

# Intricate layers of radiant detail

Sasha Grishin

**DIANNE Fogwell: *Transient***  
Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street,  
Deakin. Closes November 22.

Dianne Fogwell is a local Canberra legend in printmaking circles.

She spent many years teaching at the Canberra School of Art, she has been a founder or co-founder of a number of print studios, has worked as a master printer while professionally editing prints for other artists and, throughout, has maintained her own art practice that has mainly focused on prints and artists' books.

Now aged in her early 60s, she has entered her golden years as a serious obsessive artist producing some of her best work to date. This is a mature and distilled exhibition where Fogwell with her impressive technical skillset examines the local environment - especially the trees and the birdlife - as something of a microcosm for the broader global ecology.

Fogwell has always been a "decorative artist", a description that a couple of decades ago would be like the kiss of death. Contemporary art was meant to be austere, conceptually driven and devoid of extraneous and ornamental details.

Today, in a much more pluralistic art scene, there is room for complex art with encrustations of patterned surfaces and glittering effects.

Most of the prints at this exhibition are built up on beautifully intricate surface patterns, the trees, birds and the foliage have a mesmerising degree of detail and many of the surfaces are sprinkled with gold dust and pearlescent dust to create complex sparkling surfaces and textures and, at times, evoke a three-dimensional effect.

Thank God that we are free of the COVID-enforced online experience of art, as these prints need to be seen in the flesh to get any appreciation of their multi-tiered complexity.

Although this is an exhibition exclusively made up of prints, the detail of technique



A Dianne Fogwell linocut (detail) titled *Half light*, on show at Beaver Galleries.

has meant that all of the polychrome images are unique impressions and only the black-and-white prints appear in a small edition of five copies.

Although Fogwell prides herself with a working knowledge of the broad spectrum of printmaking techniques, this exhibition is restricted to relief prints, in particular, to linocuts. The artist frequently creates a carved matrix of a particular form or compositional element that she can then introduce in various combinations into several prints. It is a composite way of building up compositions and a process where you can superimpose layers to create thick, rich surfaces.

The main theme of this exhibition is the

experience of the bushfires in Canberra last summer. In her exhibition note Fogwell writes, "The haze and unburnt particles that laid a blanket of smoke over Canberra were the ghostly indicators of the immense devastation and turmoil ... These elements made me contemplate the strength and fragility of the materials I use and acknowledge the irony of making an image about the natural enemy of works on paper."

The print that possibly best captures the strange ghost-like atmosphere that many of us experienced is "Half light", a linocut a bit over a metre high.

The landscape appears almost submerged in an eerie light that blankets the

trees silhouetted against the background. Superimposed over the scene are five birds in various states of flight, while our attention is drawn to the luminous ash white ground in the foreground. Light ripples through the print, evoking a mood of pathos.

There is a solemn majesty in the black-and-white intricate linocuts such as Specimen D1 - Illawarra Highway where we are presented with a very detailed and exacting rendition of one of the threatened species potentially facing the flames.

Fogwell's *Transient* is a sparkling and radiant exhibition that addresses the sombre threat facing Canberra in particular and the world in general.