



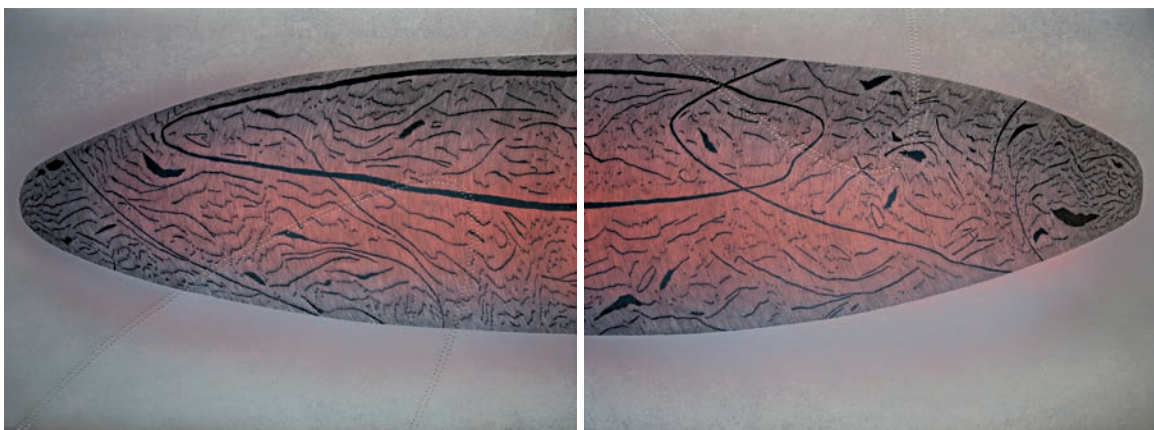
Collective Traces

MELISSA SMITH

SELECTED WORKS 2004 - 2009

Exhibition dates: 12 February - 28 March 2010

Exhibition curator: Malcom Bywaters



Traces of Touch, 2004

linocut

56 x 152cm

Edition: unique state

Collection: Eskleigh Foundation Inc.

Foreword

It is with great delight that the Academy Gallery presents *Collective Traces* by Melissa Smith. The artwork created by Smith provides insight into the ongoing artistic drive to make, to mix ink and find wonder in paper. There is a primal element that concerns the human relationship within printmaking, as if "we" all appreciate the need for mark making. I would argue that printmaking holds an element of direct relationship with the body. In narrative terms there is a strong partnership between us, the viewers, and Smith's creations. These works are not distant; they draw us in; the warmth of seduction is apparent. In many ways Smith makes relevant what many of us crave in the madness of our all too fast world: a desire for beauty and love. The printmaker's art is one of seduction, passion and the need to expose the hidden of the plate and press.

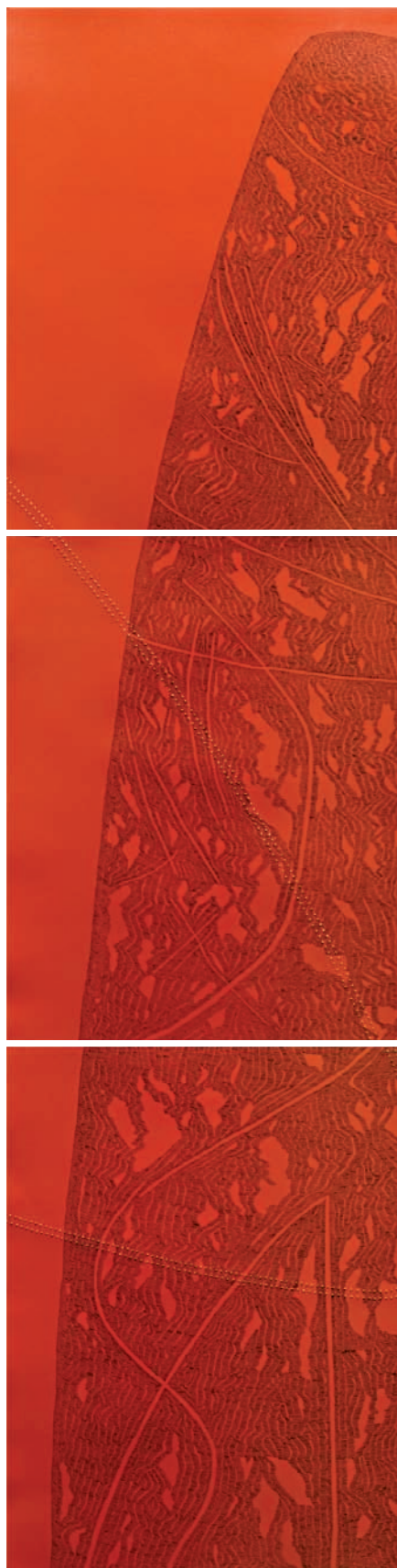
Melissa and I have worked closely on this exhibition. It is with combined great pleasure that we bring together in the Academy Gallery a wonderful selection of her artworks. Some have been chosen because they have won awards and prizes, others simply due to the passion Melissa holds for the finished work and a few because they represent for Melissa a time, a memory or an important part of her oeuvre.

I congratulate Melissa for her enthusiasm, integrity and trust in bringing together this fabulous suite of artwork.

Please enjoy the exhibition.

Malcom Bywaters

Collective Traces exhibition curator



Remembering, 2004 (detail)

collagraph

170 x 76cm

Edition: unique state

Courtesy of the artist and Handmark Gallery, Hobart

Tipping Point

In scientific parlance a 'tipping point' refers to the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the levels at which the momentum for change becomes unstoppable. The phrase 'tipping point' comes from the world of epidemiology, but it is now used more commonly to refer to changes in our climate. In environmental terms a tipping point can be seen as movement towards a delicate threshold that can cause dramatic environmental change; the point of no return from which linked and symbiotic systems spin perilously out of balance. It is a phrase with some pertinence to Melissa Smith's exhibition *Collective Traces*.

This is not to suggest that the work in *Collective Traces* is concerned with environmental catastrophe. However a central theme of the exhibition is the artist's relationship to the environment and of immanence. Another thread that runs through this body of work is the idea of the oblique, the incline and the threshold in the landscape. But as the title of the exhibition suggests there are multiple threads drawn together here. There are specific meanings and places alluded to rather than laid open; traces for us to follow along the meandering lines of the artist's lived experience.

Collective Traces represents a survey of the last five years of Melissa Smith's printmaking practice. This coherent body of work presents certain recurrent motifs, concerns and distinctive mark making processes. Multiple printmaking techniques are employed to create a layering of image and meaning creating a rich, smouldering surface on which fine striations and deeper incisions build up a complex accretion of marks. Many prints feature organic, elliptical forms floating on or anchored to the red glow of the ground. The artist also often perforates the paper, piercing the surface, rendering it permeable. These perforations reference possible journeys, arcs moving across fields of memory or the more tangible imprints of experience.

By a Side Wind marks the start of references to the oblique in Smith's work. The forms appear to be pushing from one side, toppling into one another. Yet mirroring and avoiding this collapse the forms remain upright. The perforations reference the artist's movement through the landscape and create a sense of momentum and energy in the work.

A number of images reference specific locations as well as emotional states associated with memories of those places. As a child Smith spent time in the Northern Territory. The work *To Remember* is inspired by this time and place. The form, while suggesting the ubiquitous and anthropomorphic presence of termite mounds in that part of the world, also, in its intricate patterning, echoes the surface of the ground, the sand hills of the desert and the tracks that criss-cross the country. For Smith the work alludes to the sense of independence and cultural richness she encountered there, as well as acknowledging a subliminal connection to the freedom and openness of childhood.

Certain other works are more intimate and grounded in experience of the sensate world. In *Traces of Touch* or *Lean Towards Me* the starting point of the imagery is the sensuous arc and immediate tactility of a smooth stone picked up from a shore. The experience of the stone cradled and caressed in the hand can act as a mnemonic, both for the particular beach and the touch of a particular person - the memory rooted in a time and place. In *Passing Thoughts* the same dynamic is at play. A random encounter with the delicate fragility of a fallen leaf from an old tree recalls a lover's brush, the fleeting nature of love and the passing of time. Here multiple intersecting lines and overlapping perforations suggest possible trajectories towards delicate thresholds. There is a story, a journey and a memory associated with each print. These psychological landscapes reflect the artist's experience of stepping lightly in the world.

The diptych *Hollow Pearl* is part of a series of works that relate to different, more expansive concerns. It is a monumental print that seems to offer multiple viewpoints and frames of reference. The work highlights the relationships between the micro and macro worlds perceived by the artist. Perhaps it is an image of an island viewed from above surrounded by a pulsating sea; perhaps it is a hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica viewed from below and intersected by the arcs of flight. It could also be a close-up view of an irregularly shaped stone surrounded by delicate, moss-like plant forms, overlaid by the wings and antennae of an insect. This speculation is enabled by the indeterminacy of the image and the artist's desire to create layers of meaning. Whatever it is, this is not a passive representation. It is an expression of momentum, of forces shifting, forming and moving.

Vapour is more grounded to specific imagery, despite its cosmological reach. It is an image of a vapour cloud hovering above a low profile of the earth, referencing those aspects of the aerial landscape that also influence changes on the earth's landscape. This piece is one of a series that turns the artist's vision up-wards towards the heavens. *Trail* is immediate to the experience of viewing the particular moment when McNaughts comet cut a great swathe across the planet and was witnessed by the artist above the local mountain range. The movement of stars striates the blaze of red sky and the perforations lead us along an astral trail. *Astral* is also part of this series and represents arcs of energy; cosmological forces at work.

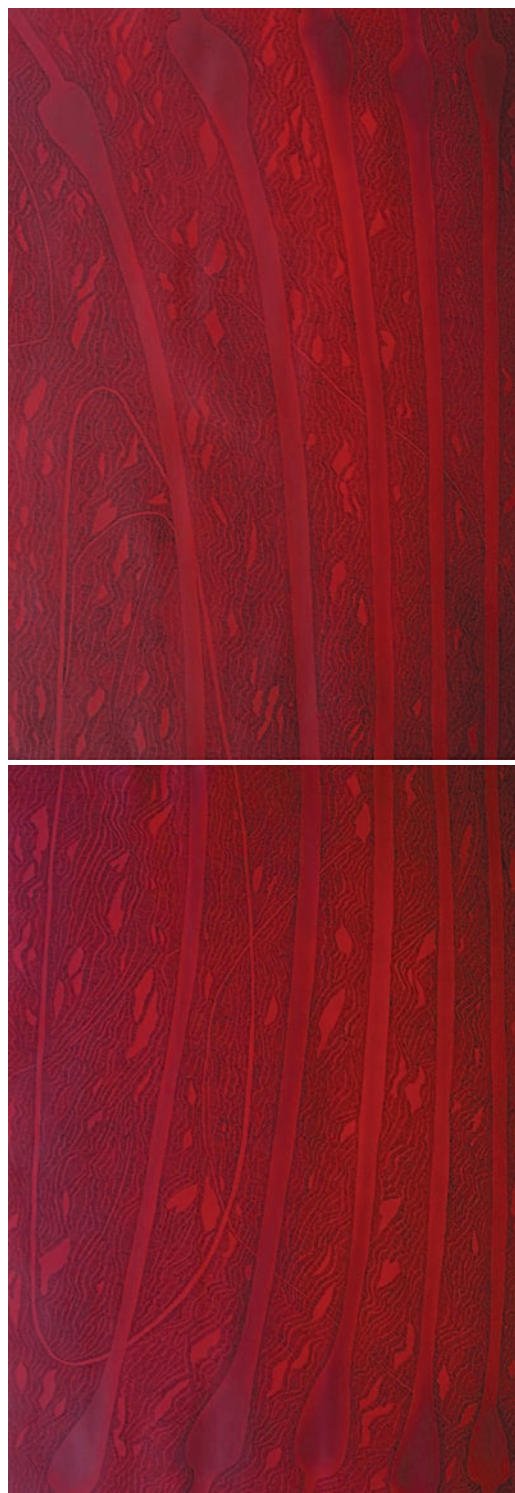
In *Collective Traces* the artist's concerns are manifested in subtle ways and always cloaked in seductive beauty and technical skill. Smith is not interested in hitting the viewer over the head with rhetoric or an easily read position. However the sense of tipping, of being slightly out of balance, encapsulated in these works, is an eloquent response to our precarious situation, the extent of which is only now becoming evident.

Dr. Cath Bowdler

Director

Wagga Wagga Art Gallery

Cath Bowdler is an artist, curator, writer, arts administrator and currently the Director of the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. She has recently spent two years researching Indigenous visual art at the Centre for Cross Cultural Research at the Australian National University in Canberra. Before that she spent fifteen years in the Northern Territory. During that time she was Director of 24HR Art - NT Centre for Contemporary Art, after previously lecturing at Charles Darwin University in Art History and Theory. She has written widely about Australian art and has been published in Australian art journals, including Art Monthly, Australian Art Review, Artlink and Realtime.



Journeying, 2005

collagraph

170 x 60cm

Edition: unique state

Courtesy of the artist and Handmark Gallery, Hobart



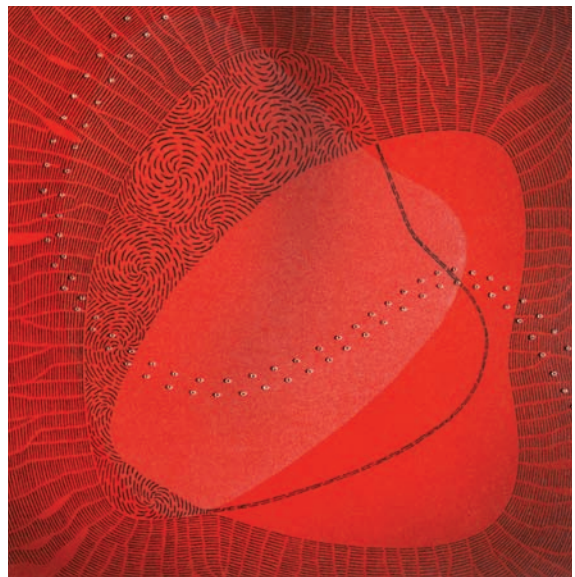
Recall, 2009
linocut
20 x 20cm
Edition: 10
Courtesy of the artist and
Handmark Gallery, Hobart



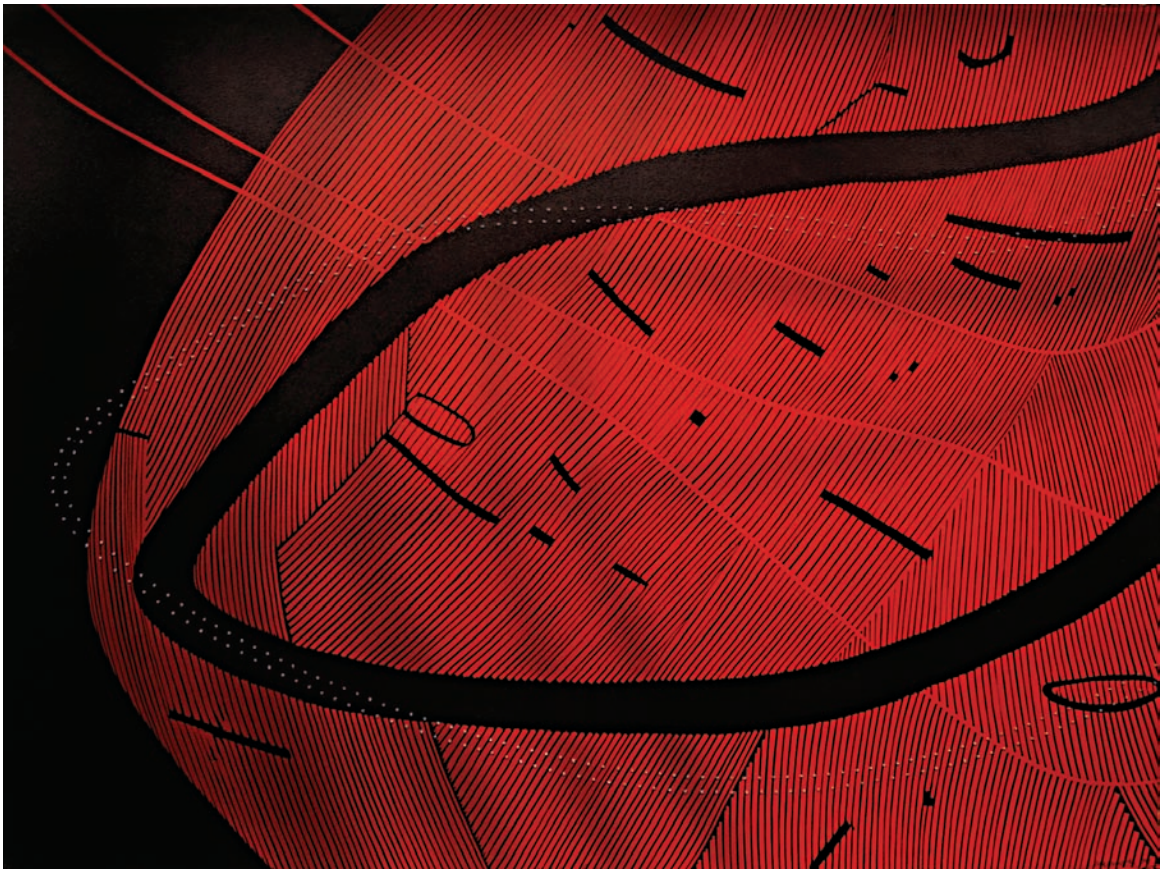
Tilt, 2009
collagraph/linocut/carborundum
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Courtesy of the artist and
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Rhythm, 2006
collagraph
20 x 20cm
Edition: 10
Collection of the artist



Align, 2009
collagraph/linocut
20 x 20cm
Edition: 10
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Handmark Gallery, Hobart



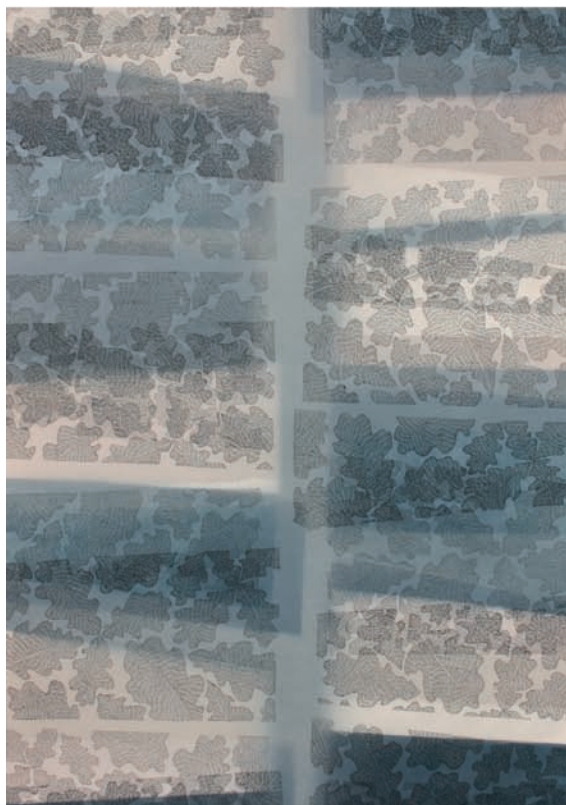
Holding Pattern, 2009
linocut
56 x 76cm
Edition: 6
Private collection, Hobart



Veer, 2009
linocut
38 x 23cm
Edition: 10
Courtesy of the artist and
Handmark Gallery, Hobart



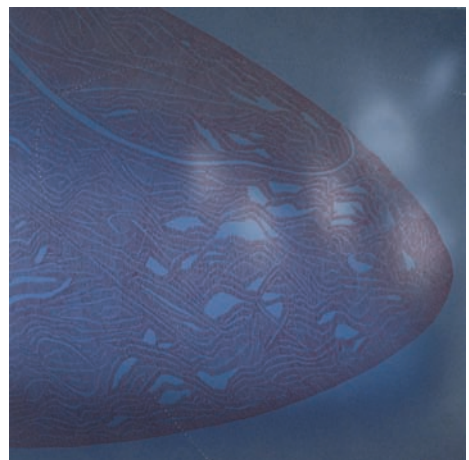
Shift(ing), 2009
linocut
38 x 23cm
Edition: 10
Courtesy of the artist and
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Turning the Page, 2006
collagraph
142 x 50cm
Edition: unique state
Collection of the artist



Tangential, 2005
collagraph
50 x 50cm
Edition: unique state
Private collection, Hobart



Headland # 2, 2005
collagraph
50 x 50cm
Edition: unique state
Courtesy of the artist and Handmark Gallery, Hobart



Heartland, 2006
collagraph
77 x 171cm
Edition: unique state
Collection: Eskleigh Foundation Inc.



To Remember, 2005
collagraph
76 x 56cm
Edition: 40
Collection of the artist



Drawn Aside, 2009
collagraph/linocut
76 x 56cm
Edition: 4
Private collection, Hobart



Linger, 2008
collagraph/linocut
76 x 50cm
Edition: 5
Private collection, Launceston



By a Side Wind, 2008

linocut

85 x 122cm

Edition: unique state

Courtesy of the artist and Handmark Gallery, Hobart



Melodic Contours, 2006

collagraph

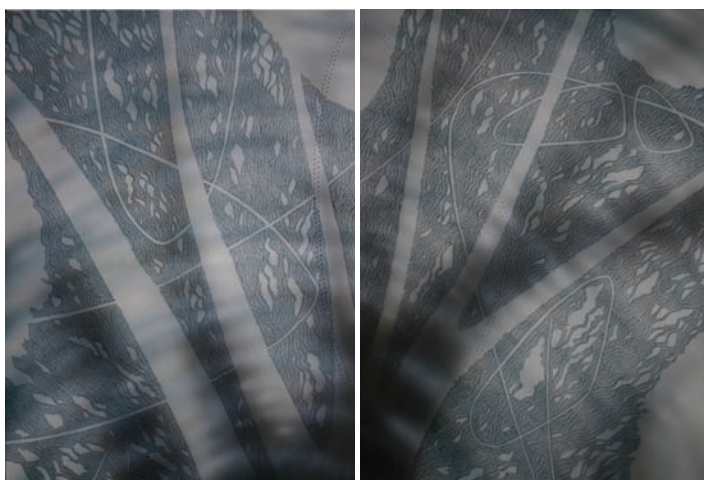
76 x 112cm

Edition: 2

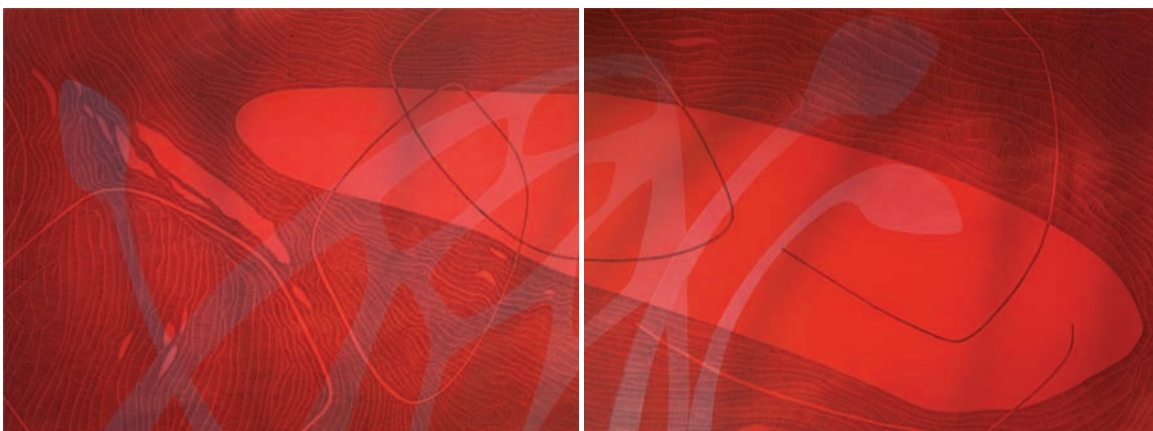
Private collection, Hobart



Bluff Wanderings, 2004
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Edition: unique state
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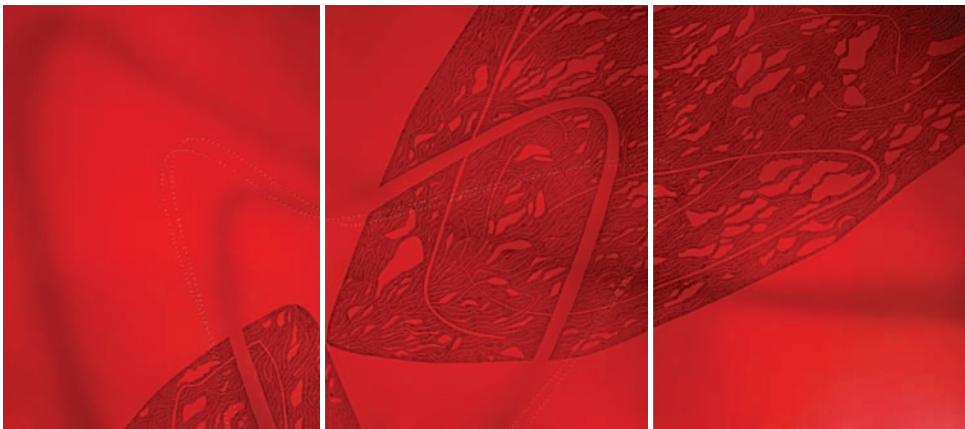
Songline #3, 2009

collagraph

76 x 112cm

Edition: 4

Courtesy of the artist and Handmark Gallery, Hobart



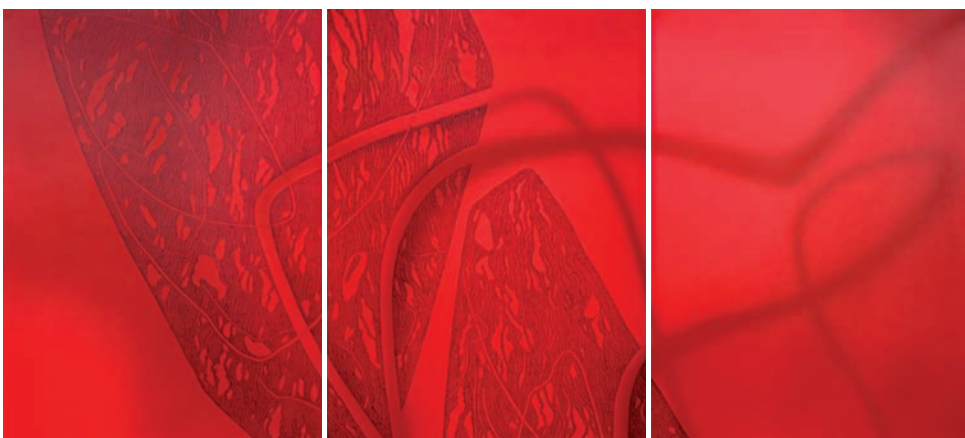
Songline #2, 2009

collagraph

76 x 168cm

Edition: 4

Private collection, Hobart



Songline #1, 2006

collagraph

77 x 171cm

Edition: 3

Private collection, Hobart



Lean Towards Me, 2009
linocut
152 x 56cm
Edition: 4
Private collection, Hobart



Azimuth, 2005
collagraph
85 x 30cm
Edition: 5
Private collection, Launceston



Careen, 2009
collagraph
36.5 x 70cm
Edition: 8
Private collection, Launceston

The artist

Melissa Smith born 1964, Gawler, South Australia. Lives and works in Launceston, Tasmania



Melissa Smith completed her Bachelor of Education in Secondary Art teaching at the South Australian College of Advanced Education in 1984. She is currently the Head of Visual and Performing Arts at Scotch Oakburn College in Launceston and has recently completed a Master of Cultural Heritage at Deakin University, Melbourne. Smith has participated in a number of solo and numerous group exhibitions throughout Australia and overseas during the last thirteen years that she has been exhibiting her prints. In 2004 and 2006 she won the *Tasmanian Art Award* and has been a finalist in a number of major art prizes including the *Fremantle Print Award*, *Silkcut Print Award*, *Alice Prize*, *Hutchins Art Prize*, *Burnie Print Prize*, *Rena Ellen Jones Memorial Print Award*, *Sunshine Coast Art Prize*, *Geelong*

Acquisitive Print Award, *Banyule Works on Paper Art Award* and the *Outback Prize*. In 2005 Smith was selected by the Print Council of Australia to produce a commissioned Member's print, which remains part of the PCA Collection. Her work is represented in corporate, tertiary, college and private collections in Australia and overseas, and in the following Regional public galleries; Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Tasmania; Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, Grafton Regional Gallery, New South Wales and the Warrnambool Art Gallery, Victoria.

Melissa Smith is represented by Gallery 101, Melbourne, Victoria and Handmark Gallery, Hobart and Evandale, Tasmania.

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