Dirk HR Spennemann, trained as an archaeologist in Germany and Australia, specialises in documenting and managing cultural properties in Oceania and the Pacific–Rim Region. Dirk’s artistic output draws on his professional work by critiquing the present through the lens of the past, and by imagining a future against the backdrop of the present. Dirk teaches Cultural Heritage Management as an Associate Professor at Charles Sturt University in Albury, NSW.

Solo Exhibitions

2010  War on the Tundra. Impressions of the Kiska Battlefield
      Anchorage, Alaska

2009  eyes \ world \ hands. 366 days... 2 cameras...364 people
      Regional Art Gallery, Albury, NSW

2009  Tantalizing & Troubling Visions
      Images of Saipan and Tinian
      Saipan, Mariana Islands

2009  Echoes of the Past. German Settlement in the Riverina and South Australia
      Hahndorf Academy, Hahndorf, SA

2008-09 Echoes of the Past Images of German Settlement in the Riverina
      Albury LibraryMuseum, NSW
      Barossa Regional Gallery, Tanunda, SA
      Temora Rural Museum, NSW
      Museum of the Riverina, Wagga Wagga, NSW

1000 Prayers
War in the Pacific
Dirk HR Spennemann

Benalla Art Gallery
10 July - 15 August 2010
Dirk Spennemann, *1000 Prayers. War in the Pacific*

An Exhibition curated by Jacqui Durrant

On 6 July 1945, the United States’ B-29 bomber *Enola Gay* flew to Tinian in the Northern Mariana Islands, where it was armed with an atomic weapon destined for Hiroshima. The loading pit at North Field, abandoned since the end of WWII, was re-opened as a memorial in 2004. As the point of inception for the Hiroshima holocaust, it is not as well known as the epicentre of the explosion, the ‘A-dome’ located in the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park. Both places feature prominently in this exhibition, not only as sites associated with genocide and war, but in turn, as fields of remembrance.

*1000 Prayers* was born out of an acute and particular awareness of the past: a child of post-WWII Germany, Dirk Spennemann’s first profession was as an archaeologist of Pacific cultures. In the early 1990s, while working in the Marshall Islands—a former German colony turned Japanese territory, subsequently invaded by the US in WWII—he was charged with the task of locating and preserving historic sites. The Marshallese people have endured almost two centuries of colonialism, war, military occupation and nuclear testing. Spennemann found this past clearly inscribed upon the landscapes of the present.

The photographs in *1000 Prayers* express Spennemann’s continued interest in the way in which different sites are indelibly linked to the horrors of war, and how such places can be integral to maintaining memories—both individual and collective—of state sanctioned violence.

The idea of prayer is ever-present, suggesting that the act of remembering war can be experienced as a secular sacrament. By making a pilgrimage to a site such as the Atomic Bomb Memorial Mound, which contains the ashes of seventy thousand unidentified victims of the Hiroshima bomb, an unavoidable connection between the self and others’ suffering is made. Ritual acts, such as the placing of Flanders poppies alongside the names of the war dead at the Australian War Memorial, can also provide a temporal space in which to connect with the consequences of war.

Spennemann’s view of the world is anxious: at Rota in the Northern Mariana Islands, he notes with unease that the bell in the belfry of Santa Lourdes Catholic Church is really a bomb casing; in the Asakusa Temple in Tokyo, he finds that a motif similar to a swastika on an incense stick readily raises the spectre of Nazism and the Jewish Holocaust, despite its centuries-old role in Buddhist symbolism. A pit of empty bomb casings on the small Aleutian island of Kiska, where US forces subjected the Japanese to aerial bombardment in 1942, is remindful of mass graves. In these photographs, there is no complacency about the horrors of the past, and nor should there be for any of us.

Spennemann’s aim is partly of aesthetic beauty: many of his images are more softly spoken for having been photographed through a bi-convex glass viewfinder of a 1946 French Olbia Eikon. Nevertheless, he scans the landscape with an archaeologist’s eye: gathering fragments of the past to be marshalled as evidence of humanity’s seemingly endless capacity for violence. Fortunately, along the way, he also finds moments of reflection and commemoration. Every one of the thousands of paper cranes sent to the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park by school children from around the world signifies an individual who has devoted time not only to honouring the life of Sadako Sasaki (a young girl who lost her life to radiation sickness), but also to contemplating the unbearable costs of war. In this sense, these images are an expression of hope, and an ‘advocation’ for peace.

At a time when Australians are becoming increasingly inured to war, *1000 Prayers* asserts the value of individuals devoting time to meditating on the suffering of others who are remote from us in time and place, presenting the notion that each of us has a duty to offer up our ‘prayers’ for peace.

Jacqui Durrant, 2010