

# drifting back – SOPHIA SZILAGYI

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Catalogue essay for [Sophia Szilagyi's](#) exhibition *drifting back*, 9th October – 1st November 2015,  
[Port Jackson Press Australia](#)

*“The horizon is not a straight line, but a segment of a great arc.”* – Hiroshi Sugimoto

This fragmented arc has long been present in the digital prints of Sophia Szilagyi. Contained by the edges of the picture plane, occasionally interrupted or thrown off kilter, the infinitude implied by the slow curve of the horizon is a leading feature in some of Szilagyi's most memorable works.



Sophia Szilagyi, *that fine edge*, 2015, digital pigment ink on rag paper, edition of 6, 55 x 80.7 cm

As a pictorial device, the horizon line draws the viewer deep into the receding space within an image. This is powerfully demonstrated in *almost loneliness – moonlight* from her new exhibition, *drifting back* at Port Jackson Press Australia. Here the eye travels from the wet sand in the foreground, across the cold, moonlit white wash to the irregular horizon, and up toward the turbulent clouds above. The lofty perspective and evocation of vast space combine for a thrilling result, and continue the artist's romantic conception of nature as a mirror for dramatic human emotions.



Sophia Szilagyi, *almost loneliness moonlight*, 2015, digital pigment ink on rag paper, edition of 10, 172.5 x 118 cm

A gentler mood exists in *shifting*, which again sees the artist make a feature of big skies and open spaces. Yet behind the tall grass in the foreground a mist creeps into the centre of this image, as fog would naturally gather in a valley. This atmospheric vapour becomes a prominent feature in other works, where it rises in veils to consume the landscape in a diffused light. Sometimes the horizon line is obliterated completely, destabilising a clear reading of the image.



Sophia Szilagyi, *shifting*, 2015, digital pigment ink on rag paper, edition of 10, 65 x 55 cm

In some ways this treatment of light reverses its inherent function. Whereas usually light reveals, in works such as *held* and *exposure II* it becomes caught in smoky atmospherics that serve to obfuscate the scene. Previously Szilagyi employed darkness in this manner, cultivating an unsettling, ominous quality for which her work is well known. In these earlier pieces, velvety blacks threaten to envelop the landscape imagery. Yet in this current series, darkness has largely been replaced by luminous vapours. Orbs of light pierce these milky veils of atmosphere, radiating pearlescent hues and generating an overall tonal warmth.



Sophia Szilagyí, *yellow noise*, 2015, digital pigment ink on rag paper, edition of 15, 33 x 36 cm

There is a slippery quality to these images that encourages close inspection. Within each print certain areas stand out in sharp focus, with individual leaves or blades of grass clearly delineated. While other areas within the same scene are swallowed up by that ethereal mist. In *held* and *exposure II*, it is as though a layer of glass separates the viewer from the view, with leaves and marks reflected on this invented surface within the picture plane.



Sophia Szilagyí, *exposure II*, 2015, digital pigment ink on rag paper, edition of 10, 40 x 40 cm

Through creating such layered optical effects, Szilagyí's works shift between clarity and ambiguity, certainty and doubt in a way that mimics the unstable nature of memories. Her imagery has long been informed by the internalized experience of memory and emotion, using nature as a vehicle to express this hidden terrain. In each image the artist fuses numerous photographs taken of various locations, manipulating them to convey a fleeting thought or mood. Her technique, while digital, is almost painterly in the level of rendering employed to create the rich and layered aesthetic depth present in her work. Through this methodology Szilagyí creates true mindscapes of the imagination, using the natural world as a starting point to invent uncharted territory, while disrupting the documentary 'truth' associated with photography.



Sophia Szilagyi, *tender*, 2015, digital pigment ink on rag paper, edition of 10, 61 x 84 cm

Of this world, yet otherworldly, this new series of prints reveals a visible shift towards a lighter, gentler and roomier conception of the universe. While the unsettling darkness still exists, it is uplifting to view Szilagyi's fictional realms filtered through a flood of light and colour.

**Marguerite Brown**



Sophia Szilagy, *held*, 2015, digital pigment ink on rag paper, edition of 15, 40 x 44 cm