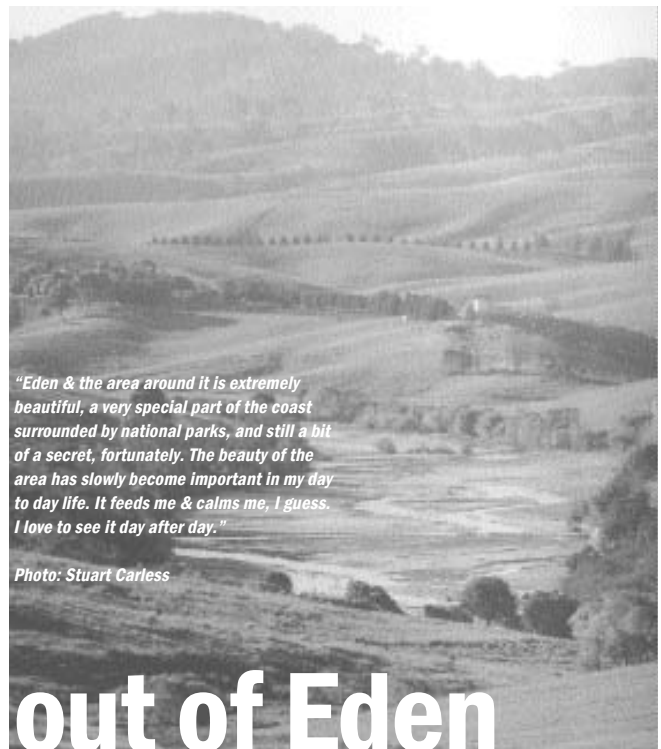
'Now a river went out of Eden' will be a body of photographic portraits of youth in Eden and some of their parents, with accompanying text that responds to this question. The text will directly quote the participating subjects.

The impetus for this work was my gradual realization that what I as a newcomer had perceived as a prevailing inertia and absence of ambition has a positive face as well, of connection to and love for a place inhabited since birth. There is an active desire to stay. The issue is a complex one, in ways that I only begin to understand as I live longer in the community. I think of the work as a two-way mirror, partly a view that I hold up to the community, partly a reflection of its challenges to me.

The project represents my own growing integration into a community radically new to me. Until now the work I've made while living in Eden has either taken me away from the place or has been done here but in isolation. With this work it is the differences – geographical, cultural and philosophical – from the urban environment I have known that have become the stimulus/inspiration.

I asked Ruth about her relationship with Eden and her experience as a regionally based artist. This was her reply:

"I don't think of myself as a 'regional artist'. I am who I am and I do what I do. Where I am currently has certain frustrations logistically, practically, but also has opened up new ways of working and



"Eden & the area around it is extremely beautiful, a very special part of the coast surrounded by national parks, and still a bit of a secret, fortunately. The beauty of the area has slowly become important in my day to day life. It feeds me & calms me, I guess. I love to see it day after day."

Photo: Stuart Carless

making images. When I first came here I only knew two other people living here. But here I was, in new territory, quite unlike anywhere I've lived before. So I walked the land, and started making new and very different work. As I became more a part of day to day life here in my own way, all that stuff to do with the nature of people's lives began to pull me back to the portrait, and the documenting of small moments of a life.


"I feel isolated in relation to my work because no-one here works as I do, and I think few people understand what I do as 'real work'. I come from a different 'ideas pool' [...] I'm learning an enormous amount of new things to do with local knowledge – the lives of the fishermen, who know the ocean, the life in it, the weather, boats and the lives of their partners and kids. Same with the timber workers. And the wonderful thing here is the 'permission' is so easy. 'Can I come in your timber truck to the forest for the day?' 'Can I come on the boat?' The answer is always, 'Yes, no problem, just tell me what day.' All of that is very exciting for me, and now people start to see me everywhere and know I live here."

In February, Ruth got in touch with Jennifer Hunt, the RADO for the South East, and they discussed the idea of having the work seen locally before it left the area. Together they got Bega Regional Gallery director Ross Cameron involved to auspice a proposal for further funding from the Myer Foundation, which was successful, and the NSW Ministry for the Arts (decision pending). ■

'Now a river went out of Eden' will open at Bega Regional gallery next September then at the Stills gallery in Sydney in the first half of 2003.

January – February


January 31 - February 2

 GLEN INNES Annual Show. Contact Cathy Lewis Tel 02 6732 1744.


February 9

 125th Annual Crookwell Show. Not quite the traditional Agricultural show - bands, Feral Utes, crafts, agro olympics and a grand parade. **CROOKWELL** Contact Mrs Ruth Collins Tel 02 4832 1839

February 15

 **DEADLINE** for listings in the March / April / May edition of ArtReach magazine. Listings are FREE! Email a brief description to rachael@regionalartsnsw.com.au or fax 02 9247 7829.

February 18 - April 5

 Art Impress 2002 - Ray Walsh House Community Gall. Tamworth City Gallery **TAMWORTH** Contact Brian Tel 02 67554459