

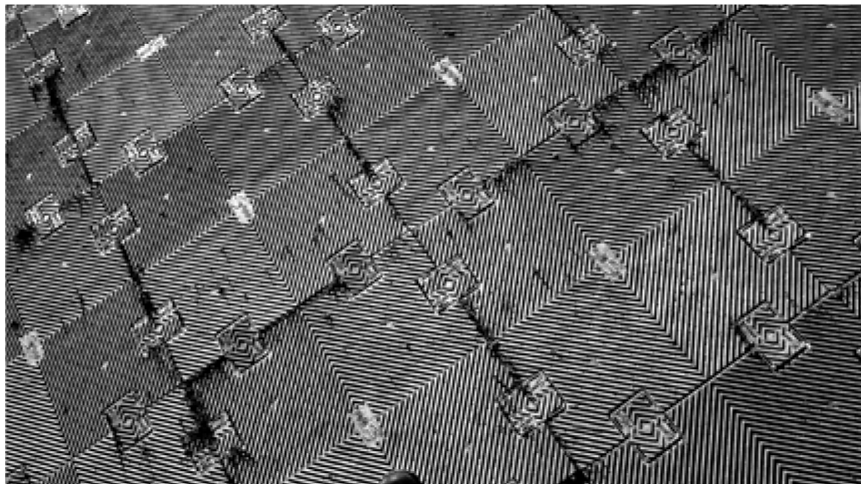
## Roy Ananda

The notion of an artist living and breathing their work is by now a familiar shorthand, denoting a level of passion, commitment, or immersion on the part of the practitioner. However, in the case of CJ Taylor, it is genuinely difficult to distinguish where his art practice ends, and the rest of his life begins. The studio visit that preceded and informed this piece of writing involved very little time in the workspace that abuts Taylor's home, being instead largely given over to a ramble through the magnificent bushland of Peramangk country where the artist resides—a locale that he would argue is the 'real' studio. The reciprocal nature of Taylor's relationship to this landscape is immediately apparent. As a volunteer firefighter, Taylor is keenly aware of the fragility and volatility of the Australian bush. He takes his role as caretaker of his property very seriously, weeding, planting, and monitoring its wildlife with assiduous attentiveness. Accordingly, the landscape gives back, informing the artist's practice and activism. This rigorous dedication to firsthand experience and primary sources underpins Taylor's contribution to *Neoteric*, in which elements of recent suites of work, specifically *Base Camp* and *This Little Paradise*, are brought into dialogue with one another.

While Taylor maintains a certain scepticism toward the notion of 'photography as truth', the gut-wrenching impact of *Base Camp* lies in its unflinching, documentarian approach to its subject, namely the devastating bushfires that ravaged Australia over the summer of 2019-2020. In between his firefighting duties in New South Wales, Taylor photographed the peripheries of what became known as 'Black Summer'. The fires themselves are not represented in the works; instead, Taylor's lens lingers on the quiet moments adjacent to the act of firefighting, such as views of the aftermath or the makeshift barracks of the work's title.

In contrast to *Base Camp*'s apocalyptic immediacy, *This Little Paradise* operates in a much more enigmatic register. Utilising the form of the diptych and triptych, Taylor photographs the personal effects of a certain South Australian surveyor-general of the nineteenth century—a nib, a wax seal and various chess pieces—and floats them in ambiguous, soft-focussed pictorial spaces. By way of their function and historical provenance, the objects become emblematic of a reductive, quantitative, and decidedly colonial sensibility, where time flows along a patriarchal lineage, and can be distilled into a familial seal, and the stroke of a pen dictates the arbitrary demarcation of territory. Indeed, perhaps this is the very nib used by William Light to subdivide Tarntanya into the city grid of Adelaide (itself reminiscent of the hierarchical, gridded milieu of the chessboard). In turn, these objects might be seen as relics of the early Anthropocene, brought to light, and ruefully examined in the wake of Black Summer and other by-products of the current climate crisis.

In hybridising these two previously discrete bodies of work, we also see Taylor's mercurial attitude to the 'objecthood' of the photographic artefact at play. His on-going preoccupation with what he terms 'elastic photography' has yielded outcomes that run the gamut from tintypes to stereoscopes to audio-inflected, augmented reality experiences. Taylor is as likely to conjure up an image that betrays no grain, pixelation or other trappings of process or artefact as he is to wrench a photograph from the wall, tearing and crumpling it to tangibly assert its object status. The restless curiosity that has driven Taylor's interrogation of the photographic medium over the past decade now seems shot through with a sense of urgency, born of the looming climate catastrophe. Under the auspices of *Neoteric*, Taylor consolidates these concerns into works that are lyrical and numinous in their execution, whilst simultaneously edifying and cautionary in their implications.



# CJ Taylor