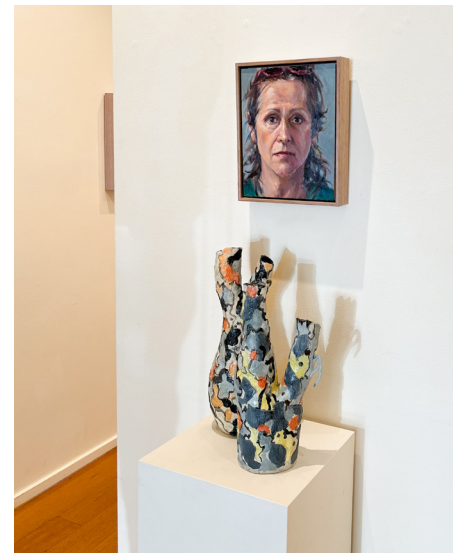


## Christine Wrest-Smith - *Recent Work Outback NSW*

In conversation with the artist, we discover some of the themes, inspiration and experiences which shaped this incredible body of work.



This magnificent series of paintings and ceramics by Christine Wrest-Smith is the culmination of the artist's recent road trips into outback NSW. Wrest-Smith painted this series while staying at Compton Downs, an expansive acreage 59 km from the next largest town, Brewarrina.

Christine has become a regular visitor for the family that live on the property and thus has access to remote places rarely seen or painted. During her stay, members of the Indigenous family at Compton Downs would drop Christine off at a location of her choice, an abundance of art supplies in tow. Christine recalls;

***“They’d drop me off and say, ‘Right, when do you want to be picked up?’  
and usually I’d stay for a few hours to draw.”***



Christine Wrest-Smith *Split Rock study* 2022 watercolour and pencil on paper 28 x 38 cm

Scenes in this body of work, such as *Split Rock study* (above) and the misty Tarrion River are seldom visited and had likely never been painted before.



Christine Wrest-Smith *Mullock heaps, Lightning Ridge* 2022 oil on linen 91 x 122 cm

The vibrant works on paper begin as *plein air* drawings created in this landscape, later finished in the artist's studio, or further developed into oil paintings. The largest work in the exhibition, *Mullock Heaps, Lightning Ridge* was a finalist in the 2022 Fisher's Ghost Art Award, and captures the heavily mined landscape of that region. Christine says,

***“It struck me as quite disappointing that the landscape [in this area] has been torn up into piles of dirt just for the chance at finding a few little stones.”***

This image stands in stark contact to the beauty of the lively rock holes at Byrock, as captured in the pastel drawing *Byrock rock holes, NSW*.



Christine Wrest-Smith *Byrock rock holes, NSW* 2022 pastel on paper 56 x 76 cm

In one section of the exhibition, Christine's skill with ceramics is on display, including a plinth piled with ceramic tortoise shells, resting atop a hand-woven dilly bag.

Here the essence of this exhibition, exploring territory and place, is expressed through the artists' ability to create unique compositions from discarded objects. This perspective is also evident in the works *Scallop shells and pincers* and *Mother of pearl shell*.



Christine Wrest-Smith *Tortoise shells and dilly bag* 2022 earthenware, ceramic and twine (dimensions variable)



Christine Wrest-Smith *Banjo shark* 2023 oil on linen 92 x 76 cm

A stand-out among this marine-focused section is the large oil painting, *Banjo shark* (above).

Christine found this shark on the beach, washed up among ocean material. Closer inspection of the painting reveals wounds on the creature, telling its story of being caught and discarded.

***“In my painting, seaglass is intentionally juxtaposed with seashells for an environmental comment. Seaglass washes up every day, on our beaches, along with shells - the fragments of glass being an unnatural presence in our oceans.”***



Christine Wrest-Smith *Abalone shells and seaglass* 2024 oil on board 40 x 50 cm

These found-object compositions are reminiscent of the artist's previous exhibition, *Autumn Offerings*, which equally highlighted themes of environmental loss.

*Recent Work Outback NSW* is on view now at Australian Galleries Melbourne until 2 April 2024.

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