

BEYOND THOUGHTS

Melissa Smith



HANDMARK GALLERY 1 - 25 May 2020

BEYOND THOUGHTS

It may seem somewhat ironic that a philosopher has been asked to write about an exhibition with the title *Beyond Thoughts*. After all, is not 'thinking' the stuff of philosophy? Yet, philosophers have always been interested in what lies just beyond the boundary of the known – whether those boundaries are established in space and time, by perception, or by reason itself. It is, in fact, one of the demands of philosophy that we not retreat from the face of the unknown and the unknowable.

Melissa Smith is also interested in passing beyond boundaries – in this case, the noisy business of a world that attempts to define everything in terms of 'presence'. In this, Melissa reminds me of Les Murray in his *Noonday Axeman*. There, he wonders if

the preoccupation with noise is distinctive of the European colonists' profound discomfort with the abiding silence of the native Australian landscape. Speaking as the axeman who has just felled a Red Gum, Murray writes:

*... And then, I know, of the knowledge that led
my forebears
to drink and black rage and wordlessness,
there will be silence.
After the tree falls, there will reign the same
silence
as stuns and spurns us, enraptures and
defeats us,
as seems to some a challenge, and seems to
others
to be waiting here for something beyond
imagining.*

To be waiting for something beyond imagining ... for something (perhaps) beyond thoughts?

It is this, I think, that has drawn Melissa to the quiet places where one discovers what is simply there. What is found need not be 'noodled' over. One simply responds.

So, it does not surprise me that there is a hint of an indigenous sensibility in Melissa's work as presented here. I am not thinking so much of the subject matter or its treatment. Nor would Melissa ever think to link her art to *the* Indigenous world view. Rather, her response to what she finds in the silence expresses a relationship with the world that demands nothing more of it than it just 'be'.

Melissa Smith has achieved this in work that I want to describe as 'serene'. However, I shy away from using this word because

serenity tends to connote stillness. That is not what's going on here. The works are alive ... they move while being entirely still. This defining aspect of the work does not seem to be a property of scale (some works are expansive – others relatively contained). Instead, it seems to be a function of how they have come to be.

That's it, I suppose. The works featured in this catalogue are part of an ongoing process of becoming that began when Melissa created her first work as a child – probably just a scribble; a slash of colour. However, that first scribble, that first slash of colour, is somewhere to be found in the history of these works; a history that began before they were ever made. At last, after years of thinking about how to be an excellent artist, Melissa has moved to the point where she just is – beyond the need for further thought.

Dr. Simon Longstaff

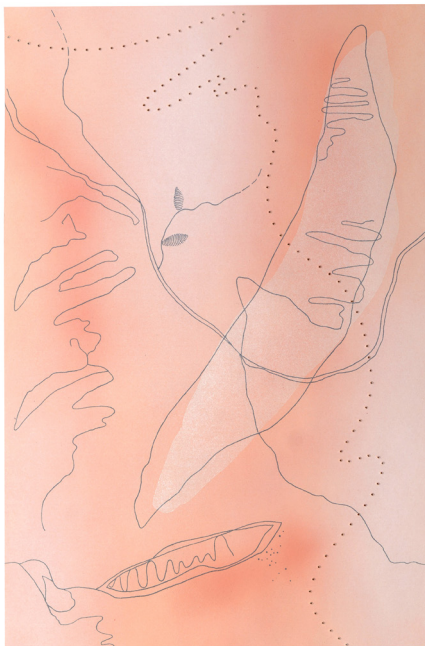
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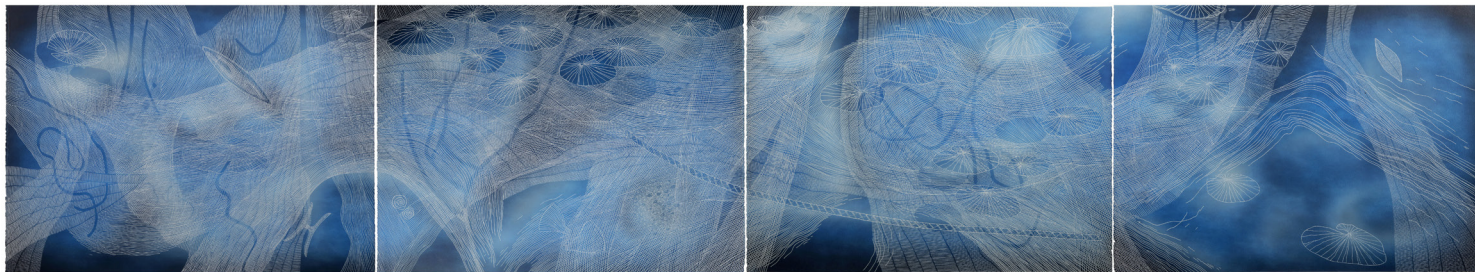
Reaching into the Stillness 2019
intaglio collagraph, 76 x 56cm



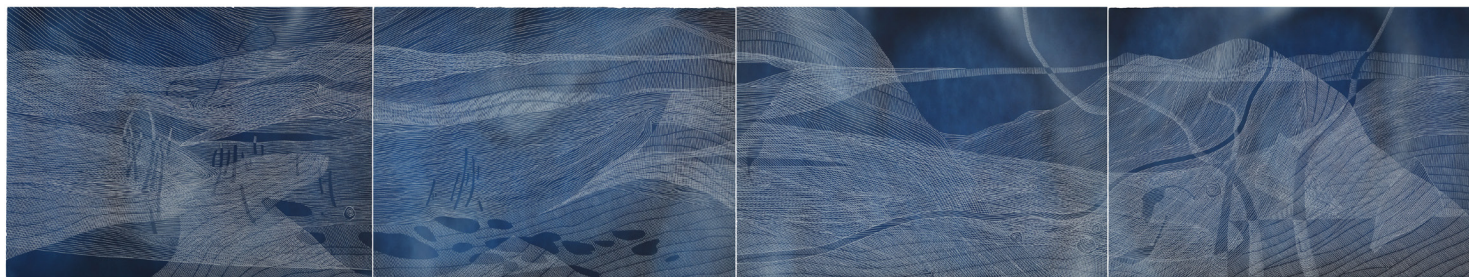
Quiet words I 2020
 intaglio collagraph/lino stencil, 42.5 x 28cm



Quiet words II 2020
 intaglio collagraph/lino stencil, 42.5 x 28cm



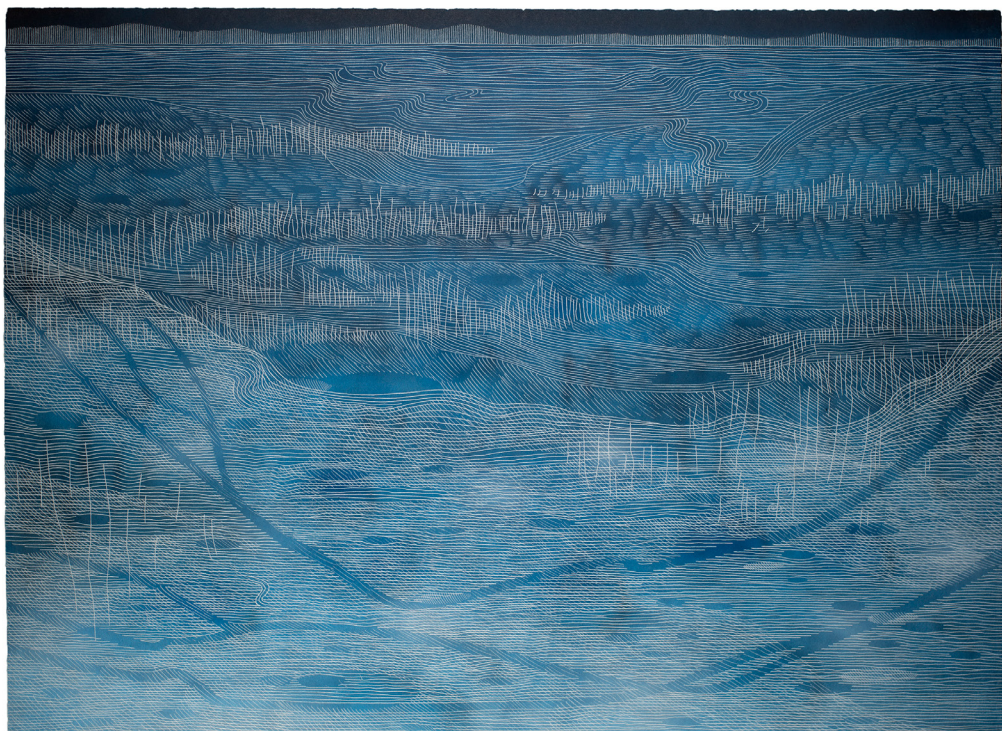
Silenced flow (I, II, III, IV) 2019
intaglio collagraph, 56 x 304cm



Water carrying memory (I, II, III, IV) 2019
intaglio collagraph, 56 x 304cm



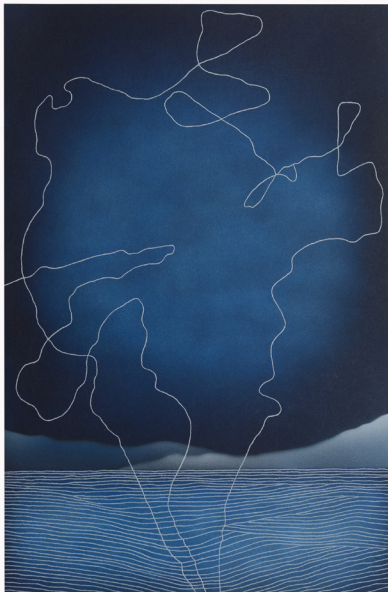
Without a sound - Lake Sorell 2020
intaglio collagraph/lino stencil, 76 x 168cm
Private Collection.



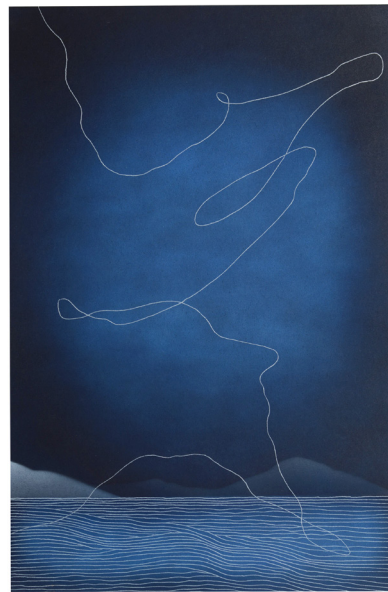
Branch point 2019
intaglio collagraph, 56 x 76cm



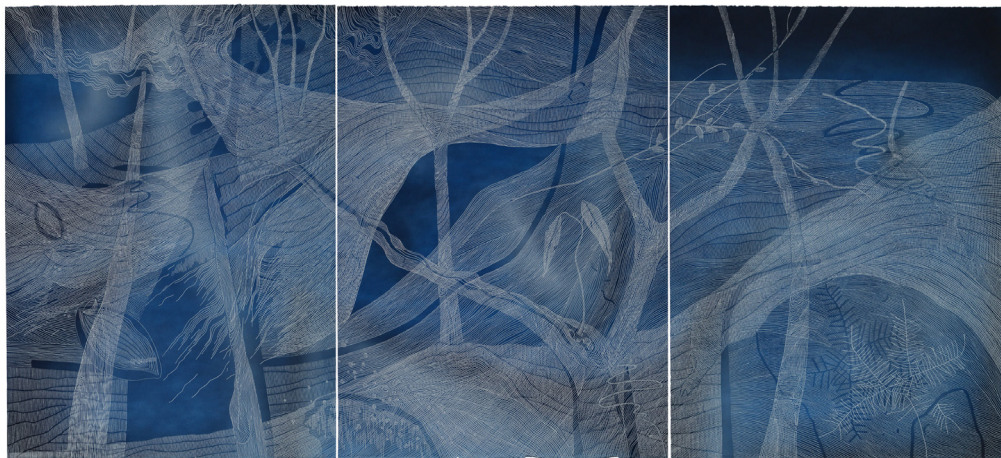
Swallow lines I 2020
intaglio collagraph, 42.5 x 28cm



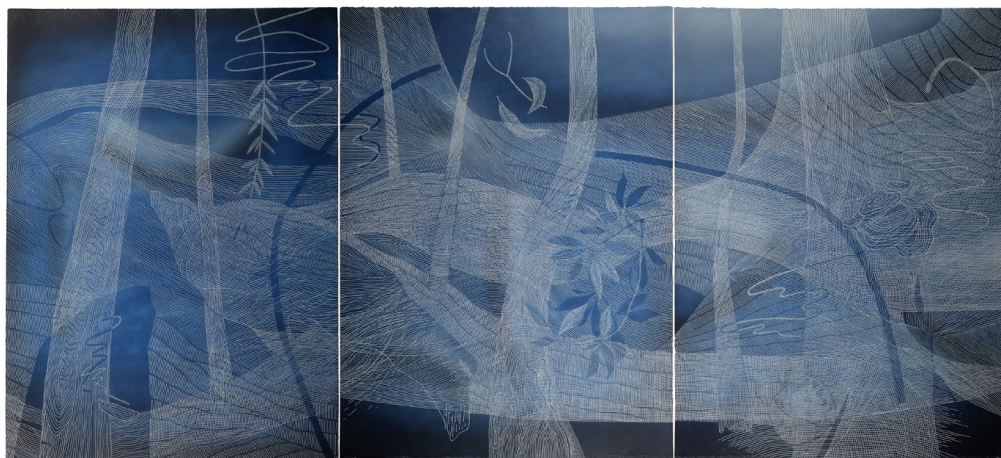
Swallow lines II 2020
intaglio collagraph, 42.5 x 28cm



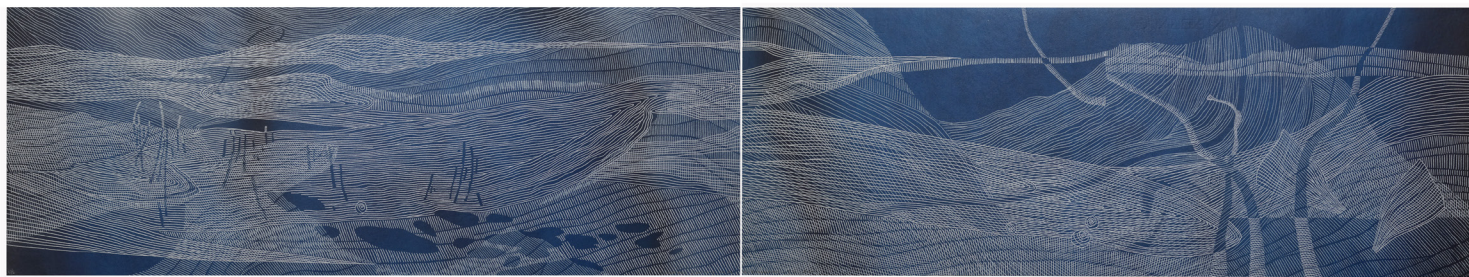
Swallow lines III 2020
intaglio collagraph, 42.5 x 28cm



Eva's walk I 2019
intaglio collagraph, 76 x 168cm



Eva's walk II 2019
intaglio collagraph, 76 x 168cm



Water carrying memory (study) 2019
intaglio collagraph, 27.8 x 151.4cm

ARTIST STATEMENT

In Susan Sontag's essay, *The Aesthetics of Silence*, she makes reference to an absolute silence: coming to an end of mental activity. This state is both absolutely vacuous and completely full...like empty wisdom. In this silence there is an opportunity for thoughts beyond thoughts.

The majority of the prints in this exhibition respond to the biodiversity of the Manly Dam Reserve environment in Sydney. In addition

are prints that relate to another body of water and its surrounds, Lake Sorell in Tasmania.

Both of these places provide a sense of quietness, layered in their own history and stories. There is a unique sense of self-awareness realised in such environments that is difficult to describe that in turn emanates a sense of life and hope within our ever-changing world that balances on a tipping point.

Melissa Smith

BIOGRAPHY

Melissa Smith lives and works in Launceston, Tasmania. Her first degree was a Bachelor of Education (Secondary Art) followed by a Masters of Cultural Heritage at Deakin University, Melbourne. Melissa balances her art practice with her dual roles at Arts Tasmania as a Roving Curator and a Program Officer for Public Art. She has exhibited widely and been a finalist in major art prizes

including the Glover Prize, Hadley's Art Prize, Australian Print Triennial Award and the Waterhouse Natural Science Art Prize. Her prints were acquired in both the 2011 Silkcute Print Award and the 2012 Fremantle Print Award. Melissa's work is held in private and public collections including the National Gallery of Australia and regional galleries in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania.

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Cover Image
Detail: *Quiet words I* 2020
intaglio collagraph/lino stencil, 42.5 x 28cm