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Precipice by Annika Romeyn at ANCA Gallery

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Precipice. By Annika Romeyn. ANCA Gallery, 1 Rosevear Place, Dickson. Wednesday to Sunday, noon to 5pm. Until October 22.

The Canberra-born and Canberra-based artist, Annika Romeyn, in the half a dozen years that I have followed her work, has drawn her inspiration from nature.



Ghost 1 is among the artworks by Annika Romeyn in *Precipice* at ANCA Gallery.

However, unlike many artists whose gaze is set towards the heavens, Romeyn looks down at what is under her feet and at ground level. She adopts this earthworm's perspective to explore the world in great detail. Her earliest work was that of an illustrator, which was also her earliest art training in Baltimore, and consisted of very detailed drawings and lithographs of natural objects such as seashells and fossils. She adopted a very close-up view so that the broader contextual framework was lost and we were looking at abstracted images.

Gradually the focus moved a little further out and the macro and micro views of nature started to merge and there was a greater semblance to landscapes, flowing streams and watery rapids. Late in 2015, Romeyn undertook a residency at Hill End, the old goldmining town in regional New South Wales outside of Bathurst. As with many such towns, most people left after the gold ran out, but unlike most towns, Hill

End was rediscovered by a group of artists, including Russell Drysdale and Donald Friend, and survives today primarily as an artists' colony.

Studying the eroded gullies, tortured trees and cliff faces, Romeyn developed something of a metaphor for a threatened and fragile environment, where scars of human occupation create an environment resembling a lunar landscape. As you walk down the main street and reach the end of it, this strange landscape starts to surround you on all sides so that you almost feel trapped within this setting.

Romeyn has managed to create this immersive experience through scale, where she has printed huge monotypes on six large sheets of paper with composite dimensions of 228 centimetres by 168 centimetres. A monotype, or the painterly print, is usually made through the application of inks on a matrix, usually a metal plate, which is then passed through the press. As the name implies, it is a unique print in an edition of one, but while the ink is still fresh it is possible to pass it through the press a second time to receive a pale second impression, called a cognate or a ghost impression. Many artists, including Edgar Degas, would rework this second impression with a different medium, in his case usually with pastels.

Romeyn enjoys playing with monotypes and their ghosts enhanced with pencil. The black and white pieces in the *Chasm* and *Ghost* series are the strongest pieces in the show, while the brightly coloured watercolour drawings are a little too busy and pull in too many directions.

The *Chasm* monotypes are like small installed environments so that when you move close into them, the abstracted landscape forms seem to tower over you and envelop you on all sides. They are almost theatrically dramatic images of considerable power where the forces of nature seem to completely overpower the actions of people. It is a strong show by an artist in the process of establishing her own authentic visual language of power and majesty.