

Valentina Palonen | Hunting the far mountain

Hunting the far mountain is a response to our instinctive longing for the natural world.

From camping and canoeing, to mountaineering and gardening — we continue to be drawn to green spaces and what are often threatened natural environments. Following two research trips to Tasmania, I was inspired to explore how people continue to seek out and try to immerse themselves in existing remnants of the natural world. Using drawing and painting, I spent last summer travelling around many of the state's national parks, in particular to the renowned wilderness areas of the west coast, documenting individuals from a variety of backgrounds make the pilgrimage to these world-famous natural environments. Encountering day-trippers, professional mountaineers ('peakbaggers'), hikers, as well as crowds from eco-tours and research scientists, I began compiling an archive of visual references of wayfarers searching for a way back into the wild; perhaps modern-day pilgrims en route to a sacred site.

Starting from this collection and watercolour studies made on various hiking trails and lookouts during my travels, I have developed a new body of sculptures and paintings focused on reinterpretations of these sites — and those I encountered there — transforming both people and landscapes into a fantastical counter-narrative of unknown worlds and wandering fictional tribes. In these works, synthetic materials and colours suggest our distancing from nature and are contrasted against our innate biophilic impulses. Despite these oppositional forces and difficulties, many seem compelled to continue searching for a way to bridge this divide, daring to imagine ways we might rejoin the rest of the natural world. As poignantly mused by John Muir:

The Mountains are calling and I must go

Hunting the far mountain, Gould Galleries, March 4 – April 11 2015

