

# An attraction of opposites

## VISUAL ARTS

Juha Tolonen  
Finlandisation

Art Gallery of WA

REVIEW WILLIAM YEOMAN

The latest exhibition in AGWA's WA Focus series, Finlandisation features a series of enigmatic land and cityscapes by WA

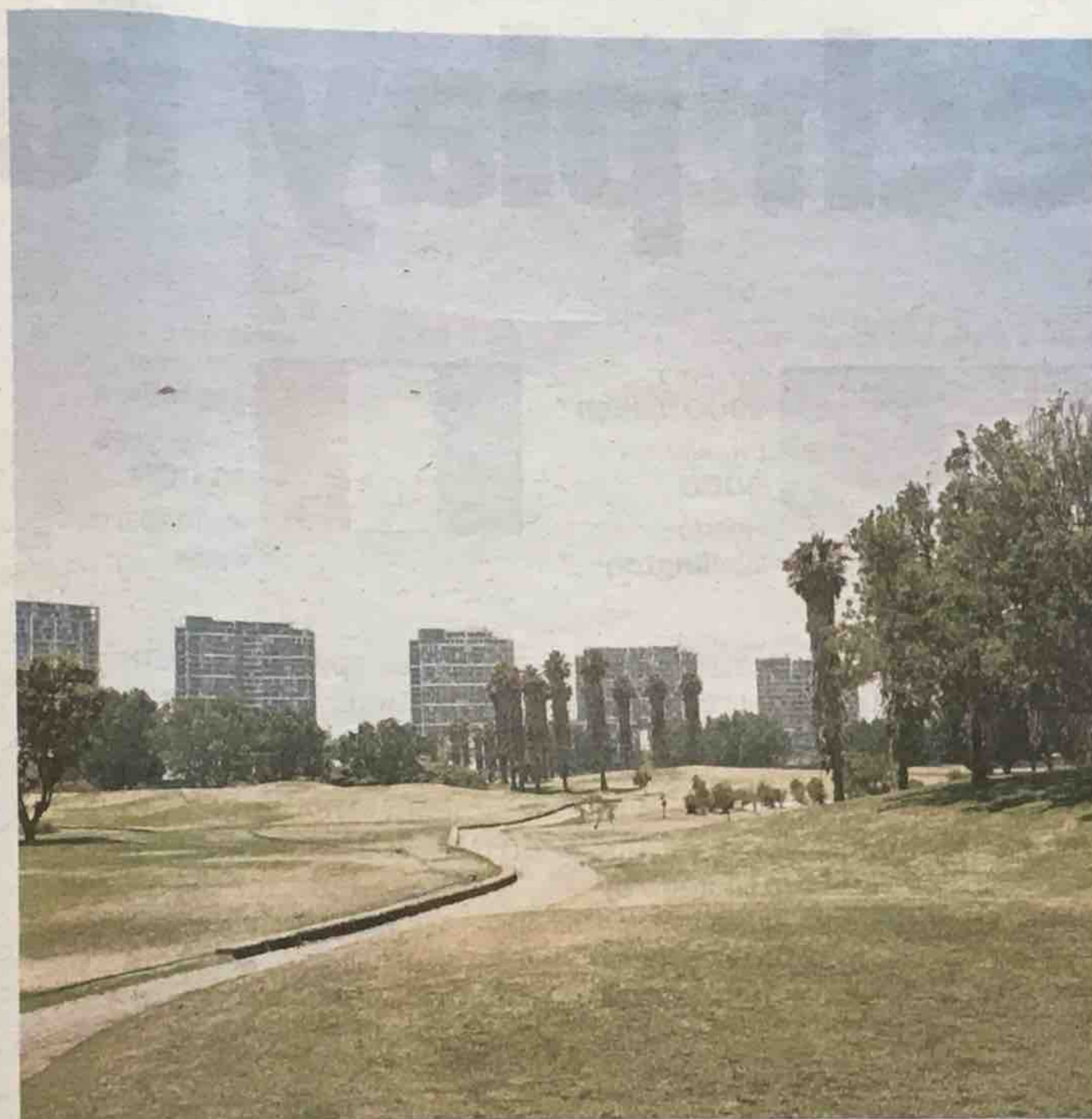
photographer Juha Tolonen, who was born in Geraldton to Finnish parents and since last year has been living in Lapland, Finland.

Finlandisation is a beautiful if vaguely disquieting exhibition.

A central wall divides in two the large-format giclee prints, made from photographs taken by Tolonen over the last four years in Australia and Finland. They are further arranged in diptychs and triptychs.

One half of the exhibition is mainly devoted to the summery Swan River hinterland, the other mainly to the winter Lapland landscape.

Throughout, muted palettes, low-key harmonies and desaturated tones create a unity between the disparate locations that is reinforced by



Juha Tolonen's *The Hill* creates a sense of comforting recognition and disorienting strangeness.

flattened perspectives and subtle geometric composition.

So far, so abstract.

But dwell, for a moment, on the counterpoints between bald, blasted, snow-covered hills and spare forests

populated by spindly leafless trees and the desiccated grasses and forlorn palm trees of the Swan River foreshore and the melaleucas lining the river.

Here, as in the sad staccato rhythms of the buildings'

windows in a cityscape which greets the visitor before entering the exhibition proper, as well as in the softer rhymes between the clouds, leafy branches and reflections in a puddle, there is a powerful poetry.

The result is a gentle, insistent tugging in the viewer's mind between comforting recognition and disorienting strangeness. Which, I guess, is the whole point.

As Tolonen writes: "Travelling further afield into distant lands our eyes continue to spy out the familiar. Even in an alien landscape, we can arrange it into patterns and forms that comply with our own prejudices and preferences: valleys mirror

hills, thickets recall swamps, small details evoke a memory.

"All places are connected via the partiality of our sight. The status of foreign is only achieved via a relationship to a place we call home."

Previous exhibitions of Tolonen's have focused more overtly on urban spaces and natural landscapes in various stages of decay or becoming, both here and abroad. Despite the static nature and classical melancholy of the images, in Finlandisation we have a more robust, dynamic conversation, a dialectic of sorts in which anyone can participate.

Just don't expect answers.

Finlandisation is on at the Art Gallery of WA until November 21.



Blue Water evokes the winter Lapland landscape.