

## Becky Beasley

P.A.N.O.R.A.M.A. 2010

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*"When the work was done, Muybridge retired to Kingston-on-Thames. Withdrawing from all contention, he serenely took up the British national pastime of gardening. The old man imported sago palms and a ginkgo tree from California, and planted them in his backyard. I am told that they still thrive. When he died, in 1904, he was constructing a little pond, in the shape of the Great Lakes of North America. I am tempted to call it a perfect life."*

Hollis Frampton,

*Eadweard Muybridge: Fragments of a Tesseract*

Frampton's line above is one in a suite of variations, which invariably close biographies of Muybridge: *At the time of his death, M. was digging a scale model replica of the Great Lakes in the garden of the house in which he lived at No. 2 Liverpool Road.* What sets each sentence apart is largely the choice of verb deployed by a writer: designing, planning, constructing, digging, and building. Those verbs cover the full range of a project from conception to production and presentation. I have had, on a few occasions in recent years, the pleasure and great privilege to share vicariously in Becky Beasley's enthusiasm, immersive research and passionate commitment to a project across the stages of its realisation. Beasley is very much a project-based artist and each phase of a project – from the research and reading to the design, execution and/or fabrication of a work – is attended to with an equal measure of intensity and import. P.A.N.O.R.A.M.A. encapsulates the strange and wonderful fruits of her year-long adventure in the archives tracing the origin of a myth, and musing on the late work, last things and places of Muybridge in Kingston.

Few contemporary artists are as deeply engaged with photography as Beasley, its histories, practices, techniques, materiality and variable status as both image and object. Following on previous work in black-and-white, P.A.N.O.R.A.M.A. is her first involving colour digital printing. The output consists first of twelve large digital colour prints of a fragmented 360° panorama taken in the back garden of what was Muybridge's final home in Kingston. These prints are roughly the same size as the mammoth 20 x 24 inch glass plates Muybridge used to make his 1878 San Francisco panorama and they also share its portrait format. The second is a sculptural expression of P.A.N.O.R.A.M.A. that comprises twelve A6 postcards presented on a card rack, which derive from the same images of Muybridge's garden coupled with a textual component drawn from the descriptions of each of the twelve portrait images in his 1878 San Francisco 360° panorama. Beasley has matched up identically the orientations of Muybridge's Panorama with those of his garden in Kingston. Importantly, this allows her to structure her own images as a circle with no beginning and no end. A crucial third element of the project is a vast cut linoleum floor in mossy green and charcoal black, on show this autumn in Antwerp and to be installed at the Stanley Picker

Gallery in Kingston this November, which echoes the mythical late last project of Muybridge in his garden. The inlay linoleum floor depicts a hieroglyphic reduction of the Great Lakes – the United States' 'third coast' – in flattened silhouette and conceptually condenses all the states of the verbs used to describe Muybridge's own Great Lakes project. The epic scale of both a life – that of Muybridge, indeed Western in its scale considering his vast movements and ambitions – and that of a continent is set first within the domestic scale of a Victorian back garden and then shifted onto the parameters of a gallery floor.

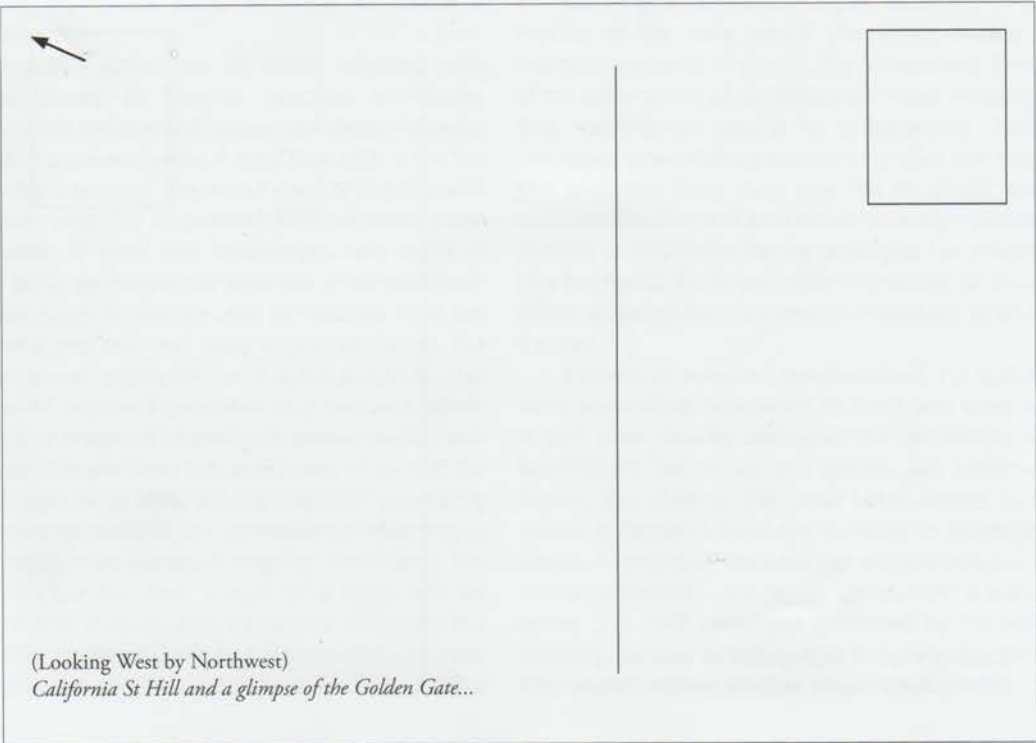
Beasley's aim here is not, as she says, "to animate or illustrate Eadweard Muybridge but to leave him dead still." I myself have come to appreciate P.A.N.O.R.A.M.A. as a homage that is literary in spirit given its intricate conceptual structure; something like a finely-tuned short story with a wonderfully mysterious gap at its centre. Through her research in the Kingston Museum, Beasley came into direct contact with Muybridge's extraordinary 360° San Francisco Panorama. The museum owns one of nine extant copies and on two occasions it was brought out for her to examine. A still unsurpassed technical and conceptual masterpiece, Muybridge constructed his panorama as a folding book in a brown leather slipcase and never meant to be seen in the round. As she puts it, "he undid the 'impressive' view which 'resolves' the image in a viewer's mind." With all its seventeen feet lay-out on a table nothing 'makes sense' spatially. One is presented with fragmented individual elements of reinvented and eccentric space – an impossible space – the folded space of a book. This reading of Muybridge's Panorama shaped Beasley's conception and making of her own, which she signals in the typographic individual elements of its title, the content and then in the form of the presentation of the postcards. "I was interested in the way that framing, so central to photography, becomes quite redundant when making a panorama, since one might frame the first shot, but from there one has to simply keep going to complete the circle and so does not have any real choice." Beasley decided to emphasise this by separating her images completely into fragments. Some are more 'interesting' or photogenic than others, although each is related to individually as an equivalent to the next.

Through its extended manifestations, P.A.N.O.R.A.M.A. is a vastly imaginative exploration of space and scale, which began in part when Beasley discovered the domesticity of Eadweard Muybridge's last house and garden and within a last great project. The scale of the Great Lakes project to that garden relates, in Beasley's mind and thinking, to Muybridge's life and travels. A specifically domestic but imaginatively vast relationship to scale is present – one which springs from a black hole at the centre of a 360° panorama generated by the position of the camera. That gap becomes a perfect metaphor for the mythic, magical and missing pond in Muybridge's garden.



(Looking West) *In the foreground the residences of D. D. Colton, Charles Crocker, and other prominent citizens*





(Looking West by Northwest)  
*California St Hill and a glimpse of the Golden Gate...*



(Looking Northwest) *Russian Hill; Mt. Tamalpais, Sausalito and Richardson Bay in the distance...*