

Art review **Sasha Grishin**

## Nesting impulses

**A**lthough born in Adelaide, Sue Lovegrove for many decades has been a Canberra-based artist well known to Canberra art audiences through her frequent exhibitions, initially with Helen Maxwell and more recently at the Beaver Galleries.

For the past decade she has been working as a professional full-time artist and has relocated to Tasmania.

In temperament she is a Romantic, one preoccupied with nature and the artist's personal responses to the natural environment.

She also appears to be a keen amateur natural scientist and a "tree hugger", who has been artist-in-residence in numerous generally remote locations, where in each instance she has allowed the environment to flow through her and into her art.

If in her last exhibition at this gallery she

**Sue Lovegrove:**  
*Nest.* Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Tuesday to Friday 10am-5pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm. Closes July 8.

was primarily concerned with the native grasses of Tasmania and the patterns which they made, here her gaze once more travels upwards, looking at the sky and trying to capture the shape of the wind and the cloudscape.

The "nest", the main theme in this exhibition, is more of a metaphor than a



literal image. The nest is a microcosm where many different elements are brought together to comment on whole environment.

Lovegrove has devised a very effective artistic strategy where pointed, spiky forms are silhouetted on the surface, like haptic elements in a painting, and these are suspended against a closely worked endless space. She appears to work in an almost miniaturist technique in acrylic and gouache, obviously employing a very small brush, to build up a finely differentiated

background space. As in Australian Indigenous art she appears concerned not only with the surface pattern and the background colour, but also in the space between the two.

In her major paintings in this exhibition, including *Nest No. 538*, as well as in *Nest No. 539*, there is a certain ambiguity and tension between these floating, tactile brittle forms in black and the great expanse of nuanced background colour masses richly diluted with white. The backgrounds are highly worked, textured and in a rich but subdued palette. When you look into one of her paintings there is that contemplative and meditative element present, where the artist invites you to lose yourself in her carefully crafted infinity.

If there is a criticism of the work, it is that she feels she needs to control all of the elements in her painting, rather than occasionally surrendering to the medium and accommodating the element of chance.

As an artist she seems to embrace the concept of chaos, rather than practice of chaos as a path to give nature itself a voice in her art practice. Sue Lovegrove is a committed environmentalist and a serious artist who is in the process of creating a formidable body of work.



**Meditative element:** (From the top) detail from *Nest No. 538* and *A long walk, Skullbone Plains, Tasmania No. 14*, both by Sue Lovegrove.