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EXHIBITION REVIEW BY SASHA GRISHIN

Sophia Szilagyi: Water studies

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin
Closes June 11.

This is the second solo show at the Beaver Galleries by the Melbourne-based printmaker Sophia Szilagyi.

This 40-year-old artist is predominantly a Romantic, one who explores the moods of nature as a reflection of her own temperament. She is a digital printmaker who samples photographs and images of paintings, which through Photoshop she transforms into her own personal creations that are then realised as pigment prints.



Sophia Szilagyi's *Stormy Sea (after Courbet)*.



Sophia Szilagyi's *Place*.

The present exhibition is dominated by seascapes with crashing waves and stormy skies.

In one of these prints, the artist offers as a title, *Stormy Sea (after Courbet)*, referencing Courbet's great vision of human torment of 1870 while the artist stayed in the small town of Etretat in the Haute-Normandie region in northern France.

The writer, Guy de Maupassant, visited Courbet while he was working on this painting and left us this vivid account.

"In a huge, empty room, a fat, dirty, greasy man was slapping white paint on a blank canvas with a kitchen knife. From time to time he would press his face against the window and look out at the storm.

"The sea came so close that it seemed to batter the house and completely envelope it in its foam and roar. The salty water beat against the windowpanes like hail, and ran down the walls.

"On his mantelpiece was a bottle of cider next to a half-filled glass. Now and then, Courbet would take a few swigs, and then return to his work. This work became *The Wave*, and caused quite a sensation around the world."

When I think of the two pictures side by side, both their common point of departure and their differences become immediately apparent.

Both embrace the huge, unbridled power of the ocean and its waves, its fluorescent magic and its foaming effervescence.

Courbet however employs the stormy sea as a metaphor for the human condition, as Paul Cezanne would memorably observe: "His tide comes from the depth of ages."

Szilagyi celebrates the visual splendour of the seascape with its moods and sense of fury.

Throughout her exhibition she evokes the spectacular and the picturesque in nature and captures this in beautifully executed images.

It is more a question of surface and facade, which captures our attention and draws us into these digital prints, than any deeper or profound feeling.

Szilagyi is a gifted artist with a refined sensibility who has mastered a technique of considerable sensitivity.

In her work of about a decade ago she explored fragmented apparitions, reflections and close-up studies of the human eye which created a rather unsettling note in the viewer. In her most recent work she has reconstituted her visual universe and I miss some of that earlier edginess.