

people's sin to make their piles,
to unseed others so they can reseed
with a genetically modified form of civil

liberties that only express *their* needs,
their wants, *their* version of 'freedom'.
As they hurtle through the air, head-

over-heels for space and orbit, they watch us and perform
acts of largesse or beneficence or 'create jobs' or thrust through cataclysm
in one stroke — but they lose us and our *pro forma*

need to *comprehend* even those who make schism,
even them as they torment, torture, exploit, purchase
immortality and expect to be loved abundantly, to teem

with our gratitude at their 'greatness'.
Venus dazzles, but its atmosphere
is volatile and deadly, and its providence

is ambition, is conquest — for
to conjure an idea of the *uninhabitable* seems a way
for people to possess and confer

the dividends on their shareholders and progeny;
but we want that planet — that 'Venus' — to stay
where it is, fully intact in its own agony —

for this love I follow you in has no monetary
value no property title no accrual
of debts or profits; and if we

stray from the path of the style
of love we have — a style without
style, a fashionless though carnal

spirituality, to love better than love — we will lose out,
never having wanted to win, to be 'victors';
all we have seen together will simply etiolate.

No, we know there's fire and there's *fire*.

John Kinsella's recent books include the memoir *Displaced: A Rural Life* (Transit Lounge, 2020), the co-written poetry collection *The Weave* (with Thurston Moore, UWAP, 2020) and the collection of stories *Pushing Back* (Transit Lounge, 2021). His new poetry collection, *Supervivid Depastoralism*, will be published by Vagabond Press in 2021. He lives in wheatbelt Western Australia on Ballardong Noongar land.

Artists and Writers – DISAPPEARING

Over the last few decades Bett Gallery has explored what it means to live or have lived in the place now called Tasmania in a series of exhibitions including *Future Perfect* (2003), *South of No North* (1991) and six 'Poets and Painters' collaborations.

It is time to again look deeply into this place.

A group of Tasmanian artists and writers were invited to join curators Carol Bett, Gerard Castles and Pete Hay to explore the idea of what it means to be Tasmanian, and who Tasmanians are and might be as islanders at this moment in an unfolding story.

The resulting exhibition, *Disappearing*, included eleven pairings of visual artists and writers. The following pages offer a taste of the project, but you can find the full suite of works at bettgallery.com.au.

We've long had a secret here.

Disappearing: to cease to be seen; vanish from sight; to cease to exist or be known; pass away; end gradually.

In our islands, their past, the land, seas, the movement of air, its peoples, the cadence of life and in the place itself is something unfathomably beautiful. You sense it as much as see it. It's about connection and time, not the here and now. It's a secret that has been closely held, cherished, sustaining our soul.

Entwined with that secret has been a hope that one day Tasmania would be recognised, acknowledged and able to stand on its own two feet. This has been elusive but now we are told that perhaps it is so close as to be reckoned by the beads on the accountant's abacus.

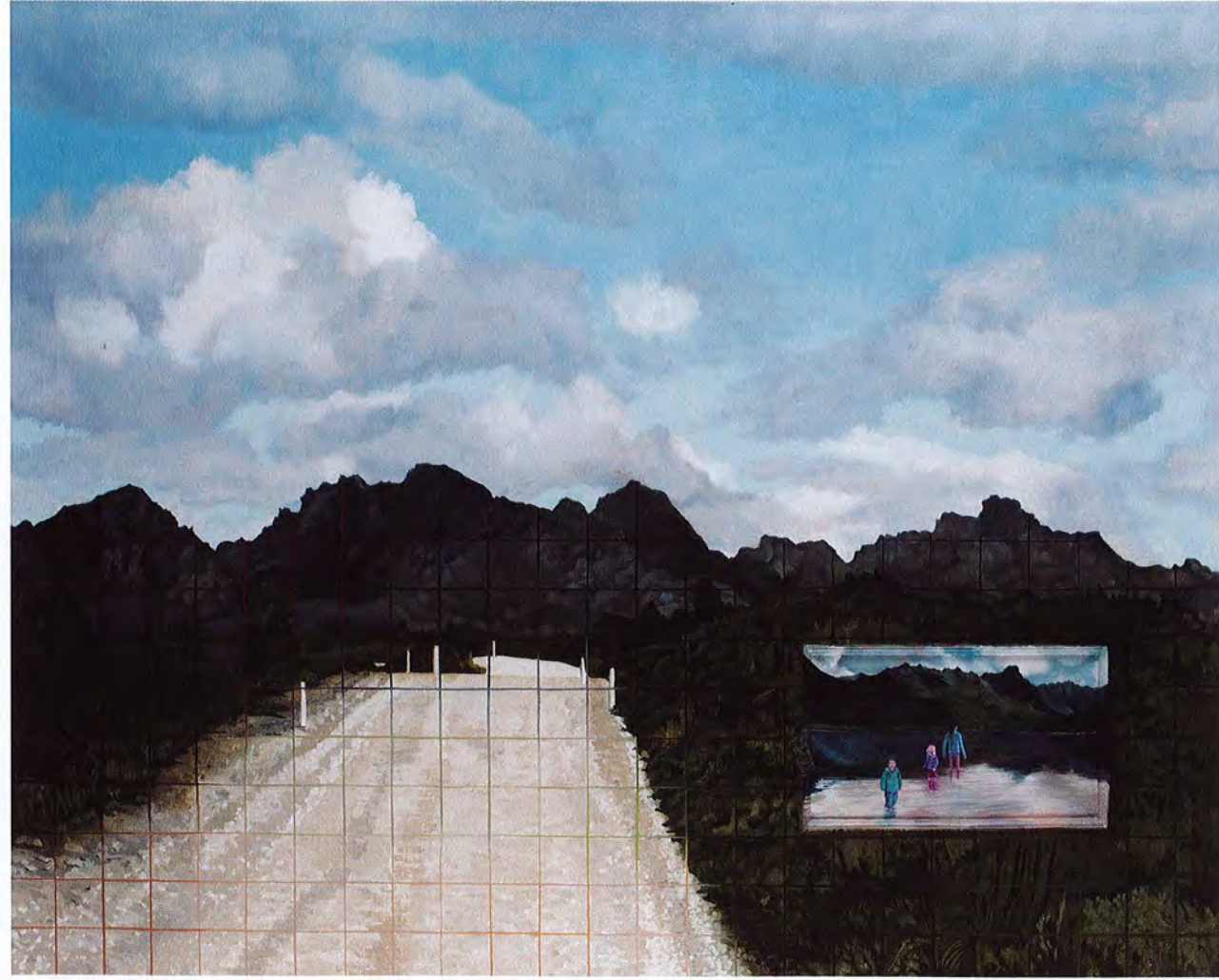
Then again, perhaps not. Is the price we are paying a disappearing, a disappearing of the very stuff that sustains us? Or is it a more complex story, shedding a skin as part of the inexorable march of renewal?

Disappearing.

We are at a unique time in our life on these islands of Tasmania; forced to pause, reflect, reevaluate, to consider, to reset, to look again at where we live with new eyes.

—Pete Hay and Gerard Castles

David Keeling
The road back (inset after Olegas Truchanas), 2021
oil on panel, framed
83.5 x 102 cm (frame size)



I am young when I see, in a child's encyclopedia, pictures of diving birds – their throats cinched with metal rings – that are forced to spit their catch into the market baskets of fishermen. *Who thinks up something like that?* I wonder. But the lesson is learned: it is our human genius to make nature work against itself. Water is power, it is discovered. Someone hypothesises that a ring of mountains could be made into a bowl for holding it, if only a way could be found to plug the occasional ravine that allows a wild river to run away to the sea. That way is found. Catchments, they call them, as if map-lines could net water itself. Into the heart of the island come steel and concrete and dozers that push through the raw gravel roads that are needed for conveyance, and soon the rivers are stoppered and the mountain-bowl fills like a bathtub so that hilltops become islands and stands of trees appear as solid mirages on the surface of the floodwaters. Years pass. Waves lap on mountainsides, washing away peat soil, and now we know that if the rivers were loosed, the ranges would be marked for centuries with a dirty-white Plimssoll line to remind us. For now, though, the rivers remain plugged, and when I go to this place, I wonder, *would you know?* I mean that if you didn't know, would you be able to tell? Would you see the wrongness of the ratio of water to mountain? The way the edges of hilltop islands fall into the water without shelving? Would you know, if you didn't *know*,

IN OUR DREAMS

WE GO ONCE AGAIN TO THIS PLACE WHERE THE SKY GETS ALL

SHELTERING AND THE UNDERFOOT EARTH IS THE SOFTEST PELT AND

THE MOUNTAINS LEAN CLOSER AND TIME S L O W S TO THE GRIND OF A

GLACIER LEAVING A BASIN OF LIGHT THAT BATHES THE EYES AND

WHEN WE BREATHE IT IS TO THE RHYTHM OF WAVES THAT

about the other lake, the true lake, the lake that lies beneath?

HERRINGBONE THE SHALLOWS WITH THEIR COME AND GO AND WE

ARE NOT NOW OR THEN OR HERE TO CONQUER OR PRAY BUT ONLY

TO LISTEN TO THE RIGHTNESS OF AN ANCIENT HUMAN CODE

READY-TWISTED INTO OUR HUMAN HEARTS, WHISPERING

THIS IS HOME THIS IS HOME THIS IS HOME

waters and pictures of fishermen dangling gleaming trout from their fingers. But the drowned lake is nowhere to be seen. Here, it exists only as a mid-blue smudge on a scale model – under Perspex – that makes Lilliputian crinkles of the Franklands and the Coronets. The true lake is still there, divers tell us. They've seen the pink crystals of its beach lying in wait beneath a fine layer of silt. Discernable even now, the divers say, are tyre-tracks from the light aircraft that landed in their droves on the wide swathe of sand that last summer. When I dream of the lake, it is sealed, somehow. As if water tension alone could make a thin, rainbowed film to separate the true lake from the floodwaters that weigh upon it. And I do dream of it. Waiting down there. For its chance to **undisappear**.



Richard Wastell
Thoughts from a rock on Great Oyster Bay, 2021
 oil and pumice on linen 153 x 153 cm (stretcher size)

You leave the car and walk towards the sea. All you feel is loss. You mourn one loss and then all the others follow. One disappearance after another. Losses that are yours alone. Losses that are universal. You can see what is going. You see what is gone.

Some leave in a flash, a sudden vanishing, a violent death. An unfathomable absence. Others fade, wrestling inevitability, and enter a final slow decay.

Information, noise, relentless, tight in your chest. Every under-told tragedy, every over-told distraction, every betrayal and untruth, every intervention missed – ringing in your ears.

You feel like a city collapsing. Everything buzzing around, yet you cannot track a single vehicle, map a single thought. Cracked, overgrown, lonely. Your open avenues and dark hidden lanes; your parks of quiet contemplation; your traffic noisy and futile; your broken infrastructure; and abandoned works. Pollution, weeds, seeping into every corner. In ruins.

Randomly, you think of your Gran. She has been gone for ten years. It is hard to remember her voice or see her face. Like a drawing in the sand, the waves have all but washed her away. Each tide a generation. Yet, she is still inscribed in your memory. She is still a young girl playing in granite rock pools at The Gardens. She is still ashes scattered there seventy-five years later.

One thing she said always returns. One tragic line, she told your brother. Still haunts you. Breaks your heart whenever you think of it.

She was so wrong, so unbearably wrong. And yet, you have been thinking about it lately. You hear it in the news and on the socials; you see it in vacant teenagers and numb marriages; you feel it in the prognosis for the land, seas & air. You fear it for your children. 'Life is just about pretending', she said.

And yet.

And yet...

Some say they tell of rain coming when they are on the move, but as four black cockatoos pass over you, the only rain is the rain that falls inside your head. They are carrying something above you, some ancient wisdom, some ancient grace. Somehow their calm purpose pierces the restless noise enclosing you, and you notice the crunch of the dry twigs and leaves under your feet as you move through the sparse coastal bush toward the granite shore.

You sit. On ancient stone. Hunched over from the weight of it all. You watch as the clear water breathes in and out below you, lapping at the stone. Popping and splashing, playfully.

Calm. Unhurried. Every little wave a brush stroke beginning to paint a different picture. A gentle breeze, a caring hand on your shoulder. A new image forming. A new power generating. Your breath slows to the rhythm of the sea. Your back straightens, your shoulders slide back.

Sitting on a rock, patiently shaped by millennia, listening to the sounds you think form silence, but are so far from it, you begin to feel sure again - she was wrong. You are reminded of important things. Fundamental things.

You have memories that bring joy with each reliving. Memories – the best investment you will ever make. To create them. To bank them. Proof of life. Proof of living. Proof of possibility. Proof of hope.

Each wave rising then falling gently below you reminds you that your species is not yet gone. And there is always one more amazing human, one more extraordinary act. You are one of the lucky ones. You have agency. You have choice. When it is all too big, you can just make each next choice. Each tiny right decision, each little wave slowly shaping the shore – the meeting place of two worlds.

You remember that your children experience moments of joy every day, and they call for you when they are hurt, wake in terror, or need to share wonder.

You sometimes wake to the sound of wattlebirds.

You can walk in the rain and breathe the perfume it makes when it cools the forest.

You can shrink the world to your immediate view and time will shrink to the moment you are living.

You sit, feeling the warmth the granite has been gifted by the sun and now gifts you, feeling gratitude, knowing you can leave little legacies every day, and hoping they might all eventually join up, like drops of new rain, and quench some piece of dry earth.

—James Dryburgh



Michaye Boulter
Everything is less certain VII, 2021
 oil on hand-beaten steel
 43 x 48 cm (overall size)
 Photographer Peter Whyte

Whale, Dolphin, Human

My skin is a wetsuit. In the cold waters of the River Derwent, I swim through late winter and into spring in nothing but bathers. In the water, I am just another aquatic creature, akin to whale and dolphin who must also rise to breathe.

Today the sea is calm and luminous, milky Prussian Blue. Other days it's the green invitation of Phthalo Blue. I rarely miss a day. It's a gift to my 75-year-old self, twenty years from now, all this swimming.

I see the older women come down to the beach through the frosty months, through days when there is snow on the mountain but the sky is cloudless and the sun is warm away from the wind.

One woman with white hair puts out a plastic chair and lays her towel over it. She swims in bathers and a cap emerging, some twenty minutes later, radiant as a sea goddess. Two other women slowly breaststroke, half a kilometre and back, chatting and laughing though the sea is probably eleven degrees.

When I do it myself, brave the cold, brave it almost every day, I walk in up to my waist. I trail my hands in the water. My brain says 'You've got to be joking'. It suggests every reason not to do this crazy thing. But then I go in.

At first, when I began this ritual, electricity shot up my arms. My breath see-sawed. There is no putting my head under. No freestyle. The air is too cold for wet hair and the water so cold it burns the skin of my face.

I kick on my back. I breaststroke with care. I surrender my limbs and become swaying kelp. This is another sort of dance with the elements and I must learn the steps.

After ten minutes or so, something strange starts to happen. The shock has departed. The sea has become soft. I can sense it against the outer layer of dermis, but my organs are not cold. My body feels enlivened, as if this elixir of chilled sea and sky is a balancing tonic, a healing forcefield of mysterious potential.

The cold has taught me a certain fearlessness. I procrastinate less. I need less. I am more grateful. I live more simply.

Sometimes the beach is closed because the sewerage plant upstream has another spill. My parents ate fish from this enormous river, but no one has done that for years now. Too many heavy metals.

Our twenty-first century bodies are soft, but we are hard on this planet. All we discard, all we pour onto the land, flows into the sea. Comfort is killing us. Disconnection too.

I am an ocean swimmer, a coast dweller. My home is just seventy centimetres above the sea.

Everything is less certain.

—Heather Rose



Helen Wright
The Fragile and the Fury, 2021
 woodcut on Japanese rice paper,
 framed, 143 x 89.5 cm (frame size)

Wood splintered and crashed. All day, wood splintered and crashed. The machine pushed into the forest and wood splintered and crashed. Yellow and black, rock-hard, steel-hard, weighing over seven thousand kilos, its maker's abbreviated name, CAT, stamped in black along its side.

The bulldozer would not doze, would not sleep languidly in late afternoon sun. Fed on diesel, it coughed black smoke.

Wide-awake, the dozer approached the gum, stopped before it. The man inside pulled a lever and it reversed. It idled, then began a slow creep forward, shovel held aloft. Bark split, branches shook. The machine retreated, charged again. The tree cracked, its roots struggled and let go, flailed at the sky.

Revvng and attacking, it went on through the day. Trees smashed, ground trembled. A possum fell, a possum and its baby fell. Owls' nests fell. Pygmy possums fell. All manner of animals fell, succumbed under the weight of fallen trees. Tomorrow, again. The next day, again. On and on and on, they fell. Fur fell, eyes fell, hearts fell. How many?

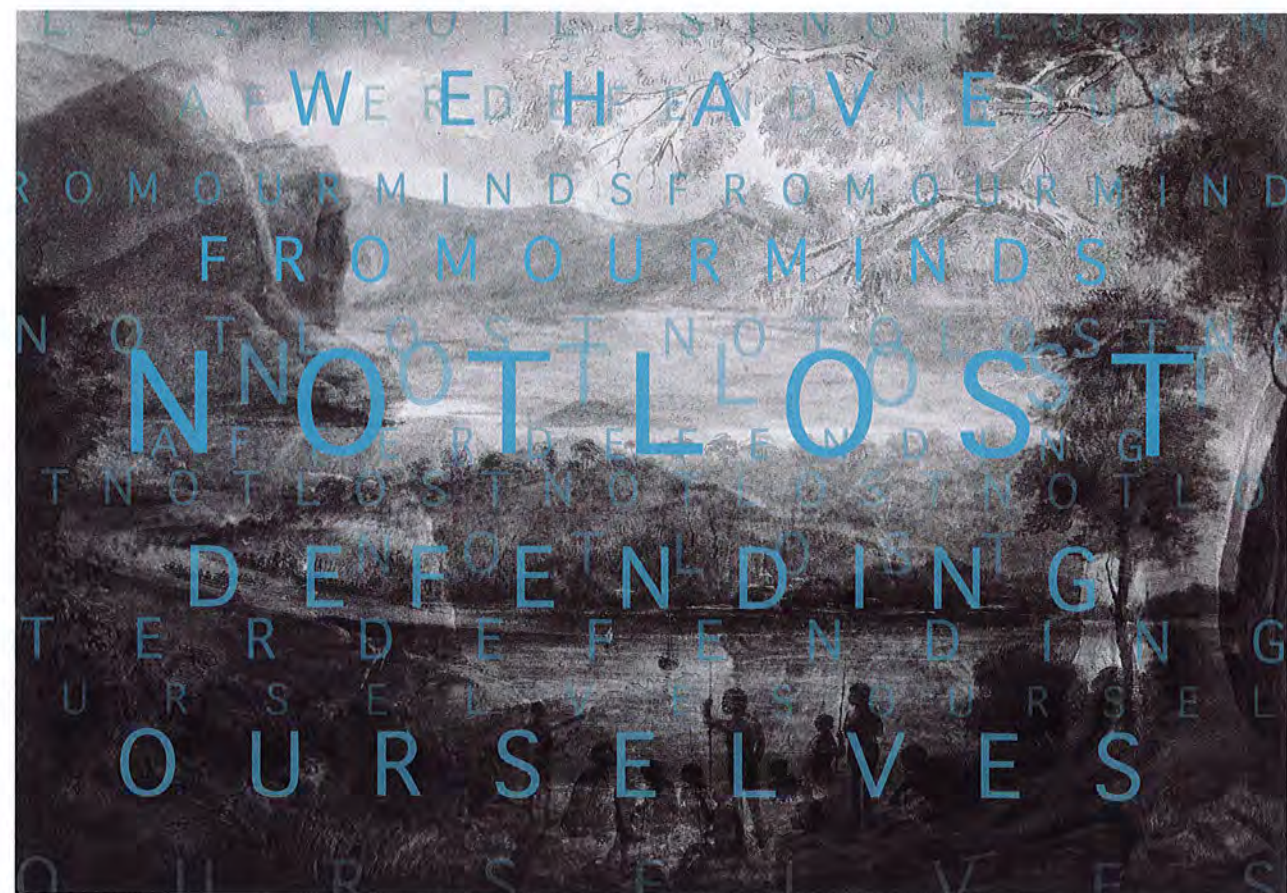
The next day the man climbed back up into the CAT.

A minute later it spluttered alive. The machine, Caterpillar, crawled, slipped in old mud. The first trees of the day, dead and down. Birds scattered, wings broke, innards spewed—nerves spoke pain. God-made, dust-made; but made, all the same. Home, a different word to habitat.

Habitat smash.

Habitat crash.

—Rachel Leary



Brigita Ozolins
Not Lost, 2021
 digital print 70 x 100 cm

*We shared their delight.
 Their festival mood became our mood;
 we all revelled in a common abundance
 & in each other's wellbeing.*

— Aldo Leopold

*If not we ourselves, the day will come
 when our children will undo what we have foolishly done.*

— Edward St John

*This vanishing world is beautiful beyond our dreams
 It contains in itself rewards and gratification
 never found in the artificial landscape
 or man-made objects so often regarded
 as exciting evidence of a new world in the making.*

— Olegas Truchanas

Not Lost

I

Some dark secrets run so deep that they slip from view. The hole left in our conscience is gradually plugged, with shallow distractions and awkward half-truths. Questions, if uttered, pass unheard. An uneasy and enduring silence prevails. So it has been since the end of our war. When we were imprisoned at the Settlement.

II

I have been here from the first time of the Settlement. I have been here since the beginning of the Settlement. You brought me to the Island and I have been here ever since. When I was in my Country I seen many of them in the bush, for there was Natives at their Country. & now my dear friends what was it that kept you out so long a time? My friends can't you tell me what it was kept you out so long? Why, I think they were looking out for the sick.

My brothers in our own Country a long time ago we were a great many men. A great number. But the white man killed us all. They shot a great many. We are now only a few people here & we ought to be fond of one another. The native People of Van Diemen's Land is gone out hunting & some of our men has got some books out with them. And they are singing and reading out in the bush. We never were taught to read or write or to sing to God.

Now my friends I should like to tell about something what yourselves to not like to hear it mension to you. This is you have got to die some time or another. Yes you must all die. We have not got to stop in this world where there is having no peace & where there is always sickness. Would you like to stop here, this wicked sinful world, where there is always fighting and Growling?

Me like to tell true & me tell you true. The way in which we are treated it is shameful for any Person of any feeling to hear. You put arms into our hands & made us to go to fight the Soldiers. We did not want to fight the Soldiers, but you made us go to fight. You do as you like with my things & take away my Garden and make me a prisoner. You used to carry Pistols in your pockets & threaten'd very often to shoot us & make us run away in a fright. Our houses were let fall down & they were never cleaned but were covered with vermin. You did not care to mind us when we were sick until we were very bad. You put many of us into Jail for talking because we would not be slaves. You shot our dogs before our eyes.

We are free Aborigines. We are free Children, not taken Prisoners. We freely gave up our Country after defending ourselves. You made for us an agreement which we have not lost from our minds since & we have made our part of it good.

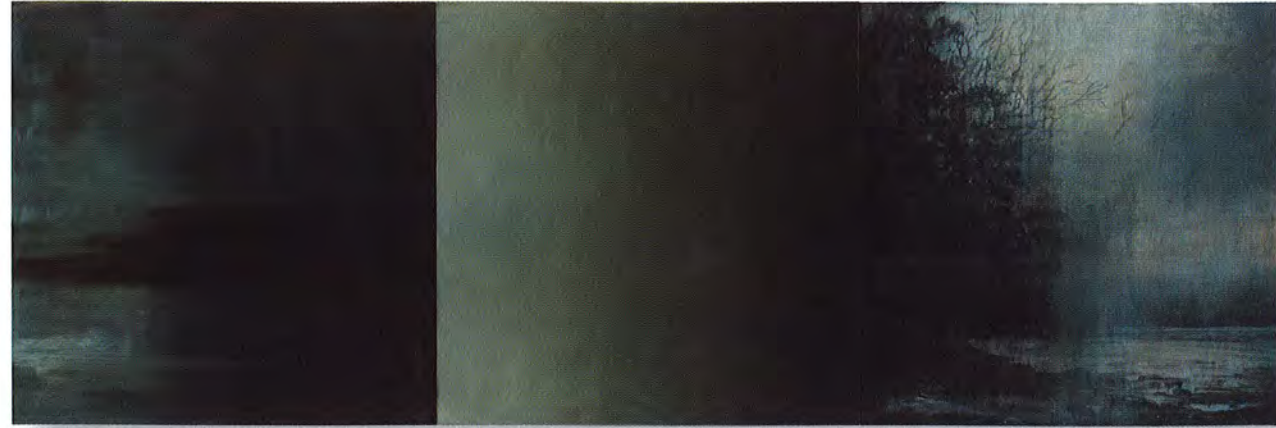
III

Fix your mind on that other pole & the four stars our Old Ones knew to guide you through the darkest forest & past the coming Inferno. There is a path not wholly lost. Often spoken. Seldom walked.

Other voices inhabit this garden. Their echoes move without pause over ashes freshly burned but rich with bursting life. A bird calls. A dry pool, filled with light beckons.

—Greg Lehman

Endnote: The voices in this assemblage, other than exact quotes from those named, are based on (I) the author's original text, (II) the writings of Tasmanian Aboriginal people (including Pallooruc, Drinene, Nomome, Walter George Arthur, Thomas and David Brune, Wooreddy, Maccamee), held in permanent detention at the Wybalenna Settlement on Flinders Island between 1833 and 1847; (III) remix of Dante, TS Eliot and the author's original text. Wybalenna text is drawn from Leonie Stevens, *Me Write Myself: the Free Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land at Wybalenna*, Clayton, Monash University Publishing, 2017. Quotes from St James, Leopold and Truchanas are drawn from John Griffin, *On the Origin of Beauty: Ecophilosophy in the Light of Traditional Wisdom*, Bloomington, World Wisdom, 2011; and Max Angus, *The World of Olegas Truchanas*, Hobart, Olegas Truchanas Publication Committee, 1975.



Michaye Boulter
Everything is less certain VI, 2021
 oil on board, triptych 20 x 60 cm
 (overall size)
 Photographer Peter Whyte

David Keeling is a Hobart-based artist who has been Chair of Artbank Australia, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, and a Board Member of Arts Tasmania. He has exhibited widely in Tasmania and interstate. David was also the first artist to win the Glover Prize twice.

Danielle Wood is a Tasmanian writer, author of several books including *The Alphabet of Light and Dark* and *Housewife Superstar: the Very Best of Marjorie Bligh*. She is working on a novel about Lake Pedder.

Richard Wastell was born in Hobart in 1974 and grew up on the beaches of south-east Tasmania. He has been exhibiting his paintings and drawings with Bett Gallery since 1996.

James Dryburgh writes essays and shares stories about important things. James's essays and articles have been published widely and his books are *Essays from Near and Far* (Walleah Press, 2014) and *The Balfour Correspondent* (Bob Brown Foundation, 2017).

Michaye Boulter's work has been extensively exhibited around the country and her work is held in a number of public and private collections. In Tasmania, Michaye Boulter is represented by Bett Gallery.

Heather Rose is the author of eight novels including *Bruny* (2019) which won the ABIA fiction book of the year and *The Museum of Modern Love* (2016) which won the Stella Prize. Heather lives by the sea in Tasmania.

Hobart artist **Helen Wright's** artwork is represented by the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of NSW, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Queensland Art Gallery, Artbank, the Gippsland Regional Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of South Australia and in private and corporate collections throughout Australia.

Rachel Leary's writing draws on her experiences of growing up as a working-class girl in Tasmania and on her studies in geography and environment. Her debut novel, *Bridget Crack*, won the 2019 Tasmania Book Prize.

Brigita Ozolins is a multimedia artist based in Hobart. Inspired by a passion for literature, her work explores the links between language, culture and lesser-known aspects of history using installation, digital imagery, video and performance.

Greg Lehman is a Tasmanian Aboriginal writer of art history, place and identity. His writing and poetry first appeared in *Island* in 1996.

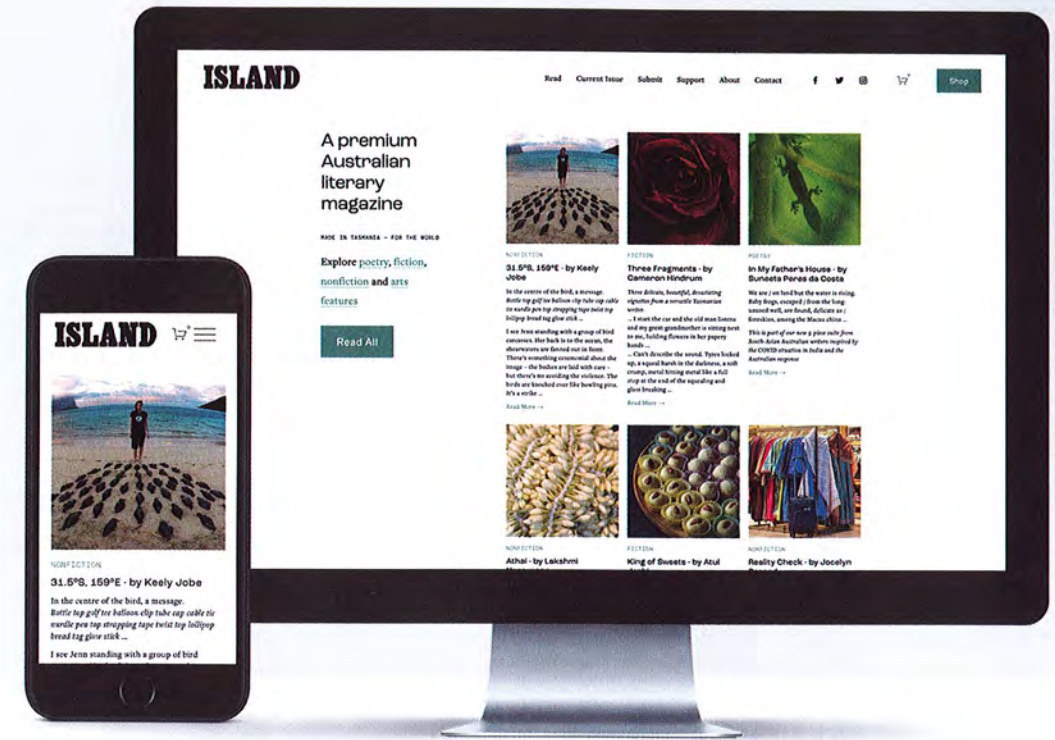
Pete Hay is a Tasmanian scholar, poet and essayist with particular interest in islands and environmental activism. His latest collection of essays is *Forgotten Corners: Essays in Search of an Island's Soul* (Walleah Press, 2019).

Gerard Castles is an international business consultant based in Hobart. He was co-curator of *Future Perfect*. He sees a future for Tasmania as an icon for the rest of the world – not just in words but in reality.

Carol Bett is owner and founding director of Bett Gallery. Over 35 years she has invested considerable energy into developing audiences for contemporary art in Tasmania and interstate; representing more than 60 professional artists, facilitating art collection groups, and curating the highly successful series of 'Poets and Painters' exhibitions.

Bett Gallery has been working with local, national and international artists from its base in Hobart, Tasmania for 35 years. It has established itself as a unique platform for celebrating the work of highly acclaimed and collected artists, as well as identifying and supporting new and emerging artistic talent across Australia. The gallery has staged over 400 exhibitions by some of Australia's most collected artists. Bett Gallery regularly attends national art fairs and has supported the public acquisition of hundreds of works to Australia's most important arts institutions.

Image p 101: Michaye Boulter, *Light Shift*, 2019, oil on linen, framed 122 x 152 cm



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Cover image: Sally Rees, *Gateway for the Witness* (video still), 2020

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STORIES
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and ART
including

**THE ISLAND
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and
'DISAPPEARING'
– a collaboration
between writers
and artists

