

WEEKEND

# Visual arts

Andrew Harper



## Hooked on a vision

**FISHING, PAINTING**  
Richard Wastell  
Bett Gallery  
Level 1, 65 Murray St.  
Until September 21  
Price range: \$4200 - \$14,000

**F**ishing is something people do. It requires a bit of skill and the right tools (although you can just manage with a string and a half decent hook off the right jetty), but mostly it requires that you go to a spot where fish might be, and wait. Being patient would seem to be a crucial ingredient of the practice.

If it goes well, you get something nice to eat, and is there anything more essential than that?

You could even cook the fish up where you caught it. You could camp overnight, and go floundering with a torch in the dark, or set a net, or find someone with an amateur licence who knows what to do and where to go, and, if you have a battered little aluminium dinghy or can borrow one, you can go and get some abalone, straight off the rocks.

Someone might suggest they could get you a crayfish. They might have a good spot they decline to reveal to you.

Fishing is something people do.

Painting is also something people do, but possibly not as many paint as those who drop a line in, and no one paints like Richard Wastell.

This new collection of works feels like a statement, and a leap – it's as if Wastell has been reaching for the imagery and, more than that, the emotional content he shares here.

There's just so much real joy in these works; there's something transformative here, because – while they are landscape works – they are also something more.

The rules have been chucked away – caught flathead and scallop shells float in the foreground of calm bays; lichen appears to grow on the painting itself; shells; a live abalone crawls along while an immense crayfish leg beckons you to a feast by the waterside.

Wastell has always hinted at this, but



Travelling Home, East Coast Garden, from Richard Wastell's exhibition Fishing, Painting at Bett Gallery. Picture: Supplied

here he has dived into a world of daring, bright colour and detail, and to be honest, it's breathtaking.

The sense of immersion, of being right at a place, sitting in it, doing things, fishing and cooking the catch, has been seen in previous works, but this time it's not a sense – it's a bold statement of intent.

I feel like Wastell has always wanted to paint like this, to express a sense of connection, rooted in memory, born of being active in a place, exploring the sea shore, gazing at the distance and the waves, being drawn into the small universe of a rock pool, and finding utter wonder in a seedpod (which Wastell deftly borrows a

title from Gustave Courbet for).

Fishing, Painting is both a total surprise and a logical step for Wastell. It does feel like he was always heading here, but the leap he has made into a vivid and expressive world that uses a range of techniques to create not so much a vision but a sensation of really being somewhere.

Wastell shows us what he touches, what he catches and eats, the waves he can hear, even the wind and sun he can feel.

It's really very good, but it's also a precious moment where, it seems, an artist has caught up with his own vision and decided it's time to really do everything that he has ever wanted to do.

**LOST BEDROOMS**  
Jonny Scholes  
Rosny Schoolhouse  
Until September 22  
Wednesday - Sunday  
11am - 5pm

This clever, witty work uses rocks held by a robot on strings over images of bedrooms printed on glass sourced from historical real estate. The homes depicted were long term, but are now possibly to become short-term accommodation. If a house becomes a short-term rental, a rock will fall and break the glass, directly making an analogy about disappearing bedrooms and rentals during a housing crisis. It's a stark and direct work that is not supposed to be at all subtle. If you see it – you'll quickly take the point, and indeed, if you should see the shards of glass you will know the robot has done its job monitoring planning data. This is what's so impressive about this artwork – it's clean, direct and simple. Scholes himself must have worked hard, because the technological prowess on display here is impressive, but you sort of barely notice this, because the work itself is just so deftly constructed: you are taken straight to the point. Scholes's decision to use bedrooms for his imagery is spot on; the bedroom is where we are safe, warm and happy; symbolically breaking even an image seems somehow brutal during a housing crisis. This is a fine idea beautifully executed; make sure you catch it. Not many artists use data from the internet in such an elegant, pointed manner.



Lost Bedrooms exhibition by Jonny Scholes at Rosny Schoolhouse