

Ethereal landscapes haunting and mysterious

Sasha Grishin

SOPHIA Szilagyi's photographically derived digital prints, with their romantic sensibility and a brooding, slightly mysterious and slightly nostalgic mood, have become a frequent fixture at exhibitions in this gallery.

At a time when many of us have been cooped up in our quarters for months, even the title of the exhibition - *A walk in the gardens* - promises welcome relief. The gardens in question, the Sydney Botanical Gardens and Musk Cottage on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, have been interrogated by the artist's camera, then manipulated and transformed and presented as striking prints on good quality rag paper.

If I recall correctly, in the earliest exhibition of this artist's work at this gallery about a decade ago, the

WHERE TO SEE IT

■ Sophia Szilagyi: *A walk in the gardens*. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Tuesday to Sunday, 10am to 5pm, until August 9, 2020.

editions of prints were about 20 copies, now they have shrunk to about six or seven. This is possibly an indicator of the new economic reality that faces most working artists today.

The prints from the Sydney gardens series are largely monochromatic with a love of contrasting textures and hollowed-out spaces in which mysterious elements seem to appear and collide. Some of the finest of these, including *Before dark IV* and *Before dark XI*, have a vertical portrait format and an intricate intensity.

Dusk is a most wonderful time of day, when the dying light seems to be precious

and caresses the limbs of the trees, imbuing them with a sensuality tinged with mystery. There is much that is seen with the eye, but even more that is guessed at or felt through the imagination and, as viewers, we appear to enter the created scenes as if in a dream-like state.

Szilagyi enjoys constructing her compositions with dark elements in the foreground frequently placed against the light background of the sky, creating a sort of tracery effect.

She is a very deliberate artist who takes a large number of source photographs that she layers in Photoshop, altering focus and blurriness,



Sophia Szilagyi, *Into my own*. Picture: Supplied

ness, tone and colour. When she has achieved the desired balance that successfully evokes her feeling of the place, the digital image is then taken to a professional printer and printed with pigment ink on good quality archival rag paper.

The Musk Cottage prints, including *Into my own* (with the illusion of a fugitive, ghost-like figure) and the

monumental print *Scrub* that measures 106 centimetres by 250 centimetres, generally favour the horizontal landscape format and exploit a pastel-like palette.

In these prints, there is a layering of imagery creating a multi-tiered reality, where we, as viewers, remain uncertain as to what exists in the real world captured by the camera and what is

a projection of our or the artist's imagination.

One could say that most of Szilagyi's digital prints could be considered as self-portraits - or images of self - projected into the landscape.

They are slightly haunting, ethereal images of landscapes that at the same time appear tangible and real as well as being imaginary and created by the artist. She appears to embrace an irrational aspect of romanticism where nature is not something that simply exists, but something that can be imagined and occupied by mysterious forces.

Szilagyi's invitation for us to take a walk in the gardens is also an invitation for us to enter her digital prints and to inhabit with our imaginations a multi-layered, encoded dreamscape in which phantoms and fairies may dwell.