

# BROADSHEET

## These Breathtaking Landscapes Aren't What They Seem

Rosie Hastie's landscape photographs are pristine. Her process is precise. But the beauty contained in these frames is entirely constructed – and comes with a warning about the future. In partnership with Tourism Tasmania, the Hobart-based artist talks us through her process.



Photography: Rosie Hastie

1/5

Published on 09 May 2023

by **SABRINA CAIRES**



You experience Rosie Hastie's artwork in three stages. First, you see a photograph of a beautiful Tasmanian landscape with all its jagged edges and sweeping horizons. But then there's a tension – an uncertainty. The image is almost too pristine. The earthly scenes appear unearthly. Then, if you squint at the wrinkled folds of the mountains, you see it. These images aren't real.

The Hobart-based artist uses minimal materials – glass and black or white paper – to create her “paperscapes”. These few household items are remixed and replayed until that perfect moment

where the light catches the paper just to Hastie's liking. It might take two photos or 200, ten minutes or three days, but an epic landscape appears momentarily on Hastie's tabletop theatre.

"When I first started doing it, it was all about the foolery of, you know, how can I do something so simple and convince people that this is real?" Hastie says.

She was also convincing herself, in a way. Hastie's early work, such as the 2015 series *Folding Truth II*, has an escapist bent, presenting dusky, idealised versions of the Tasmanian coastline. "Dreamscapes", she calls these.

More recently, her images have acquired a sinister, brooding cast. *Once 1*, which contemplates the environment's tentative future, won last year's Henry Jones Art Prize for contemporary Tasmanian art. The series it belongs to, *Once, Postcards From the Future*, explores the dichotomy between the local landscape's sublime beauty, and its commodification and exploitation.

"I think I watched too many documentaries on climate change," she says. "And [the artworks] just ended up having this kind of post-apocalyptic doomsday feel about them. There is that beauty, but something sort of underlying and haunting about it."

To produce the series, Hastie made an off-kilter addition to her artist toolbox – vapes, a rare expansion of the tight parameters she usually places upon her materials. Her only source of colour, for instance, is the warmth or coolness provided by a typical household lightbulb. She says these limitations make the process more rewarding and the results more interesting. Using vapes – little plastic cartridges full of toxic chemicals – to puff a fine haze over the landscapes reminds audiences that the "untouched" beauty of the wilderness is a fleeting illusion, and the threat of climate change is ever-present. Symbolism aside, the cartridges are very good at emulating Tasmania's famous Off Season mists.

"Mists really define the winter season," Hastie says. "They're so synonymous with Tasmania. Lingering over the mountains and gullies, they're even given endearing names, such as the Bridgewater Jerry [on the River Derwent in Hobart]."

While landscapes are Hastie's key inspiration, she says she's "not a hiker". Her process is very insular and her research is mostly online, working from photographs of real landscapes. *Once 1*, for example, is based on Peter Dombrovskis's iconic Rock Island Bend, known as the poster image of the 1982 campaign that prevented the damming of the Franklin River.

Still, she appreciates the seasons' metronomic quality, measuring out the year and adding a distinct character to each quarter.

"I believe I get more out of time and life living in a place so defined by its seasons," she says. "The Off Season means I can relax from the stress of constant commercial photography, reflect a little and take some time to conjure up new ideas for artworks."

Moving forward, she hopes to work with other mediums, including video. *Breadth*, a 2021 installation with filmmaker Bree Sanders and audio producer Sarah Mashman, filled a room with smoke, mirrors and mountains of rustling garbage bags. Standing within this "mess", visitors saw themselves reflected and framed within the landscape, like being in a Hastie photograph. This is "heterotopia" – a Foucauldian notion of a space that simultaneously reflects and distorts the real world. And it adds a fourth stage to Hastie's artwork – inviting you to step inside the unreal.

"Art, for it to be successful, has to be accessible," she says.

*This article is produced by Broadsheet in partnership with Tourism Tasmania. Explore more wild, weird and wonderful experiences during Tasmania's Off Season.*