

Keynote Address

Elizabeth Truswell  
Australian National University

### **Celebrating the Past in Art and Science**

As an artist and a scientist, I work from a conviction that art and science are closely linked; that each is a different way of responding to the natural world. Only recently have they been considered separate disciplines. History provides clear examples of the close interaction between these two human activities. The way in which Leonardo da Vinci's science informed his art is one example; the work of artists who accompanied voyages of exploration from Europe to the new world is another.

In a long working life as a geologist – a palaeontologist – I have spent much of that involved with concepts of time, in deciphering earth history, which is a field rich in diverse imagery. Much of this has involved the reconstruction of past landscapes, using a range of scientifically accepted techniques. This culture of science imposes a particular view of the world, a view in which change is an essential element.

Translating this view of an ever-changing world into an art practice remains an ongoing challenge. While I am conscious that art and science use different languages to express a response to nature, I believe that the processes of working are very similar. Both the artist and the scientist, when tackling a subject, go through the same processes of collecting information, of gathering data, then testing a range of different ways of expressing what those data might mean. And serendipity often plays a part – happy and unexpected discoveries made by accident are a feature both of art and of science.