

It's all in the technique

Sarah Tomasetti: Surface of last scattering

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin.
Closes April 9, Tuesday to Friday 10am-5pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm.

Reviewer: **Sasha Grishin**

Sarah Tomasetti is a 45-year-old Melbourne-based artist who is having her first solo exhibition in Canberra. She is a romantic by temperament, sensibility and in the subjects she paints – clouds, expanses of drapery, mystic seascapes and visionary mountain scenes. She is attracted to moments of transition, where water meets the sky, where night meets day and light merges into dark. The title of her exhibition encourages us to seek out the origins of the universe in the cosmic past.

Part of the beauty and seduction of her art lies in her technique, where she reverts to traditional fresco painting and on a thin layer of intonaco (thin fresco ground), brushes on pigments, some with an oil base, others with wax. There is this quality of an antique, faded art object that carries within it the arbitrary patterns of the crazed plaster into which breathings of colour have gathered. There is a sense of temporality, where we are permitted to glimpse monumental snow-clad, mist-laden mountain peaks cast against the vastness of the heavens, yet the whole scene is offset by a myriad of hairline cracks to the surface somewhat eroding the permanence of the imagery.

This is more of an exhibition concerning a sensibility, rather than a more definable subject matter. Geographic



Main, *The Snowline*; below, *Snowscape*, both by Sarah Tomasetti.

specificity in some of the titles, including Glenmary Glacier and other sites on the South Island in New Zealand, are contrasted with more abstract conceptions, such as views of the infinite, future tense, and surface of last scattering of the light that emerged from the infant universe. The artist enjoys games with illusion and plays with hints and suggestions where the viewer is invited to peer into the fractured surfaces and become locked into a daydream state, one where grandeur, the sublime and magnificent are brought together into a personal microcosm. Ambiguity is a key to this mood game where at any single given moment we can never be certain if the object is solid or can turn to vapour and melt into the thin air.

At a time when so many artists are lost for technique, or to put it more bluntly, after their art school training still simply cannot paint with technical competence, Sarah Tomasetti is a consummate technician. She takes pride in the well-crafted, unusual art object that has all of the connotations of an old master with echoes of the frescos of the Renaissance, but still remains firmly entrenched in the present.

