

ART COLLECTOR

#117 JUL - SEP 2026
AUD \$26.95 / NZ \$27.50



THE UNDER 5K ISSUE

+ John Nixon + Zoe Young+ Sam Gold
+ Hendrik Kolenberg+ Loribelle Spirovski
+ Ngaroma Riley + Hilary Finch + Fred Williams + more



THE REMAINS OF TIME

Hilary Finch builds her photographs slowly, layering images into enigmatic terrains where memory and antiquity coalesce. Ahead of her first major solo with Australian Galleries, she reflects on deep time, the print as encounter, and why meaning, in the end, belongs to the viewer.

WORDS | ROBERT BURATTI

It begins with a line of Blake, found by lamp-light. **Hilary Finch** was home for Christmas at the end of 2024, turning the pages of the William Blake volumes her father had left her when he passed that year, when the phrase surfaced and would not let go: “all night beneath the ruins” — now the title of her exhibition and a fair description of where her artworks want to take you.

Finch came to the camera obliquely. A University of Melbourne degree paired film and literature with subjects like Decadence and Surrealism; the camera came later, in Europe in the early 2000s, where a second-hand Box Brownie and then a Rolleiflex sent her into the darkroom inspired by the example of **Edward Steichen**, **Brassaï** and **Heinrich Kühn**. However, as she developed Finch realised “style was no substitute for substance”, that the equipment mattered less than the mind and instincts behind them. Her tools have changed many times since, but the pursuit of art remains and is the focus rather than a direct engagement with technical process.

What is relevant is the print: physical, scaled, encountered in person, an almost theatrical immersion in which the viewer, as much as the artist, becomes a player on the stage. Her method is a painterly application of photography. Some works are single captures; many are built over months, occasionally years, from multiple layered images. The technique descends from **Gustave Le Gray**, who around 1850 was already combining several negatives into one harmonious image — proof, for Finch, that pictorial construction was present at photography’s birth, not an aberration of it. The medium has always been able to move past documentary “truth” toward something described from within. Technical mastery matters to her only as “the invisible pathway to finding out what an image will become. Finch believes the works should stand up beyond time and place and speak to human emotions. Refusing to fence in the viewer’s reflections, she numbers her works rather than titling them.

opposite: Hilary Finch, XXV. 2025 - 2026. Archival pigment print, 130 x 112 cm. Edition of 3 + 2 AP.
courtesy: the artist and Australian Galleries.



above: Hilary Finch, XXIV. 2025. Archival pigment print, 124 x 177 cm. Edition of 3 + 2 AP. courtesy: the artist and Australian Galleries
 opposite: Hilary Finch, XX. 2019 - 2024. Archival pigment print, 180 x 122 cm. Edition of 3 + 2 AP. courtesy: the artist and Australian Galleries.

Experience drives the practice, and she seeks terrains that bear the traces of deep time: glacial Greenland, the Jurassic cliffs of Tasmania, the archaeological sites of Greece, where a 2019 Creative Victoria grant took her on residency. The resulting works owe something to the capriccio — that Renaissance genre of ruined architecture set in convincing landscape — and to the Neo-Romantics **Eugene Berman** and **Christian Bérard**, with their melancholy play-ers on ruinous stages.

In 2025 her work XVII, 2022 was included in **Turner and Australia** at Gippsland Art Gallery, the first major exhibition to survey **J.M.W. Turner's** influence on Australian art — her work hung alongside **Frederick McCubbin**, **Arthur Streeton** and **Clarice Beckett**. That same tension between the real and the unreal

drives **All Night Beneath the Ruins**. The works span primordial landscapes and reimagined Greco-Roman relics, united by a single project: the remains of time, the passage of all things. The show is her second, and first major solo with Australian Galleries, following her 2024 representation. She credits director **Stuart Purves** — “the real deal,” she says, “and nothing but the real deal will do” — with the freedom and space her large-scale works demand. “Stuart is a true believer in art and the artists he represents,” says Finch, who has found Australian Galleries “an environment where you can thrive and make the work that is true to you.”

Finch works slowly, allowing the pictures to reveal their true nature on their own terms. The works she trusts are the ones that stay alive,

that hold their enigma over time. For the collector who lives with one across years, she hopes for the gasp of recognition when something is at once true and inexplicable: to be held on the precipice of a mystery, drawn by a feeling of uncertain familiarity. That threshold is the whole of it. What lies beyond belongs to the viewer.

Hilary Finch: *All Night Beneath the Ruins* is showing from 21 July – 8 August at Australian Galleries, Naarm/Melbourne.

