



Having grown up in a family of photographers, I have spent most of my life with a camera in my hand, taking photographs when many of my friends were out playing or working. I have travelled around different parts of the country and tried my hand at landscape photography, but my pictures seemed to me to be typical and familiar. I knew I had the technical ability to handle difficult conditions but had never found the right subject to put myself to the test.

The flooding of Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre is considered a rare event. This is one of the natural wonders of the world—a place that has drawn artists like John Olsen, Tim Storrier and Fred Williams and inspired them to produce some of their most recognised and acclaimed paintings.

My own journey into Australia's interior led me on a five-year odyssey where I would witness the transformation of our deserts into a land exploding with life. A journey that not only changed my life, but also changed my



Above: Silcrete Island 2012 Aerial close up of salt formations, Kati Thanda 2013
Opposite: The combination of pink water and reflected sky join to make the water appear purple.

KATI THANDA

PHOTOGRAPHER PETER ELFES DESCRIBES AN
EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY



Above and opposite: The Tangerine Sea
Silcrete Island 2012

perception of what these vast areas of desert interior mean to me, ecologically, artistically and spiritually. From an artist's perspective, this experience was both challenging and liberating. I knew the only way I could break away from the conventions of landscape photography in this vast landscape was to take to the air. Doing so allowed me to see this seemingly empty terrain in a new way. The transformation of desert and salt lake was more like a giant multi-coloured kaleidoscope that stretched for miles.

Even during my first trip in May 2009, I realised that things were different. This was a landscape that defied convention and it was up to me to document it as artistically as possible. I threw everything I had at it, and my perception of the place continued to evolve, as did my approach and the way I represented it during every return trip.

Each corner of the hundreds of kilometres of coastline of this inland sea seems to have its own unique patterns. You can see these fractal like forms in Aboriginal art. It



almost always represents some part of nature and often in a topographical perspective. The small things and the infinite horizons which seem in contrast with each other, are often represented in a single Aboriginal painting.

Such infinite horizons constantly attract my attention and overwhelm my visual sense, but the observation of the small things in the desert seen from the air were even more fascinating. Just as in Aboriginal people's culture, their observation of the smaller details in nature has been the key to their survival, especially in such hostile environments.

By 2012, the water in the lake was beginning to recede and I thought the story had finally come to an end. I was wrong! The unprecedented four years of water in this inland sea had left behind what had become literally a

10,000 km² painted canvas... painted by nature. In 2013, on my last trip to the lake, the pictures I took were by far the most beautifully abstract of all. So much so that I am often asked by other artists who see them if they can paint them. I see this as a compliment of course, but at the same time, I cannot take credit for what nature has achieved—I am just a messenger of its beauty.

My hope is that my photographs convey nature's beauty and give all of us a greater appreciation for the significance of and the need to preserve this still wild ecological haven, so that future generations will be able to appreciate it as well.

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This page: Lake Eyre

Opposite: Siltcrete Island, 2012

The combination of pink water coloured by pink algae and reflected sky join to make the water appear purple.

