

Enchanting and haunting beauty

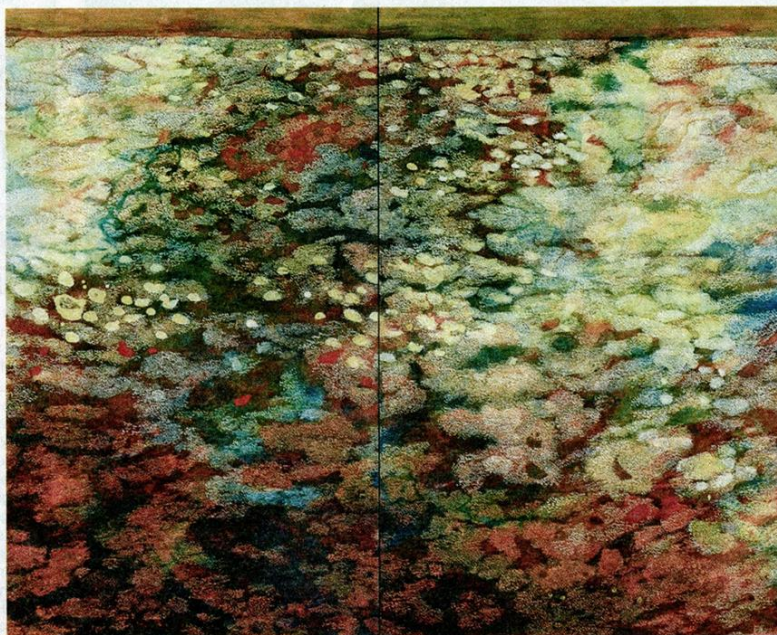
Review

Sasha Grishin

Sue Lovegrove: Waterholes and wetlands. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until April 11, 2021.

The "voice of water" has long been an obsession for the Tasmanian-based artist Sue Lovegrove. Unlike the historical experience of the impressionist artists of a century ago, where they would travel to the fringes of the big cities to paint landscapes, explore the waterways and their gay social life or frolic in the plein air painting camps, Lovegrove belongs to the generation of artists for whom the landscape is an immersive experience. The land is something that the artist explores with the intellect of a scientist and embraces with the passion of a lover.

Lovegrove is a deliciously obsessive artist, one who will turn to the exploration of the wind, grass, lichen or, in this case, pools of water, and explore their dynamics and physical and metaphysical existence. Not only does she explore the minutiae of the elements of nature, but examines its molecular structure, the patterns of the breath of wind on the rippling surface and the growing plants on and around the water. Over the decades she has devised a miniaturist technique, not only working with very fine brushes capturing an infinite amount of detail, but



Sue Lovegrove, No 563 in Waterholes and wetlands. Picture: Supplied

also drawing on different traditions of visualisation.

Unlike the miniaturist painter who works with an "innocent eye" to develop a very detailed version of naturalism, Lovegrove has devoted many years of her life to the study of Australian Central Desert painting, Persian miniatures, the traditions of botanical illustration as well as mainstream western academic painting.

After more than 30 years of experience of painting with more than 25 solo shows and dozens of awards and residencies to her name, she has developed her detailed mimetic style that entertains a considerable amount of lyricism and romantic flights of fancy.

Lovegrove is one of few contemporary Australian painters of whom I am aware whose works evoke

a sound response from the viewer and an immersive contemplative experience. Titles to her paintings are deliberately unhelpful in providing an entry point and seem to draw on some arcane knowledge, like some of my favourites in this show: *No 9.38*, *No 563* and *No 12.1*. We are told nothing as to the location of the waterholes and wetlands that are depicted and realise

that they may range from remote locations in Tasmania through to central and northern Australia.

This may suggest that for the artist it is not important for the viewer to know the location of the shimmering expanse of reeds and water, with the mysterious glowing white ghostly life forces on the surface and clusters of dark mysterious growth and the luminous foliage on the

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far shore. It is not a photographic reality that this artist conveys, nor does she draw on the toolkit of the photorealist painters - it is a moving, shimmering vision that murmurs as you approach and enter it. The small blotches and fine strokes remind you that you are observing a painting of an expanse of moving water or a crystal clear waterhole teeming with life - an interpretation made by the human and not the mechanical eye.

The artist comments on this series of work, "the fragility and fleeting nature of life sustained by these small unassuming bodies of water - the constantly shifting light patterns, the melancholy darkness and the movement of wind imprinting on the surface".

In Greek mythology, the beautiful Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection until he pined away and became a flower. Lovegrove has looked into the pool of water and has discovered an enchanting and haunting beauty which she shares.