

Isabella Foster, Catalogue essay

*Dogs Belly*, Colville Gallery, 2016

One cannot experience the scoured Tasmanian landscape without enduring the silent presence of the past.

“Here... be warm and draw.” We are in a colonial garden. Jane instructs, handing me a large sheet of thick cotton paper, a dish of ink, a brush, and a whittled bamboo stick, she points to a fur coat sprawled in the grass. I crouch into the dew and seek out the darting transience of light and shadows across a tree and some emerging sheep and one loud peacock.

For the past eighteen months Jane and I have travelled into the vast lull of rolling hills and continually worked plateaus that are the Midlands of Tasmania. With Lilu the dog, the furs, paper, drawing tables, ink, brushes and bamboo in the boot, we roll into the long thin driveway leading to the scattered remains of some sandstone buildings.

Two women, two artists... a teacher, and a student, trespass in gendered territory, a landscape most often known as a male domain.

Pointing to her stack of thick cotton paper, Jane instructs and offers agency.

Pushing the paper into the parched red earth between patches of grass I imitate Jane's hunt. Looking up before me, I squint, I search, and I slip the bamboo into the slick dark ink.

Primarily, here, there is a relationship with the landscape. This relationship is built with the present, the past, historic texts, the dirt, the animals, the garden, the paper, and the ink, as well as each other, all of which influence our response to this place. I depict through inspired practice, my own experience of this relationship.

This landscape emerges and recoils. It is fragmented, it is scratchy, and it is whole. These are reminders of core sensualities that saturate Jane's memories of sweltering road trips with her father as a young girl. Since 2004, Jane has worked in the Tasmanian landscape, but now, she struggles to draw, and paint and photograph the figure in her search for a further distillation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Jane Giblin March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016

The existence of the figure in Australian landscape art evolved out of an early intention to provide a realistic yet picturesque report about a new and acceptable world.<sup>2</sup> The Anglo-Saxon women who were shipped here to complete domestic chores and fill the ports with porcelain children share a restricted existence amongst the Tasmanian landscape.<sup>3</sup> Encrusted with its thick history of proud misogyny, the Australian national consciousness has been manipulated and molded by centuries of Australian male artists' depictions and exploitations of the landscape.<sup>4</sup> Considering the scrutiny of art made by women as 'craft', and the ongoing enforced confinement to domestic spheres, women were, and still are ostracized from the representation of an Australian national consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

The depiction of women's initial experience in the Australian landscape is one in which exclusion from practical participation and engagements underpin their occasional representation. The understanding of the use of women in Australia, women in bush, female in human animal realm, tension and release, and even student in a teacher's sphere, are comforting and hostile. Mythologies and historic truths, endured and acknowledged are inherent.<sup>6</sup>

The merging of human animal with animals of the land allows for the exploration and recognition of human animal sexuality and animosity as well as the relationship between the working human and the working animal. Identifying herself with the rawness, the fur, the blood and the filth, Jane explores questions of identity and how one's relationship with a land must consider its history.<sup>7</sup> Jane toys with the intersectionality of female oppression and indigenous cultures by European and British settlers, and the suppression of the human animal.

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<sup>2</sup> Wallis, Helen Margaret. "Abel Janszoon Tasman." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web. 01 June 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, Robert. "The Colony 1788-1885." *The Art of Australia*. 2nd ed. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Australia, 1970. 28-31. Print

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Hoorn, Jeanette. "Introduction: Regulating Art." *Strange Women: Essays in Art and Gender*. Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne UP, 1994. 1+. Print.

<sup>6</sup> Jane Giblin, interview, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

When Jane tells me to walk out into the overgrown orbicular garden, barefoot and draped in furs, with Lilu to my left and compound bow at my right, she is no longer suggesting that I may, this woman may, be part of the land. She instead allows me to actually exist, react and respond to the landscape's silent ethos.

Observing me, Jane records every movement of skin, fat, and hair across my bones, and the rise and fall of my chest, while Lilu and I work together to hold a position for the hunt.

The urgency of her scratch into cotton leaves no room for delayed contemplation.<sup>8</sup> Becoming an automaton to her knowledge, experience, and lingering memories, opaque lines are pushed into the paper, dragging pigment across the cotton, pulling forms and tones together. This capacity to observe what is before oneself, consider and assemble the culmination of knowledge, experience, and the fine-tuning of the 'control dial' allows for Jane's manipulation of risk, a risk she enjoys.<sup>9</sup> The consequent mess and disarray are liberated from the confines of the historical representation of the Tasmania we have been taught to understand.

I sweat under the sun's unwavering heat, and I shiver and squirm into the warm fur of a possum to escape the brutal bite of the wind.

We are women. We are in the bush, hunting for shadows that dance and hide, chasing fleeting sunlight, interpreting forms and textures, we draw.

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<sup>8</sup> "The Scratch" Jane Giblin, interview, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Giblin, interview, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016

