

Conveying qualities of Australia's High Country

Review

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Holly Grace: Belonging - a landscape memoir. Beaver Galleries. Until April 11, 2021.

Holly Grace has conceived this exhibition as a story of a place and its inhabitants.

It continues a theme in the artist's work concerning her deep connection with the past and present of the Australian High Country - not only its distinctive landscape but with the people who are a part of its history.

Evoking the atmospheric mood of old photos and daguerreotypes, light becomes a device to illuminate and reflect the images on the large glass vessels and other objects.

Grace uses glass as an artist would use a canvas.

The three-dimensional quality of the works is enhanced by light that brings an added spatial dimension and provides a continual change of mood and atmosphere.

A number of small paintings in ornamented gold frames (for example, *Memoir III-Four Mile*), are arranged in the style of the 19th century; they reimagine the world of the early settlers.

Their subject is the landscape etched into

the glass in tracteries of golden branches.

Other domestic objects associated with European settlement - bottles, billycans and frying pans - are emblematic of a frugal existence.

Grace inscribes these objects made in blown glass with imagery taken from journals, letters or photographs and interposed with the ever present landscape of tall trees against open skies.

In *The Wedding Ring-Red Robin Mine* textual imagery on the billy can is reflected onto the wall behind the work reminiscent of old lantern shows.

In *Good Friday 1939* bottles and billy cans are diffused with a dark red glow suggestive of the bushfire that ravaged the area in that year.

The four frying pans (*Whealers Hut*) are almost believably real but are actually glass replicas painted with rich enamelled imagery and hiding gold leaf interiors.

Eastern Bentwin bats, cicadas, Bogong moths and Alpine Darner dragonflies are either modelled in glass or appear as small images flying across the landscape.

Isolated spatially from the depiction of the landscape, they seem fragile and poignant - a reminder perhaps that their existence is problematic.



Holly Grace, *Into the Clouds I/II*. Picture: Supplied

Interesting as these works are in creating an atmospheric and theatrical context for the artist's inspirational "walk" through the Australian high country, the starring role in the exhibition must be given to the series of open glass vessels.

In these works the artist's creative imagination is freed from the more pictorial imagery of her other works based on historical

photographs and objects.

This freedom allows the artist to work not only on a larger glass "canvas" but to fully express her poetic imagination to conceive in these works a more atmospheric, poetic and mystical evocation of the landscape.

Into the Clouds I, *Into the Clouds II* and *The Blue Hour* are not only outstanding works but are a reflection of a very moving and romantic vision.

In both the *Clouds* series, tree branches are etched sharply against a softly coloured background.

The viewer becomes drawn into a wintery world of tumultuous cloud filled skies that change with the light - a light that so gracefully traces a changing path across the glass surface.

In *The Blue Hour* - traditionally a romantic time of day - the soft pink of sunset is starting to colour the evening sky.

These works are a statement by the artist about her personal relationship with the High Country of Australia. She successfully communicates its unique and significant qualities - its strength but also its fragility.

In this exhibition Holly Grace has given us a vision of this special place that enables us not only to appreciate its beauty but to see it in a new and significant light.