

## **Jane Giblin**

*A Conversation with Country*

Friday 19 August – Sunday 18 September 2005

Burnie Regional Gallery

### **Fire, Flood, Silt and Change**

#### **Introduction**

This exhibition by Jane Giblin contains oil paintings, ink wash works on paper, and small, dense black and white photos. They represent different ways in which she has responded to the challenge of working through her responses to the landscape over the last decade.

The landscapes range from western NSW, through open forest, riverbeds and darkened thickets, to the Northwest coast of Tasmania. Giblin has described much of the included work as a learning process: learning about painting in a new style, learning about meaning lies in the landscape, and perhaps most of all, about how the landscape helps to define one's identity.

There are the oil paintings with their segmented modules, united by raw shapes filled by thick linear webs which surge and move across the surface. There are ink wash works on paper which represent efforts to capture, in an ever more spontaneous and intuitive manner, essential elements in a passing landscape. In seeming contrast are the small photographs that often project elements at odds with the tactile manual energy of the other works. They are like private moments staring at "the secret place" among the trees.

#### **Art and Landscape**

Many of our richest feelings are mysteriously buried in past childhood experiences. These long embedded "memories" subconsciously affect our response to certain kinds of landscape. In Giblin's case, she has been drawn to revisit places where she lived or travelled when much younger.

In 1998 on such a visit, she was consumed by a passion for the endless paddocks of outback NSW. The simplicity is beguiling; however, the "flat" seen at an angle to the eye is a complex deep space. The mind provides the bird's eye plan to further complicate the transferal to a surface representation. Ever since the Post Impressionists, nature's shapes have been subject to a process of formal transformation. The process is complex and even photography transforms what many people see as "real".

However, the nature of Art is not just to record what appears real in that sense. It is essentially to convert the world and the artist's experience of it, into a new experience: an Art Object.

#### **The Transient Shadow**

The landscape painting process develops out of a curiosity to explore qualities that define a place, and then (to explore) specific aspects that have demanded the observer's subjective response. It requires the synthesis of memories, contextual meanings, and immediate sensory responses in a creative solution.

Giblin has often experienced an uncomfortable sense of encroachment that has striven to engage with her problem. She recognizes that there are established attitudes, which help to define what meaning a place has. There is a sense of possession, a union with the land, based on generations of occupation, which permeates the contemporary view of place and identity. However, Giblin has a self-conscious awareness of her presence in the landscape. She is struggling with a predicament, where she is not 'of' the landscape, but a visitor to it, who finds herself passionately involved or connected to it. For example, the painting 'My Shadow in Four Positions' provides surfaces, which correspond with these conflicting psychological and perceptual relationships.

Selection of a subject removes it from its surroundings. On the paintings surface a rocky headland may "float" in its newly created space (see The Last Cape) detached as it were from its origin. The subsequent picture

structure is like an analogy for Giblin's sense of incursion into a land where people have lived for generations, investing it with a sense of heritage and the ecology of renewal burning. For her, their presence pervades and makes her feel that the most she can include is her shadow, because a shadow still allows direct access to the intrinsic value of the land. The shadows are by definition, transient.

### **The Moving Glimpse**

It is only when the observer moves through the landscape that you get an appreciation of scale, distance, and spatial dimension. Through Giblin's excursions into the land, she encounters the immediacy of the surface textures and the vital presence, which surrounds them. It is not just a visual but holistic experience. Giblin continually speaks of the smells and sounds which arise as she passes through an area; the crunch under foot and the swish or rustle as she passes into a zone of rediscovering memories. Often, however, a special event or recognition has passed before one can contemplate it. Moving through the landscape produces a myriad of such moments, glimpsed fleetingly, but potentially powerful elements in the experience. To capture this definitively elusive, special moment is not possible in a single image. However, a painting can develop from these seminal moments, which move the observer out of the usual condition of "just looking". The problem is that the resulting art works are destined not to "look" like what the casual observer is conditioned to believe and expect "their" landscape to look like. They are a journey into new worlds.

**Peter Jackson**

June 2005