

# Visual arts

Andrew Harper



## Remembering a jewel

*THE INVISIBLE LAKE, by Sue Lovegrove, at the Bett Gallery, Hobart  
Until September 24; Price range: \$1900-\$12,500*

**T**he topic of Lake Pedder as a focus for art is a rich one for Tasmanian artists, and a volatile one. The campaign to prevent the damming of the lake was one of the earliest environmental campaigns, and it resulted in the birth of what is now understood to be the world's first green political party, the United Tasmania Group. The campaign ultimately attracted international attention.

Although the damming occurred, Pedder remains a powerful symbol for the environmental movement, and there exists a campaign to restore the natural state of the lake by removing the dams – after all, the geography is still there, beneath the water.

It's a strange and poetic idea: beneath the lake of now, there is a lake of then, and there's a possibility that there is a lake that will be. This complex notion of time, loss and hope is where Sue Lovegrove is focusing this collection of images, and why she collectively calls it the invisible lake. It's

quite a concept for work that is clearly landscape art – this is about a landscape that cannot be seen, but is powerfully present.

This is a strange concept, but one that is deeply worthy of investigation: it speaks of the preciousness of a place, and the importance of memory. Time, as a concept, is rolled into the work as well, and this is the task Lovegrove gave herself – to paint memory and time and to do so by working with a lost space that is part of a political and culture narrative that has grown massively in scale over the half century since the then premier Eric Reece supported the creation of the dams and the drowning of the lake.

Essentially, there's a lot there to contend with, and it may be suggested that Lovegrove set herself quite a task when she embarked on this project. The question then to ask is – was she successful? Did she manage to find a way to infuse her paintings with these complex notions?

The play of light and colour Lovegrove has captured in her art here is quite

intoxicating. The work is shimmering, ghostly and infused with an uncanny sensibility that manages to invoke imagery that appears to glow through a bright, opaque fog that could be understood as a symbolic reaching through time to pluck a vision of the lost environs.

Lovegrove uses separate panels within one work to create separation while reminding us that these are works of art, and that what we are seeing is more than an image of wilderness, although that wilderness is there. There are images that could be roots, maps of river systems, even veins in a body.

Lovegrove reaches for the sublime in this collection, but she also mourns a loss and gestures to impermanence and the possibilities of change. She captures beautiful light, but she also uses that to say something about the loss of a place, and the crucial work of memory. The complex longing that underpins the work here makes for a superb show by an accomplished artist.