

Jane Brown's black-and-white photographs hold their subjects in a state of melancholy. The once extravagant is depicted in a latter-day condition of decrepitude, while in some images time appears to have stopped.

In *Lake Burley Griffin, Canberra*, 2011–13, the lake's iconic jet fountain rises from the horizon framed by banks of trees. The shimmering water in the lower half of the frame mirrors the varied translucence of dramatic cloud formations, which in turn mingle with the branches of a tree draping gently from above in the foreground. The symmetry Brown has conjured from such organic elements is striking, but what is more intriguing is how the human-made water jet sitting centrally within the image is dwarfed by the majesty of nature surrounding it.

The material qualities of the analogue photographic process are important to Brown, who describes her chosen technique of making silver gelatin prints on fibre-based papers with palpable affection: 'The paper has a lovely weight and I love how it curls up on the corners when it dries ... It feels special'.¹ Brown's admiration for contemporary artists working in analogue photography extends from those striving steadily to perfect a technology in parallel to its supercession, such as Laurence Aberhart and Hiroshi Sugimoto, to those interrogating this decline materially and conceptually, including Zoe Leonard and Tacita Dean.

The body of work comprising 'Not Before Time' (2013), which is included in the landmark exhibition 'Melbourne Now' (2013–14) at the National Gallery of Victoria, represents a shift in scale for Brown, whose work is nonetheless limited in size because of home-studio practicalities. Photographs such as the recent suite 'Island of the Colourblind' (2013) are as invitingly small as the images in the photography books that Brown collects. 'The current work [although employing the same medium-format cameras] is a little larger as I wanted the mottled effect, due to the deterioration of the film, to be obvious to the viewer.'

Decommissioned Art History Library, University of Melbourne, 2012–13, depicts Brown's former workplace, but could equally depict a library a century earlier. Her use of aged film stock has created an effect of stippled light, which causes the photograph to appear as an object from another time, while also suggesting the library itself to be somewhat mildewed and dusty. A neat connection exists between the deterioration of film stock leading to the beautiful effects in Brown's works (initially accidental, now deliberate but still experimental) and the sense of urgency the artist feels in documenting what is sometimes rapidly disappearing subject matter:

I am attracted to the places I have visited in my work usually by some historical curiosity, and these can be as wide and varied as the mining history of small town Australia or the colonial histories of Belgium. More often than not there's a sense of urgency to document a moment in time or a place in history before it disappears. These places often seem to be forgotten or are on the edge of destruction.

The Elizabeth Towers Hotel, Melbourne, 2011–13, is photographed from the perspective of an awe-struck pedestrian peering up at the imposing structure. The hotel's glass-clad spiral staircase forms the central focus of the image, appearing simultaneously futuristic and outdated. Brown's manipulation of the film gives the sky a galaxy-like effect, making the building, shabby around the edges, appear as though it is about to ascend into outer space to live out its dotage. And perhaps this is a kinder way to imagine the structure's demise, as the 1950s heritage building was in fact demolished not long after Brown captured this image in 2011.

The grander a thing is to begin with, the more tragic its eventual decay.

Chloé Wolfson was mentored by Kathy Bail, Chief Executive, UNSW Press, Sydney.

¹ All quotes are taken from email correspondence between the author and Jane Brown, October 2013.