

MAKING CONTACT

Susan Gibb examines the work of Elger Esser showing at this year's Sydney Contemporary, where the German artist casts his eye and photographic lens on the Australian landscape.

Over the past few decades, Stuttgart-born, Düsseldorf-based artist **Elger Esser** has been crafting a finely-tuned photographic practice in which he focuses his lens on unpeopled landscapes to create large scale prints that, beautifully balanced in tone and composition, investigate the romantic spirit and the poetics of travel.

As part of Sydney Contemporary, Esser is showing work from his 2011 *Australian Journal* series, in which he casts his eye on the Australian landscape. Inspired to produce the series while visiting the country for his first exhibition at Dominik Mersch Gallery, Esser translates his sensibility for the European landscape to explore the natural variety of the New South Wales coastline and the structures that bare witness to European endeavours within it.

Speaking to Australia's historic points of European contact, Esser's chosen subjects also reflect his own relationship to this idea in a personal, contemporary sense. As Esser himself has said: "As I'm European, I don't feel I can do something on the outback for instance, as it's not mine, it's not from my culture [...] I was looking in Australia for something that tells me of Europe." Of an Australian audience's response to the work, gallery director **Dominik Mersch** says: "The audience loves Elger's subject: seascapes, wrecks, lighthouses, uninhabited beaches. With our show on Australian lighthouses and shipwrecks they've been even more mesmerised. It was a big deal to get him to work here, as he nowadays normally focuses on France and Italy. The Australian audience have very much appreciated this."

