


*Above: Worlds within Worlds II* 2017  
linocut (diptych), 76 x 113cm

*Left: Momentary Worlds (Holly II)* 2017  
intaglio collagraph, 42.5 x 32cm

*Cover: Breaksea (detail)* 2017  
intaglio collagraph/linocut, 93 x 57.5cm

handmark 

Handmark Gallery  
77 Salamanca Place, Hobart, Tasmania  
Open daily 10am - 5pm  
[www.handmark.com.au](http://www.handmark.com.au)

Catalogue Design  
*Louise Thrush*

Photography  
*Scott Cunningham*

[www.melissasmith.net.au](http://www.melissasmith.net.au)

# The Blue of Distance

## MELISSA SMITH

2 - 19 February 2018





# Beckoned into the blue

Time spent in a wild place provides space to be aware. To notice the wind, tide, sea and sky, rock and rain. Sensations are apparent: cold wind, wetness, rough rock, prickly vegetation, and the possibility of solitude. These everyday things were part of an intimacy with landscape that our forebears took for granted as part of life. To notice was necessary. Weather and tide had a powerful presence that governed daily activities. This is certainly still the case in a place like Melaleuca in Southwest Tasmania, a place often described as remote and wild.

A question arises – remote from what? Too often nowadays we are remote from the elements, enclosed in four walls, encased in a car, engaged with a screen. This is a loss. Perhaps the term should be turned around. To be where we are no longer remote from

the elements, where we make time to listen, watch, smell, touch and to notice, is revitalising.

During her sojourn at Melaleuca, Melissa took notice. In this body of work, *The Blue of Distance*, Melissa shares sensations from a wild place. The tangible becomes intangible. A rock becomes layered with stories ancient beyond telling. The solidity of a mountain dissolves into blue. Islands are imbued with longing. Wind, tide, and human history too, are ephemeral, here and then gone.

An ordinary moment, such as a passing shower of rain, transcends the expected. Easily overlooked from the office block, rain is cold on your face in the wild. Its apparent simplicity masks a complex interweaving of stories. Far away over sea or lake, water is vaporised, rises high and is blown by wind,

maybe over a mountain range, maybe the range west of Melaleuca. Air is cooler at height, and the water vapour condenses in the chill. Droplets coalesce, eventually succumbing to gravity and plunging to earth. We seldom dwell on the physical mechanisms of our everyday natural world, but isn't it marvellous?

Melissa's images of rock, tide, river, mountain, wind, cloud, island or leaf have universal meaning and timelessness, yet are grounded in a particular place or a moment in time. A twig of leaves, for instance is a universal. But here a story unfolds that is extraordinary. *Lomatia tasmanica* (Melissa's 'Holly') is the oldest known living plant clone in the world. It was discovered in forest in Southwest Tasmania by an observant man, my father

Deny King. And again, a banksia cone is instantly recognisable Australia wide. Yet the banksia ('Lost') is a particular one, the extinct, lost *Banksia kingii*, known only from fragments in a sedimentary bed over 38,000 years old. Deny King noticed strange banksia remnants as he excavated in his tin mine at Melaleuca. These stories take us back into both the geological past and the recent life of the discoverer.

Melissa's images beckon us into the mystery of elemental nature, to the faraway and unknowable, geographic or temporal. We speak of blue in this way. "Out of the blue", the unexpected. "Into the dim blue yonder", travel into the unknown. We are beckoned into the blue of distance.

**Janet Fenton**  
*Melaleuca*



*Longing* 2017 intaglio collagraph/linocut (diptych), 34 x 114cm