

**WOMEN  
WORKS  
SUE JANE  
TAYLOR**

MINEWORKS | Sue Jane Taylor | West Coast Pioneer Museum, Zeehan, Tasmania | 15 March – 19 April 2009



MINEWORKS  
SUE JANE TAYLOR

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** Arts Tasmania and HI-Arts Scotland kindly funded my residency which was hosted by LARQ in Queenstown. The resulting exhibition has been supported by Ten Days on the Island festival and the Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery. Phil Vickers at West Coast Heritage supported the Zeehan exhibition.

None of this would have happened without the assistance of Raymond Arnold of LARQ whose idea it was and who has worked so hard to make it a success.

I am grateful to Scott Clyde, Phill Kemp, Jim Manley and their teams at Vendanta/Copper Mines Tasmania and Hayley Boyd, Mat Daly, Pete Ray and others at Henty Gold Mine who were ever-helpful on the surface and underground. I would also like to thank all the Mt Lyell and Henty miners who stood patiently for their portraits.

Many people made our stay in Queenstown welcoming including Rod and Sue Linhart and Peter McBain at St Joseph's School, Noeleen Bradshaw and her volunteers at the Galley Museum, and Helena Demczuk, John Halton, Shirley Scolyer and Taimi Kapanen.

I would particularly like to thank Mary Unwin in London for editing the catalogue and Lynda Warner for its beautiful design. As always, the encouragement and support of my partner Ian Westacott and our sons, Lachlan and Finn, makes it all possible.

Sue Jane Taylor

**INTRODUCTION** Sue Jane Taylor was the 2008 international artist at Landscape Art Research Queenstown (LARQ). It is an art organisation housed in a studio/gallery in the western Tasmanian mining town of Queenstown founded by Australian artist Raymond Arnold. LARQ's primary objective is to develop a type of 'wilderness' art space with 'artists in residence' responding to the rich natural and cultural values inherent in the region.

Sue Jane Taylor was hosted by LARQ to work with local mining companies to develop her ideas about labour, industry and their respective place within the natural world. The Tasmanian author Richard Flanagan's treatise, *A Terrible Beauty*, which is essentially about the early piner/timber cutters of the west coast, established a literary precedent for an analysis of this labour/landscape relationship in Tasmania. During her LARQ residency Sue Jane worked with local underground miners at Copper Mines of Tasmania (CMT), Queenstown and Barrick's Henty Gold mine – *The mine in the wilderness* – and these complicated environments facilitated further art works concerned with industries and their contingent personnel located in delicately balanced and relatively remote areas.

Sue Jane came to work on the west coast of Tasmania after a long period of involvement in the North Sea oil industry. Over time, Sue Jane has created a unique visual record of the places and people affected by oil, visiting construction yards, oil terminals and offshore facilities, capturing the gritty, harsh conditions there in her artwork. In a development from this research she was also invited in 2006 to begin recording Talisman Energy's pioneering energy project, the Beatrice Downwind Offshore Wind Farm Demonstrator Project located off the Caithness coast. Sue Jane also has both personal and professional links with Australia. In 1995 she accompanied a female drover in outback Queensland. This resulted in a touring exhibition throughout eastern mainland Australia and the highlands of Scotland in 1998-2000.

Sue Jane Taylor's artwork from the period spent in the mines of the West Coast is on exhibition through the auspices of Tasmania's Ten Days on the Island festival. CMT and Barrick are supporting the exhibition through catalogue sponsorship. Carole Hammond and Cobus van Breda from the Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery have been instrumental in staging the exhibition.

Raymond Arnold

Supported by



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HI-ARTS



Sue Jane and Raymond Arnold, LARQ Gallery, 2008 Peter Lord, courtesy of the Launceston Examiner



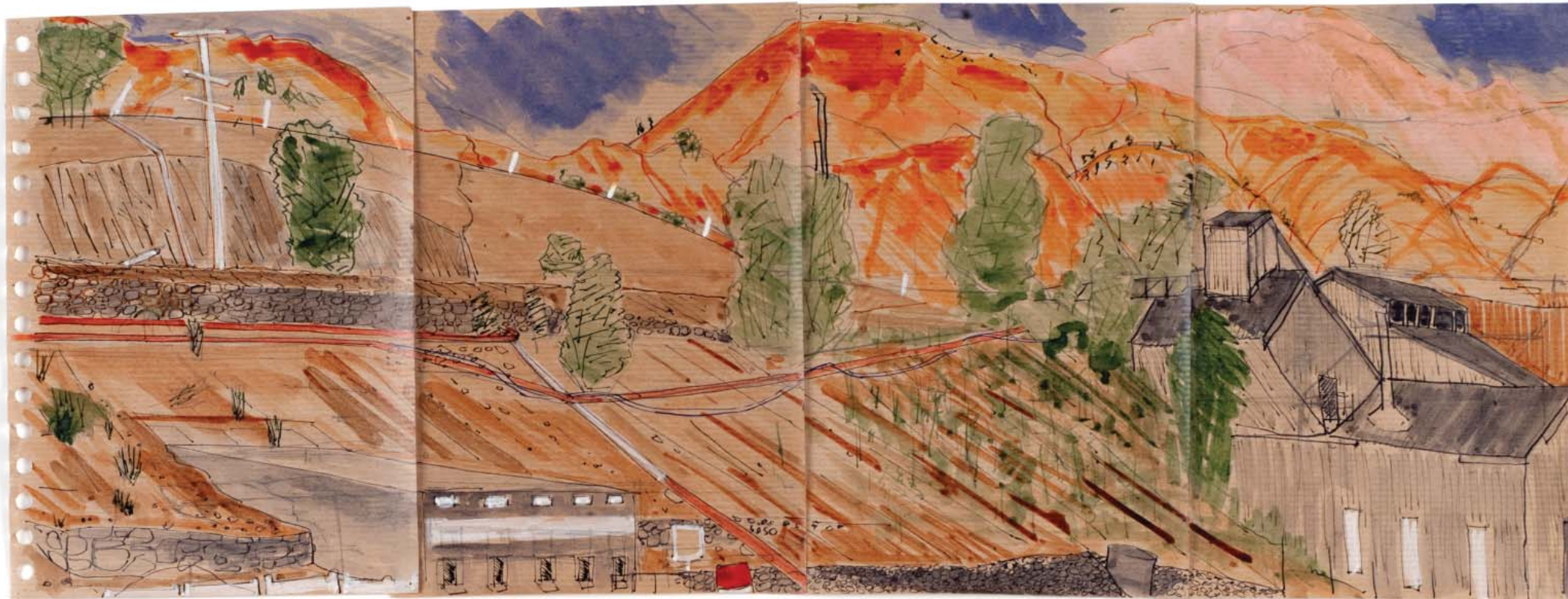
**FIRST IMPRESSIONS** On the journey from the airport, as Raymond's jeep wound its way down the hill towards Queenstown, I got my first sight of Mt Lyell: a mountain stripped bare and half eaten away; huge hillocks of red orange ochre rock strewn all over its mountain sides. Below these heaps, mill workshops were messily scattered and giant rusting power pylons zigzagged across the landscape. These industrial scars were in stark contrast to a backdrop of forested green landscape. I caught my breath; the adventure was about to begin.

Pioneer Lodge was where Finn, my youngest son, and I would stay: a flat-roof cement block built in the 1970s. As we lay in bed at night we could hear the Queen River flowing close to the flats, tranquil and soothing.

By daylight, though, the river was a shocking sight – bright orange in colour, due to the high iron content, and sick with acidic poison.

“From the Mt Lyell smelters and reduction works, the metal tailings pumped almost continuously into the Queen River. The river was pure grey. It reeked of acid and mineral waste. It didn't rush and rollick over the stones and its waters never gleamed or sparkled. From the mine it wound, sullen and deathlike, through the town to a point south of Queenstown where it joined waters with the King.”<sup>1</sup>

Surface sketch, Mt Lyell 2 2008, pen and ink wash, 21.5 x 75cm





**WALKS AROUND QUEENSIE** On our third day, Finn and I went to see the town's water supply dam. We had been warned not to drink the tap water, and baths were a novel experience because of the deep, dark natural tannin in the water. After lunch we walked to where the two rivers, Queen and King, met. The sight of the Queen's pollution spilling into the King was horrifying. We sat quietly for some minutes contemplating this powerful, disturbing vision.

**It was a conjunction that condemned the bigger river to a gradual choking death. The King, which had just emerged in a great tumble and jumble of energy and rushing water from the narrow confines of the deep gorge between Mt Jukes and Mt Huxley, met up with the slow-moving Queen and drank her poison. The fast, brown water typical of the western country mingled with the grey dregs of the huge and famous copper mine and as the streams swirled and became absorbed with each other the colour of the King changed until it too was a kind of dirty, pallid grey. And with this shabby change of hue, and weighed down by its uninvited toxic burden, the King moved turbidly on to the sea.<sup>2</sup>**

Around town I noticed the differently-styled weatherboard houses, traditional miners' cottages, some well maintained and others badly neglected. There were lots of barking dogs but no real sign of human activity, just the chimney smoke from wood-burning stoves. In the middle of a bare garden we spotted a life-size tree made entirely from VB (Victoria Bitter) beer cans. The railway line ran close to this property and the VB Tree had become a tourist attraction. Its creator was sitting crouched over on the veranda of his purple-painted weatherboard house, swigging a beer can and assisting with the tree's development.

**MT LYELL MINE** Driving up the wide dirt track in Raymond's jeep, I noticed a bright orange stream at the side of the road, gushing down the slope towards the Queen. This was pumped-out run-off water from the old underground mine works. Industrial scenes and their noises began to unfold as we turned each corner. A towering red brick chimney stack stood high above on the red, bare carved-out rock. Now heritage-listed, this stack was part of the deadly smelter systems at the turn of the 20th century. For 25 years sulphur fumes hung over the town and valleys, killing and damaging all vegetation in its path; with topsoil washed away, vast swathes of lush hillsides became bare rock.

At the next corner, a massive, menacing, vibrating surge bin came into view. It crushed transported rocks from a conveyor belt high above, which started its journey from the shaft a mile away on the hillside. The crusher spat the rocks out onto another conveyor belt which continued its journey over to the mill works on the other side of the hill. As I got out of the jeep I could smell the minerals in the air.

At the mine I was greeted by Jim Manley, the Human Resource Manager, and Phill Kemp the Safety Manager. Phill was trying to improve the complacent safety attitude of the miners; there had already been 78 easily preventable minor accidents this year and it was only May. Scott Clyde, the General Manager, joined us and explained current technology and work practices. He overwhelmed me with facts and statistics. Mt Lyell used to be the biggest copper mine in the southern hemisphere. Had it been a new site, 99 per cent of the practices which had taken place in the previous hundred years would have been forbidden. It was now impossible to build a new smelter anywhere in Australia.

**SURFACE TOUR MT LYELL** Back at the mine rescue office Phill asked Bertie, one of his safety team, to give me a surface tour round the vast, sprawling site and I got kitted out with the standard industrial work gear: reflector boiler suit, hat, glasses, ear protectors and Blundstone steel-cap gumboots.

As we got into the rescue vehicle, I looked over to the porthole located only 100 metres away from the main office. This entrance; insignificant in appearance, led to the mine's industrial underworld. On the way up the hill we passed the orange creek I had noticed earlier; Bertie called this Cola Creek because of its frothy and visually disturbing appearance.

We drove further up past the conveyor belt making its way down to the surge bin and past the old dynamite stores – tin roof shacks on stilts with timber walls, built nearly 100 years ago and isolated from all the workings. Natural scrub growth was slowly beginning to take root on the barren, rocky, ground which had for years been churned over. Sedge and restio grasses were the first plants to regenerate along with snowberry, wattle, tea trees and some rainforest tree species.



Eerie, rhythmical noises came from the shaft wheel as the rock was brought up in giant buckets from 680 metres below before falling onto the conveyor belt.

Not far away, a giant vent expelled underground steamy vapours, assisting with the circulation of clean air underground. We could hear men inspecting levels in the lift shaft below; the lift was used for quick access for emergency purposes and for bringing up the injured.

Surface sketch, Mt Lyell 1 2008, pen and ink wash, 21.5 x 45cm

It was a beautiful, clear day as we drove along the upper ridges. At one of the highest points we saw the site of the 1912 West Lyell mining disaster. Forty-two men had perished from smoke inhalation in an underground fire. This tragedy rocked the whole community and has never been forgotten.

I was shown an old shaft, a threatening, wide, black gash in the ground. Many abandoned tunnels and deep shafts were scattered all over the district and one had to be careful when bushwalking. Dotted all around the bare ridges, old King Billy Pine tree stumps lay almost fossilised from being cut down for timber or destroyed by sulphur fumes and bush fires. Middens of broken coloured-glass bottles and fragments of crockery from previous settlements were scattered and spread out.

We made our way down to the site of West Lyell's open-cut massive crater. Gradually the edges of this deep, open crater were sliding, crumbling and caving-in as rock from deep underground was taken out by current mine operations. It was like looking into the void of a volcano. I felt the pull, trying to suck me in

and seduce me with the rocks' beautiful, vibrant, warm colours. There was an echoing silence all around as we looked out onto panoramic views of the mountains and ocean beyond.

In the afternoon, Bertie showed me round the mill production site, a sharp contrast to the open space and fresh mountain air. Amongst the many workshop buildings, machines further crushed and processed the rock into dust, separating out the copper from the sludge. As we walked around, I was sensitive to the loud, penetrating noises, the fine grey layers of dust on everything and the industrial smells. Some workshop areas resembled the bowels of a mad machine with its endless passages and networks of pipes.

**UNDERGROUND TOUR MT LYELL** For my underground tour, I was kitted out with a hat with a lamp, a belt with heavy gear strapped to it weighing five kilos, a lamp battery and a 'self rescuer', a silver-cased canister which enables one to breathe for a short while in emergencies. In the work cruiser, Harvey, the underground operations manager and my guide for the tour, flicked on the LV's flashing orange roof light. With headlights full on, we drove towards the portal's complete darkness. Harvey switched on the radio and spoke into the receiver, 'LV coming down main decline'. This was the moment that I had been preparing and waiting for all these months. To Harvey this was his routine morning inspection.

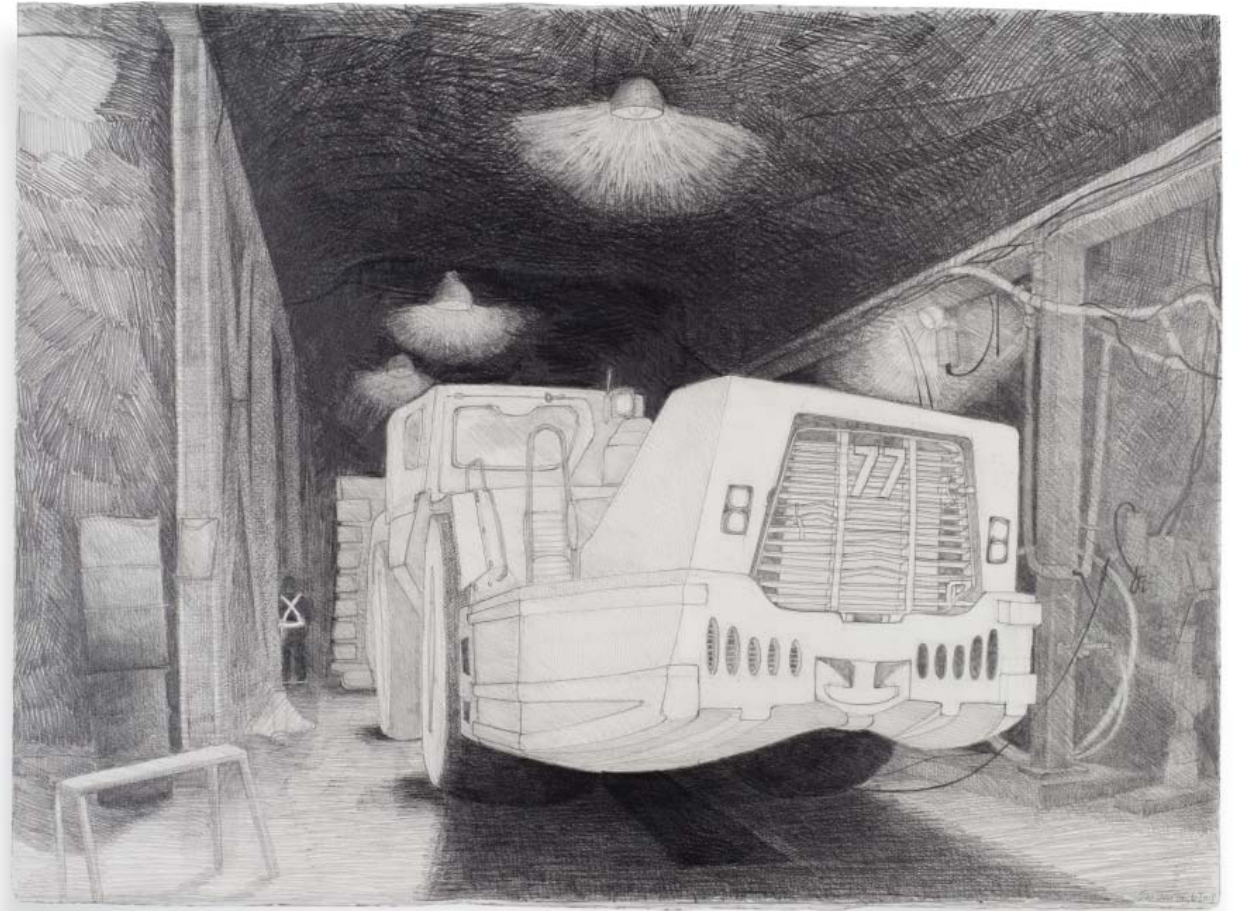
We drove down the steep tunnel's uneven track, just big enough to squeeze in huge trucks. The background sounds of workers' voices came over the radio enabling Harvey to be constantly aware of truck movements and mining operations. My ears popped as the gradation levels dropped and we passed a sea-level sign, illuminated by our headlights. We drove further and further down, everything in grey, tonal blackness. There was no colour, only the orange headlamps creating and reflecting artificial colours. The challenge for me

was how to portray this tonal complexity, devoid of sunlight and bright colour. I had drawn many times in industrial environments but never one so extreme, so devoid of light.

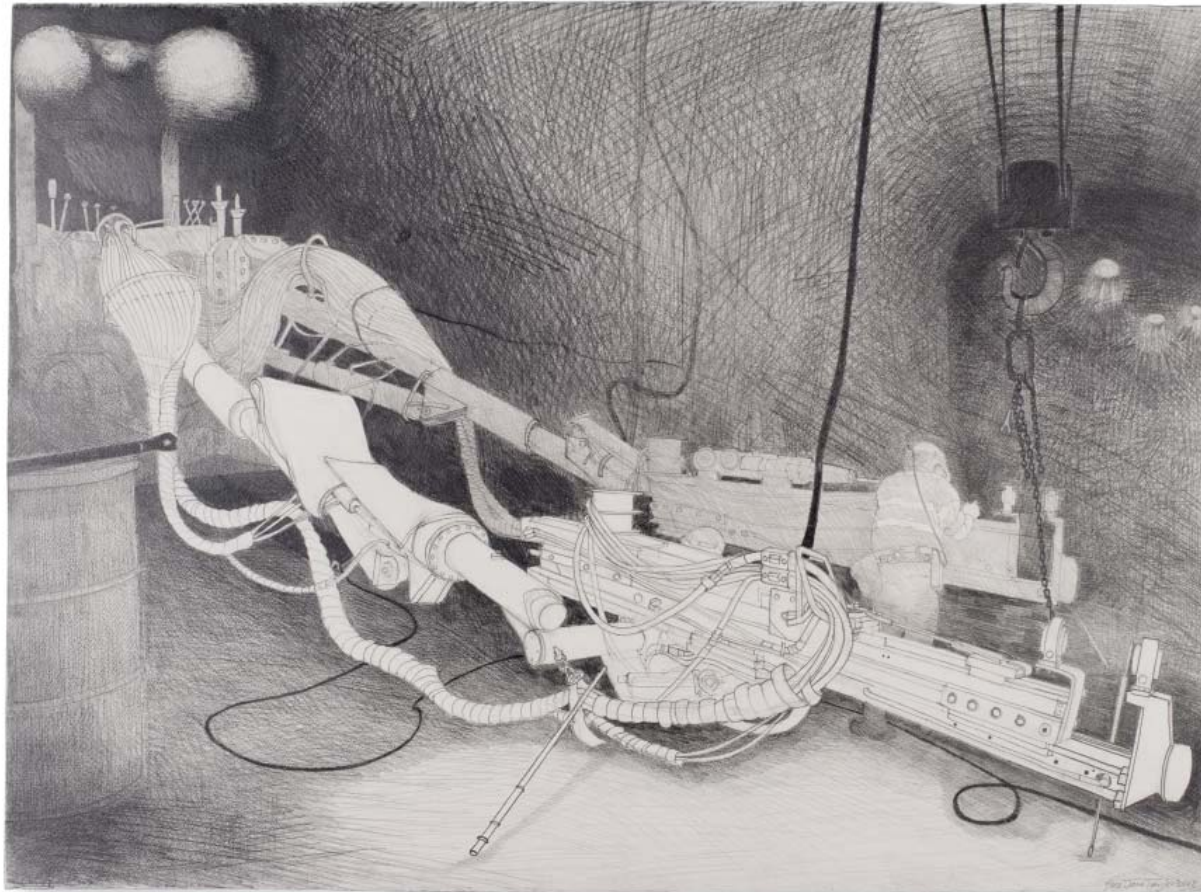
Harvey radioed ahead as we entered 15.15 level. We stopped at a tight dark siding, jumped out and switched on our helmet lamps. The ground was uneven, potted with small water pools and it was difficult for my eyes to adjust to the dark, dim light. Our headlamps and Harvey's torch were our guides. Off the main track, we came upon a giant crusher breaking up huge lumps of rock. We continued on to the mechanic workshops. A boomer (which drills holes in rock) and a bogger (a front-end loader) were being repaired, both massive, complex machines. Harvey encouraged me to climb up into the bogger cabin, commenting that girls my size drove trucks like these. As he shut the door I felt very cramped. Working 12-hour shifts in this cramped space and in the dark would not be my idea of fun but at \$72,000 per year for an average wage it was a lure for many people.

We drove further down to the level where bidders and trucks started to operate, stopping off at the crib (canteen) to hang up our tags, indicating our descent to lower levels. Back in the LV, Harvey kept his ears to the radio, no conversation. A woman trucker's faint voice called up and he reversed suddenly into a small siding.

From the darkness below, the headlights of a huge monster truck appeared, blinding my eyes. Everything shook as it passed us. We stopped frequently to let more trucks past. With Harvey's experience he handled this with ease, getting into sidings out of the giants' way by reversing up steep blind corners at high speed.



Bogger arse end, Mt Lyell 2008, graphite, 54.5 x 76cm



Boomer, Henty 2008, graphite, 56 x 76cm

We watched a bogger loading rocks into a truck's bucket. In a confined dark space the noise and dust was magnified and my only glimpse of the drivers was that of the reflectors on their helmets. It got warmer and muggier as we drove further down. Sometimes water poured and splashed onto the cab's roof from the tunnel's back. In some areas there were small flowing streams at one side of the decline. Surface rain took about three days to percolate down through the oxidised sulphide-bearing rock and into the bottom of this mine. As a result vehicles did not last long down here. At each level, pump systems removed acidic rain into pipes leading to the tailings dam. Mixed with tailings from the mill, the acid drainage was neutralised. But the acidic water from old mine works predating 1995, for which this company was not responsible, had been pumped out and poured into creeks such as Cola Creek and down on into Queen, then King and out to sea. Harvey carried out his inspection in military fashion. Whenever we walked close to the shaft, cool, fresh air brushed against my face. It felt good, a connection with the surface above.

At 14.14, the lowest level, there had recently been a flood and it had taken months to pump out the water and realign the tunnel walls. Nearby a boomer was drilling rock; its gigantic, hydraulic arms at work. The scene was reminiscent of a science fiction film. Finally, Harvey showed me an emergency pod container. These pods, where miners could survive for up to four days in an emergency, were placed on every level.

For part of the way to the surface we were behind a truck, its bucket full of rock. Dust clouds hindered Harvey's driving visibility. He radioed for the tunnel sprinklers to be switched on. The truck veered off into a side tunnel heading for 'Kylie' and 'Madonna' rock dumps near the crusher. Our ascent seemed to take a long time. At first I could not identify the sharp, shimmering speck of light in the distance amidst the blackness. It was like an optical illusion as we drove closer, the circle growing bigger and bigger. Suddenly I recognised it as daylight streaming into our darkness. As we drove out of the tunnel it was like a burst of freedom for my eyes, to see the natural light and the sky above again.

**UNDERGROUND TOUR HENTY GOLD MINE** I had been looking forward to visiting this mine which was located in a World Heritage Site and had been built on an old hydro property 12 years ago. I was curious to compare this small marginal mine and Mt Lyell. Pete, Henty's underground projects co-ordinator, was my guide. Driving down into the black portal did not seem as daunting as at Mt Lyell.

The winch was our first stop, built 400 metres below surface because of strict planning restrictions. From this level, trucks drove their loads up to the surface. A thumbnail of gold is extracted from each truck load.

Further down, in the mechanic workshops, boomers, bidders and trucks were in for repair. It was becoming clear that these workshop areas were the only realistically safe and lit places where I would be able to draw for any long period of time. There was a lot of activity with miners passing through on foot and mechanics working on the massive machines.

The darkness and monochrome rock tones were similar to Mt Lyell underground but here the air felt much cleaner. At 19.40 level (636 metres underground) Pete guided me in the pitch black to where I could just make out a boiler suit's reflectors from the light of our helmet lamps ten metres away. Tom Hansen was contentedly operating a production long-haul drill rig. Radio contact and crib time were important to individuals such as Tom, who worked alone, dotted all over the mine. At the deepest level, in a disused stope, another solitary figure sat operating a tele-remote bogger in darkness; two monitor screens were his visual driving guides. Unnerving sounds could be heard from a stope nearby, where the remote bogger was moving back and forth. I tried to capture these moments on paper, making pencil marks in the sketchbook by feeling my way with aid from my helmet lamp and other little-used sensory brain functions. My recall and sketches became key resources as it was impossible to take any decent photos underground; a camera's flash picked up only reflector bands from work clothes.

At lunchtime we drove back up to the crib. Men, squads of them, with interesting faces, all shapes and sizes, were cooking at the homemade barbecue hot plate. Their work gear caught my eye, from boiler suits to bib-brace-style dungarees; blues, oranges and reflector strips each creating different patterns on their garments. Pete offered me spring water which was tapped directly from the rock, cool and refreshing after our hectic morning's tour. On our ascent, the daylight beam of the portal was a welcome relief but our five-and-a-half-hour tour had gone in a flash.

In the afternoon I was shown around the processing mill. Cyanide is used in the extraction of gold and scientists from the University of Tasmania strictly monitored the tailings dam and nearby creeks, regularly testing the fish and water life. I noticed posters alerting workers to the dangers of snakes during spring and summer periods. The building was partially open to the elements with magnificent views out to the bush, cool winter breezes blew all around as we walked along the steel grid platforms.



Bogger in tunnel, Henty 2008, pen and ink wash, 37 x 71cm



Remote boggler driver, Henty 2008, graphite, 38 x 58cm

**THE WORKING DAY** My day often began at 4.15am in the mine muster room. For a couple of hours I sat there observing miners as they came in for meetings. Each miner's personality was reflected in his work clothes with their personal touches. I am fairly comfortable in an all-male environment but the presence of women workers seemed to bring a sense of balance and as I got to meet more women I could see that they were strong characters who would not put up with too much feral behaviour from the men.

Later in the morning was spent drawing in the underground workshops. With my rescue-minder man by my side, I sat drawing on a crib chair close to the monster machines. I laid out paper to protect my equipment from surfaces thick with grease. In the background, banter, chat, drill noises and the banging of huge hammers could be heard, a surreal cacophony of sound. Being devoid of natural light, there was no gauge of time.

Each day after my mine visits I retreated to my studio which was the finance room of the historic mining offices on the edge of town. There, I reflected on my new experiences and continued to develop my sketches, working on the original finance desk made of solid timber three metres long. In my drawings I built up layers of tonal graphite and developed further colour tonal ranges in my pen and ink drawings.

My walks back to the Pioneer Lodge, before darkness fell, were full of visual experiences. A wooden foot bridge over the Queen, yet untouched from acidic run off downstream, led to mine workshops. These old heritage buildings were full of character; corrugated iron workshops spread out over a large open industrial site. Behind lay Sticht Hill, a giant black slag heap (more than 60 feet high, half a mile long and covering 40 acres). It was named after the legendary general manager at Mt Lyell from 1897-1922. Planted wattle trees grew precariously on a thin layer of topsoil along its long, narrow ridge. High above, Mount Owen's pink craggy tops were spotlighted by the late afternoon winter sun. At the edge of this site were rows of newly refurbished pre-fab and weatherboard bungalows, mostly owned by mining families.

**THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACY** Jeff Cordery, the environmental manager, took me on several site trips around Mt Lyell and up to the company's massive tailings dam where he listed all the birds and animals using it as their habitat. He spoke of the damage produced by mineralization on this site before 1995; millions of tons of sulphidic tailings, smelter and topsoil flowed down the King and Queen. Eighty-five per cent of all mine waste discharged over a century of mining still lies in sediment banks, some 15 metres deep, along the lower reaches of the King and trapped in its delta. Even if the Queen River's current acidic rain pollution were to cease, scientists believe that the run-off from the million tonnes of sulphidic overburden dumps could last for a further 500 years or so. The Tasmanian government has acknowledged that there is a natural scientific remedial process, in the form of a sulphide-eating bug, which could start to clean up the Queen, but the process is deemed too expensive. Jeff was more positive about the slow but steady growth regeneration. He was particularly proud of the moss and lichens starting to spread in some tiny areas of rock faces.

Sue Jane Taylor



Cindy, Mt Lyell 2008, colour conté, 57 x 79.5cm



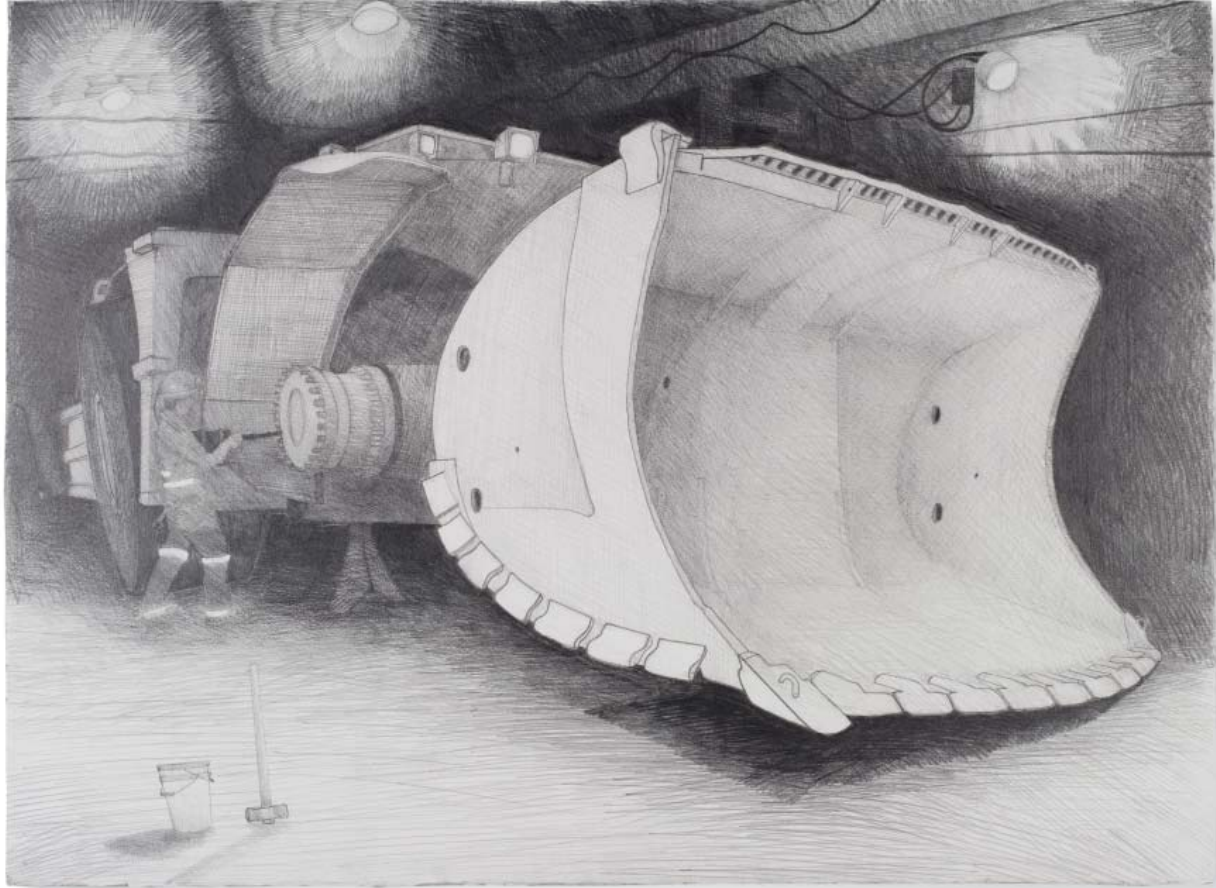
Jeff, Mt Lyell 2008, colour conté, 56 x 76.5cm



Gold man, Henty 2008, colour conté, 57 x 79.5cm



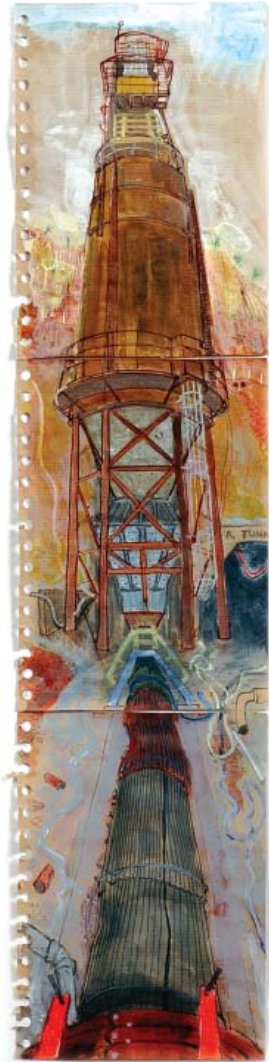
Sally, Mt Lyell 2008, colour conté, 56 x 76.5cm



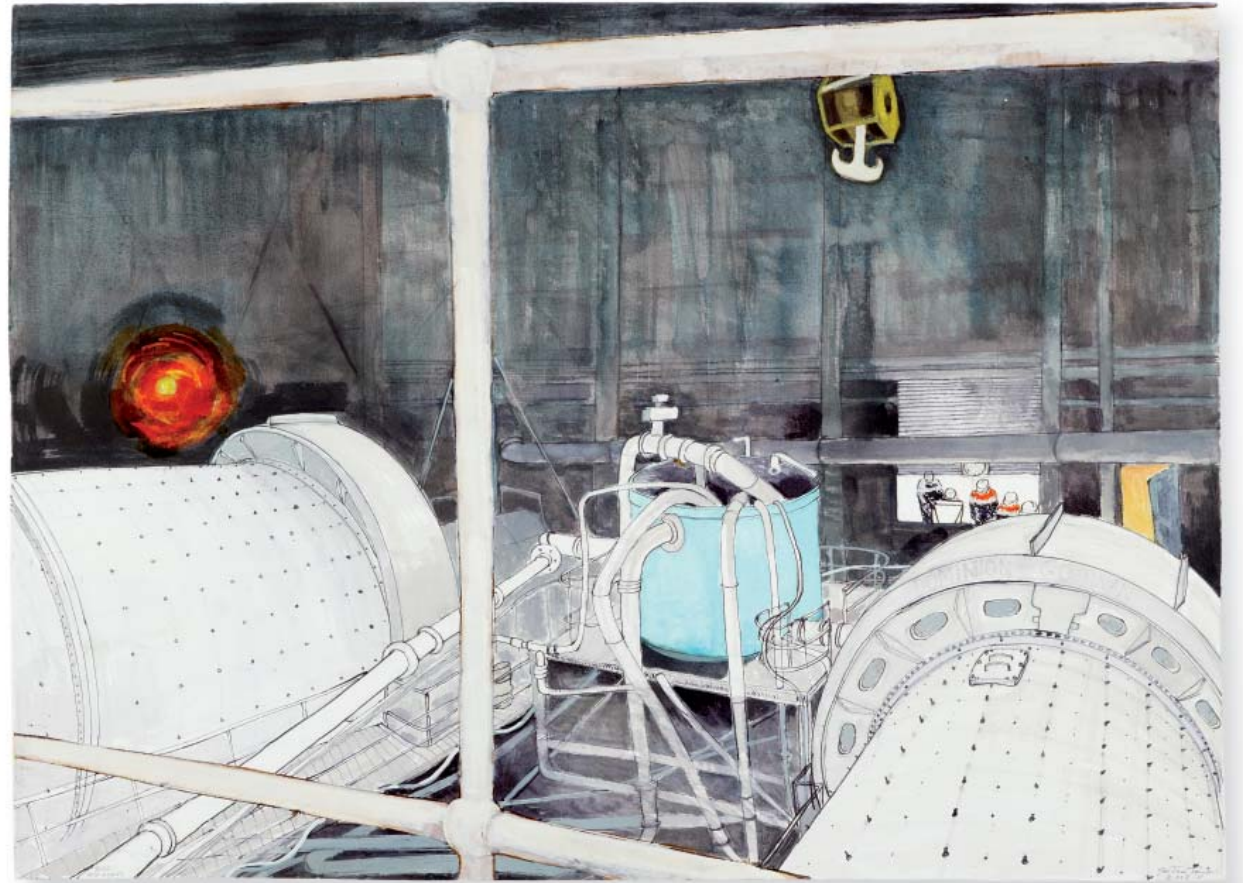
Bucket bogger, Mt Lyell 2008, graphite, 77 x 56cm



Loading rock, Henty 2008, pen and ink wash, 51 x 55cm



Surge bin, Mt Lyell 2008, pen and ink wash, 63.8 x 15cm [two sheets]



Grinding Mills, Mt Lyell 2008, pen and ink wash, 57 x 79cm



**SUE JANE TAYLOR** was brought up in the Black Isle and studied Fine Art at Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen, the Slade School, London and Konsthogskolan, Stockholm. She has worked regularly with James Macmillan and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, has exhibited at the City Arts Centre, Edinburgh and has held residencies at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, U.I.E Shipyard, Clydebank and Armidale Gallery and Museum, NSW, Australia. For a fuller introduction to the artist's work and background please see [www.suejanetaylor.co.uk](http://www.suejanetaylor.co.uk)

Title Page: **Truck in tunnel, Mt Lyell** 2009, ink and wash, 21 x 30.5cm

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Portrait of Sue Jane Taylor opposite by Helena Demczuk

Printer: Focal Printing

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