

# Meditations on life's transience

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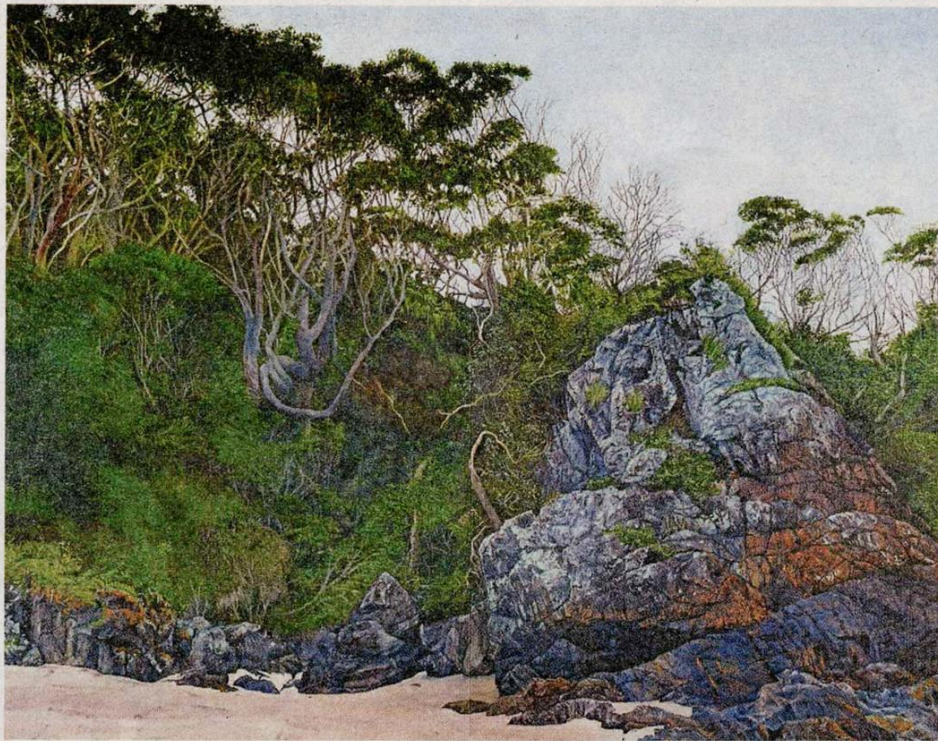
THERE is always a danger for an artist to peak too early and then play catch-up for years to come.

The Canberra painter Elisabeth Kruger is now aged in her late 60s, but she found early recognition at the age of 34 when she was awarded the Moët and Chandon Fellowship for her painting *The last of the cool skies*. The prize carried a purse of \$50,000 together with a fellowship and residency in Europe and converted the career of an emerging artist, primarily known as a printmaker and quiltmaker, into a painter with a national reputation. Prices for her paintings were quickly inflated through exhibitions in Sydney.

Over the subsequent 34 years her art has matured, her intricate technique of working with oil glazes has become increasingly refined and her subject matter has moved away from flights of romantic fantasy to become more grounded in observable nature. About a dozen years ago, the Drill Hall Gallery organised a limited but worthwhile survey show of her work that suggested undeniable development as well as a certain stagnation.

When Kruger's art is viewed holistically, the roses and garden produce from her own backyard and the seascapes and scenes of coastal bushland evoke something moody and

beautifully lyrical about her oeuvre coupled with associations with romantic classical music and meditations on the transience of life. The use of roundel shapes in about half of the paintings in this exhibition, frequently with a tracery of line and densely packed masses, does suggest parallels with tapestries and quilts and their strong sense of tactility.



The strongest painting in Elisabeth Kruger's latest exhibition is *Crust*, a large diptych. Pictures supplied

The strongest painting in the exhibition is *Crust*, a large diptych measuring 122 centimetres by 184 centimetres, where rising from a sandy foreshore is a craggy rocky outcrop covered with lichen with luxurious spindly vegetation behind it.

Kruger writes of this series of paintings: "Greys of bark and stone, rust and eau de nil lichens, bright dairy-farm greens and deep and

bright blues of sea and sky. Everywhere sparkling glints of sunshine and surf white foam. The clear echoing birdcalls can only come from there. Not here, where its more sulphur crested, black and white and dry. Everything changes though, and the coast is growing into the future."

*Crust* evokes the quality of something ancient while at the same time bursting

with fecundity, the twisting form of the foliage may appear anthropomorphic and involved in some sort of dance silhouetted against a radiating blue sky.

The shape of Kruger's canvases is an important ingredient in her thinking as an artist. The roundels are a form of circular perfection where everything is enclosed with a silence and there is no beginning or end to the

## EXHIBITION DETAILS

Elisabeth Kruger: There

■ Beaver Galleries. Until April 8. S  
■ See: [beavergalleries.com.au](http://beavergalleries.com.au)

composition, but a cyclical repetition.

The remarkably effective canvas *Wind twisted* is a long narrow painting, 41 centimetres by 153 centimetres, where the shape of the canvas suggests something of a wind tunnel within which the trees are shown twisted into agonised sinewy forms. All the elements of the composition, together with the finely worked oil glazing technique, are employed to create this image of nature blown into fantastic forms.

In the curiously titled painting *Uptumble*, a narrow vertical format has been adopted, enhancing the idea of great boulders as if tumbling from the sky and in their path crushing the trees and other vegetation. There is a dramatic vertical motion that serves as the main compositional element in the structure of this painting.

Kruger is an interesting, thinking artist whose paintings of our environment hint at a rapidly changing reality that denotes both the passage of time and the impact of climate change.