

WeekendLife

Weekend Feature

Capturing the beauty of our irrigation network

The saying goes that one man's trash is another man's treasure. It certainly ran true when photographer Peter Garnick entered a farmer's machinery shed with "not much" in there. JOHN LEWIS takes a sneak-peek at the latest exhibition at Shepparton Art Museum.

There's not much in here. Those were the words of a Strathmerton farmer who threw open the doors of his old machinery shed for photographer Peter Garnick.

Garnick's response came from a man who sees life and stories in inanimate objects.

"I could spend a week in here," Garnick told the farmer as he observed piles of rusting iron and racks of cobwebbed wooden boxes full of old tools and bolts.

"It was packed with wonderful machinery that time has worn away," he said.

American-born art photographer Garnick was on a Foodbowl Unlimited-commissioned tour of the Goulburn-Murray irrigation district to record the monumental changes taking place under the \$1.2 billion Northern Victorian Irrigation Renewal Project.

Over two years Garnick travelled thousands of kilometres under the guidance of Goulburn-Murray Water veteran employee Ian Rogerson.

Garnick photographed an irrigation system built by men with shovels and horse-drawn implements a century ago, at a moment of profound change as channels were lined and old meters and gates of stone and wood were replaced with silent, gleaming solar panels and pre-cast concrete pipes and gates.

The result of his work – an exhibition of 20 photographs called *Liquid Gold* – was officially opened at Shepparton's Eastbank Centre last night.

Foodbowl Unlimited convenor Ross McPherson said Garnick had assembled "a graphic short history of a hundred years of irrigated agriculture, adroitly summarised in beautiful images that somehow extract the essence of a vast and bold endeavour".

Garnick said he tried to avoid political argument sparked by the project, and to focus on the images.

"On one level I was trying to create works of art, but on another I wanted to capture the stories and resourcefulness of the pioneers," he said. "For a lot of the men who went to World War I, these are their monuments in time."

Shepparton Art Museum acting director Ryan Johnston said Garnick had struck a delicate balance between art and documentary.

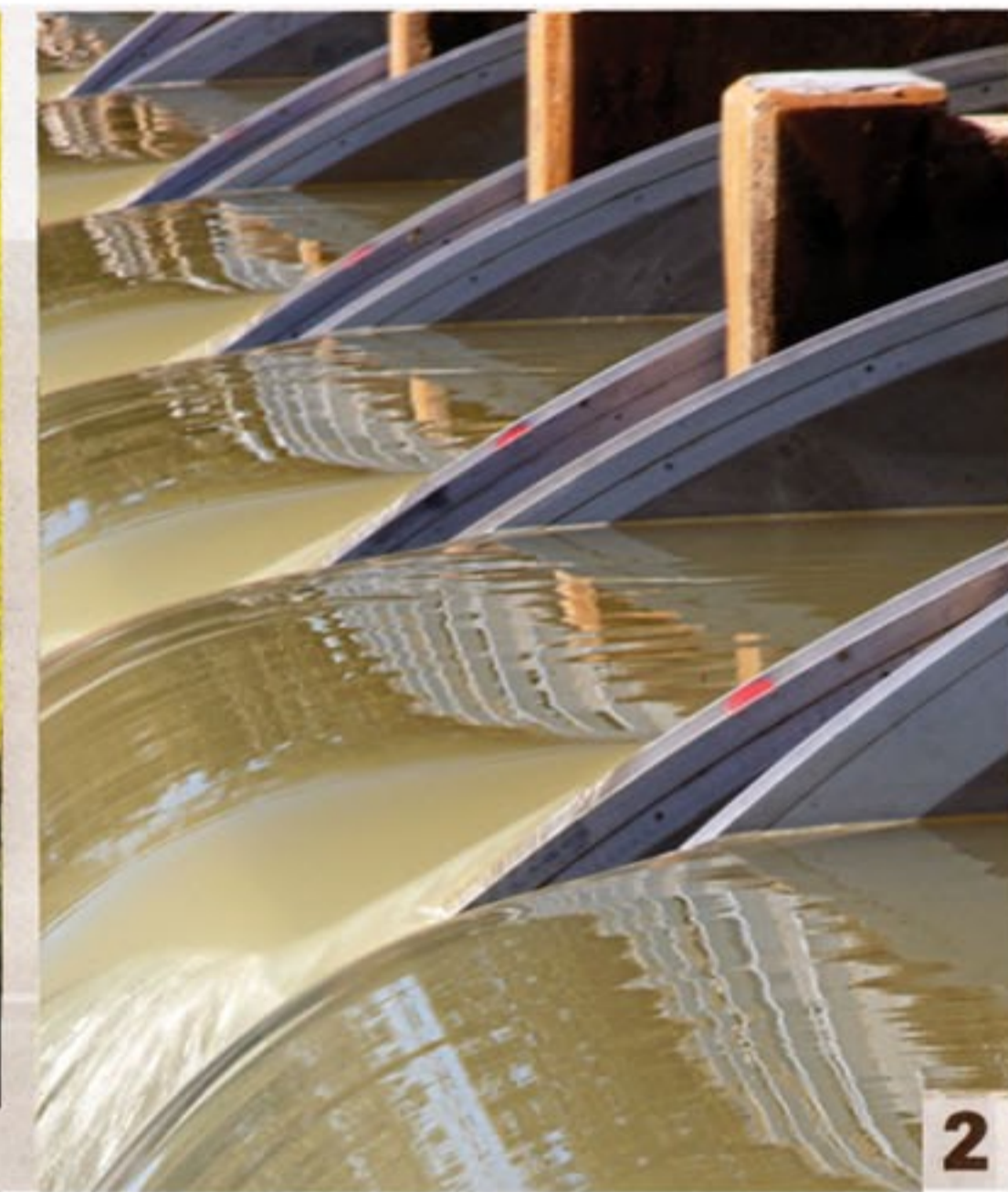
"In one sense they are realist images – they tell a definite story. But in another, they verge on the abstract and have very strong artistic elements," Mr Johnston said.

He said the exhibition "provides an extraordinary opportunity for the community to witness up close a once-in-a-century transformation of their region".

■ *Liquid Gold – The Art of Irrigation* is on display in the foyer of the Shepparton Art Museum at the Eastbank Centre in Welsford St, Shepparton until February 24.



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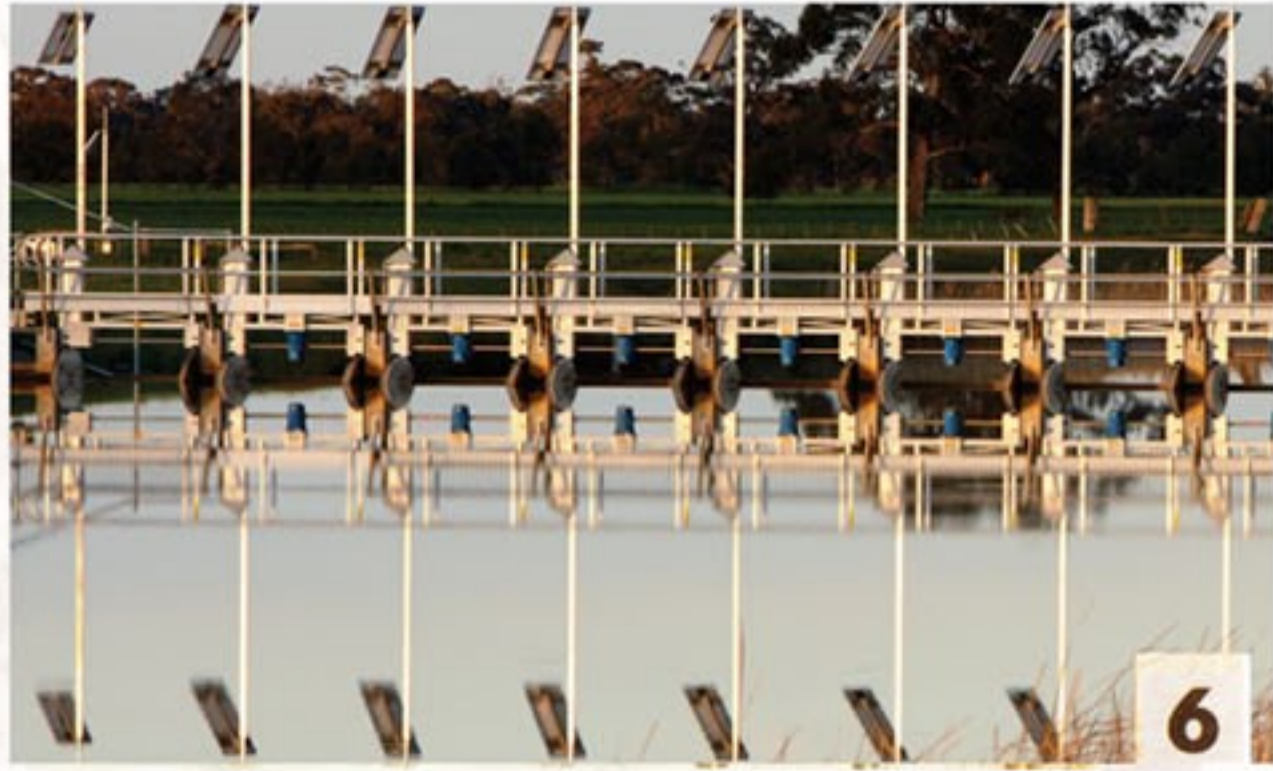
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1. Canola at Dookie.
2. Shepparton Channel Gates II
3. Cattinach Channel Cut
4. Channel Road Orchards
5. Strathmerton Shed
6. Arcardia Road Channel
7. Shepparton Channel Lining
8. Box Creek Regulator