

# Visual arts

Andrew Harper



## The immediacy of being

### PRESERVATIONS

Richard Wastell  
Bett Gallery

Level 1/65 Murray St, Hobart  
Until October 22

Price range: \$34,500-\$15,000

**R**ichard Wastell is something of a revolutionary. His take on landscape art is very different, and it is possible he is at the forefront of a shift in how this very dominant form of art is understood.

The images are driven by a narrative: it is easy to glean that the places Wastell paints are places that he visits, and visits with some regularity, and they sustain him, possibly spiritually, possibly literally: there are beautiful images of fish, that have been caught in these places, and then are cooked and consumed right there as well: there are paths, beautifully rendered fires, cooking pots and kettles, all rendered in the singular style Wastell has developed over years, which blends a kind of obsessive detailing that is akin to pointillist forms with an exaggerated realism that is all about looking closely.

Wastell isn't just looking at a place and seeing its majesty; he is inside that place, active in it, moving through it and feeling it beneath his feet, glancing at the ground and taking in the details of the path he walks along, the way that small track subtly meanders around plants and past rock formations. There are mountains and water in the distance, but there are tracks and rough roads to travel, tasks to perform, and experiences to be had. He is not just looking; he is being there. This is different, but everything about this art is different.

Wastell uses symbols informed by personal experience: fish, cast iron pots,



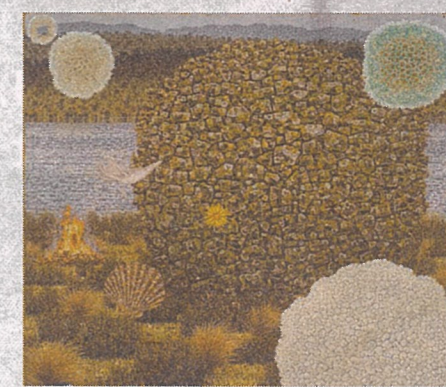
Clockwise: Sacred Bones; Return to Trout Lake; Invincible Summer; and The Pilgrim from Richard Wastell's Preservations exhibition at Bett Gallery.

animal bones, scallop shells and lichen. The lichen is particularly notable; Wastell does something very interesting here. The lichen often appears to be growing on the surface of the painting itself – as if Wastell has taken the art to the Central Plateau and left it there, allowing it to be grown on. It's a strong effect: it reminds us that what we see here are paintings that they are objects not to be confused with reality, and that the works are not attempts to reproduce what the land looks like, but attempts to share the reverence Wastell feels when he is in these places.

Wastell's art is drenched with emotion. He uses rich symbolism – the presence of

scallop shells indicate a powerful personal notion of pilgrimage, linking his childhood on the southeast beaches of Tasmania to his journeying to the central plateau. His works are a representation of that idea: he goes to the special place where he depicts a ritual of fishing, cooking, eating – there's activity.

Wastell avoids the idea he's visiting a place so that he can do a painting of it later. Instead he's visiting the place so he can feel it, be in it – and he uses art to communicate that sensation, that immediacy of being. It's a very different way of understanding landscape art; it's communicated through a visionary technique, and it's incredibly refreshing art.



## Lloyd Rees

*Looking into the sun.*

19 – 31 October 2022

Long Gallery, Salamanca Place

Lloyd Rees' love of Tasmania is shown in this unmissable exhibition of 40 original lithographs by one of Australia's greatest landscape artists. These signed limited edition prints also available for purchase.

JON CECIL  
FINE ART

