

If anyone can make an urban white Australian fall in love with the desert, Nicolas Rothwell can. His magical 2003 book Wings of the Kite-Hawk tracked his personal odyssey through the outback. Another Country concentrates on the Northern Territory, from Darwin deep into the secret, sacred places of the desert.

Many of these pieces have been published before, mainly in the Australian: Rothwell is their northern correspondent. There are portraits – of healers and homeless teenagers, but principally of artists whose paintings make fortunes for dealers and investors. These men and women are worlds away from the art market, and Rothwell ponders the paradoxes arising from the civilised world’s insatiable hunger for these products of another dimension. There is a thoughtful essay on the problems of aboriginal art criticism. There are accounts of communities, the desolate and desperate as well as the successful showplaces. But Another Country approaches the sublime in the Epilogue, when Rothwell travels with friends to their Western Desert country, slowly learning to trust their knowledge of places they haven’t visited for decades and sharing with us his puzzlement, joy and grief. This is no report from an intellectually detached journalist but a deeply engaged, personal chronicle.