

Euan Macleod
Hold Fast



Large figure on ladder crossing 2020,
oil on polyester, 705 x 650mm

Opposite: *Hold Fast 2021,* oil on
polyester, 1800 x 1370mm

Hold fast

As I write this, Covid cases are steadily increasing in New South Wales, with greater Sydney in lockdown. The situation feels a little like *Crossing (green rope)*, awkwardly traversing a ladder crossing, gaping crevasse below. Likely we'll make it safely to the other side, but how long it will take, and how easy it will be is uncertain.

The physical remoteness of Aoraki / Mount Cook – the setting of many of these works accessible only by helicopter – seems an apt metaphor for the social isolation many have found themselves grappling with over the past year. Like the climbers however, most of us have had a core group of people to rely on. In *Study, 3 figures and ladder* we see a wider view of a glacial crossing, and the gap seems much more feasible with support on both sides. Here the figure's widely extended arms seem more playful, less flailing. The rope linking the three is obvious, and then becomes noticeable in the first image, and in others with a solo figure at their centre.

This connection to others, lifesaving in a mountaineering setting, is equally important when dealing with the mental challenges of the past year, and life in general. *Hold Fast*, while referencing the tight grip on the rope, also happens to be the Macleod family motto. I have held this familial bond closely throughout my life, sometimes grasped tautly and with full awareness, and other times unthinkingly, loosely. It is there supporting me through tough times, the steep uphill climbs and deep chasms, but also present at the peaks of life, when mountains have been summited.

In a year when in person catch ups became more difficult, through lockdowns and border closures, new methods of staying connected became necessary and were established. Despite the physical distance the bonds remained strong, like the ever-present rope, a grounding force to rely on.

Bridget Macleod



New Year 2021 2021, oil on polyester, 1200 x 840mm



Aspiring study with light 2020, oil on polyester, 510 x 380mm



Split study 2021, oil on polyester, 510 x 388mm



Study with ash figure 2020, oil on polyester, 510 x 380mm



Summit 2021, oil on polyester, 1200 x 840mm



Study - red man on mountain on boat 2021, oil on polyester, 380 x 510mm



Study figure in Antarctica 2021, oil on polyester, 380 x 510mm



3 figures in torchlight 2020, oil on polyester, 650 x 815mm

Opposite: *Linked in Moonlight* 2021, oil on polyester, 2000 x 1500mm





Life line 2020, oil on polyester,
1200 x 840mm

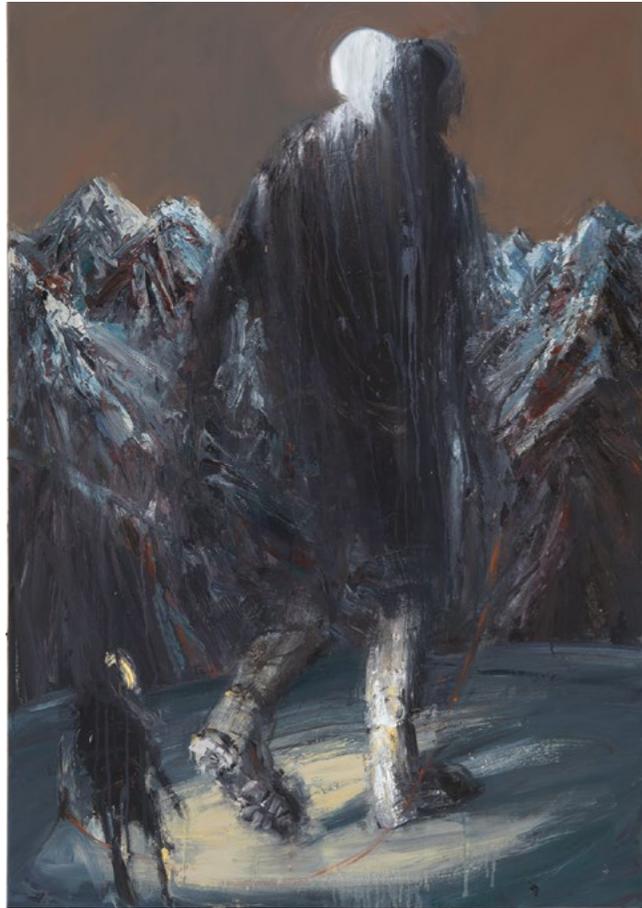
Crossing (Green rope) 2021,
oil on polyester, 780 x 560mm



Study 3 figures and ladder 2020,
oil on polyester, 380 x 510mm



Study looking down crevasse 2021,
oil on polyester, 380 x 510mm



Moon on man 2021,
oil on polyester,
1200 x 840mm



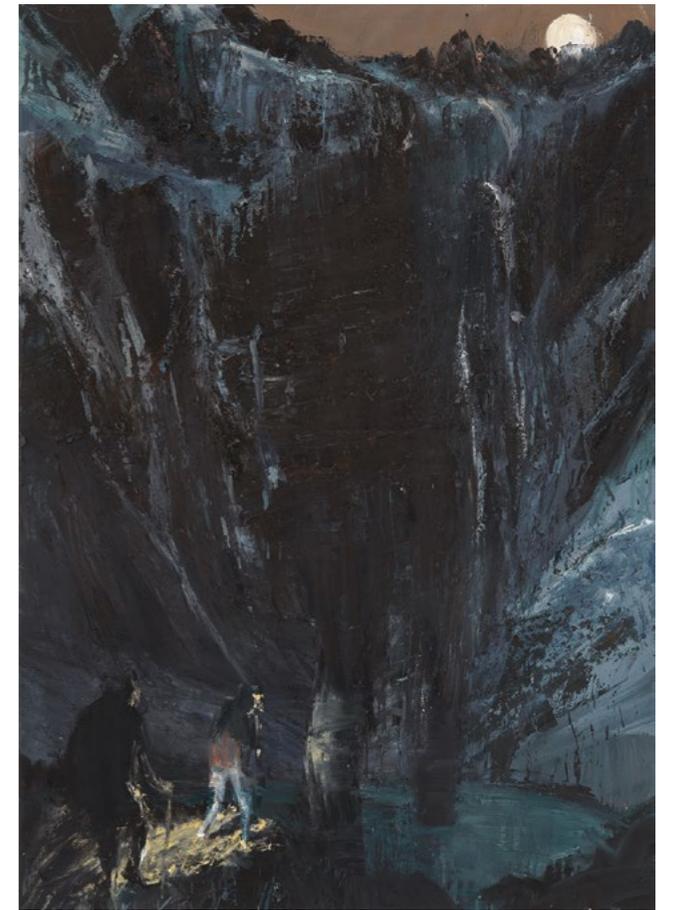
*Study - orange
man on boat on
mountain 2021,*
oil on polyester,
380 x 510mm



*Biking sunset study
2021, oil on polyester,
470 x 320mm*



Biking in sunset (Newcastle) 2021,
oil on polyester, 530 x 660mm



*Moonlight/Spotlight 2021, oil on polyester,
1200 x 840mm*



*Walking in sunset
(Newcastle) study 2021,*
oil on polyester,
510 x 380mm



Split Study (Close up) 2021,
oil on polyester,
510 x 380mm



Summit study 2021,
oil on polyester,
510 x 380mm

Hold what you have

When they taught us how to write a good story, they always used the mountain. Teacher drew the first line on the board. 'This Is the Introduction. It tells you where and when you are.' It is the earth, the sky and the horizon. The next line she drew connected to the first one but lifted off like a plane. 'This Is the Development. The part when right and wrong are hidden' in a foggy grey that hangs around for an eternal day. Character development must happen. This is the night that may never crack to let in new light, but then teacher raises her pen and brings it forth from great height to draw a third line. It shoots straight up like a point on a star. Now her face is alight as she gets to teach us a truth of life, 'This Is the Climax. Where it all comes together and the story is made'. The sun rises on the impossible day and everyone is satisfied, safe and tired.

Each head is a land with tectonic plates that slide and hit, stories build like mountains and we must find a path through them. From an early age we are sent on our way, with no shoes, no clothes, not even a face into the dark of the mountain. There are cliffs we can spend hours sitting at the edges of and dark nights following the footsteps of our bigger selves. She is as still as ice and rock, one minute holding, the next minute dropped. Then the sky fills with shrieking winds and skies of tears and bodiless sirens. We walk for nights on end. Sometimes we sit but the rope tied to our friend tugs until we move again. These are the mountains we climb in each other's minds, hoping to see eye to eye. This is the mountainous effort of choosing to hold what you have. As long as the choice is yours to make, make it for the mountains sake, make it to the top, to see the sky face to face, to hear the wind drop and see the sweet sight of the setting moon and the sun like a myth rising.

'The conclusion,' the teacher closes her eyes and draws a random line, 'is the bit where you tie all the strings together'. Sometimes you can even write it first, if you're sure of the weather. It's where the character lies in bed that night, listening to the wind outside, he remembers his day in the rain, his heart red as the coals on the fire.

Maeve Hughes

Bridget Macleod is an Australian Arts writer and curator. She studied Art History and Museum Studies at the University of Sydney. She currently works at the Shoalhaven Regional Gallery, Nowra and lives in Jervis Bay, New South Wales. Bridget is Euan Macleod's daughter.

Maeve Hughes studied at Elam School of Art before graduating from Victoria University in Wellington with a Bachelor of English Literature and Creative Writing. She is published in *Artzone*, *Capital* magazine and *starling*. Maeve also has a book of poems – *Horsepower*. She is gallery assistant at Bowen Galleries.

Hold Fast

Exhibition

12 July – 1 August 2021

Photographs
of Euan's paintings
by Michèle Brouet

Euan Macleod
is represented
in Wellington by
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