

The process of weaving fishing line appears to have helped Groves find the structuring dynamic of her paintings. The warp and weft of the woven form, and the tension they provide between vertical and horizontal emphases, has become increasingly intrinsic to her paintings. Irregularities which emerged in the weave and which disrupted strict geometries, as in *Bloom* of 2000, were reminiscent of the irregularities which had characterised the earlier work of Eva Hesse. Hesse's organic translation of 1960s formalist abstraction, including her use of unconventional materials, bears many parallels to Groves's work. Groves explains, however, that it was not until 2002 that she became fully aware of Hesse's work, when in Paris.⁷ Hesse's *Metronomic Irregularity III* of 1966—a favourite work of Groves—comprises a series of painted square-format boards, each interlinked by a horizontal swarm of cotton-covered wires emerging through a grid of holes. It is a work that is prescient of the rhythmic flow achieved by Groves in her works of woven fishing line and other media.

That fishing line bore a relation to water was a bonus. Fishing line—the angler's means of camouflage—could be used to articulate the transparent fluidity of water while also, in part, rendering the artwork dematerial. Such a use of unconventional materials does indeed revisit the 'anti-form' concerns of art practice of the late 1960s. Groves, however, is a manipulator of carefully contrived aesthetic results, albeit results which are allowed to meander from set rule. Her collection of a full palette of fishing line, developed over some ten years, extends to collecting the best international lines available, knowing their colours, their physical properties.

In that sense, Groves 'paints', rather than sculpts, with fishing line. Even as she unmakes the idea of traditional canvas, she makes it again anew. The undulations of the weave ensure that light is refracted from the shiny filament, encouraging a sense of visual depth and flow. In *Untitled #1* and *#2* of 2002 and the *Meltwater* works

of 2003, Groves added to this watery allusion by encasing segments of woven fishing line loosely within 'droplets' of moulded Perspex, which visually splay and distort the woven geometry. Bands of different tones imply bands of frozen and less frozen water. These works hang against the wall as a metaphor for the frozen expanses of Lapland, whose summer brings a partial thaw and a strata of life. Now, even as 'paintings', they become 'sculpture'.

An earth of extremes

In recent years, Groves has increasingly used painting as a means of marshalling the extremes of fire and ice into visual form. A series of works of 2000 had translated river currents into horizontal bands of small squares. In works such as *Liquescent #2* or *Current #1*, Groves achieves a vibrant optical shimmer by placing rows and rows of small squares of colour, painted in a linear format with a small chisel brush, over a darker coloured surface. Horizontal bands of the darker substratum emerge to segment the works. These, on examination, appear strangely water marked, as if harbouring cultures of unspecified micro-organisms. Again we are drawn back to observations of natural phenomena.

Throughout 2002, Groves maintained a reduced palette. White and grey figured in taut configurations in the series *Light and dark shadows* and *Increments and shadows*. In *Double fold*—a work painted for the 2002 group exhibition *Good vibrations: the legacy of Op Art in Australia*⁸—tiny squares of a hue close to white are placed in grid-like rows, writ left to right, over horizontal bands of pale grey and darker grey. These horizontal bands may be read as the shadows which fragment the landscape. The canvas is further divided into five vertical sections, including a larger central section, each defined by misregistrations of linking tone and pattern. The two panels embracing the central section are tonally darker and give an illusion of a 'folding'. Groves

relentlessly pursues a process that results in a scintillating surface, but does so with fresh spontaneity rather than overly determined exactitude. Dappled shadows flicker through a complex grid of light and dark.

Vibrant colour was reintroduced in 2003. In a diptych *Firestorm* of 2003, Groves constrains an inferno's maelstrom into vibrant fields of variants of yellow and red, the pale ashen and blackened remnants rendered in *After fire*. Bands of pearlescent pigment here provide a fine grid which holds together the small squares of brushed oil paint, layers competing for attention. Squares of colour stand out from the mesh-like structure or sink back within it—this 'mesh' being what remains visible of the underlying layers and layers of slowly built-up paint. A shifting architecture of thrust and recession ensures, in *Firestorm*, an almost visual crackle. Unlike the works of 2000, however, in which the horizontal dominated, now both vertical and horizontal axes are more equally weighted, the eye following competing visual pathways about the canvas.

A visit to Finland and the Arctic Tundra in Lapland in 2003 prompted Groves to translate this region's harsh environ through several subsequent series of works. While for the most part her palette maintained its frigid tones, some revealed the summer colours she experienced in north-eastern Finland and Lapland—indeed the bushfire works were completed after her return in response to the Victorian bushfires. Titles are linked to the transformations that unfold in the Tundra: *Ice folds*, *Meltwater* (water melting from glaciers or ice), *Striated peneplain* (plains produced by long-term erosion), *Subterranean flow* (the flow of meltwater beneath the earth) and *Frozen earth* (the permafrost or permanently frozen earth lying beneath a layer of earth that thaws briefly in summer, allowing plants to grow).

As Groves worked on the paintings in these series, a different method began evolving. This time she applied squares of contrasting colour within those squares she had already written across the canvas. Moving from left to right and applying the squares 'freehand', the wavering bands were emphasised. In *Colours of the Arctic fells* and *Subterranean flow* of 2003, the rhythmic flow already established by the rows of paint squares gain a jolt of melody that flares throughout the work. A startling sky blue meanders through the warm tones of *Colours of the Arctic fells—Summer 2002 #1 and 3*, as if the Tundra had been visited momentarily by a Queensland summer. In *Subterranean flow #2*, a warm red subverts the horizontal emphasis, leaving a vibrant vertical trail up and down the otherwise deep blue and violet tones. Like a fugue, these trails stand connected to yet apart from the rhythm and melody already established, while serving also to highlight pre-existing disconnections.

Conjuring associations with these extreme conditions—of land and ice in transformation, of ice and meltwater, of plants that never decompose, of depths unseen by the eye, of a layering of realities—is a series in which watercolour is painted on wet media acetate. Instead of the more firmly inscribed squares of colour of the paintings, strokes and lines of pigment inflect with impromptu regularity an amorphous surface. The fresh delicacy in the *Tundra series* of 2003 strikes a subtle tone that speaks of momentary abundance and life.

A subterranean earth

In her latest series of works, Groves has explored a world that could be linked to Nordic myths—a dark subterranean sphere of underground rivers and caves with their eerily sparkling stalactites and stalagmites, formed by the slow drip of water. It is a sphere partly experienced in the limestone caves in South Australia. But also partly imagined. Just as Groves imagined cross sections of the Arctic Tundra's permafrost in *Frozen earth* of 2003, so she imagines the underwater caves of the Piccaninny Ponds in South Australia, visible only to speleologists armed with diving equipment. Her translation of the 'old stream caves' continues her concern with the transformative properties of natural phenomena.⁹

In a two-panel work of 2004, *Stratum #1 (Subterranean series)*—the first in a new set of works—Groves has again written out rows of small painted squares. On this occasion, the relatively smaller size of the squares confirms the sense of an obsessive working method. Groves, in sympathy with the chill darkness of her subject, employs an overall tonality of deep blues and blacks. While she once more highlights already painted squares by overpainting, here it is a less raucous addition. The smaller squares of paint give an illusion of a ribbed surface, not unlike knitting or woven fabric, making for inevitable parallels with her works of woven fishing line. Two of the underlying bands—at top left and bottom right—remain unadorned by overpainting, suggestive of the substratum in question or again of woven fabric. And, once more, imperfections and misregistrations punctuate the rhythms within the piece.

In her rendering of natural phenomena, Groves does not describe an easily recognisable world. Obsessively, she weaves and writes the deep currents that lie beneath surface appearances. As she draws in the net of her vision, her trawl is revealed as an interconnecting energy, an energy which is linked to closely observed nature but which also transcends it. Hers' is a project which imagines and rewrites the world. Her find, her gemstone, is one of endless tumescence.

1 Fourth Estate, Harper Collins, London, 1993, p. 304.

2 E-mail correspondence from Groves to the author, 25 August 2004.

3 Obvious exceptions include, for instance, *Folded flag* of 1996 and the tangled 'vines' in *Shadow of a shadow* of 2001 and *Overlapping shadows #2* of 2002.

4 Interview with the artist, 10 June 2004.

5 For example, Robert MacPherson's *Gilgai: Rain, and Six Kinds of Rain, Seven Frog Poems for Clement Wragge 1990-91 and Nine Frog Poems: Nine Skies, Nine Airs for B.A., 1990-1992*; and Eva Hesse's *Repetition Nineteen III* of 1968, composed of a group of nineteen, slightly misshapen, fibreglass cylindrical receptacles.

6 Yve-Alain Bois, 'The iconoclast', *Piet Mondrian 1872-1944*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1995-96, pp. 360-61.

7 E-mail correspondence from Groves to the author, 24 August 2004.

8 Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne.

9 E-mail correspondence from Groves to the author, 25 August 2004.