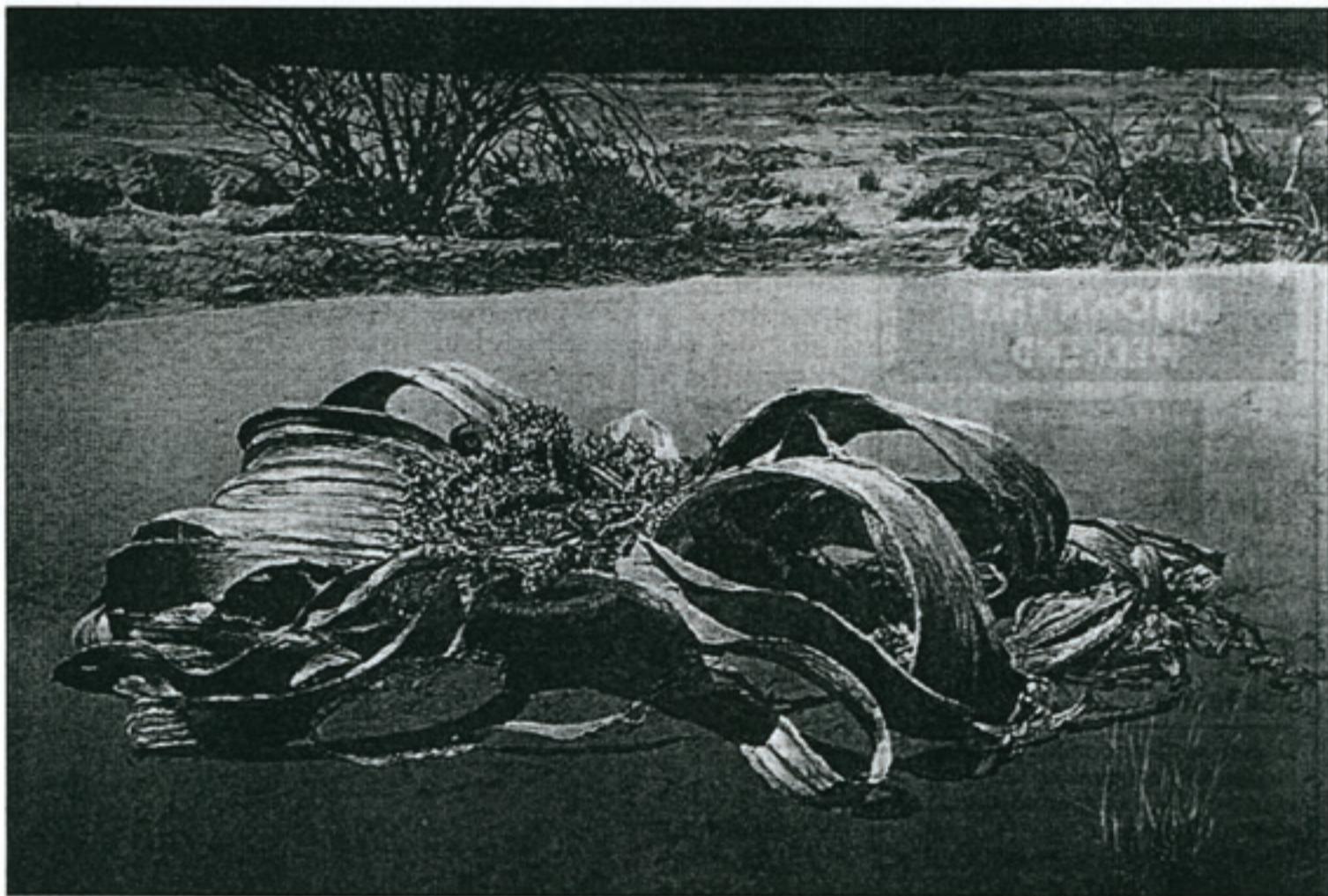


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Vast landscape: Withered Cactus by Masakatsu Kondo conjures up a reverential air for the viewer

ART REVIEW

masakatsu kondo

★★★★★

Until Jun 30, Turnpike Gallery, Civic Square, Leigh, Mon, Thu and Fri 9.30am to 5.30pm, Tue 10am to 5.30pm, Wed 9.30am to 5pm, Sat 10am to 3pm, free. Tel: 01942 404469

Staged as part of the Japan 2001 festival, Masakatsu Kondo's epic paintings use that most traditional of English art forms – the landscape. Kondo describes his style as hyper-realistic – not in the sense that it is of photographic quality but in that it subtly heightens reality.

This can be used to confound the perceptions of the viewer, as in the realistic renderings of impossibly huge mountains rising up into gold tinged skies like the mythical Olympus, or the retina-jarring greens of tree foliage in Lime Trees and the lurid autumnal hues of Birch Woodland, their exaggerated shades resembling a faulty TV colour control. The effect from a distance is of a screenprint, while, up close, the brushstrokes become evident.

Wisely, this slight detachment from reality means Kondo isn't

trying to compete with natural grandeur. Instead, the artist conjures up an appropriately reverential air in these vivid little visual hymns. Human presence is entirely absent throughout, from the vast Koyaanisqatsi-like desert wildernesses populated only by distant trees or dead cacti, to the more claustrophobic forest scenes, with the large dimensions of the canvases adding to this effectiveness.

When attempting to convey the scale of the Himalayas or Arizona desert, size really does matter.

Rob Haynes