

ROBERT OWEN
ENDINGS

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Pictures at the end of visuality

I cannot remember the last keystroke that I made on a typewriter. I have to reconstruct the wistful attempts that I made to rehabilitate the naïve technology against the patent superiority of the computer; and that way I can conjecture a date for my last true keystroke. But in effect, the swansong is forgotten and my memory is deaf to the last clack.

In a similar way, I cannot remember the last click of my camera or the final roll of film that I wound up and plucked from the stumpy spindle. These are truly unceremonious endings because, as ultimate actions, they were never intended to have the finality that they ended up with, and there was no knowledge of their ending at the time that they ended. It's just that something petered out or died - as if abandoning our presence - and very soon even slipped from memory.

There is always something that is last but not always something that means to be last. I fancy that when something is unintentionally at the end of a time, it innocently defines a kind of horizon for whatever comes after the last; and the vacuum that it leaves announces the next presence. And because there is a horizon, there is no last anymore, not in any tangible sense (or even in one's recollection) but just a kind of threshold beyond the last where there is portentously something else which is yet unknown.

When you first go into the gallery, Robert Owen's Endings look like bright abstract landscapes. They are in fact prints made from film stubs that Owen collected from 1968 to the 90s, when film began to come to an end for the bulk of photography. Most photographers would discard these useless bits of plastic, in the same way that we tend to throw out the little clips on processed bread for the children. But Owen kept them, because each one always marked an end. What would happen when you shine photographic light through the end rather than the middle?

In the Endings, we have a unique study in the phenomenology of the significant but inadvertent finale, the involuntary end of something which brings a threshold of visibility into alarming presence, a negative—in the sense of absence—which turns out to be positive. The Endings are a portrait of a photograph beyond the last photograph; and strangely this seems to presage the end of photography while simply representing the end of the photosensitive celluloid. The zones of colour on either side of an uneven horizon resonate with associations that the mind tries to deal with, such as romantic pictorial studies of the sublime. The works, though, are not really pictures but the end of pictures. They're about disorientation and wonder. You struggle to gain your bearings yet feel at ease in immersive ontological speculation. How does cast-off matter reach such a spiritual threshold?

Robert Nelson is Associate Dean, Monash Art & Design, and art critic for The Age.

Endings

Archival print on 310gsm Canson BFK Rives paper
1040 x 725 mm

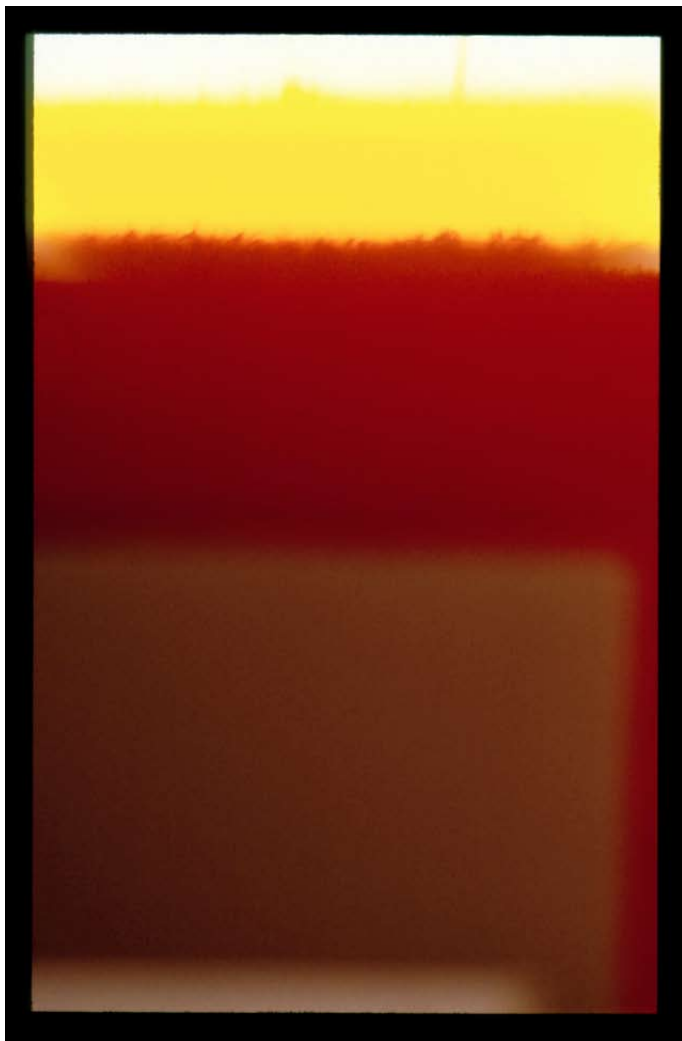
Edition of Seven 2009



Endings – Kodachrome II, No.37. 19/04/1968



Endings – Ektachrome EP, No.37. 16/10/1969



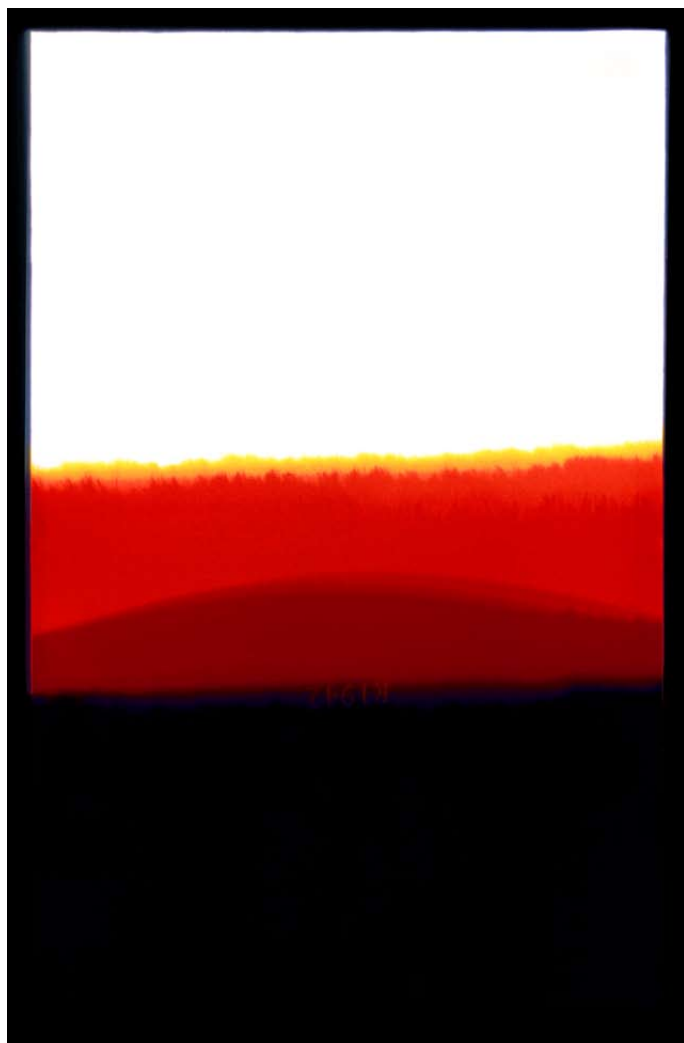
Endings (Rothko died today) – Kodachrome 64, No 21. 26/02/1970



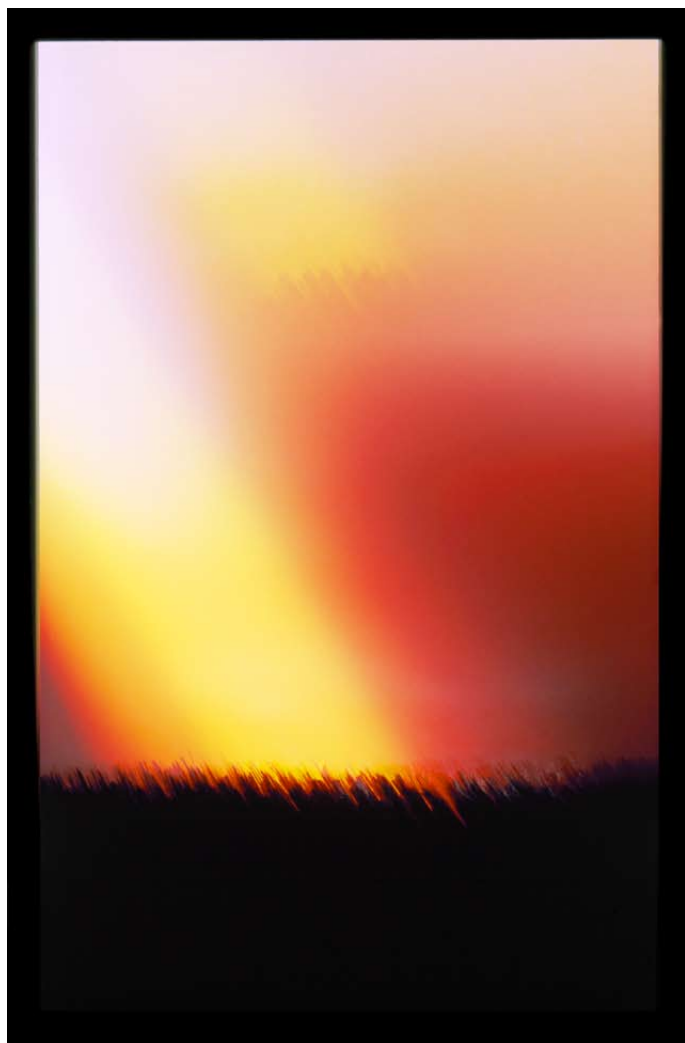
Endings – Kodachrome 64, No.0A. 17/07/1970



Endings — Kodachrome 5045, No.00. 13/01/1972



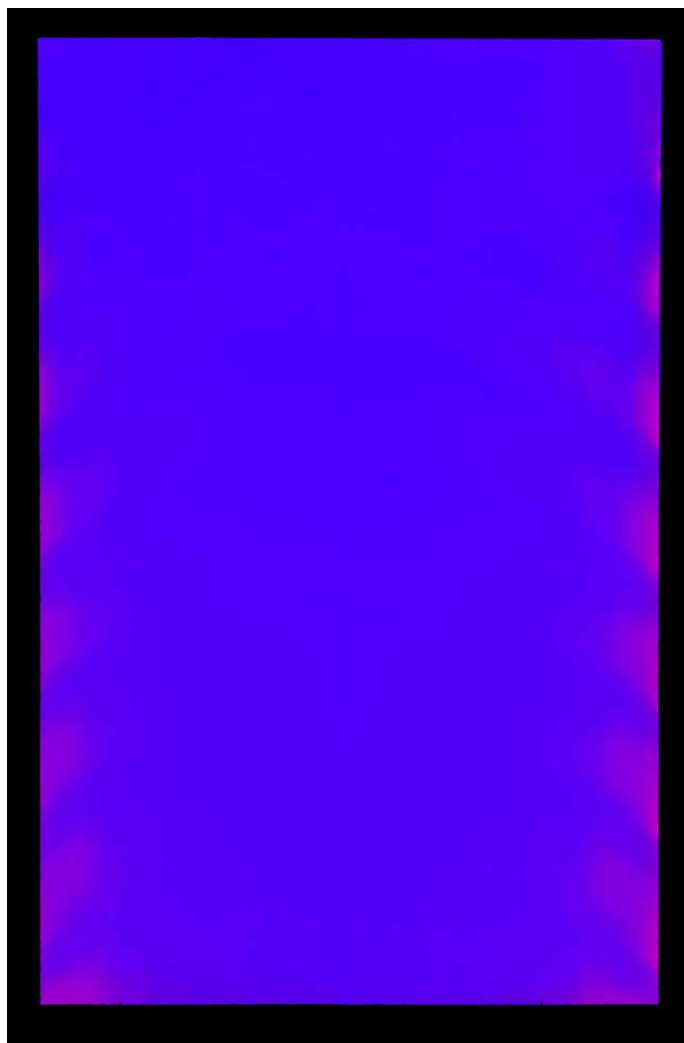
Endings – Kodachrome 64, No.00. 10/06/1975



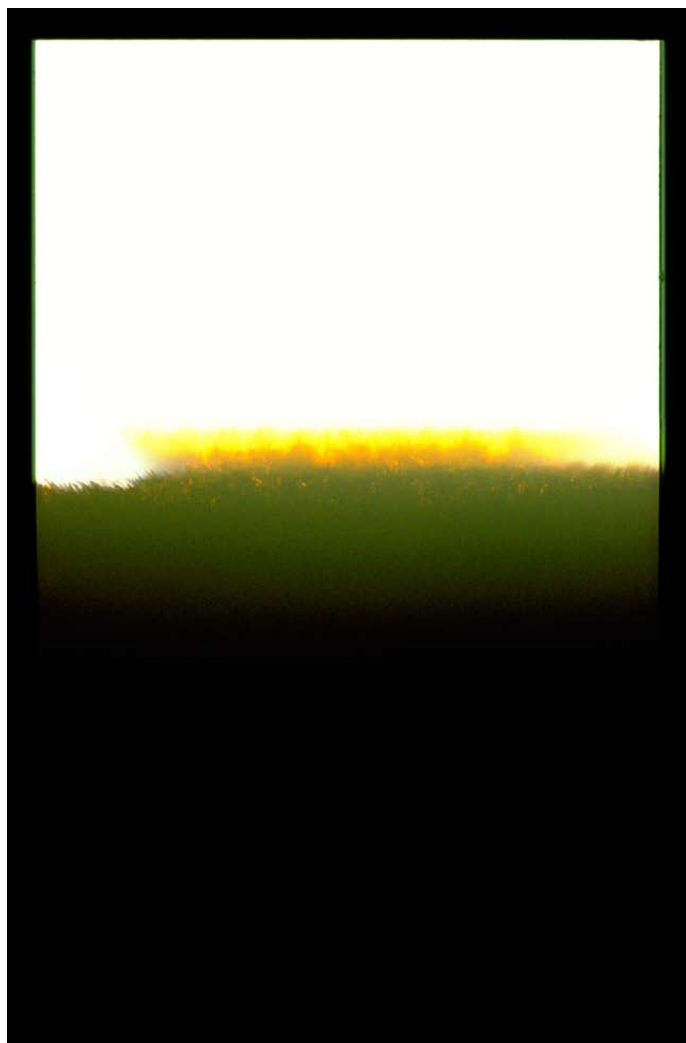
Endings – Kodachrome 64, No.37, 26/05/1978



Endings – Kodachrome 64, No.00A, 30/10/1978



Endings — Ektachrome E4, No.37. 21/08/1979



Endings – Ektachrome E4, No.01. 20/09/1982



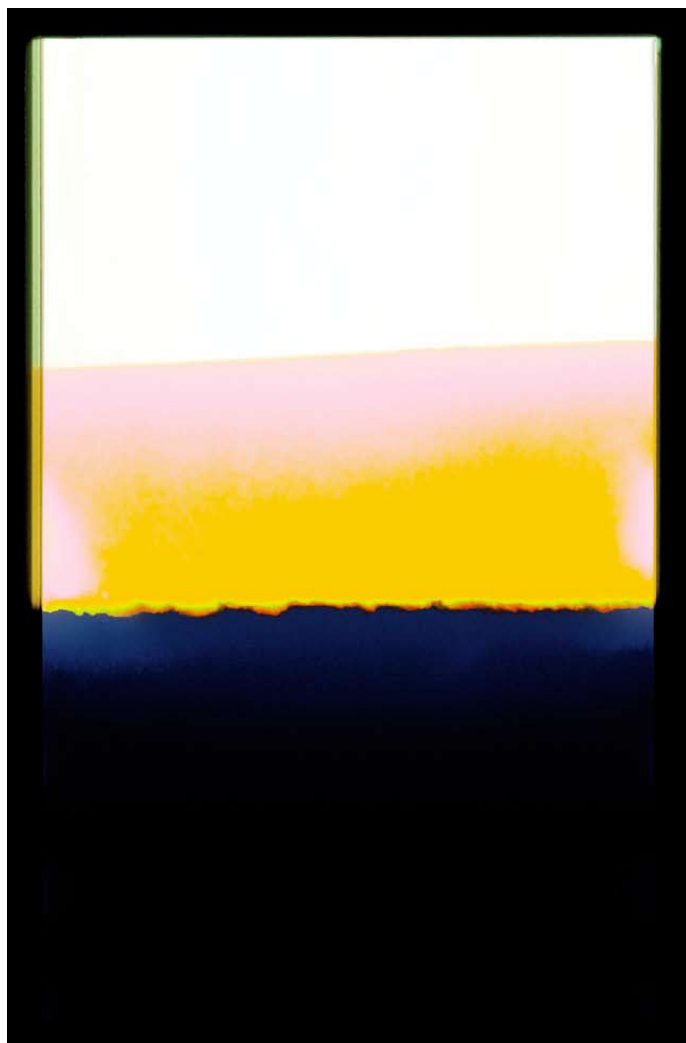
Endings – Kodachrome 64, No.36. 05/03/1985



Endings – Fujichrome, No.0A. 29/01/1987



Endings – Fujichrome, No.0A. 01/02/1988



Endings – Ektachrome, No.0A. 17/05/1990



Endings — Kodachrome 64, No.00, 22/07/1992



Endings – Kodachrome 64, No.37, 19/06/1995



Endings — Yellow — Kodak Safety, No.21, 30/11/1983

Robert Owen

Born in Sydney, now living in Melbourne, the Australia Council awarded Robert Owen the Emeritus Award in 2003. He has had over 35 solo and 60 group exhibitions both in Australia and overseas and represented Australia in the 38th Venice Biennale in 1978.

Owen has been exhibited in *Contemporary Australia: Optimism*, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane Queensland (2008); *Australia, Contemporary Non-Objective Art*, Gesellschaft Für Kunst und Gestaltung e.V., Bonn, Museum im Kulturspeicher, Würzburg and Kunsthalle Dominikanerkirche, Osnabrück, Germany (2008); *21st Century Modern*, 2006 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (2006); *A History of Happiness*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne (2002); *Buddha: Radiant Awakening*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (2001); *Sydney Spirit and Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (1996-97), *Geometric Abstraction in Australia 1941-1997*, University Art Museum, University of Queensland (1997), and *the text of light*, TarraWarra Museum of Art, Yarra Glen, Victoria (2004).

Publications include George Alexander, 'The Loaded Brush' Art Asia Pacific No. 52 March/April, 2007, pp. 46-47; Caroline Barnes, 'Robert Owen: A different kind of modern', Artlink, vol. 26, no.3 2006, pp. 40-45; Laura Murray Cree (ed.), *Twenty: Sherman Galleries 1986-2006*, Craftsman House, Melbourne, 2006; 'A short ride in a fast machine, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces 1985-2005', edited by Charlotte Day, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces in conjunction with Black Inc. Melbourne, 2005;

Victoria Lynn, 'Robert Owen', catalogue essay, 21st Century Modern 2006 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art; Victoria Lynn, 'Robert Owen', review, *Art & Australia* Vol. 42 No 3 Autumn 2005; Alex Selenitsch, 'Dark Night', catalogue essay, Sherman Galleries, Melbourne 2005; SallyCouacaud, 'Hidden Treasures' *Art & Australia* Vol. 42 Summer No 2, 2004, p. 281 and Alex Selenitsch, 'Jumping Dimensions', catalogue essay, ARC One Gallery, Melbourne 2004.

Survey exhibitions are *Between Shadow and Light – London Works 1966-1975* which was held at Monash University Gallery, Melbourne in 1999 and *Different Lights Cast Different Shadows, The 2nd Balnaves Foundation Sculpture Project*, held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney in 2004.

Robert Owen is represented in public and private collections worldwide including the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; British Museum, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Museum im Kulturspeicher Würzburg, Germany; Archivio Arti Contemporanee, Venice, Italy; Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris; National Gallery and Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, Greece; Puskin Museum of Fine Art, Moscow, Russia; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; National Institute of Fine Arts, Mexico City; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, India; Central Art Gallery, Beijing, China; National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, Japan; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Olympic Sculpture Park, Seoul, Korea.

Comprehensive CV and Bibliography available upon request.

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