



William Charles Piguenit's painting *A Mountain Top, Tasmania*

Opinion

Talking Point: The land that inspired art that endures

AMY JACKETT *The Mercury*
27th June, 2017 12:00am

TASMANIA is becoming an island of art — a destination to come and experience something marvellous at MONA, a plethora of local galleries or one of the state's many festivals or art prizes.

With the recent announcement of the Hadley's Art Prize, Hobart is now home to two of Australia's most generous landscape art prizes.

There are more than half a dozen landscape art prizes in Tasmania. This begs the question: Why the fixation on landscape in Tasmania?

Landscape art is an enduring and magnetic form which lures and comforts viewers. It can trigger sensations of being at home, stir emotions, make us stand back in awe, or reconsider our views of place.

Tasmania has a rich and complex history of landscape art. Wildly romantic, picturesque, abstract or gothic, the Tasmanian landscape has been portrayed in many ways. Our mountains have been raised to towering heights; pastures perfected under glowing light; gumtrees curved, and fine details captured on photographic film.

Landscape was a major theme in nineteenth-century Tasmanian art. John Glover created his own picturesque vision, while William Charles Piguenit and Knut Bull made dramatic depictions of Tasmanian mountains and lakes.

Artist-explorers aplenty, many Tasmanian landscape artists have travelled with camera and equipment in tow, or easel under arm, bushwalking and kayaking great lengths to capture the beauty of remote places, their experiences and artistic output shaped by battles with the ever-changing weather that characterises our state.

There is a strong tradition of watercolour landscape painting in Tasmania, inspired by John Skinner Prout and John Eldershaw and continued by Max Angus and Patricia Giles, among others.

Mt Wellington has been the subject of countless landscape paintings, bathed in sun or snow-capped, watching over our capital city below.

Landscape images have been, and continue to be, integral in promoting natural tourism in Tasmania.

Since the mid-nineteenth-century, they have been reproduced in booklets, stamps, postcards and posters — such as the early twentieth-century tourism poster, which boisterously declares Tasmania as “The Switzerland of the South”.

Landscape includes more than distanced views of natural scenes. For many artists, it is about forming and expressing connections with place, or evoking sensations of being in the land.

There is a darkness to the Tasmanian landscape which has been harnessed by some artists. Our violent past is inescapable.

I can't help but feel that our 'islandness' is partly responsible for our continued fascination with landscape art. As islanders, we are bounded by the ocean. Our geographic isolation shapes and conflates our sense of self and place. We look out to sea or look inland, never engulfed by relentlessly unfolding cityscapes but always close to the natural environment.

All the landscape art prizes in Tasmania stem from a person, place or tradition.

The origin story of the newly announced Hadley's Art Prize, Hobart involves one man's love of art and a hotel's history of art.

I hope it will excite and inspire artists while giving Tasmanians and visitors another amazing opportunity to view exceptional Australian landscape art on our culturally-buzzing island.

Dr Amy Jackett is a Tasmanian artist and the curator of the Hadley's Art Prize. The inaugural prize, launched in January, has attracted 385 entries from across Australia, with the winner of the \$100,000 award to be announced on 14th July, 2017.