

Water works invite contemplation

Visual art

Sasha Grishin

Sue Lovegrove: *Slow Water*, Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until May 27. beavergalleries.com.au.

Sue Lovegrove is a dedicated and committed artist - obsessive and completely focused on her work.

To employ an unfashionable word, she is an "authentic artist", one who lives her art and pushes her theories of observation and art making through to an extreme, especially since she abandoned her teaching commitments a few years ago and has focused exclusively on studio practice.

One of Lovegrove's lasting obsessions has been with water, for at least half a dozen years, and this is the focus of her present exhibition, *Slow Water*.

She is looking deeply and intensely into the lakes of Tasmania, especially those located in the south-west of that state, including Lake Promontory in the Western Arthur Traverse.

In some of her earlier exhibitions that have dealt with water, the artist contextualised the scene and would usually include the surrounding vegetation and topography to provide an easy entry point into the work.

Here, in most instances, we are presented with a horizontal, beautifully observed slab of water exactly recorded with the artist's miniaturist technique of tiny brushstrokes.

These are precise "portraits" of expanses of still or slow water where we experience the reflections on the surface, sense the effects of a breeze passing over a lake and feel both the depth and surface of the water being portrayed.

Another obsessive artist, Leonardo da Vinci, observed some 500 years ago, "Water is the vehicle of nature".

Water was a theme that ran throughout his oeuvre and was the subject of numerous drawings from 1473 through to 1508-11.

He wanted to understand and categorise the movement of water and devised five kinds of water movement.



Sue Lovegrove, *Slow Water*, No 596 (detail).

He celebrated, in his words, "beautiful spectacles of rippling water" and with his typically empirical bent of mind concluded, "beautiful movements which result from one element [air] penetrating another [water]".

Lovegrove arrives at her revelation when she notes: "There is an inherent abstraction in the mesmerising patterns of light and shadow that play out on the surface in a constant state of flux and transience..."

If Leonardo wanted to discover the underlying principles of how air and water mixed to create the mighty spectacle, Lovegrove is more concerned with recording the various facets of this spectacle.

One of her most accomplished paintings

in this exhibition, *Slow Water*, No 596, executed in acrylic and ink on aluminium composite panel and arranged as a triptych that stretches for almost two metres, presents a striking and absorbing vision of water with its subtle yet powerful chromatic richness.

There is an element of mystery about the work, where, once all references to the tangible world have been removed, the abstracted vision opens to a metaphysical reading.

The artist writes about this series of work: "I think of the surface of water as a threshold space, a place of liminality, an intermediate or transitional space between the known and unknown, between the cacophonous

sounds of life above and the imperceptible sounds below...."

"These paintings are about a state of mind - a way of being in and within a landscape"

If still waters run deep, in Lovegrove's work, slow waters hint at a transitional space between various states of existence as reflected in so much folklore around the world and in Australia.

The 20 paintings at this exhibition, especially *Slow Water*, No 590 and *Slow Water*, No 586, invite the viewer to contemplate the presented slices of water and explore the possibility of dissolving into them and discovering an alternative reality.